

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

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THE SOMM JOURNAL



Respecting Tradition, **CHALLENGING CONVENTION**

RAMOS PINTO LEANS INTO ITS HISTORY
WHILE LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

*Ramos Pinto president/CEO Jorge
Rosas and his cousin, master blender
Ana Rosas, at estate vineyard
Quinta do Bom Retiro.*

TRIVENTO

Golden Reserve

PLATINUM



THE BEST KEPT TREASURE

"In our wine we find the unmistakable influence of the Andes, tradition and the Lujan de Cuyo terroir."

M. Viani

MAGDALENA VIANI
GOLDEN WINEMAKER

THE SOMM JOURNAL

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{ letter from the publisher }

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



Meredith May

THE DEFINITION OF “ZOOM” is to move or travel quickly. Isn't it ironic that we have been deterred from doing either, yet a new interpretation of the word, with a capital Z, has revived us by allowing us to connect with people face-to-face, do business, and get our messages across our physical boundaries.

The concept of webinars is not new, yet *The SOMM Journal* had to reinvent its approach to education and bring our industry together in the absence of all of those wonderful in-person events. With our recently established webinar partnerships, we have the ability to bring the world of wine to our professional audience. Our collaboration with *National Geographic* for the monthly Geographical Digest series has had an extraordinary effect in increasing our print and digital audience. You'll find our recap of the first two installments, “Unique Wine Regions of the World” and “Domestic Bliss,” on pages 84 and 60, respectively; they can also be accessed at sommjournal.com. As *Nat Geo* is behind the publication of *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia*, customized maps and introductions by the book's editor, Orsi Szentkiralyi, are a big boost for us. Thanks as well to our own vice president of education, Lars Leicht, whose on-camera presence as moderator engages our panelists and our viewers alike. And our continued relationship with SommCon and SommGo enables us to widen our trade audience via their networks.

For our next series, Somm Sessions, Treasury Wine Estates national education manager and Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance will teach a monthly themed webinar on the world's wine regions. With Treasury, *The SOMM Journal* and SommFoundation work together to offer scholarships as well as an opportunity to win a trip to Crush Camp (when permitted next year). The first 50 qualified registrants will receive a bottle of wine to taste along with us. (See more on page 40.)

Partnerships help us all grow, keep us connected, and strengthen us from within so that we can continue to bring the wine world directly to you.

Meredith May
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

{ letter from the managing editor }

SPEAKING OF PARTNERSHIPS, we hope that you'll continue to bring your wine world directly to us. From the pandemic to the ongoing threat of tariffs to a critical reckoning with the issues of racism, gender inequality, and sexual harassment, the past year has upended the hospitality industry—and the lives of its workers—in ways that may take years to right. We (a majority-women staff, by the way) want to know what you're thinking and doing; if you have a story to tell that may be of interest to your colleagues in our audience, please don't hesitate to reach out. We didn't put our email addresses on the masthead for nothing.

Ruth Tobias

Ruth Tobias,
Managing Editor



PHOTO: JENNIFER OLSON

Going the
**EXTRA
MILE**

FRINGE COLLECTIVE
AIMS TO VENTURE DEEP INTO
CALIFORNIA TERRITORY

*Fringe Collective
winemaker
Sebastian Donoso.*

PHOTO: LIGHTSPEED FILMS



*The Monterey Shale dominates Bien Nacido
Vineyards in the Santa Maria Valley.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF FRINGE COLLECTIVE



Maybe it's his heritage:

Winemaker Sebastian Donoso hails from Chile, where the landscape is defined by the extremes of endless seashore and dramatic mountain peaks. Maybe it's his background in astronomy, indicating a lifelong interest in the outer limits of knowledge. Or maybe it's simply that, like any artist, Donoso has a penchant for defying convention. Wherever his sense of adventure may come from, it has led to the aptest of ventures: Fringe Collective.

Case production is limited to 300 for its two labels, Seafall Chardonnay (\$50) and Rockbound Pinot Noir (\$65), with which "we're trying to make a statement," says Donoso. "The project is exciting because we're venturing not only into areas that have a history to them but also into up-and-coming areas," all with an eye toward distinctly rugged coastal terroir: "We're looking for sites where the fruit struggles." After all, that's the fruit with the most compelling story to tell in the glass—a memoir of survival on the fringes of California wine country.

Navigating the Seafall

"The Sonoma Coast is an area I've always been intrigued by," Donoso acknowledges. "It's an area that we're still exploring; we have a lot to learn—it's so big. And we really want to go as far west as possible to capture that [coastal] element." By "we," Donoso means himself and viticulturist Ben Byczynski, who calls the project "an amazing collaboration. It's been really fun



PHOTO: LIGHTSPEED FILMS

Fringe Collective viticulturist Ben Byczynski.

to be out in the fields with Sebastian and really dial in the nuances that we want in the final products."

For Seafall, they found what they were looking for in Heintz Vineyard, along with three Dutton Ranch properties. Heintz, explains Byczynski, is "[essentially] on the edge of the Pacific, [and] it's got the redwoods right against it, so to me it's a unique site. It really [represents] the essence of the Chardonnay Sebastian's trying to make"—not least because of the difficulties it poses as a late-ripening vineyard to Clone 4, with its larger berries and clusters. "We have to focus on where our maturity is, because the site can get very challenging weather later in the season," he says. "What Brix can we get to, what's the fine line, how far can we push this without going too far?" Donoso concurs: "In a way, Clone 4 is probably the wrong clone for that area, but that's what

makes it interesting. You can get hammered with botrytis, so we do a lot of work with [owner Charles Heintz] to manage our grapes in a very special way." The result "retains acidity much better, and the type of minerality I get from Heintz I don't get from the other sites."

On the other hand, he adds, a Dutton Ranch property like Morelli Lane "gives you the mouthfeel, the richness that complements what Heintz brings." But it's not only the combination of vineyards that acts as a safety net for the winemaker's delicate balancing act, according to Byczynski: "It's also the combination of different clones that allows him to get to his target. The Dijon clone, I think it's 76, ripens earlier; it's much smaller-berried [than Clone 4], so you definitely aren't under as much pressure for rot."

Though the fruit is primarily fermented

Heintz Vineyard is located on the western Sonoma Coast.

PHOTO: LIGHTSPEED FILMS

in (30% new) oak, Donoso began putting a small percentage in concrete eggs last year “to see if I could integrate more of a coastal aspect, and it worked out really well,” he says. “It yields a wine that is extremely minerally. In the future I see myself upping the amount [from 15%] to 25–30%.” Partial malolactic treatment and monthly bâtonnage during the 14-month aging process impart “a little more richness—within reason,” he stresses. “Again, I’m going for a more austere, minerally feel.”

Byczynski, for one, thinks he’s nailed it. “I always get this complexity of apples,” he asserts. While partly attributing its character to the sandy Goldridge soil it’s grown on—“which I’m going to call ‘powder’ for lack of a better term”—he adds, “I definitely see the work Sebastian and I have done in the field, pushing to the extremes to get a beautiful product.”



Donoso barrel ferments the Pinot Noir that goes into Rockbound.

Rockbound for Glory

As Seafall provides an immersion course in the Sonoma Coast, so Rockbound is a lesson in the Santa Maria Valley, says Donoso, who calls the appellation “amazing—the soil is fantastic. All this Monterey Shale in the vineyard really adds a different element.” The vineyard he’s referring specifically to is the famed, multigenerational Bien Nacido, which provides 100% of the fruit for Rockbound—though, he notes, “We don’t designate it on the label,

Meridith May’s Tasting Notes

Seafall 2018 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast

Barrel fermentation and aging in French oak (18% new) for 14 months results in a bright and sassy white with an underlying creaminess. Aromas of lemon oil and tarragon have a salty sea-air quality. Fine acidity leans in to enliven spiced apples and lime. The wine vibrates with energy while maintaining weight and texture; the finish of salted toffee and custard is proof of its ability to straddle leanness and lushness. **94**



Rockbound 2017 Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley

A savory and earthy beauty, with tobacco, heather, and red plum filling out the round, plump body. Pomegranate and cherry add sweetness and a bright light as minerality shows up on the finish with tilled soil. **94**



A spectacular aerial view of Bien Nacido.

PHOTOS: LIGHTSPEED FILMS

because we are also showcasing the area: the fog, the long ripening season.”

In fact, says Byczynski, “When you taste the wine, you can almost taste the salty air.” It was that hallmark of a coastal climate, where temperatures rarely exceed 85 degrees Fahrenheit, that he and Donoso hoped to highlight in their work with vineyard manager Chris Hammell on own-rooted blocks planted in the 1970s. Describing the “gnarled, weathered vines almost like driftwood,” Byczynski credits Hammell with fine-tuning their care in keeping with the goals of the Fringe Collective; because Hammell’s team “farms at a very high level [and] they know their site so well,” he and Donoso are freed up to focus on “where the maturity is at,” as he puts it. “Are we seeing the lignification? Are we seeing the seeds, and are they brown? There aren’t that many vineyards where you can just let [the fruit] hang there and get those soft, supple tannins perfect, but that’s one of them.”

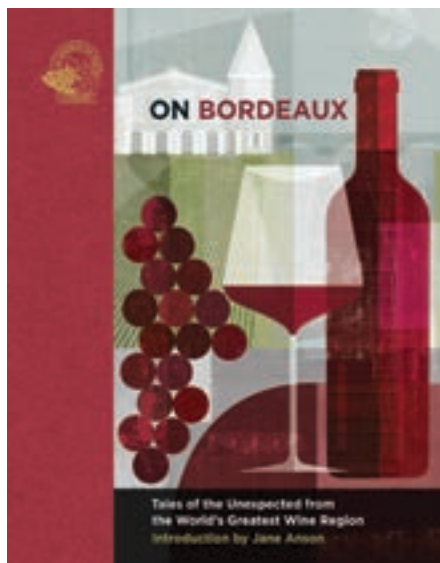
Donoso agrees. “For me, Pinot Noir is about the mouthfeel; you have to have really lignified seed tannins for [what I’m doing] to work.” What he’s doing, unusually,

is barrel fermentation—at least 70% each year, with the remainder going into tanks. While the latter provide “a little more of that bright red-cherry fruit character and a little more tension as well,” he says, the barrels make for “a more earthy, floral, feminine, soft wine. The coopers that I use are really amazing; I’m not working with the usual suspects [but rather] two or three small, family-owned French businesses that very few people can get their hands on. Their barrels are extremely well integrated early on; it’s almost like you wouldn’t know they’re brand-new. I could put 40–50% new oak on the wine and you could never tell, because the tannin is not bitter; it’s not astringent.” (That said, Rockbound ages for 11–12 months in only 25–30% new oak.)

Just as his experiments with fermenting in concrete eggs are ongoing, so his barrel program “is a long-term process that’s really starting to pay off,” Donoso says. “There’s definitely an evolution as I’m learning about these vineyards and myself and what I want to achieve with these wines. But from a stylistic point of view, I think I’m where I want to be.” **SM**

Bordeaux Bound

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS ON THE REGION AND ITS ESTEEMED WINES SPANS THREE CENTURIES



FOR HER RECENTLY RELEASED book *Inside Bordeaux*, wine writer and critic Jane Anson delved with contributing researchers into the region's terroir, drawing links between its microclimates, soils, and taste profiles. Now Anson offers an introduction to a new tome, *On Bordeaux*, former *Decanter* editor Susan Keevil's collection of essays from some of the wine world's most brilliant voices. Spanning four continents and hundreds of years, they provide a glimpse into the famed French region and its liquid treasures via personal anecdotes, opinions, commentaries, and appraisals.

Insights abound from such heavyweights as Hugh Johnson, Michael Broadbent, and *The SOMM Journal's* own London correspondent Steven Spurrier as well as 19th-century writers Edith Somerville and Martin Ross, who traveled to the Médoc in 1893 with a notebook and a new device called "the Kodak." Master of Wine James Lawther provides an enlightening explanation of *élevage*, suggesting that the best word to describe the process is "nurturing" rather than aging or maturation. And readers get to live vicariously through the pen of the late Nicholas Faith—author of 20 books on everything from wine auctions to Swiss banking—as they visit Château Margaux circa 1980, where, he noted, "The enigma posed by the variation in quality of the wine [can] be—albeit partially—provided by the geographers and geologists."

On Bordeaux is a publication of the Académie du Vin Library, conceived by Spurrier along with veteran wine professionals Simon McMurtrie and Ben Howkins. More engrossing than any textbook, this stunning anthology brings Bordeaux to life as well as—if not better than—a Netflix documentary would.

To learn more, visit academieduvinlibrary.com. —Meridith May

Concours d'Spirits Returns

SOMMCON OPENS ENTRIES FOR THE LUXURY COMPETITION'S SECOND YEAR


SOMMCON, A LEADING provider of wine and spirits education for industry professionals, is now accepting entries for the second annual Concours d'Spirits, a domestic and international spirits competition sponsored by *The SOMM Journal* and judged by a blind-tasting panel of industry tastemakers, buyers, reviewers, mixologists, and sommeliers. Medal categories are silver, gold, double gold, and the Award of Excellence.

Judging will take place in San Diego April 27–29, 2021, followed by a winner's-circle



tasting for 100 buyers and influencers. In the fall, all winners will be showcased during a trade-only tasting at SommCon's annual West Coast conference while receiving additional exposure via social media, print articles, and promotional

materials as well as license-free marketing assets. These include but are not limited to digital medallions for use in newsletters and advertisements; press release templates; and POS materials such as bottle stickers and shelf talkers.

Fees are \$695 for one entry and \$1,145 for two entries. For brands entering more than two spirits, each additional entry is \$350. 

For information, visit sommconusa.com/competitions.html. To learn more about SommCon, visit sommconusa.com.

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The SOMM Journal's London correspondent, Stephen Spurrier, at Bride Valley Vineyard, his property in south Dorset, England.

PHOTO: LUCY POPE

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PHOTO: BONNI PACHECO

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SILVERADO

In 1968, Harry See planted the Silverado Vineyard to Cabernet Sauvignon. Over the next two decades with careful vine selection and cultivation, a unique clone emerged. Designated the Disney-Silverado Heritage Clone by the University of California, Davis, it is the only Cabernet clone in the Stags Leap District to attain Heritage status. Each year, Silverado honors this select clone with SOLO.

In 1988, Silverado purchased the Mt George Vineyard in Napa Valley's Coombsville AVA – where vinifera was first planted 120 years earlier. Classic Claret varieties thrive on the deep, gravelly down-slopes of the volcano whose name the vineyard bears. Inspired by the vineyard name and Greek root for “Earth”—GEO represents the highest expression of single-vineyard Cabernet from this extraordinary place.

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POINTS

THE TASTING PANEL



2016

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POINTS

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A vineyard at *Domaine Bergeville* in the Eastern Townships of Quebec.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOMAINE BERGEVILLE

Acadia Ascending

A LOOK AT SPARKLING WINE PRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND AND CANADA

by Rachel DelRocco Terrazas

AFTER THE YEAR we've had, there will never be a better time than now to kick out the old and usher in the new by popping a bottle of bubbles. And as the globe continues to warm, there may be no better place to look for those bubbles than north of the latitude lines historically favored for grape growing. With a cooler climate that's prime for sparkling wine production, New England and Canada are giving us another good reason to look forward to 2021.

La garagista is a farm and winery located on Mount Hunger in the central Vermont town of Barnard. Although the project started in 1999 as a way to supply their own restaurant in Woodstock, New York, Deirdre Heekin and Caleb Barber shifted their focus solely to farming and winemaking in 2017; today they're considered to be at the forefront of the state's wine industry. They biodynamically farm four vineyard parcels of mainly hybrid grapes—some destined for cider, some for still wine, and some for their *pétillant naturel* series *Ci Confonde*, including a 2020 Blanc and Rosé to look forward to.

Some 250 miles to the east in Warren, Maine, is Oyster River Winegrowers, a winery, orchard, and farm that cultivates both cider fruit and wine grapes, including French-American hybrids. Low-intervention winemaker Brian Smith uses estate Vidal Blanc and Le Crescent to craft his best-known bottling, a traditional-method sparkling wine called Chaos. He also makes



Winemaker Jean-Benoit Deslauriers in the cellar of Nova Scotia winery Benjamin Bridge.

PHOTO: JESSICA EMIN

bright *pétillant naturels* in both white and pink styles under the Morphos label.

They may be north of our border, but the Canadians are right there with us when it comes to sparkling-wine production. *Domaine Bergeville* was founded by husband-and-wife team Marc Théberge and Eve Rainville in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, where they grow hybrid grapes such as Frontenac, Marquette, and St. Pepin in their organic and Biodynamic vineyards. From these, they make only sparkling wines, using both the traditional method and *pétillant naturel* for everything from Bruts to zero-dosage wines to deep rosés. The traditional-method wines see at least 15 months of lees contact; all are perfect indulgences for everyday drinking.

Still further east is a peninsula of ap-

proximately 21,000 square miles, 632 acres of which are under vine: the province of Nova Scotia. Benjamin Bridge was founded in 1999 by Gerry McConnell and Dara Gordon on the coast of the Bay of Fundy, which is located in the northwestern part of the province and is one of its better-known wine regions. Winemaker Jean-Benoit Deslauriers started in 2008 by taking a low-intervention approach to the production of traditional-method sparkling wine. Using the classic Champagne grapes (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier), the winery makes both vintage and non-vintage Bruts, Reserves, and Rosés. With 20 years of experience, McConnell and Gordon certainly know their potential; it's time we looked up north to see it too. *sj*



ANGOVE

McLAREN VALE

•••••

Founded in 1886, Angove Family Winemakers is a fifth-generation, family-owned winery dedicated to creating premium wines from McLaren Vale, South Australia. The Warboys Vineyard collection of wines come from a vineyard planted in the 1930's that is certified both organic and Biodynamic.





Trying Times Call for Trying Wines

HOW FLIGHTS CAN HELP BOOST MUCH-NEEDED REVENUE

WITH THE THREAT of reduced dining-room capacities or even new lockdowns looming this winter, it is critical that restaurants maximize every revenue opportunity possible in order to stay solvent. The good news is that people seem to want (or should I say need) to drink more than ever. As an industry, we should definitely be capitalizing on the demand by not merely offering wine, beer, and spirits but merchandising them effectively. The good news is that it takes surprisingly little effort to entice consumers into purchasing premium beverages and beverage packages; the trick is in the presentation.

Drinkers these days like to experiment. They're interested in not just alcohol but also meaningful experiences—especially now, when we are all experience-starved. Beverage flights are the perfect way to provide them for your guests while also capturing extra revenue. Don't feel limited to table wine: Beers, spirits, apéritifs, digestifs, and dessert wines are all great fodder for flights. In fact, flights representing categories that often go ignored, especially at the

end of a meal, are more likely to generate additional revenue. Offering, say, three small pours of different styles of dessert wine is a great example—one that I put to the test years ago when I opened St. Anselm in Washington, D.C., where an after-dinner flight called “The Holy Trinity” was among our most popular options. It featured 1 ounce each of Vintage Port, Pedro Ximénez Sherry, and Malmsey Madeira—and despite being more expensive than many of our dessert wines by the glass, it outsold them by more than ten to one (no doubt because a 3-ounce pour of a single wine was more daunting to consumers unfamiliar with the category). The experience made the elevated price a non-issue.

St. Anselm's pre-dinner flights were also a hit. Our expansive selection of over 50 different Madeiras could be confusing to guests, but we made it approachable through such offerings as the entry-level “Exploration of Styles,” consisting of 1 ounce each of 10-Year Sercial, Verdelho, Bual, and Malmsey from a single producer, and the advanced “3 Centuries,” which

featured wines with a combined age of 300-plus years. The net result was thousands of dollars a month in Madeira sales. Often, the purchase of one flight would lead to another, or guests would order a full glass from the flight they'd tried to accent their meal.

I've also seen great success with apéritif flights like “Lillet All Day,” a sampler of white, rosé, and red Lillet, and spirits flights such as “Fernet About It” and “Island Hoppers,” featuring Scotch from different islands. In the beer category, “Hip-Hop Foray” was a tasting of three beers with different levels of hops designed to keep pace with the progression of a typical meal and capture increased revenue from non-wine drinkers.

As these examples show, clever names help to spark diners' interest. But the mere offering and suggestion of flights is usually enough to drive sales, so train your staff to lean into the idea of highlighting them in their introductory spiels. Your business is sure to be rewarded with bonus revenue across beverage categories. **sj**





Jordan

grateful pours

Thank you for voting Jordan #1 Cabernet Sauvignon and #1 Wine Brand in the 2020 *Wine & Spirits* Restaurant Poll—though it's been a difficult year for celebrating. We look forward to brighter days when we can gather around the dinner table and share a glass of wine together.

Jordan

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by Randy Caparoso

Agents of Change

EVAN MARTIN OF OREGON'S MARTIN WOODS WINERY IS HELPING TO SHAPE THE STATE'S CONSTANTLY EVOLVING WINE INDUSTRY

THERE'S SOMETHING EXCITING

happening in Oregon's wine industry. Bree Stock, MWV, education director for the Oregon Wine Board, says that as vintners explore "alternative varieties [while] working minimally in the cellar and with organic vineyards, [they're] changing the conversation surrounding Oregon wine to gain the attention of sommeliers."

Ask any young somm and they will tell you that they are always looking for something new and different—a target that Evan Martin, the visionary behind Oregon's Martin Woods Winery, has been pursuing with laser-like focus. In Stock's words, Martin Woods is helping to drive this period of "massive change" in Oregon winemaking, joining other innovative producers such as Johan Vineyards, Pray Tell, Maloof, Golden Cluster, and The Marigny as well as Ltd.+ , Stock's project with her husband, Chad.

Martin was working in the Seattle restaurant scene and earning a CMS certification before he landed a harvest gig in 2009 at Belle Pente Vineyard & Winery in Carlton, Oregon. He returned for two more vintages, then stayed on as an assistant winemaker until 2017, when he and his wife purchased a 40-acre wooded property in Willamette Valley's McMinnville AVA. After they constructed a winery on the lower level of their home, they launched Martin Woods. "It's worth noting that from the beginning," Martin says, "our biggest supporters were somms and restaurants in Portland who appreciated that we were making not only Pinot Noir but also Gamay, Riesling, and Chardonnay [with] the tension, freshness, purity, and honesty they were looking for."

With a nose for terroir, Martin uses native yeast and minimal new oak to allow sensory qualities imparted by the vineyard to shine through. He has been working with

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARTIN WOODS WINERY



Martin with his wife, Sarah, who also serves as vineyard manager for Bergström Wines.

further, defining itself far more by its minerality than by its honeyed-lemon varietal character.

Martin uses phrases like "honest aromatics" to describe the qualities he seeks to bring out in varieties such as Gamay. His 2018 Willamette Valley Gamay Noir is exuberantly varietal, teeming with strawberry and cocoa-like spice. The raspberry character of his vineyard-designate 2019 Tualatin

◀ *Evan Martin in the barrel room of Martin Woods Winery in Oregon's McMinnville AVA.*



Oregon Barrel Works cooper Rick DeFerrari on custom Oregon-grown oak barrels to further accentuate sense of place (as unfamiliar as that idea may be, even to Oregonians). As is typical of Oregon wineries, vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs dominate the Martin Woods portfolio, primarily aged in 50/50 French/Oregon oak.

But there's much more to consider: Martin's 2018 Willamette Valley Chardonnay shows off the pure peach and mineral qualities expected of Dijon clones 76 and 95, grown in two vineyards in the state's windiest appellations, McMinnville and the Van Duzer Corridor. With its penetrating acidity and moderate ABV of 13.3%, it personifies the tension endeavored by Martin. Aged in tanks and puncheons, the Martin Woods 2018 Van Duzer Corridor Grüner Veltliner pushes the envelope

Estate Gamay Noir is stamped with the forest-floor scent of its source, while its moderate tannin grip reflects partial whole-cluster/carbonic maceration.

Martin's svelte 2018 Walla Walla Valley/Oregon Cabernet Franc has a Christmas-y, cinnamon-candy fragrance that's unlike any other example of the varietal in the world, and his sleek, taut, feral 2018 Syrah from The Rocks District of Milton-Freewater is simply stunning. The 2016 Hyland Vineyard Pinot Noir beautifully weaves a woodsiness typical of McMinnville into its rose-petal and strawberry qualities, while the 2018 Havlin Vineyard Pinot Noir from the Van Duzer Corridor is compact yet joyously zingy in its expression of wind-swept terroir—a style of wine guaranteed to warm the cockles of the most daring sommelier's heart. S|J



LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE



Sipping for Social Justice

MEET TWO VINTNERS WHO BLEND WINEMAKING WITH ACTIVISM

WINE OFTEN PLAYS an integral role in our lives' most joyous moments, but can it also be an agent of social change? Dynamic entrepreneurs Ashley Trout of Vital Wines and Donae Burston of La Fête du Rosé certainly think so, as they've discovered firsthand that social justice and good juice make for a powerful blend.

Concerned by the logistical, financial, and cultural barriers that impede access to health care, Trout founded Vital Wines in 2016 as a nonprofit that supports vineyard and cellar workers in Washington's Walla Walla Valley, in part by donating to an area health clinic that offers free, bilingual services. According to its website, Vital Wines also raised more than \$18,000 in the first three months of the pandemic "to help vineyard workers stay at home if someone on their crew was infected and they wanted more time before returning to work."

"I was raised in a bilingual, bicultural household," Trout says. "My brother and I would do the translating in the hospital for our surrogate grandmother, and the memory has stayed with me. Although hospitals have translators, these situations are rife with problems. At the end of the day, we need to understand that this luxury business is resting on the backs of people whose basic needs aren't always being met, and I needed to do something about that."

From the beginning, Trout, who is also the founder and winemaker of Brook & Bull Cellars, recognized that engaging the Walla Walla Valley winemaking community in her mission was essential to Vital Wines' success; fortunately, they've stepped up in a big way. "We get grapes, corks, capsules, labels, shipping supplies, warehousing costs, crushing costs, trucking, all donated [and covered]," says Trout. After the nonprofit produces wines from those donated grapes, they're sold online and to wine club members, with 100% of the prof-



Ashley Trout is the founder of Vital Wines.

its going toward its health initiatives. Its lineup includes a Chardonnay, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon as well as a bold and layered blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah called The Given (\$28).

When Burston founded La Fête du Rosé in 2018, he didn't want to simply create a chic pink wine from Provence; he also wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people from underserved communities. "As a Black entrepreneur, I am a firm believer that leading by example is imperative," Burston says. "After I graduated college, I had the fortunate opportunity to travel the world. My experience doing so without a doubt contributed to the development of new skills and, in turn, helped me grow as a person and mold me to be a better man, father, partner, and entrepreneur. During my travels, I often thought about how others aren't as fortunate. It led me to become extremely passionate about empowering underrepresented youth through travel experiences."

That passion inspired him to partner with Domaine Bertaud Belieu, the oldest



Donae Burston is the founder and CEO of La Fête du Rosé.

estate on the Saint-Tropez peninsula, to produce La Fête du Rosé (\$25), a crisp, fruit-forward, and dry blend of Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Syrah released in 2019. Burston donates a portion of the wine's proceeds to several programs, including Atlanta-based charity All Abroad, to which he contributed \$10,000 to help fund a 2021 trip to Africa for high-school students from Atlanta and Baltimore. Burston has also donated \$25,000 to The Roots Fund, an organization that supports minorities in the wine industry through education scholarships, mentoring, and job-placement programs.

By demonstrating that the wine industry can commit to far more than performative activism when addressing social issues, Vital Wines and La Fête du Rosé have proven that drinking well and doing good is a pairing worth pursuing. *WJ*

Wanda Mann is a Certified Specialist of Wine and the founder of winewithwanda.com.

Follow her on Instagram @winedinewanda.

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On the Central Coast Beat

AN INTRODUCTION TO A DIVERSE AND DELICIOUS CALIFORNIA REGION, PART ONE

CAN ANY WINEGROWING REGION

in the U.S. match the quality and value of the Central Coast of California? My job in writing this new column is to convince you that the answer is “no.” Be they entry-level Central Coast designates or bottles sourced from famous AVAs such as the Sta. Rita Hills or the Santa Cruz Mountains, I intend to define and celebrate the wines it produces, which have long been “sommelier secrets” but are ready for their vinous close-up among mainstream consumers.

With no fewer than 40 distinct AVAs contained within it, the larger Central Coast appellation is staggeringly diverse in terms of terroir, from rainfall patterns, elevations, and soils to varieties planted. My first few columns will broadly categorize and describe the region from south to north, beginning with the area stretching roughly from Santa Barbara to the two southernmost AVAs of San Luis Obispo County. I will then start highlighting specific areas and producers that are vinting noteworthy bottles, with the goal of helping you choose diverse and delicious coastal California wines for your enjoyment and edification.

Santa Barbara County: The oldest of the region’s seven AVAs is cool and sandy Santa Maria Valley, followed by sprawling Santa Ynez Valley, with a range of climates and soil types. Sta. Rita Hills is cool, torturously windy, and foggy in the mornings, with sandy soils; Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara, by contrast, is arid, with huge diurnal temperature swings and a focus on Bordeaux grapes. The sandy promontory that is Ballard Canyon has a moderate climate and a penchant for

With no fewer than 40 distinct AVAs contained within it, the larger Central Coast appellation is staggeringly diverse in terms of terroir, from rainfall patterns, elevations, and soils to varieties planted.



Rhône varieties. The moderate-to-warm Los Olivos District is planted to historic vineyards with diverse soils and grapes. And the just-approved, Rhône-focused Alisos Canyon also has a moderate-to-warm climate, cooled by the Pacific.

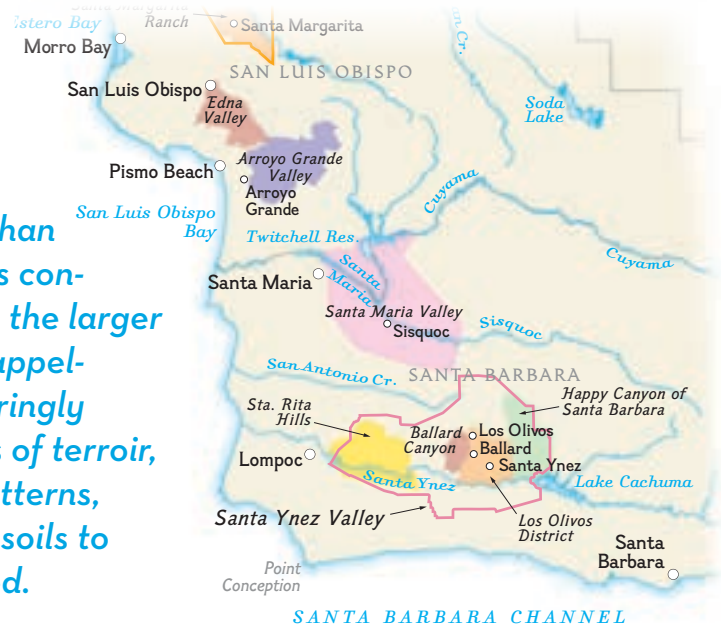
In general, Santa Barbara County is known for making restrained, balanced wines (with the exception of a few big boys) that appeal to those seeking Old World-style elegance and structure. Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, and Rhône reds and whites are the key grapes. My favorite vineyards and wineries include Ken Brown Wines, Jaffurs Wine Cellars, Liquid Farm, Longoria Wines, Au Bon Climat, Lindquist Family Wines, Palma Wines, Bien Nacido Estate, and, of course, J. Wilkes Wines, where I serve as winemaker.

Southern San Luis Obispo County: SLO has long been a favorite among those seeking wines of not only value but great character and liveliness derived from its varied

soils—volcanic, sedimentary, marine—and Pacific influence. As in most Central Coast AVAs, that influence burns off quicker the further inland they’re planted. This variation between cool marine and warmer inland climates contributes to a wide array of ripening curves and styles, so you can likely find a perfect wine for any palate.

Two AVAs exist here: Arroyo Grande Valley to the south and Edna Valley to the north. Coastally grown Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah, and Viognier show great freshness and cut, while sites closer to the inland mountains exhibit the heat needed to grow fantastic Zinfandel and Petite Sirah. My favorite brands and sites include Stephen Ross Wine Cellars, Claiborne & Churchill Winery, Chamisal Vineyards, Tolsosa Winery, and Saucelito Canyon, which crafts ageworthy Zinfandel. **sj**

Wes Hagen is consulting winemaker and brand ambassador for Miller Family Wine Company. Follow him on Instagram @wes_hagen.



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by Ruth Tobias

Honey Elixir Bar's nonalcoholic "potions" contain not only honey and herbs of all kinds but also the "vibrational ingredients" of various crystals and flowers.

To Your Health

TOASTING TO A BETTER TOMORROW AT DENVER'S HONEY ELIXIR BAR AND WILDFLOWER

TO END A HISTORICALLY

hellish year on a note of hope, I planned to pen for December the kind of rosy-hued, wellness-oriented column one typically publishes in January by profiling two newer Denver establishments with a focus on botanically driven, better-for-you beverage programs. I'm actually penning it on a day that the city's restaurants and bars have once again been ordered to cease indoor operations—so it's hard to muster much optimism for a healthier, happier 2021. But if anything could represent the promise of better days ahead, it's these two concepts.

Honey Elixir Bar comes by its name honestly: Most of owner Jocasta Hanson's cocktails and nonalcoholic "potions," as well as the kombucha-like *jun* she sources from Boulder, contain the ingredient that she describes as "bees turning sunshine into liquid gold." Honey is "an incredible substance," in her view, not only for its medicinal properties or because its use supports local bee populations but also because "it makes a richer cocktail, with greater viscosity and greater depth."

The proof was in the pudding of the drinks I tasted on a recent visit. Featuring gin, saffron liqueur, aquafaba, and bee pollen as well as vanilla-bean honey, the Pollen Nation was borderline creamy yet brightly lit by its exotic spices; the warm, frothy, earthy, barely sweet Chocolit, meanwhile, combined honey with cacao sourced



PHOTO: BONINI PACHECO PHOTOGRAPHY

Wildflower's In Full Bloom with Cava, Carpano Bianco, rose water, and sorrel flower.

from a Mayan women's cooperative, MCT oil, various herbs, and what Hanson

calls the "vibrational ingredients" of rose quartz, gardenia, and pink yarrow. According to the "same theory as homeopathy," she told me, the crystals and flowers she chooses to infuse her potions "support the concept of the drink," in this case a sense of peace and harmony. I certainly felt at complete ease while sipping it in the cozy, colorful confines of her alleyway space in RiNo, which opened just three months before the first shutdown in March; here's hoping I'll be able to linger there again before spring.

Off the lobby of brand-new LoHi hotel Life House, Wildflower comes by its name just as honestly: All of its cocktails, with or without alcohol, contain floral elements. Life House corporate director of food and beverage Daniel Levine explained to me that "when we were looking for our muse [for the hotel], we really drew it from the landscape—all the beautiful wildflowers and the beautiful gardens that [our] neighbors work so hard to curate. And because we wanted to do a vegetable-forward culinary program, partnering with local farmers," blossoms could serve as a "single unified inspiration" for both the bartenders and the kitchen crew.

Seating myself on a barstool for the first (and last) time this year, I was smitten with the sprightly, festive In Full Bloom, a low-ABV sipper with Cava, Carpano Bianco, rose water; and sorrel flower, as well as a companion's Frontier Fog, a gin-based concoction served with lavender, lemon, and Earl Grey in a milk-washed teacup. They arrived, however, only after I'd been treated to an immune-system booster shot that Levine called a "COVID-era amuse bouche for the drink program": Flavored with turmeric, black pepper, ginger, lemon, and alfalfa honey, it was a cute gesture toward another notable facet of the flower-centric list—mead.

In Levine's view, Colorado's craft-beer culture is so advanced that "there's not much meat left on the bone of discovery anymore." Meanwhile, its mead community is growing fast; he pointed to the fact that it's home to two of the country's biggest mead festivals—just as it has long been to the nation's biggest beer festival—as evidence that mead "offers a real opportunity to explore a subset of fermented beverages that speaks to Colorado right now." Pouring six locally made examples, he said they're avoiding dessert styles to "combat the association with syrupy sweetness—the different flowers that bees pollinate create honeys with different flavors, and you don't need to be an [expert] to tell the difference." The selection, like that of exclusively natural wines, will grow with demand from their guests, he asserted: Three cheers for a positive attitude. **\$J**

PHOTO: MATT KISDAY FOR LIFE HOUSE

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The Gold Standard

THIS WINE-TASTING KIT IS SURVIVAL GEAR FOR PROS AND ENTHUSIASTS ALIKE

STUDYING WINE WITHOUT THE

experience of tasting it in real-world settings such as trade events and seminars is frustrating at best. One elegant solution, developed by author and educator Evan Goldstein, MS, and his business partner, Full Circle Wine Solutions CEO Limeng Stroh, has quickly become the gold standard of study tools for professionals and consumer enthusiasts.

I first learned of the Master the World (MTW) tasting kits in late 2018, when Goldstein and Stroh mounted a successful Indiegogo campaign to launch their company. The kits contain six screwcapped, 187-milliliter bottles of wine selected by a panel of Master Sommeliers and access to both a proprietary online-tasting platform and live webinars led by Goldstein and his colleagues.

"While we had planned for a soft launch once we went live in January 2020, the pandemic accelerated that launch to hang on and grow," says Goldstein. "[In] the new normal of structured tastings being relegated to the confines of your dining-room table or living-room couch, we have seen an enthusiastic response from the trade and consumers alike."

With travel severely restricted during the lockdown—limiting access to field research—keeping our tasting skills sharp has proven challenging. Here's how three industry professionals are using their MTW kits to broaden their horizons.

Santa Cruz native Scott Thomasen is vice president of sales Mountain West, air, seas, and export markets for Vino del Sol, a regional importer of Argentine wine. "With a portfolio of 12 wineries, the kits help me understand other regions; they also keep me from becoming myopic and developing cellar palate," he says, noting that two wines from the Vino del Sol portfolio are included in the kits for Argentina (as they were designed for blind tasting,

we can't disclose the labels here). "Most consumers aren't aware of these wines, and it's a great way to introduce them to these regions and producers."

Wine Enthusiast's Wine Star Awards 2020 Person of the Year Heidi Scheid can't wait for her kit to arrive each month. Scheid, who is also the executive vice president of Scheid Vineyards in Monterey County, participates in a tasting group with friends and family members, but she says that it's not structured enough for someone who wants to constantly keep learning about wine: "When you're on your own, it can be very hit-or-miss, [but] these kits work on so many different levels."

Scheid adds that she gets the most out of her kits when she's tasting along with the live webinar: "The presenters are such gifted speakers, and they make the information very accessible." Then, when she and her partner taste together, he gets to enjoy the wines and she gets to exercise what she's learned by acting as his guide. She also has high praise for the kits'

slick design and packaging developed by Goldstein and Stroh.

Kat Thomas, yoga instructor and former wine education and training manager at The Hakkasan Group in Las Vegas, Nevada, is preparing for the Master Sommelier exam and using the MTW kits to replicate the conditions of sitting for the tasting portion. She points to the webinars and online tools—including a "Full Workout" blind-tasting mode for sensory evaluation and a "Quick Picks" mode that encourages tasters to try to guess what's in their glass—that Goldstein offers with each kit as the biggest value-add: "You have an opportunity to self-check against the tasting notes of the presenters during the live webinar and use the online tool."

Thomas is also using the kits to lead a private class of eager consumers through blind-tasting sessions, the objective of which is enjoyment. As she explains, "The kits are perfect for exploring on your own, but many consumers genuinely enjoy having a guide." S



PHOTO COURTESY OF FULL CIRCLE WINE SOLUTIONS

Cheers to a Sweet(er) 2021!



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ROSA REGALE

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Checking All the Boxes

A GUIDE TO THE MYRIAD VIRTUES OF **VINHO VERDE**

by Erik Segelbaum

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINHO VERDE WINES



Alvarinho is perhaps Vinho Verde's most famous grape.

GEEKY SUBREGIONS WITH DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER? Check! Autochthonous grapes as well as major Iberian varieties? Check! Multigenerational farmers and wine-makers coaxing the terroir out of every last vine? Check! A wide range of styles that not only represent exceptional value, especially at premium price points, but also work well with virtually every type of cuisine, even the notoriously hard to pair? Check, check, and check! One of the world's best-kept secrets? Not anymore. The word is out, and the buzz surrounding Vinho Verde just keeps growing.

Allow me to (re)introduce you to Vinho Verde, one of my favorite wine regions on the planet. As a sommelier, I'm driven toward dynamic wines that overdeliver on quality for the price: I'm looking for diversity in the vineyard, passion from those who steward their grapes from ground to glass, and versatility at the table. As a wine nerd, meanwhile, I appreciate the opportunity to dive deep into subregions, microclimates, indigenous varieties, and all of the other wonderfully esoteric elements of terroir that tug at the heartstrings of enophiles everywhere.

The Minho River borders Vinho Verde to the north, the Douro River to the south.





The town of Amarante is a hub of Vinho Verde wine tourism.

One of the world's most common vine-training systems, the simple ascending cord is often used in the viticulture of Vinho Verde.



Yet despite its rising profile, too many consumers still believe the myth that the region is devoted to inexpensive, semi-effervescent white wine. Nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, premium Vinho Verde wines are complex and ageworthy. And there is an immense groundswell in this segment: Producers are focusing on microterroirs, subregional vinification, high-quality equipment, appropriate application of oak and bottle age, and many other factors that add up to pure deliciousness in the glass.

The results are as diverse as they are exciting and rewarding. If you've tried Vinho Verde Branco (white) but not Tinto (red), Espumante (fully sparkling), or Rosado (rosé), then you have been depriving yourself of some seriously delectable stuff.

A Taste of Terroir

Vinho Verde is one of the largest demarcated wine regions in the EU and the largest in Portugal, where it's home to nine distinctive subzones. In the not-too-distant future, I expect that conversations about the inherent flavor differences between Monção e Melgaço and Lima will be as commonplace in sommelier chat rooms as those comparing Pommard to Volnay. And these dialogues will be underpinned by discussions of some of Vinho Verde's amazing indigenous grapes, of which there are many. Alvarinho, the ascendant variety of the region, is rapidly


gaining international acclaim, with examples from its ancestral home of Minho receiving special attention.

Though the composition of white Vinho Verde can vary greatly depending on whether it's a varietal wine or a blend, Alvarinho leads the charge along with Loureiro, Trajadura, Avesso, Azal, and Arinto. Whites may be oaked or unoaked, citrus- or stone fruit-driven, lean or rich, and still or effervescent. Similarly diverse are the region's rosés and reds, which may be composed of Espadeiro, Alvarelhão, Padeiro, or Vinhão.

A Welcome Dinner Guest

With dishes that typically present as challenges for pairing, it's Vinho Verde to the rescue. There's a wine for the spice of Indian and Southeast Asian food, another for the equally intense heat of various Latin American cuisines, and still another for the bold flavors of the Middle East, as well as options for more delicate European and Mediterranean gastronomy. If it lives underwater, there's a perfect expression of Vinho Verde for it, be it sushi, octopus, squid, mussels, tuna, or seaweed. In fact, one of the most amazing pairings I've ever experienced was a red Vinho Verde with charcoal-grilled sardines. For some reason, many sommeliers insist that you cannot easily pair wine with artichokes or asparagus—I beg to disagree!

Look no further than premium oaked Vinho Verde Branco.

At the end of the day, Vinho Verde wines belong in the glasses and hearts of serious wine lovers. Sommeliers have the opportunity to showcase these expressions in their programs and on their store shelves—sharing with consumers the entire symphony of Vinho Verde, not just the one-instrument solo they've been led to believe is the music of the region. It's time to shout Vinho Verde from the mountaintops! 



Erik Segelbaum is an Advanced Sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers, representing one of under 600 people in the world that currently hold this level of certification. Previously the corporate beverage director for Starr Restaurants, he is the founder of wine consulting company SOMLYAY and vice president of the United Sommelier Foundation as well as a 2019 Food & Wine Sommelier of the Year and a 2020 Wine Enthusiast 40 Under 40 Tastemaker.



A Model of Success

THE WINES OF ALENTEJO SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM MARKS FIVE YEARS OF PROGRESS

by Deborah Parker Wong

PRODUCERS IN THE Portuguese winegrowing region of Alentejo—whose vineyards encompass about 18,000 hectares, or almost a third of the country—have made significant gains in sustainability under the guidance of the Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Program (WASP).

Launched as a membership program in 2015 by the Comissão Vitivinícola Regional Alentejana (CVRA), WASP offers a certification path that aims to tackle environmental and societal challenges while reducing operational costs and improving the economic health of its members.

“In developing WASP, we benchmarked the most relevant international schemes on sustainability, being strongly inspired by the OIV [International Organisation of Vine and Wine] guidelines as well as [those established by] the California Sustainable Wine Alliance and Wines of Chile, due to the similar characteristics of these [three] regions,” says João Barroso, sustainability manager at the Alentejo Regional Winegrowing Commission, which works with the CVRA to implement the program. “We also received input from the University of Évora and the Alentejo Winegrowers Technical Association as well as individual Alentejo grape growers and wineries.”

Since the program's inception, its membership has grown steadily and currently comprises 411 wineries and vineyard owners representing approximately 45% of Alentejo's considerable vineyard area. Much of that growth can be credited to the support and incentives WASP offers free of cost: In addition to consultancy and assistance with implementing and monitoring sustainability-related practices in the field, the program provides training led by Barroso that's focused on water, energy, and waste management in both the vineyard and cellar, representing a key value-add for the hundreds of members that have participated.



Alentejo's roughly 18,000 vineyard acres experience the highest average summer temperatures in Europe, making the climate change-focused initiatives promoted by WASP all the more urgent.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WINES OF ALENTEJO SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM

WASP in Action

The program's impressive gains over the past five years are indicative of an organization that is striving to build a big membership tent. While the majority of members are already certified organic, it's not required; others are also part of the Integrated Production of Wine—a separate sustainability program launched in South Africa in 1998—which allows for the limited application of synthetic inputs in the vineyard. Instead of excluding them, WASP opts to focus on reducing the use of herbicides and pesticides by providing education about alternatives such as cover crops to increase organic matter in the soil and the application of natural nitrates. In addition, the use of sheep, geese, and bats is encouraged for both managing insect populations and pruning vines.

"We are mostly focused on promoting biodiversity in the vineyards with auxiliary insects and cover crops," Barroso explains. "By establishing ecological corridors and buffer zones around our [members'] vineyards, we have increased the number of insect-eating mammals and birds and have significantly reduced the use of pesticides and spraying." WASP participants have also decreased their dependence on pesticides by using equipment that captures and recycles spray drift, reducing chemical use by up to 50%.

Another top priority is water conservation, as the production of just 1 liter of wine requires 14 liters of water on average. Producers are reducing their consumption by installing water meters, closely monitoring use, and implementing water-management plans while improving maintenance on their irrigation systems; as a result, some are now using as little as 1.2–5 liters of water to produce 1 liter of wine.

For WASP members, an indirect effect of adhering to these sustainability-driven

practices has been better wine quality, according to Barroso, who notes that "savings as a result of conservation can be used to invest in better equipment and next-generation technology." Among the producers looking to the future is Herdade do Esporão, which has developed a 9-hectare vineyard to test 180 grape varieties (about 150 of which are indigenous to Portugal) in order to identify those best adapted to the warming climate. "Alentejo consistently has the highest average summertime temperatures in all of Europe," says Barroso. "We are not planning for climate change; we're living it."



WASP members aim to promote biodiversity in their vineyards through the use of cover crops and grazing sheep.

in the program's 18 chapters; they also must source at least 60% of their grapes from vineyard areas also registered in the WASP program.

WASP's success hasn't gone unnoticed: It was recognized by the European Commission with the 2019 European Rural Innovation Award and is now one of the EU's Rural Innovation Ambassadors for 2020. The program's initiatives have drawn the attention of researchers and sustainability groups from the University of California, Davis; Wines of Chile; Italy's Viva la Sostenibilità nella Vitivinicoltura in Italia (VIVA); and many others hoping to draw




The Path to Certification

In order to officially verify its members, WASP launched its third-party certification in July 2020. Producers can work with one of four certifying bodies: SGS, Bureau Veritas, Certis, and Sativa. After conducting the first certification audits in late November, Barroso says that "we anticipate having our first certified producer by the end of the year and at least five producers certified by the first quarter of 2021."

To become certified, producers must reach what's known as the "developed" level for each of the requirements defined

inspiration from its progress to improve their own practices.

Over the next five years, Barroso expects WASP to continue making gains toward its overall goals as a result of promoting the use of ecosystem-management services specifically designed to make vineyards and organizations more resilient and adaptable to climate change. "Climate change is not a one-region or one-country fight," says Barroso. "Alentejo and Portugal have benefited from learning from other world regions, and we are now proud to also be looked at as a sustainability frontrunner." 

Tasting Notes

Herdade do Rocim 2017 Olho de Mocho Reserva Branco This monovarietal Antão Vaz shows crisp, mineral citrus and a touch of vanilla; the lush body reflects five months of daily lees stirring.

Malhadinha Nova 2019 Peceguina Antão Vaz Exotic floral and tropical-fruit aromas point to a ripe style on the palate, with lemon and grapefruit flavors and a saline, mineral finish.

Luis Duarte 2019 Rubrica Branco This blend of Antão Vaz with Verdelho and Viognier offers delicate aromas of white blossom and a creamy body with notes of white peach and young pineapple.

Herdade do Esporão 2012 Vinha das Palmeiras Alicante Bouschet Scents of violets, sweet tobacco, and dark berries announce flavors of red and black plums as well as dark spices in a structured medium body.

CARMIM 2017 Monsaraz Alicante Bouschet Bright aromas of black plum, mulberry, and dark earth lead to a medium-bodied wine showing cedar and black pepper as well as tasty, still-youthful tannins.



portugal

Declared wine may be aged no longer than two years before bottling.

PHOTO: © JOAQUIN FERREIRA / IFF © INSTITUTO DOS VINHOS DO DOURO E DO PORTO

Portion Control

EXAMINING THE STRICT REGULATIONS FOR VINTAGE PORT

by Allison Levine



PHOTO: © INSTITUTO DOS VINHOS DO DOURO E DO PORTO



Vintage Port goes through several approval processes before—and even after—it is bottled.

EVERY YEAR, AS HARVEST BEGINS, so does a new vintage. Farmers and winemakers around the world share the challenges they faced during the growing season and their hopes for the outcome while comparing the vintage to previous ones, and we as wine drinkers can taste the nuanced differences between them.

In the world of Port, it is a different story. Though ongoing improvements in viticultural and winemaking practices are increasing its occurrence, Vintage Port is somewhat rare, made only in years when the quality of the harvest is considered exceptional. Only a tiny percentage of Portugal's famed fortified wine is declared as Vintage Port; most Ports—including Tawny, White, Rosé, Ruby, and Crusted Port—are blends of multiple vintages, bottled and released as nonvintage wines that showcase the house style. Also not counting as Vintage Port are three categories that nonetheless include a vintage on the label. Late Bottled Vintage (LBV) Port is a high-quality Ruby Port from a single harvest that's ready to drink once bottled after aging for four to six years. Single Quinta Vintage Port is sourced from a single vineyard (*quinta*) during a single year, typically one in which a vintage has not been declared; in those that have, the wine will usually be blended into the Vintage Port. Colheita, or "Harvest," Ports are single-vintage White or Tawny Ports matured in small oak barrels for a minimum of seven years prior to bottling.

The standard for declaration is extremely high: The producer must believe that the wines produced in any given harvest meet the standard of excellence expected of a Vintage Port. The ability to assess a wine's potential comes only with experience, but criteria include a deeply inky color with hints of violet; intense and complex aromatics;



A Port house in Portugal's famed Douro Valley.

and balance on the palate, with acidity, sweetness, and astringency in perfect complement. Producers must have their vintages approved by the Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e do Porto (IVDP) between January and July in the second year following the harvest. The wine may be aged no longer than two years; bottling may then take place until July of the third year after samples have been submitted for final approval by the IVDP.

As the regulating body for the Port trade, the IVDP controls and approves all the Port on the market with an eye toward controlling supply. It tracks the quantity of every wine produced, how much is sold, and to whom; it provides the seals of guarantee on every bottle, no matter the style; and it's very active in combating fraud, mislabeling, and misinformation. Of course, it also tests for quality, performing laboratory analysis on all batches produced to ensure they meet all legal requirements as well as blind tasting samples. There are additional tests for Vintage Port; if a batch meets the standards of the category, it is approved for bottling. The producer must then notify the IVDP of the

bottling dates, at which point IVDP inspectors come to the winery and count every bottle, collecting five samples in order to confirm that they contain the same wine that was submitted for approval. Once the bottles are authorized, the front and back labels are checked to ensure they include all necessary information.

On average, only three Port vintages are declared per decade. The decades of 1900 (1900, 1904, 1908); 1910 (1911, 1912, 1917); 1930 (1931, 1934, 1935); 1950 (1950, 1955, 1958); and 2000 (2000, 2003, 2007) each had three declared vintages. The decades of 1920 (1920, 1922, 1924, 1927); 1940 (1942, 1945, 1947, 1948); 1960 (1960, 1963, 1966, 1967); 1970 (1970, 1975, 1977, 1978); and 1990 (1991, 1992, 1994, 1997) each declared four vintages. The 1980s saw six declared vintages (1980, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1989). In the 2010s, 2011 was the first declared vintage, followed by 2016 and 2017. The declaration of two back-to-back vintages is rare.

While both were indeed exceptional, 2016 and 2017 were very different. Bento Amaral, the head of the IVDP's quality

control department, stated in an email that due to their "good concentration and structure . . . both years were quite easy to be approved . . . compared with other years."

The 2016 vintage was atypical, with a rainy yet warm winter followed by a rainy but cold spring. Summer was extremely hot and dry. The resulting wines are well balanced with good concentration; 63 producers declared in 2016. The 2017 vintage, by contrast, was extremely dry. Several heat waves occurred during the spring and early summer; as summer went on, there were some strong but short thunderstorms. The wines have good aromatic intensity without too much exuberance. On the palate, they show great structure with nice tannins. With 71 producers declaring, 2017 was the biggest year for Vintage Port to date.

"You can say 2017 is more powerful and 2016 is a little bit more elegant . . . with better freshness," concluded Amaral. "Either way, [they] are going to age very well. I would say that they . . . can be drunk probably [until] the end of this century, although they are pleasurable right now." ❧



The Belgian Connection

BEER AND CHEESE PAIRINGS TO WARM YOU UP THIS WINTER




FROM SAISONS TO SOURS, Belgian and Belgian-style beers are my go-to pairings for cheese, especially in winter. The yeast they're made with produces deep fruit and spice notes that complement the buttery and nutty aromas of many cheeses, and they also have the heft to stand up to strong cheeses such as blues. Here are a few of my favorite styles to explore in the chilly weeks to come:

Saisons: Highly effervescent and fruity, often with apple and pear notes, saisons start off sweet but typically finish dry. They can be peppery—some brewers actually add pepper and coriander to the brew—but it's that dry fruitiness that makes them seem like the “cidery” of the beer world. Try them with Camembert, Coulommiers, or domestic bloomy-rind cow's milk cheeses such as Jasper Hill Farm Moses Sleeper; Alemar Cheese Company Bent River; and Von Trapp Farmstead Mt. Alice.

Dubbels: Dark, spicy, creamy, and malt-centric, dubbels smell like a bakery the week before Christmas. Breathe deep and expect a wave of toffee, clove, brown sugar, dried fig, and molasses. Despite those aromas, most dubbels have a crisp, dry finish. Pair them with Goudas (L'Amuse or Beemster XO from the Netherlands, Marieke Gouda from Wisconsin, or Central Coast Creamery Goat Gouda from California, for example); Mimolette; or the nutty Spanish goat's milk cheese Garrotxa.

Strong Golden Ales and Tripels: These two styles are similar, with elevated alcohol (7.5–10%); high carbonation; and huge aromas of banana, citrus, and spice cake. Tripels, however, tend to leave a sweeter impression, with whiskey-like flavors. Triple-cream cheeses such as Cowgirl Creamery Mt Tam pair well, as do nutty aged sheep cheeses such as Ossau-Iraty and aged cheddars. Consider Face Rock Creamery's Limited Bandaged Cheddar from Oregon or Flory's Truckle from Iowa's Milton Creamery.

Quadrupels: Quads are dark and deeply malty, with aromas of dried cherry, raisin, fruitcake, and gingerbread. Often showing residual sweetness, these powerful brews can top 10% alcohol, so they call for cheeses with concentration and strength. Look to buttery blues such as Stichelton and Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Co. Bay Blue. Other quad-compatible choices include aged cheddar, butterscotch-scented aged Gouda, and nutty Alpine or Alpine-style cheeses such as Comté, Hoch Ybrig, and Spring Brook Farm Tarentaise.


Sour Ales: These bracingly tart and fruity brews can be challenging to pair with cheese, but there are some good options. Triple-cream cheeses buffer some of the palate-scrubbing acidity. Aged cheddars also stand up to these beers. And if you appreciate bold flavor matches, try a Flanders red ale such as Duchesse de Bourgogne with a washed-rind cheese like Munster or Cowgirl Creamery Red Hawk. Bottoms up! 



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Beer(d) Science isn't just an excuse for an '80s movie pun: Each column covers a different style of beer and related terminology to help somms expand their beer knowledge.

Skimming Apples

AN INTRODUCTORY GLANCE AT CIDER STYLES

by Jessie Birschbach

I'M VEERING OFF COURSE a bit this issue, and there's a totally selfish reason for it: I'm making cider this year for the first time ever. At the time of this writing, on a cold November day, there's a large pile—about three bushels' worth—of apples sweating in my backyard. (Sweating is the part of the cidermaking process wherein apples are left in a cool, dry area until they start to soften, concentrating their sugars and, in turn, their flavor.) In about a month, I'll be fumbling my way through fermentation, but in the meantime, I'm doing a fair amount of research in the form of both reading and drinking.

Actually, covering cider isn't too much of a stretch for Beer'd Science, considering that the Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) defines three different styles of cider in its guidelines. By contrast, there's no detailed mention of the delicious stuff on the GuildSomm website, which strikes me as odd given that the very best examples are said to compete with Champagne (mostly by proud cidermakers, but still). With that connection in mind, I thought that I should help my fellow sommeliers by offering at least a general breakdown of cider styles.

Perhaps it's best to enter the world of cider through the perception of sweetness, a pathway already familiar to a sommelier. There are three main sweetness categories in cider: dry, medium, and sweet. The first category includes off-dry expressions, while the second incorporates medium-sweet ones. The residual sugar levels in grams per liter, according to the BJCP, are as follows:

Dry: 0–4 g/L
Off-Dry: 4–9 g/L
Medium: 9–20 g/L
Medium-Sweet: 20–40 g/L
Sweet: >40 g/L

It's worth noting that sweetness levels are categorized a bit differently in countries like France and England, which take cider much more seriously than us Americans in terms of both production and consumption. In fact, English cider and French cider are two of the aforementioned three styles of cider defined by the BJCP, the third being called simply common cider.

ENGLISH CIDER

Also referred to as West Country cider, this style is traditional to the area known as the West of England, where tannin-rich varieties of apples like Dabinett and Kingston Black are grown. The resulting profile is not only tannic but also "generally dry, full-bodied, [and] austere," according to the BJCP, though its sweetness level can vary from dry to medium. Look for Aspall Dry Cider as a widely available example.

FRENCH CIDER

As with the English style, tannin plays a key role in French cider, which traditionally has been made with tannic apple varieties like Bedan and Biquet; however, it's dominated by round, fruity aromas and flavors. This "medium to sweet, full-bodied, rich" varietal character, as described by the BJCP, can also result from an arrested fermentation technique. Le Père Jules is a great example that I've been able to find stateside.



PHOTO: YURIY GOLUBEV VIA ADOBE STOCK

COMMON CIDER

Unlike English cider, which typically lacks an obvious apple character, the sweet, low-alcohol examples of domestic common cider "may have apple aroma and flavor," per the BJCP. "Dry ciders will be more wine-like . . . [with] refreshing character, neither cloying nor too austere." Both will typically feature medium to high acidity. Try Harpoon Cider, which is widely available.

Keep in mind that there is significant variation within the BJCP's basic three styles and even outside of them; in fact, cider expert Gabe Cook's *Ciderology* identifies several styles, including Spanish, hopped, barrel-influenced, and ice cider. Note too that there are several other factors, such as carbonation levels, to consider—but I hope this is a start. I know it's only the beginning for this old lady! *sj*

Jessie Birschbach is a Certified Cicerone, substandard homebrewer, and wannabe cidemaker.



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Victoria O'Bryan

WINE DIRECTOR, ADDISON, SAN DIEGO, CA by Michelle M. Metter



PHOTO: JASON O'BRYAN

ADDISON HAS LONG been a must for SoCal foodies looking to check off another box on their dining scorecard. We sat down with its wine director, Advanced Sommelier Victoria O'Bryan, to discuss her path to and role at San Diego's first Michelin-starred restaurant.

Q: What led you to your current position at Addison?

I've been in restaurants my whole professional life, but it was only when I moved to San Diego almost ten years ago that I truly fell down the rabbit hole of the wine world and fully embraced the never-ending pursuit of wine knowledge. Once I fell in love with wine, my goal was simply to work with the finest [program] I possibly could, even if it meant working my way up for years without direct involvement. When I was hired at Addison in 2013, there were many challenges and plateaus that had to be overcome to push myself to new stages of my career, including [the] increasingly demanding goals of sitting for the CMS Advanced and Master Sommelier exams. Now, as the Addison wine director, that trajectory has not changed: I'm continuously pushing myself to learn and grow in order to move myself and the restaurant forward.

Q: Tell us about Addison's wine program.

The Addison wine program is vast, with more than 3,500 selections encompassing classic styles and international rarities that allow our guests to have some truly memorable evenings. There is an emphasis on French bottlings, especially from Burgundy, as we believe this region to be one of the most versatile accompaniments [to] our cuisine. We are also quite proud of the gems we've collected from California, Italy, and Spain as well as the ever-enchanting bottles of Madeira that [go] back to vintages from the mid-19th century. While we embrace such classic representations, we are also always pushing ourselves to evolve and keep enhancing our list with wines from fascinating regions such as South Africa, Eastern Europe, and New Zealand.

Q: Who are your mentors in the industry?

Entering the wine industry while living in San Diego has been such a delight, as the restaurant professionals here are incredibly supportive and welcoming to any and all who show an interest in wine. In my early years, I found so much guidance and so many sources of inspiration within this community—it would be quite an extensive list to name each person individually. [But] Tami Wong in particular was a mentor and guiding light, helping me build confidence in myself and my abilities.

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

Leroy Domaine d'Auvenay 2002 Chevalier-Montrachet Grand Cru with my husband. I can't imagine anyone else I'd want to share a glass of such a momentous wine with. *SM*

Michelle M. Metter is the co-founder and director of SommCon USA. The Tasting Panel and The SOMM Journal are proud supporters of SommCon and its mission to provide continued education and training for the global wine industry.

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Still Life with Bubbles

REFLECTIONS ON A DECADE AT **BRIDE VALLEY VINEYARD**

story by Steven Spurrier / photos by Lucy Pope



Bella and Steven Spurrier in the drawing room of their home in south Dorset. The couple established Bride Valley Vineyard in 2009 to produce a lineup of both still and sparkling wines.

A view of the west-facing vines in Bride Valley Vineyard.



IN 1987, when my wife, Bella, bought a 200-acre farm on the edge of the village of Litton Cheney in south Dorset overlooking the home we'd just purchased, I noticed that the land was riddled with chalk. I was still working at my wine school in Paris, L'Academie du Vin, at the time, so I put a couple of small blocks in my pocket to show lecturer Michel Bettane and asked him where he thought they came from. "Champagne, of course," he said, to which I replied, "No, south Dorset." "In that case," he responded, "you should plant a vineyard."

Inspired by this, I invited Chablis producer Michel Laroche to visit me for a weekend and gave him some soil samples to take home for analysis. The results were favorable for Chardonnay and cool-climate varieties like Pinot Blanc and Pinot Noir: Nice to know, but we did nothing about it.

Then, while attending an awards ceremony at the International Wine & Spirit Competition in the mid-1990s, I was offered a glass of fizz and asked what I thought it was. Like Bettane, I answered, "Champagne, of course—certainly a Blanc de Blancs, probably from a Grand Cru." I was quite wrong, for it was the 1989 Blanc de Blancs from Nyetimber, a vineyard in Kent established by Chicagoan Sandy Moss with experts from Champagne. Now under the ownership of Dutch-born Eric Heerema (and substantially expanded), Nyetimber is the leading brand of English sparkling wine—but it was all but unheard of at the time of that competition, where it beat not only Champagnes but top sparklers from all over the world. Fifteen years later, Ridgeview in Sussex similarly took the top prize at the 2010 Decanter World Wine Awards—and by that time, my wife and I had planted the first 2 hectares of our Bride Valley Vineyard.

Why the name Bride Valley? In my view, wines should have a sense of place, and we are fortunate to be in an area of natural beauty that encompasses seven historic villages along the River Bride, which rises at Bridehead House and meanders for 8 miles before joining the English Channel at Bridport, a flourishing little market town. It makes sense that the soils here have among the

highest concentrations of chalk in England, as we are only 24 miles from the village of Kimmeridge, which gave its name to the similar Kimmeridgian soils of chalky marl and limestone in Champagne. What's more, the property is blessed with south-, south-east-, and southwest-facing slopes that are, from my perspective, perfect for vines.

Having seen the increasing success of English sparkling wines at competitions like the aforementioned, I'd compiled a dossier to present to the Boisset family from Burgundy, one of the great specialists in this category, at Vinexpo 2007. They were on board immediately with the possibility of a joint venture, and the head of sparkling wine production at Boisset, Georges Legrand, and his team visited us three times with the aim of finding around 30 hectares to plant as well as of building a winery to handle a potential production of 150,000–200,000 bottles. However, after in-depth analysis of soil, subsoil, exposure, and climate, the conclusion was that there were only 10–12 hectares of prime potential. The advice from the Boissets was clear: Prepare the plots for planting; buy the vines from the world's best nursery, Pépinières Guillaume in northern Burgundy; and take the grapes to Ian Edwards, named the 2012 English Winemaker of the Year by the United Kingdom Vineyard Association, at nearby Furleigh Estate for production instead of building a separate facility. "If all goes well," they told us, "we will buy the wine."



With this encouragement, we were off. We planted the first 2 hectares in 2009 and completed the process in 2013, and we now have 42,000 vines on just over 10 hectares, planted to the classic grapes of Champagne: 55% Chardonnay with seven different clones, 25% Pinot Noir with four, and 20% Pinot Meunier with two. The rootstocks, Fercal and 41B, are suited to both the chalky soil and the relatively humid climate. My back-of-an-envelope



The recently created Wine & Art Room houses Spurrier's collection of wine-related artifacts and visuals.

prediction was that we would produce a bottle per vine—less than the litre per vine that top English vineyard consultant Stephen Skelton, MW, advises his clients and considerably less than in Champagne.

Seemingly set fair for the future, we were in fact disappointed by the first few vintages, as only 2014 produced the expected quantity of fruit; by the time the grapes were pressed after the 2017 vintage, we were looking at an average of just one-third of a bottle per vine. In 2018, however, a Mediterranean summer gave us 60,000 bottles, putting us back on track; we even made some well-received still Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Though less ripe, the 2019 vintage brought in 52,000 bottles, and we were again able to produce a still Chardonnay and, from the second pressing (*la taille* in Champagne), some deliciously fruity still Dorset Pinot Noir Rosé. Of course, sparkling wines continue to make up 85–90% of production, encompassing four labels: Dorset Crémant, the first and only English Crémant on the market; a Blanc de Blancs; Brut Reserve, a blend of primarily Pinot Noir with Chardonnay; and Rosé Bella, a blend of Pinot Noir for colour and fruit and Chardonnay for vivacity.

As the founder of the Decanter World Wine Awards who has also served as a panel judge alongside Anthony Dias Blue at his San Francisco International Wine Competition, I know that such competitions are only as good as the judges. Because I hold the utmost respect for

those who served at the 2020 WineGB Awards—Susie Barrie, MW; Rebecca Palmer; and Oz Clarke—I submitted our full range. Every wine won a medal: The 2019 Pinot Noir Rosé and 2017 Brut Reserve each took home a bronze, while the 2018 Chardonnay, 2018 Pinot Noir, 2015/2017 Dorset Crémant blend, 2017 Blanc de Blancs, and 2016 Rosé Bella all won silver. Of course, the Bride Valley team thought we should have earned a gold, but we are not there yet. When the 2018s are entered once more at WineGB as well as at other competitions in early 2022, I think we will be.

Meanwhile, as Bride Valley harvests its sadly small tenth vintage, we've been able to complete other projects. Over the past two years in the stable block behind our house, I have created a Wine & Art Room next to our tasting room. Light and airy, it seats up to 24 and houses much of my collection of wine-related artifacts and a kaleidoscope of imagery. Along the wall outside, there is a stone lean-to that will soon be converted into an art studio for Bella, and in the gardens at the back, I've installed six free-standing sculptures by women artists, which add another dimension for visitors who come to taste.

Philippine de Rothschild once said that "producing wine is easy; it's the first 100 years that are difficult." Bride Valley is for the next and succeeding generations, and Bella and I are proud to continue to develop what we can to pass on to our children and grandchildren. SJ

Capturing the Heart of Monterey

DIORA HARNESSES THE POTENTIAL OF ITS AVA-DESIGNATED SAN BERNABE VINEYARD by Courtney Schiessl

THE WORDS “SAN BERNABE AVA”

have rarely been seen on wine labels—until now. After a 30-year effort to understand and harness the distinct microterroirs of its San Bernabe Vineyard at the center of Monterey County, Diora has now released the appellation’s first designated Chardonnay and second designated Pinot Noir.

It’s apt that Diora is the first to showcase what San Bernabe is capable of: The two are intrinsically intertwined. Diora’s small-lot winery, located within the 5,800-acre vineyard itself, was essentially built in order to best express the essence of San Bernabe as well as the estate’s River Road Vineyard in the nearby Santa Lucia Highlands AVA.

The particularities of the area first intrigued winemaker James Ewart more than two decades ago during his first year as an intern with Delicato Family Wines, parent company of Diora and owner of 1,800 acres of vines in the San Bernabe AVA.

“It’s a large vineyard with a lot of diverse soil types,” he says, “so you can really see the effects of soil differences on the same varietal clone.” Twenty years later, Ewart still rides his bike to the San Bernabe Vineyard every day, where he is working to realize the vision of the Indelicato family, who own Delicato, to bring due attention to this under-the-radar appellation through nuanced, terroir-driven wines.

Tapping Overlooked Potential

Though San Bernabe achieved AVA status in 2004, its history dates back nearly 250 years. Spanish missionaries first planted grapes in Monterey in the 1770s, naming the land that Diora now calls home in honor of Saint Barnabas. It was eventually acquired by Prudential Insurance Company, which planted vineyards designed for bulk wine production, before it was purchased by Delicato Family Wines in 1988.

The Indelicato family soon realized that the San Bernabe Vineyard was destined for

far greater things than bulk wine, so they invested in extensive research and analysis of its soils, exposures, and microclimates. They then replanted it to 57 individual blocks with an eye toward matching each block with the grape variety and clone best suited to it.

“We’re really taking a long-term view,” says Ewart, who left his native Australia to work with Delicato right around the time the research phase began. His background in soil geology made him the perfect fit for the project, and he’s been implementing sustainable practices to harness the potential of the land ever since.

Around ten years ago, the Indelicato family asked Ewart what he would need to take the San Bernabe Vineyard to the next level. The answer was a facility geared toward site-specific winemaking, filled with many small, open-top fermenters that could vinify each block separately. “It’s all of those little things we control, from what clone we plant to bottling—and as a wine-

Diora winemaker James Ewart.



The San Bernabe Vineyard in Monterey County has a namesake AVA.

maker; you want as many different spices in the spice rack," says Ewart. "It's kind of a winemaker's dream."

Showcasing Viticultural Diversity

"San Bernabe is unique because there isn't really another place in the world with all of these differences, from soil types to aspect," says Ewart. Located at the base of the Santa Lucia Range, the vineyard covers rolling hills with gentle, undulating slopes. Afternoon winds from the Monterey Bay flow south through the Santa Lucia and Gabilan ranges, cooling vines and slowing ripening, which lengthens the growing season and allows the grapes to develop complex flavors.

That's not to say that San Bernabe doesn't get warm during the day; it certainly does, ensuring robust fruit character and body in the wines. But a combination of two factors moderates vigor and creates structure to balance the ripeness. One is the low rainfall afforded by the protection of the mountains—which also lowers disease pressure, allowing the team to minimize chemical inputs in the vineyard. The other is the aeolian, or "wind-formed," soil, which isn't found in such concentrations anywhere else in Monterey; as a defining feature of the AVA, it played a key role in its approval. These warm, well-drained soils are essentially ancient, stabilized sand dunes, which explains the nickname that the team sometimes uses for the site: "San Bernabe Beach."

Over the past decade, Delicato Family Wines has turned its focus to the northern part of the vineyard, selling off much of its southern acreage in 2011 and 2016. This aligns with the company's shift toward premium and luxury wines. "The northern parts are just a tad cooler," says Ewart, "and the northern part of the ranch also has more diversity—more loam [and] limestone-rich soils as well as aeolian soils," which comprise about 65% of the remaining 1,800 planted acres. It's also hillier, creating different aspects to work with.

Pushing the Boundaries of Terroir

Though Diora has been crafting wines with San Bernabe fruit for years, wine lovers can finally taste the character of this AVA for themselves with the recently re-

Meridith May's Tasting Notes



Editor's note: The limited-release San Bernabe designates will be reviewed in an upcoming issue of The SOMM Journal.

Diora 2018 La Splendeur du Soleil Chardonnay, Monterey (\$20)

Sensuous aromas of chamomile, baked apple, and lemon curd leave a lasting impression. The clean palate offers notes of lemon meringue with toasted coconut and vanilla-apple custard. Bright acidity lights up the creamy texture, revealing key lime and a dot of salinity on the finish. **93**

Diora 2019 La Belle Fête Rosé of Chardonnay, Monterey (\$20)

Aromas of strawberry and ginger exude from the glass. The lush palate dives deep into red fruit and subtle earthiness with an accent of jasmine. Fine minerality and vivid acidity keep it fresh and vibrant. **92**

Diora 2018 La Petite Grace Pinot Noir, Monterey (\$26)

On the southern edge of the Santa Lucia Range in the San Bernabe Vineyard, Diora makes its mark. This savory Pinot Noir delivers a perfume of black plum and sandalwood and performs with grace on the palate. Earth and black cherry exhibit depth, with added flavors of blueberry and roasted coffee. Dried violets and chocolate mint add to the plush, velvety mouthfeel. **93**

leased, vineyard-designated Diora 2018 La Grande Lumière Estate Grown Chardonnay and 2018 La Grande Majesté Estate Grown Pinot Noir. These two varieties anchor the vineyard, with several different clones of each planted throughout.

"The Chardonnay really sticks out for me here," says Ewart. Ripe, tropical fruit is typical of San Bernabe, in contrast to the bright acidity and lemon citrus notes that the winemaker sees in Diora's Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay. In Pinot Noir, the site tends to bring out red-fruit notes, though each clone and block has its own identity.



Of course, this is just the beginning for both the vineyard and the winery; the Diora team is continuously exploring San Bernabe in search of new planting opportunities. "We've got so many exciting things going on that I lose track," jokes Ewart.

Diora's most recent San Bernabe project is a new vineyard in the foothills of the Santa Lucia Range, planted on 78 hillside acres above existing vines. It's a promising site with many aspects and limestone pockets, making it well suited to Chardonnay—and it's evidence of the quality-oriented forward thinking that motivates Ewart to push boundaries year after year. As he puts it, "That kind of encouragement from the family and passion to see their wines and vineyard always improve—it's infectious." **SJ**

Highest Beauty

**AT TO KALON VINEYARD COMPANY, ANDY ERICKSON
ACHIEVES THE PUREST EXPRESSION OF A HISTORIC SITE**

by Paris Vasser

NESTLED BETWEEN THE Vaca and Mayacamas mountains in Oakville, California, is the site of a historic winery founded by one H.W. Crabb. It dates back to 1868, when Crabb discovered that its nutrient-rich soil could grow orange trees and Italian chestnuts; it would soon overflow as well with what many refer to the “first-growth” vines of Napa Valley. Crabb called his winery on the property To Kalon, Greek for “Highest Beauty”—a name that was resurrected by Robert Mondavi in the 1980s to become synonymous with highly revered wines. Today, Mondavi’s famous To Kalon Vineyard is owned by Constellation Brands and has recently been opened to another exceptional force in American viticulture: renowned winemaker Andy Erickson, who is carrying out the company’s mission “to create a wine . . . that would really leverage the vineyard in a new way” at To Kalon Vineyard Company.

As the owner of Favia Vineyards in Coombsville as well as consulting winemaker for Ovid and Dalle Valle (and, formerly, Screaming Eagle), Erickson brings his deep respect for and knowledge of Napa Valley to the production of 100% Cabernet



To Kalon Vineyard in Oakville is considered to be the Napa Valley equivalent of a Bordeaux first growth.

PHOTOS: JIMMY HANES

To Kalon Vineyard Company 2017 Highest Beauty, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$200)

The perfume of dark fruit is buoyed by licorice and slate. Big, dusty-shouldered tannins are surrounded by peppered blackberry and cassis. Dried heather and violets rise up, with plum and espresso fine-tuning the long, full-bodied finish. **97** —*Meridith May*



Renowned winemaker Andy Erickson oversees production at To Kalon Vineyard Company.

Sauvignon from 15 select blocks of the storied vineyard. In fact, the opportunity to return to the place where he once did research for his master's degree in enology at the University of California, Davis, represented the culmination of 30 years' worth of experience in and dedication to winemaking for Erickson, coming in 2016 when Constellation gave him what he calls "complete latitude" on the project. The purest expression of To Kalon's terroir and a love letter to its legacy, Highest Beauty Cabernet Sauvignon launched in 2019 with the 2016 vintage, which garnered 99 points from James Suckling.

At just 500 cases a year, the label's small production encourages Erickson's penchant for detail, allowing him to "do a deep dive into the vineyard and figure out what soils and what blocks and what clones make me excited," as he puts it, adding, "It's a great project for me in that way because I get to learn about the vineyard, and I also get to fine-tune everything as I go."

That fine-tuning includes a transition to organic farming. It started by doing away with herbicides and pesticides, but as of

this year, To Kalon Vineyard Company's acreage is 100% organically farmed; it will take two more years to achieve certification, which Erickson assures is the goal. "I think farmers get used to seeing a completely sterile landscape, which is not at all what's good for plants and farming," he points out. "You want a diverse landscape; you want life in the vineyard; you want to see life in the soil"—which means, among other things, getting used to more weeds and planting cover crops in the winter. Ultimately, he adds, "I think you want to look at the vineyard itself as its own biome, its own living organism. I was told years ago you don't farm the biome, you farm the soil": Once the former is taken care of, the latter will take care of itself.

The 2017 vintage, which debuted in September 2020, is the result of Erickson's dedication to preserving as well as expressing the true nature of To Kalon. The growing season that year was mild with the exception of an extreme heat wave at the beginning of September, which he actually found beneficial: "[It] rounded the tannins really quickly," Erickson notes,

giving the wine "this really bright quality with a lot of red fruit, a lot of soft tannins." After macerating on the skins for 30 days, it aged for 22 months in new French oak; the very best barrels, of course, are "what we end up putting in the bottles." Speaking of packaging, he adds, the design of the Highest Beauty label and logo pay tribute to that used by Crabb himself: "It's fun to be a part of creating something new that also harkens back to the original history and really stays true to doing something small and well crafted."

So when does Erickson think wine has reached its highest beauty? "The biggest gift for me is when I open a bottle of wine and pour it for people at the table and watch people's eyes light up for the first time," he says. "When everyone takes their first smell or taste of the wine, and you look around and everyone's so excited—that's when you know you've got it."

On that note, customers who join To Kalon Vineyard Company's allocation list are notified whenever a new vintage is available for purchase; for more information, visit tokalonvineyardcompany.com. **SJ**

“An *Inferno* Harvest”

PERHAPS MORE THAN professionals in any other field, winemakers value flexibility; always at the mercy of the weather, they must roll with the punches that each year throws at them, from terribly timed rain to dangerous frost. But they hadn't seen anything until 2020 came along and said, “Hold my beer.” Between the heat spikes, the destruction caused by the Glass and LNU Lightning Complex fires in Napa Valley and Sonoma County, and, of course, the coronavirus cherry on top, the growing season has presented what is perhaps one of the most hard-to-swallow sundaes North Coast AVA vintners have ever been served.

Ask them what they expect to get out of the vintage, then, and you'll suddenly find many of them dancing delicately around the subject. Raeburn Winery's Joe Tapparo, by contrast, seems to be a terrible dancer; but while his hips might lie, he certainly doesn't. In fact, the self-described “under-the-hood winemaker” shot straight from the hip when I interviewed him in late October, refusing to sugarcoat 2020's challenges as he discussed the savvy ways in which he and his team are rising to meet them.

“I have never been more proud of bringing a bottle to someone's house than [I am with] Raeburn. It very much overdelivers for the price point.”

THANKS TO WINEMAKER JOE TAPPARO, **RAEBURN WINERY** RISES TO THE CHALLENGES OF 2020

by Jessie Birschbach



Joe Tapparo is winemaker for Raeburn Winery.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PURPLE BRANDS

So how will Tapparo manage this year to maintain the quality that's made Raeburn Chardonnay one of the bestselling Chardonnays out of the Russian River Valley—at an under-\$20 retail price, no less?

The answer to that requires a brief lesson in guaiacol, one of the key organic compounds responsible for the odor and flavor of smoke taint. Though it naturally occurs in new barrels (as a result of the degradation of lignin, an organic compound in all wood), its absorption into grape skins at higher concentrations due to prolonged exposure to wildfires can result in wine that smells like a wet campfire and tastes like an ashtray: "The good news for us is that the majority of the fruit we source is Chardonnay, which we press off of skins right away—theoretically, the majority of guaiacol and other smoke compounds in the skins

guaiacol [in juice] using activated carbon," Tapparo explained. "Most of the numbers came back from lab analysis looking pretty good anyway from a guaiacol perspective, but as it was a small portion of the blend, we [tried it] just as a failsafe."

He added that they may need to stir the Chardonnay weekly rather than bimonthly down the line to restore any mouthfeel the carbon might conceivably take away—but that's a bridge he has yet to cross. In any case, no thanks to climate change, forest mismanagement, and other exacerbating factors, the 150,000 gallons of Chardonnay that were fermenting as we spoke seemed "very promising" to Tapparo—"at least from an inferno harvest 2020 perspective," as he put it with his typical frankness.

To be fair, 2019 wasn't the most ideal

as he is every other year even so, aging it for 11 months in just 25% new French oak. "I just don't think Russian River Pinot needs that typical 40–50% new oak regime to really express the fruit," he said. "Don't get me wrong, I love what a lot of people are doing. But to get those bright fruit aromatics, we just go lighter on the oak—which gives us the added bonus of being able to spend less on barrels and pass those savings on to consumers."

After reflecting on the past couple of vintages, Tapparo offered a glimpse into his own way of thinking. Having been with Raeburn's parent company Purple Brands for 12 years, he mused, "I have never been more proud of bringing a bottle to someone's house than [I am with] Raeburn. It very much overdelivers for the price point." And that's no song and dance. **JS**

PHOTO: KEVIN TREBILCOCK



Joe Tapparo noses a Chardonnay sample in the lab.

went directly into the dumper after we pressed off our fruit, minimizing the risk of smoke taint in the wine," said Tapparo.

As an insurance policy, Tapparo also separated the free-run and light-press juice from the hard-press juice because, in his words, "if there's guaiacol and other smoke compounds in those grape skins, you're [likely] going to get higher concentrations in the harder-pressed juice versus the free-run and lighter-pressed." Tapparo then fined the hard-pressed portion with a combination of products that included activated carbon; according to research he'd seen coming out of Australia, where winemakers have recently endured their own terrible bout with wildfires, "it appears that you can fine out really high concentrations of

vintage either; there were a few typical yearly challenges as well as some flooding. But that actually turned out to be a good thing, as it occurred during vine dormancy and contributed to the water base—so the harvest was a cakewalk by comparison, admitted Tapparo. "Oh, 2019, how I miss you," he half-joked about the mild year, whose healthy crop resulted in a particularly bright Raeburn Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. "We bottled the 2019 in August, [and] I remember when [I was] putting the blend together, the fruit was so vibrant and the acid clung—it just hung all the way through."

In short, it's an even fresher version of what in his view is always a "fruit-forward, classic" example of Russian River Pinot—but Tapparo was as cautious of overoaking

Meridith May's Tasting Notes

Raeburn Winery 2019 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$20) While the 2018 vintage showed a distinct creaminess, the 2019 has a floral, lit-from-within profile. Aromas of honeysuckle and baked yellow apple sync up with the palate: Jasmine and lemon sorbet are electric, while a toastier note, accented by crème brûlée, adds texture to the finish. **94**



PURPLE BRANDS

Raeburn Winery 2019 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County Striking scents of underbrush, cherry, and sandalwood are both savory and sweet. Up front, primarily floral flavors emerge, including heather and dried roses. Clove-spiced cranberry is tart on the luxuriously textured mouthfeel, highlighted by a flash of high-toned acidity. The finish sees appearances by cocoa and cedar. **92**



PURPLE BRANDS

Cannabis educator and author Rachel Burkons' holiday spread includes infused delicata squash, Brussels sprouts, and punch—all paired with cannabis in servingware from Long Beach, CA, boutique Elevate Jane.



PHOTO: RACHEL BURKONS

Stoned for Supper

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF COOKING WITH CANNABIS by Rachel Burkons

THE ART OF COOKING with cannabis is rooted in lore. Passed down discreetly for generations, scribbled in subculture magazines, and jotted in private journals, the recipes and techniques developed by the pioneers of cannabis cuisine are today much better understood by science. Still, to the uninitiated, they can be shrouded in fear-inducing mystery, causing uncertainty about what to expect, concerns about dosage, and overall unease about the prospects of a good time.

Here, then, is a simple guide that will help you understand the basics of cooking with cannabis.

Activating Your Cannabis

Straight off the plant, cannabis cannot get you high. In order to turn fresh plant material into effect-inducing edibles, there is an essential first step called decarboxylation (“decarb-ing” for short). This heat-driven chemical reaction converts THC and CBD from their inactive acid forms to activated compounds that have psychoactive and medicinal effects.

While smokers initiate decarbing by lighting the cannabis, cooks must activate the cannabinoid with other heat sources. The simplest way to do this is to spread your flower on a cookie sheet and put it in the oven at 220 degrees for 45 minutes. A note of caution—this will smell rather potent!


Making Your Infusion

Once your cannabis has been activated, you may infuse it in a variety of carrier substances, including butters, oils, milks, and high-proof alcohols. There are many different techniques available to explore online, but a classic example calls for soaking activated cannabis flower in oil or butter and slowly heating the mixture in a water bath for two to four hours. You may also use hemp flower to achieve high-potency CBD infusions.

Understanding Your Dosage

Cannabinoid tolerance is highly individualized, with factors such as body size, metabolism, and frequency of use ensuring

that everyone experiences the influence of cannabis differently. What’s more, it is essential to understand that consuming cannabis-infused foods does not have the same impact as smoking or vaping. When cannabis is digested, it gets processed by the liver, and the THC is transformed into the more potent, long-lasting delta-11-THC. Because it takes a longer path to the brain via the digestive system, it has a delayed onset, taking effect anywhere between 45 minutes to two hours after ingestion.

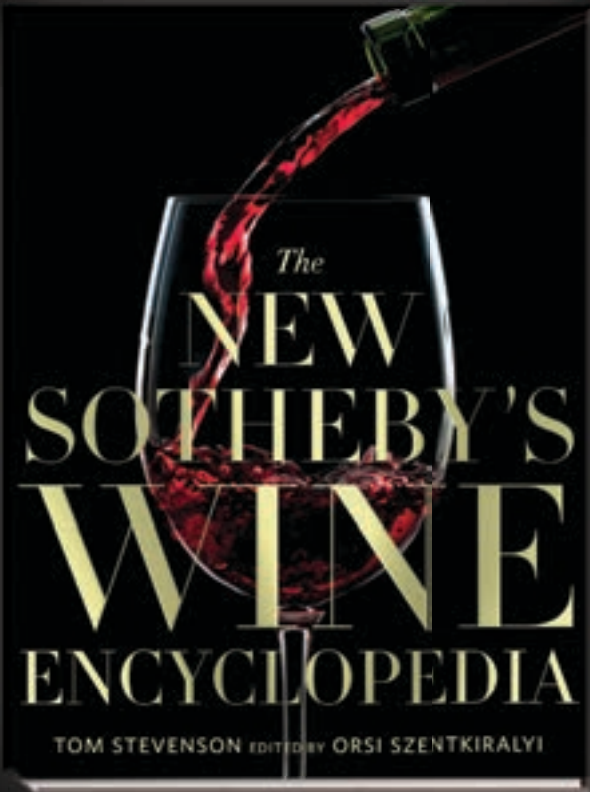
If you’re brand-new to consuming cannabis, a good starting place would be 2.5–5 milligrams of THC per serving; be sure to wait at least 45 minutes before a second helping. An intermediate user’s dose could vary from 5 to 15 milligrams. The only way to figure out for certain what works best for you is to start low and go slow! 

For more cannabis content, follow Burkons on Instagram @smokesipsavor.



THE BOUQUET. THE BODY.
THE EXPERIENCE. THE ELEGANCE.

Celebrate the world of wine with *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia*.



AVAILABLE THIS FALL WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD



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THE
SOMM
Joury

In each issue, the editorial team at *The SOMM Journal* will deliberate through wine submissions and release final judgment on select wines that garnered scores of at least 90 points. The “joury” will also occasionally feature an esteemed guest sommelier.

Going Solo: The Single Vineyard

ENROUTE THROUGH CALIFORNIA,
WE **TALLEY** OUR SCORES FOR
SINGLE-VINEYARD PROJECTS THAT
SET THEIR SITES ON SPECIFIC AVAS

Huichica soils of clay, mixed sedimentary rock, and volcanic ash bring an earthy tone to the Amber Ridge Vineyard Pinot Noir, part of EnRoute's single-vineyard series.

PHOTO: ERICK MADRID

Our Journey with EnRoute

IN THE LAST EDITION of the *Somm Joury*, we featured the Cabernet Sauvignons of Nickel & Nickel. In this issue, we delve into another Far Niente project, EnRoute, established in 2007 to show off the beauty and perfection of Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley. EnRoute's single-vineyard program captures the essence of specially selected sites.

EnRoute 2018 Pinot Noir, Northern Spy Vineyard, Russian River Valley (\$85)

In the cool Green Valley sub-AVA just 10 miles from the Pacific, this vineyard is planted on the Russian River Valley's famous Goldridge sandy loam soils. Elegant from nose to palate, with black pepper–crusted Rainier cherries and dusty plum-skin tannins. Lovely floral notes of jasmine and underbrush are followed by cigar leaf and thyme on the finish. The palate has the feel of a silk jacket. **96**



EnRoute 2018 Pinot Noir, Marty's Vineyard, Russian River Valley (\$85)

Sitting on Goldridge soils on one of the steepest hills in the Green Valley, Marty's Vineyard is often fogged in. The nose offers bright, sunshine-filled pomegranate before a dramatic wave of cherry, dried flowers, and white pepper washes over the palate. The mouthfeel is preternaturally weightless: The liquid almost hovers. As it opens, the wine reveals cigar leaf and licorice. **95**

EnRoute 2018 Pinot Noir, Amber Ridge Vineyard, Russian River Valley (\$85)

Amber Ridge is EnRoute's warmest site, with a fog pattern that allows for three more hours of sunlight than its cooler vineyards receive 12 miles away. Luscious, like biting into a chocolate-covered cherry—the liquid slowly streaming out and saturating the mouth. Notes and aromas of beetroot, cinnamon, and sandalwood follow. **96**

Keeping Record of Talley Vineyards' Wines From the Arroyo Grande Valley and Edna Valley AVAs

Built in the 1860s with sun-dried mud bricks made from local soils by one of the original settlers of the Arroyo Grande Valley, the Rincon Adobe is the symbol of Talley Vineyards; its image appears on every bottle. The Talley family purchased the property in 1974 to farm vegetables, and Don Talley planted the first grapes in the Rincon Vineyard in 1982.

JUST 12 MILES FROM the Pacific, the Arroyo Grande Valley AVA lies in the southern part of the Central Coast region. Vines here are at a higher altitude than in the neighboring Edna Valley AVA, which is defined by the Santa Lucia Mountains to the west and the San Luis Range to the southeast. A funnel that sucks in air from nearby Morro Bay ensures that Edna Valley is one of California's coolest AVAs, with its longest growing season.

Talley Vineyards 2018 Rosemary's Vineyard Estate Bottled Chardonnay, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$60) Talley's most iconic vineyard is Rosemary's; once an avocado orchard,



it's named for proprietor Brian Talley's mother: Chardonnay was first planted here in 1988. It's the coolest site on the estate, so the grapes ripen slowly, showing superb freshness thanks to naturally high-toned acidity. Aromas of buttered apple tart and chamomile are stunning. The palate reveals a crystal-clear focus on lemon verbena, wet stone, and tangerine blossom, while acidity puts a spotlight on the finish of brioche and toffee. Aged for 14 months in (25% new) French oak. **95**

Talley Vineyards 2018 Stone Corral Vineyard Pinot Noir, Edna Valley (\$75) Planted on sandy clay loam soils, the 28-acre Stone Corral Vineyard lies 4 miles from the Pacific. Spending 15 months in 35% new French oak, this is one of the most limited releases in Talley's single-vineyard Pinot Noir series. It's bright and spicy on the nose and palate, with dark cherry and wet earth. Midway, rhubarb and other notes of tart fruit laced with dried herbs express a fleshy texture. Tannins are round and supple. **95**

Talley Vineyards 2017 Syrah, Rincon Vineyard, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$50) This graceful Syrah, aged 20 months in 100% neutral French oak, shows off the exuberance of the Rincon Vineyard, which earned the winery a reputation as an Arroyo Grande Valley pioneer when it was first planted to Pinot Noir in 1982. It exhibits aromas of grilled meat, tobacco, and violets, tied together with blackberry preserves. The satin-textured palate is plummy, with hints of black pepper, dark chocolate, and baking spices and a dark, juicy note of cranberry sorbet on the finish. **94**

Talley Vineyards 2019 Grüner Veltliner, Edna Valley (\$34) Edgy and lean with aromas of lime sorbet and slate. Lithe notes of lime, grapefruit zest, and dill are drawn to an inherent minerality that keeps them in check. Perfect with oysters. **92**

PHOTO COURTESY OF TALLEY VINEYARDS

{ cover story }

*Respecting
Tradition,*
**CHALLENGING
CONVENTION**

**RAMOS PINTO LEANS INTO ITS HISTORY
WHILE LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

by Michelle Ball

The vines of Quinta do Bom Retiro wind along the rocky contours of the mountains in the famed Douro subregion of Cima Corgo.

Ramos Pinto CEO/president Jorge Rosas stands among the stone-walled terraces at Quinta da Urtiga.

Situated along the waterfront among the sloping streets of Vila Nova de Gaia, the historic headquarters of Ramos Pinto holds more than two centuries of winemaking tradition. Inside the cellar, the flurry of activity beyond its walls dissolves. “The silence is fantastic,” said Ana Rosas, master blender at Ramos Pinto, taking a deep inhalation as she described the room stacked with time-worn wooden barrels filled with Port made by her family since the 19th century. Per usual in 2020, my interview with her took place remotely, yet the detail she provided transported me right to her: “You have aromas of caramel and vanilla, but then you also have something earthy that is truly unbelievable,” she said.

The Port house was founded in 1880 by one of Ana’s ancestors, Adriano Ramos Pinto. All of 21 at the time, he started out in the family business by purchasing wines from his father’s own quinta, or estate, in the Douro Valley and branding them with his name. His vision was revolutionary for the time: Whereas other Port producers shipped their wines in casks, he exported his high-quality wines in bottles with eye-catching labels. Soon joined by his brother Antonio, he was quickly recognized as a premium producer. According to Ramos Pinto CEO and president Jorge Rosas, who describes his great-great-uncle’s commitment to quality as an “obsession,” Adriano was also a marketing genius. Focusing initially on Brazil, he “rapidly won 50% of the market share by selling his Port at twice the price of his competitors. He was really ahead of his time,” says Jorge. From the very beginning, Ramos Pinto’s drive for excellence has put the family at the forefront of innovation in the Douro.



PEOPLE ARE FOLLOWING THAT TREND—
THEY ARE PRODUCING WINES THAT ARE MORE
CONTEMPORARY, MORE ELEGANT, MORE
SOPHISTICATED. WE’VE BEEN DOING THAT
SINCE THE ‘80S.”

—RAMOS PINTO CEO/PRESIDENT JORGE ROSAS

AN ESTATE-GROWN PORT HOUSE

Unlike most Port houses of their era, which operated as merchants or négociants, the Ramos Pinto brothers began acquiring vineyards of their own, beginning with Quinta do Bom Retiro in 1919 and its neighbor, Quinta da Urtiga, in 1923. Located along the Rio Torta in the famed subregion of Cima Corgo, the vineyards sit on rocky schist soils that are vital for root-system development and water retention, allowing them to thrive despite the warm, dry conditions. In addition, the property's varying elevation (from 360 to 1,300 feet); northern exposure; and extensive selection of indigenous grapes all help make for elegant wines with lively red fruit.

The quinta truly reveals the evolution of viticulture in the Douro. Centennial vines line the traditional 250-year-old stone-walled terraces. They're flanked by earthen ramps, or *patamares*, that were introduced by Jorge's father, José António Ramos Pinto Rosas, in the 1970s to make the rows accessible to tractors as a way to mechanize some of the labor. Today, vertical plantings are preferred, allowing for much higher vine densities than the previous method—but all three systems remain prominent

features of the historic site.

José believed that they had to find a way to mechanize more of the work in the vineyards for their business to remain viable in the future. Yet the mountainous terrain of the Douro made that quite challenging. Jorge recalls seeing his father on the living room floor, magnifying glass in hand, studying military contour maps in search of flatter land. "We all thought that he was looking for something that didn't exist," says Jorge, who made several trips with his father to inspect potential sites. José finally proved them wrong when he found the perfect spot east of Bom Retiro in the then-less-developed Douro Superior: 370 acres of gentle, rolling hills on schist soils. Here, in 1974, José established Quinta de Ervamoira and changed the future of Port forever by planting ten varieties in separate lots; prior to that time, all plantings in the Douro were field blends.

José asked his nephew João Nicolau de Almeida, who had recently graduated from the University of Bordeaux with a degree in enology, to conduct an empirical study to evaluate the characteristics of each varietal and determine which were best for Port. Together, they presented

their findings at the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro in 1981, along with their five preferred grapes: Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Barroca, and Tinta Cão. While their conclusions were accepted and supported by the World Bank, which sponsored over 60,000 acres of new plantings, the Port industry was initially very resistant to change—but "I think things are very different now," explains Jorge, who sees the 1980s as a turning point in the Douro. "I believe that the Port industry agrees that the wines produced today are much better due to this selection." By cultivating the grapes separately, growers could pinpoint ripeness and avoid astringent tannins and undeveloped flavors; this was a significant improvement over the method of harvesting everything together in traditional field blends despite variance in maturation.

Today, Ramos Pinto owns 890 acres of vineyard throughout the Douro Valley, growing 90% of the grapes it uses for Port production. Like many other growers, the family began a slow shift from the conventional farming practices they'd adopted in the 1960s toward sustainable methods in the 1990s; by 2010, they'd gone all in,

Established in 1974, Quinta de Ervamoira was the first vineyard in the Douro with separate lots planted to individual Port varieties.

PHOTO: NOWISM



Master Port blender Ana Rosas inside the aging lodge of Ramos Pinto in Vila Nova de Gaia.

THE VINEYARDS ARE MUCH MORE ALIVE, ESPECIALLY DURING WINTER. YOU LOOK AT OUR QUINTAS, THEN YOU LOOK AT OUR NEIGHBORS, AND YOU SEE LIVE SOIL AND DEAD SOIL. THE FRUIT IS LIVELY, AND THE NATURAL YEAST [WE] HAVE IN THE SOIL IS MUCH MORE FRIENDLY FOR [NATIVE] FERMENTATION.” —MASTER PORT BLENDER ANA ROSAS





PHOTO: FAOUVERDE

Over 60 varieties can be found in Quinta da Urtiga, a biodynamically farmed 10-acre parcel. Cuttings from the vines, which average 80 years in age, have been planted in a 1.5-acre “vine library” created to study the characteristics of each indigenous grape.

terminating the use of herbicides. “It was a bit crazy, but it was the best thing we’ve ever done,” says Ana, while acknowledging the challenge it adds to the already difficult task of farming without machinery.

Currently, 60 acres at Quinta de Ervamoira are farmed organically, while Quinta da Urtiga is Biodynamic; the team is working to expand organic certification throughout its holdings. For Ana, the vitality of the vineyards, fauna as well as flora, is noticeably different. “The vineyards are much more alive, especially during winter. You look at our quintas, then you look at our neighbors, and you see live soil and dead soil,” she says, adding that she’s also seen improvements in fruit quality: “The fruit is lively, and the natural yeast [we] have in the soil is much more friendly for [native] fermentation.”

THE HOUSE STYLE

The oldest of nine children, Ana started her career at Ramos Pinto in the lab during the 1990 harvest. Having recently

graduated with a degree in forestry, the analytical, self-described “shy girl” had no intention of joining the family business until that year: Although she had worked several harvests in the past, “It was my first vintage where I completely fell in love,” she recalls of working beside her uncle José, then master blender, and her cousin Nicolau de Almeida, who was being groomed for the role. She would go on to spend 25 years alongside de Almeida, calibrating her palate with his through daily tastings. Every barrel from every vintage and every vineyard was gradually logged into her memory. When her cousin retired, Ana was named master blender—the only woman in the Douro to hold the prestigious title.

This meticulous approach has ensured the perpetuation of the Ramos Pinto house style despite modern shifts in both the vineyards and the winery. “We are making different wines, but the house style is still the same as it was 100 years ago,” explains Jorge, using the analogy of a 1970 Porsche versus a 2020 model.

“They have the same identity, but [the new models] are contemporary cars made for the 21st century. That’s what we’re trying to do here at Ramos Pinto: It’s a balance between modernity and tradition.”

As in the Douro overall, the 1980s marked a significant turning point for the family, due to their successes at Quinta de Ervamoira. Having defined the varieties critical to Port and committed to harvesting them separately, they found that they could produce a Vintage Port that was approachable and silky early in its life. It took some time to catch on; Jorge recalls critics who described it as “too soft,” without enough tannin to age. “People thought at that time that tannins meant you had to eat the wine, which is not necessarily true. If you put ripe tannins in the wine, you have [them], but they’re softer and silkier.” But eventually he saw a shift in perception. “People are following that trend—they are producing wines that are more contemporary, more elegant, more sophisticated,” Jorge says. “We’ve been doing that since the ‘80s.”

THE ART OF BLENDING A TAWNY

"We like to say that *Vintage* is a wine, *Tawny* is a Port. Tawny is made by man. Vintage is a question of nature," muses Ana. The blending process for a Tawny is both methodical and intuitive. For instance, to make the Ramos Pinto 20-Year Tawny, Ana first looks to wines used in the last bottling, then to those in the 17- to 20-year range, and then to even older bottles—combining Port from up to three different centuries in some cases!

Ana describes these older wines, which are sought out to complete the final blend, as behaving like an "old married couple" who are stuck in their ways and have difficulty making new friends. "If you take a very, very old wine and add a tiny quantity, it will change [the blend] completely," she says, noting that at first, the wine will shut down—" [but] then, about ten to 15 days after, it will explode in flavor." She carries out her experiments in small beakers, adding a few drops of various antique casks to the main blend as if she were crafting perfume. At the moment, the main ingredient in the 20-Year Tawny's secret sauce is a cask of 1924 Quinta do Bom Retiro. Yet Ana says she can't rely on that every year, as it's crucial for the family library to remain stable and complete. "I need the wine—it's part of the quality of Ramos Pinto," she explains. "We need to prepare the wines for the next generation."

Bottles of every vintage in their library are organized on cascading shelves that they refer to as "the piano." When making a base wine, the blenders start there. Ana recalls her own early attempts, choosing 20 or more while her cousin and mentor Nicolau de Almeida selected six or seven—and her uncle picked only three. "He knew exactly," she says in admiration, noting that she now chooses around six. "I'm still not as good as my uncle was. He had all the vineyards, all the wines, in his mind. To start the blend, he knew exactly what to pick."

Jorge, however, says his cousin is being far too modest: "She has the best nose I've seen in my life." To be sure, Ana has continued to perfect the art of blending over the course of 30 years. Her wines reflect the knowledge and traditions passed down from one generation to the next, yet they're made for the modern world. **SJ**

Tasting Notes

"Personally, I like white Ports and aged Tawnies, ideally chilled at 53 degrees Fahrenheit," says Jorge. "All the other styles [should be] no warmer than 65 degrees Fahrenheit." He also urges drinkers not to use small glasses: "A white wine glass is the perfect glass for Port."



Ramos Pinto 20-Year Tawny (\$70) Expressive aromas of baked apple and ginger-molasses cookies. Lean at first but gives

way to a spicy mid-palate with ample notes of Christmas spice, dried cranberry, and lingering orange peel.



Ramos Pinto 30-Year Tawny (\$109) Brooding notes of leather, brown butter, and dates on the nose. Intense concentra-

tion in the mouth, with an alluring mélange of Nutella, dried figs, and earthy hints of porcini mushroom. A stunning example of the balance between fruit and old wood character that comes from blending multigenerational casks.



Ramos Pinto 2015 Unfiltered Late Bottled Vintage Port (\$24) Plump black fruit and Mission figs mingle with spicy notes

of black pepper and clove. A dense but soft core shows silky plum-skin tannins, followed by hints of molasses on the finish.



Ramos Pinto 2018 Vintage Port, Quinta do Bom Retiro (\$95) A showy bouquet of hibiscus and pomegranate is

complemented by hints of graphite before leading to a lively core of boysenberry and sage. Immense concentration with extensive length—an impressive reflection of this distinctive vineyard.

In 1990, Ramos Pinto—which is now part of Maison Louis Roederer—released the first commercial, non-fortified wine in the Douro. Grapes are primarily sourced from Quinta dos Bons Ares, which the family purchased in the 1980s specifically for Douro wines. Its location on granitic soils at an elevation of nearly 2,000 feet lends freshness and natural acidity to the wines, which are priced at a tremendous value for the quality.



Ramos Pinto 2018 Duas Quintas White (\$15) Zesty aromas of salinity, lemon rind, and green apple are echoed on the palate,

accompanied by tingly, mouth-popping acidity; lime; and a hint of raw pine nuts.

Among the countless soils discussed in our webinar were those of the Royal Slope AVA in Washington's Walla Walla Valley, primarily windblown or sandy loess with some gravel and caliche formed by the Missoula floods.

DOMESTIC

Bliss

WEST COAST
WINES STAR
IN OUR
GEOGRAPHICAL
DIGEST WEBINAR

by *Stefanie Schwallb*

In an early 19th-century letter to French agronomist, lithographer, and philanthropist Charles Philibert de Lasteyrie, Thomas Jefferson declared that the United States “could make as great a variety of wines as are made in Europe—not exactly the same kinds, but doubtless as good.” Fast-forward to the present day, and it’s evident that the Founding Father was right.

Jefferson would be full of pride if he could witness the range of amazing wines and winemaking talent that our nation has spawned since the industry’s outset. While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of our daily lives, the drive and determination of producers across the country are as potent as ever, ensuring that the evolution of our regional viticulture remains vibrant. California, Oregon, and Washington in particular continue to dominate the market while innovating and embracing the new normal in ways that bring joy to wine lovers just when they need it most.

The “Domestic Bliss” webinar, held on October 22 as part of our Geographical Digest series in association with *National Geographic* and *SommCon* (see also page 84), featured eight winery representatives who delved into the distinctive aspects of their terroir, the discovery of new subregions, and the diversity of their wine styles. Rich in heritage while charting bold paths for the future, these producers are proving that this part of the New World is living up to the name, promising better days—and even better wines—ahead.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MULLAN ROAD CELLARS

Making History:

WENTE FAMILY ESTATES

For 137 years, Wente Family Estates

hasn't missed a beat. Growing and making wine in the Livermore Valley AVA since 1883, it has never skipped a vintage—even making wines for the church during Prohibition. “It all started with my great-great-grandfather [C.H. Wente], who immigrated from Germany, wound up in Napa, and ended up working with another German-speaking gentleman by the name of Charles Krug,” said Aly Wente, director of marketing and fifth-generation winegrower. C.H. then relocated to Livermore to make his mark, and the family has been there ever since.

Livermore is located 30 miles east of the San Francisco Bay. The valley is west- to east-oriented, so it opens up directly onto the bay. Foggy mornings, warm middays, afternoon breezes, and cool evenings mean that the vineyards see a 40- to 50-degree diurnal swing daily. “That’s what makes it unique,” Aly explained, “and able to grow different varieties at different temperatures.”

Wente tends 13 vineyards here, encompassing around 2,000 acres, along with two vineyards in the Arroyo Seco AVA of Monterey that represent about 1,000 acres. All are certified sustainable, as is the winemaking facility; thanks to such practices as the run of a no-till system, water-waste recycling, and cold stabilization (employed to reduce power use), Wente is one of the few companies to achieve both distinctions. “All wines are estate-grown, so the vineyard is managed from the moment it’s planted up until it’s in the glass,” said Aly. “My family has always said we are farmers first, and [we] believe that taking care of the land will take care of us as a business.”

Though Wente is renowned for Chardonnay, its Cabernet Sauvignon has its own story to tell. It’s sourced from the Wetmore Vineyard, where the microclimate is about 2 degrees cooler than most of the Livermore Valley and the gravelly soils have excellent drainage. While the longer growing season gives the relatively late-ripening berries time to develop concentration and richness of flavor, the vine stress caused by the soils imparts a strong sense of place. Sometimes the supporting grapes in the blend—Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, and Malbec—are fermented separately and sometimes together, depending on how they taste in the vineyard or on the team’s goals for color extraction. The wine then ages in 100% French oak (about 40% new).

The vineyard was named for Charles Wetmore, California’s first agricultural commissioner and a close friend of the Wente family. As a pioneer in the state, he was one of the first wine professionals to bring back cuttings from Bordeaux. “Ultimately, we ended up buying his property, and today we are growing some of his cuttings [there], which were clones 7 and 8,” Aly said. “We have his old historic winery where you would come visit us today. It’s come full circle, and as history buffs, we appreciate that context.”



PRESENTED BY ALY WENTE

Director of Marketing and Fifth-Generation Winegrower



PHOTO COURTESY OF WENTE FAMILY ESTATES

Translating Terroir:

RÉSONANCE WINES

PRESENTED BY GUILLAUME LARGE, Winemaker

For its first project outside of Burgundy since its founding in 1859, Maison Louis Jadot headed to the Willamette Valley, Oregon, which became a state that same year, shares Burgundy's latitude and maritime weather, so the venture seemed destined to be when Jadot's renowned winemaker, Jacques Lardière, visited the area post-retirement in 2012. "There was a feeling of a great location, terroir; a 'somewhere-ness,'" observed Guillaume Large, who was tapped by Lardière as winemaker for Résonance Wines. "It was the seed that was ready for our project."

Following the purchase of Résonance Vineyard in the Yamhill-Carlton AVA in 2013, construction of the three-story, gravity-fed winery got underway for completion in 2018. "It was very important for us that [it] be located at the heart of our property," said Large. "We pick by hand, and the short distance between the vineyard and the winery helps keep the whole clusters in perfect condition [to] reveal the terroir's real potential." Though the team uses "exactly the same methods and equipment as in Burgundy" right down to the barrels, they've forged their own connection to their community by opening a tasting room—which the Jadot estate does not have—last year.

Spanning elevations of 250–450 feet facing south, southeast, and southwest, the own-rooted, dry-farmed, certified-organic Résonance Vineyard was first planted in 1981 to about 20 acres of Pinot Noir. The ancient marine sedimentary soil adds a richness and minerality to the black fruit and structure of the wines. "We work with different locations in the vineyard to express the . . . diversity of Pinot Noir inside the valley," Large explained, noting that in 2017 they planted additional Pinot Noir as well as Chardonnay on a contiguous piece of property to bring farmed acreage to a total of 55 acres that form "a diverse mosaic of terroir."

Ultimately, he asserted, "This is really a beautiful wine region with big potential, and the key, of course, is the harvest working with Jacques. . . . We use our Burgundian heritage and the experience of the Maison Louis Jadot [team] not to try and make a Burgundian wine in Oregon but to reveal the terroir of the Willamette Valley."



PHOTO COURTESY OF RÉSONANCE WINES

Where Chardonnay Shines:

CHALK HILL ESTATE

PRESENTED BY SARAH QUIDER, Vice President of Winemaking for Foley Family Wines

For Foley Family Wines vice president of winemaking Sarah Quider, Chalk Hill Estate is all about the stunning property's distinctive soils. "Everybody thinks it's chalk," she said, "but it's actually volcanic rock and ash, which bring out the brightness and beautiful minerality of our wines."

In fact, the soil is what drew original owner Fred Furth to the region in 1972. Upon purchasing 1,300 acres on the northern end of the Russian River Valley, he conducted research to determine which clones were best suited to the property and to his mission of producing exquisite Chardonnay—one that has continued since the winery was sold to Bill Foley in 2010.

Soil conservation also continues on the 100% certified-sustainable property, whose 382 acres of vineyard feature an incredible diversity of terroir at elevations ranging from 275 to 1,650 feet. They're home to 11 different varietals, but the majority of plantings are Chardonnay, which "is the love and the passion of Chalk Hill," Quider asserted. "We're known for it." There are 22 different Chardonnay clones onsite, including the Chalk Hill Chardonnay Clone 97, which Furth collaborated on with the University of California, Davis.

Every lot of fruit brought in is picked, whole cluster-pressed, native fermented, and barrel aged separately before blending; the wines undergo 100% malolactic and are unfiltered. "We try to have our wines express themselves," noted Quider, who works alongside winemaker Darrell Holbrook, a 26-year veteran of the winery. "I admire his love for Chalk Hill wines," she said of her colleague. "When [someone has] that passion, it's wonderful to work, taste, and blend with [them]."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHALK HILL ESTATE



PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUNGBERG HILL

Farming Instincts: YOUNGBERG HILL

PRESENTED BY WAYNE BAILEY

Owner and Winemaker

You can take the farmer off the farm, but you can't take the farming out of the farmer. At least that's the case with Wayne Bailey, owner and winemaker of Youngberg Hill. Having grown up on a farm in Iowa, he has a keen sense of American terroir, which is what took him and his wife, Nicolette, to the northern Willamette Valley—specifically its westernmost AVA, McMinnville. "For us, the Willamette Valley had the appeal of growing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in a cool climate," said Bailey. "I chose McMinnville because it is closer to the ocean and Youngberg Hill because it is higher in altitude—both to hedge against climate change and to be more on the fringe weather-wise."

Youngberg Hill's vineyard sits up against the foothills of the Coast Range, which provides a bit of a rain shadow. "What I love about the McMinnville AVA is more heavy influence from the coast, those cooler winds and cooler night temperatures—[but] the rain shadow that we get means we don't receive some of the harsher rains that come in from the coast at any time," Bailey explained. Hillside soils throughout the Willamette Valley are pre-

dominantly marine sediment and two different kinds of volcanic rock—erosive and uplift; the latter is predominant in McMinnville.

The couple purchased Youngberg Hill in 2002 after Bailey gained work experience in Burgundy, where variation from the valley floor up to the top of a vineyard—which may be owned by many different people and broken up into many different classifications—was something he leaned into. "I loved those nuances. I also became very familiar with Pommard and Wädenswil clones, old vines of which were planted on our property in 1989 within [what is now] the Natasha block, named after my oldest daughter." The Baileys' other two blocks, Jordan and Aspen, were named after their middle and youngest daughters, respectively. Bailey admitted he gravitates to the Pinot Noir coming from Jordan, believing its terroir to be ideal for accentuating the Wädenswil clone's balance between fruit and savory characteristics.

The estate has 23 farmed acres, including 3 that were recently planted to more Pinot Noir. "The fact that we've farmed organically [since] 2003, then shifted to Biodynamic farming in 2011 [and] no-till farming in 2017, and we're non-irrigated—[all that] really expresses terroir," said Bailey. "Wine is an agricultural product. The quality is determined by... minimizing any manipulation of the wines to [showcase] the transparency of the fruit grown in each block and to let the weather shine through each year."

Built to Last:

MULLAN ROAD CELLARS

PRESENTED BY DENNIS CAKEBREAD, Founder and Vintner

No stranger to building a brand, Dennis Cakebread of Cakebread Cellars has been known as one of Napa Valley's great winemaking veterans for more than 40 years. Now, as the founder and vintner of Mullan Road Cellars in Washington's Walla Walla Valley, he's excited about the prospects of a new venture.

Though branching out had been part of Cakebread's strategic plan since the early 1990s, it wasn't until 2010 that he began to put it into action. After looking at locations in Southern California and Oregon, he became convinced that eastern Washington was the place to be. By 2012, he had secured land with the help of industry friends, including Marty Clubb of L'Ecole No. 41 and entrepreneur Norm McKibben; hired Washington native Aryn Morell as winemaker; and begun his first vintage. "The thing about Walla Walla is that it reminds me of Napa 30 or 40 years ago," said Cakebread. "We're all in the same boat, so to speak, pulling the same way and trying to make the best wines that we can."

Although people tend to associate the state with the kind of rainfall experienced by Seattle, eastern Washington is very dry; it was basically a desert until the Grand Coulee Dam was installed to irrigate the area in the 1950s. "Without it, the region doesn't exist," Cakebread noted. "That dam . . . was amazing—it altered a number of industries."

Lying south of the Ancient Lakes AVA and north of the Wahluke Slope AVA is the brand-new Royal Slope AVA, where Mullan Road is located. Established in September of this year, it's already home to more

than 1,900 acres of vineyard, planted to more than 20 varieties on mostly south-facing slopes at an average elevation of 1,300 feet—slightly higher than most AVAs in the region; it's also slightly milder by day and cooler by night. The majority of soils are windblown or sandy loess with some gravel and caliche formed by the Missoula floods roughly 13,000–15,000 years ago.

The team sources fruit farmed to their specifications from two sustainable vineyards, Solacksen and Stillwater Creek, to create the Mullan Road Red Wine Blend, composed of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc. "For the early years," explained Cakebread, leasing plots "has given us more flexibility in trying out different areas to see how they perform and fit our blend. We have evolved away from some other appellations to now, where we are focused on the Royal Slope vineyards we currently lease."

As for the name Mullan Road, it celebrates the pioneering spirit behind the first wagon road to cross the Continental Divide, which Lt. John Mullan built in the 1860s from Fort Benton, Montana, to Fort Walla Walla. "He had 200 men, and in 18 months of construction time, they built this 600-mile-long road," said Cakebread. "I thought that was a huge accomplishment."



Mullan Road Cellars winemaker Aryn Morell and founder Dennis Cakebread.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MULLAN ROAD CELLARS



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROUND POND ESTATE

Committed to Cabernet:

ROUND POND ESTATE

PRESENTED BY MILES MACDONNELL, Owner

Miles MacDonnell spent his childhood on his family's Round Pond Estate. Initially uninterested in the idea of turning his vineyard work as a teenager into his career, MacDonnell left as a young adult—but eventually returned to take ownership.

The MacDonnells started growing grapes in Napa Valley's Pritchard Hill in 1978, then moved to their current property in 1983 and—starting with 20 acres—have been growing Cabernet Sauvignon ever since. In 2002, they began making their own wine from approximately five different blocks in five different lots of Cabernet. The goal was to refine vineyard practices for clients, but the results led them to build their own winery in 2007. And as their property has expanded, so too has their mission. In addition to growing grapes and making wine, they cultivate extensive gardens with 2,200 olive trees to produce a range of olive oils; they also make citrus syrups and balsamic and red-wine vinegars.

"Since Rutherford is the widest spot in Napa Valley, we get the most sun exposure throughout the day," said MacDonnell. "It's widely considered Cabernet country here, so that's primarily what we have in our vineyards." Round Pond's Louis Bovet Cabernet, named for his great-grandfather as an homage to his mother, is a highlight of what the property is, according to MacDonnell; the 2017 is a beautiful expression of the vintage, with great depth and nuance.

However, the winery also grows Sauvignon Blanc and some other Bordeaux varietals. MacDonnell described the property as a marble cake of various soil types, including gravelly loam and clay. All of its vineyards are certified sustainable, because the family is committed to improving the land for future generations. "We live here and have little kids running around the vineyards," he said, "so we try to really be mindful of what we do."



A Passion for Pinot:

MERRY EDWARDS WINERY

**PRESENTED BY HEIDI VON DER MEHDEN
Winemaker**

Located in the Russian River Valley, Merry Edwards Winery was founded by its namesake owner and original winemaker, who was one of the first women to earn a master's degree from the University of California, Davis' enology program in 1973. She started her career at Mount Eden Vineyards, where she became known for making exquisite wines, especially Pinot Noirs.

Though she recognized the potential of the Russian River Valley back in the 1970s, Edwards wasn't able to purchase her own land until 1996. Sustainable from the start, what's known today as the Meredith Estate Vineyard was the foundation of her quest to build her own estate, culminating in the opening of her winery to the public in 2008. The Meredith Estate Vineyard was the first place Edwards was actually able to plant her own Pinot Noir clone; officially called UCD37, the "Merry Edwards Selection" was taken from the Mount Eden Vineyard, and Edwards paid to have it heat treated (to eliminate any viruses) and registered at UC Davis in 1975. It joins five other clones across 12 blocks. "It's amazing that she was able to pick such a beautiful clone, which tends to perform well throughout the Russian River Valley," said Heidi von der Mehden, who has succeeded Edwards as winemaker.

The vineyard boasts large diurnal temperature shifts caused by the coastal fog as well as the well-draining Goldridge soils that Pinot Noir loves to grow in. Dark color and fruit character; big, elegant tannins; and low pH levels are especially evident in wines made from the best blocks of the Meredith Estate Vineyard, according to von der Mehden.

Seeking Special Soils:

BRECON ESTATE

PRESENTED BY DAMIAN GRINDLEY, Founding Winemaker/GM

Prior to becoming the founding winemaker and general manager of Brecon Estate, Damian Grindley traveled the world as a cave explorer. No stranger to geology, he purchased 40 acres nestled in Paso Robles' Adelaida District in pursuit of making wines that honor it. "In California, we've got the influence of the Pacific Ocean, and it's rather key," he acknowledged, "but the thing that makes us, or even Paso's, story different is calcareous soils." (For more on Brecon Estate, see page 66.)

As a speleologist, Grindley was once employed to map the caves just under the vineyards of the Limestone Coast in South Australia, which sat on a mixture of terra rossa and sand with strong calcareous components.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF BRECON ESTATE

The experience helped him begin to understand the link between soils and wine. Now he's doing all of his exploration in the vineyard. "There is very little calcareous soil in California. Fortuitously, in Paso Robles, it spreads out for 6–8 miles on rolling, cultivatable slopes," he said. "It's a high-pH soil but interferes with the potassium uptake to the plants; consequently, you get these naturally low-pH wines that are refreshingly bright."

Located on Adelaida's west side, Brecon has several hilltop sites with microclimates that enable the cultivation of a range of varieties; some of them are home to the earliest plantings of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc vines in the district. Here, the Santa Lucia Range typically acts as a dam against fog, though sometimes it is so thick that it just rolls straight over the peaks; the result is a 50-degree diurnal temperature swing that stretches out the growing season. Due to that long hang time, Cabernet Franc, for example, develops a truly ripe character and gets past a lot of those drying tannins.

Ultimately, said Grindley, who ferments his wines in small batches after parcel selection, "We're boutique-y—but very much about elucidating what we can get out of these soils." SJ

{ terroir }

Connecting the Dots

IN PASO ROBLES

by Randy Caparoso

PHOTO COURTESY OF PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE

Grape vines set on Paso Robles' calcareous soils.

DIURNAL SWINGS AND DRY GROWING SEASONS MAKE FOR AGEWORTHY WINES

Wherever you find compelling wines, you find connecting elements. Just ask Damian Grindley, the winemaker/owner of Brecon Estate in Paso Robles. Grindley, who received a graduate degree in enology from the University of Adelaide in Australia, happens to be a world-class caver. He and his wife Amanda have traveled the world “scrabbling around in dark, damp miserable holes in the ground,” as he puts it, adding: “Many cave regions, like in the Limestone Coast of Australia, are on limestone foundations—and there you have the link to Paso Robles in a nutshell.” It was, in fact, the call of calcareous soils that brought Grindley, who had made wine in Australia as well as Europe, to Paso Robles in 2013,



PHOTO: ASHLEY BLAKE PHOTOGRAPHY

Stephan and
Matthew Glunz
of Glunz Family
Winery &
Cellars.



JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery sommelier/educator Jim Gerakaris, CWE.

when he established Brecon Estate in the heart of the Adelaida District sub-AVA.

The Paso Robles AVA is defined largely by the California Coast Ranges, replete with Monterey Formation outcroppings that consist of calcium-rich calcareous shales, sandstone, and mudstone. These make for hillside sites with soils ideal for wine grapes. But there are two other factors connected to mountainous coastal terrain that give rise to a third factor determining the distinct character and quality

of Paso Robles wines:

1. Diurnal temperature swings, which are the most extreme on the West Coast and among the most extreme in the world
2. Lack of rainfall during the growing season
3. Ageability of wines

For the final installment in our series on what makes Paso Robles wines special, I asked the teams at four member wineries of the Paso Robles CAB Collective—

Brecon Estate, The Farm Winery, Glunz Family Winery & Cellars, and JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery—for their take on the role diurnal swings and rainfall ultimately play in the ageability of their Bordeaux-inspired reds.

Diurnal Temperature Swings

According to Grindley, “Diurnal swings in Paso Robles are consistently extreme. This



past October, we experienced day-to-night temperature differences as high as 55 degrees [Fahrenheit], [though] our average that month was closer to 45 degrees. One great analogy is coming home and sitting down with the refrigerator door open after a hot summer day. It's the same for the grapes—[it] enables them to relax overnight to be able to do it all again the next day."

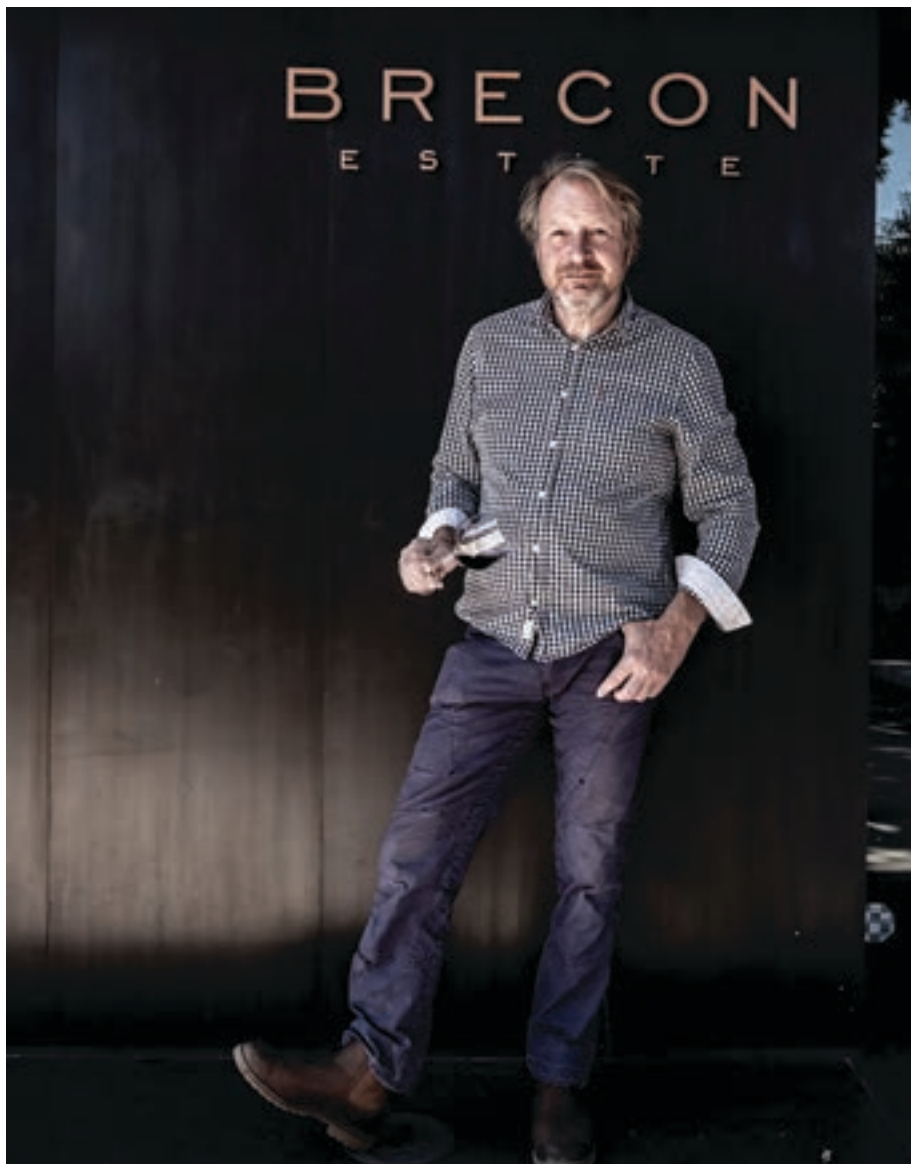
Santiago Achával, winemaker at The Farm Winery, which grows grapes in the Adelaida District and Willow Creek District AVAs, expands on Grindley's point: "A difference of 50 degrees every 12 hours is not uncommon. In late September, dawn temperatures can be in the high 30s or very low 40s. Our definition of an excellent summer is warmth with a few heat waves—ideally not above 95 degrees,

although we do get above 100." Meanwhile, at the Glunz Family Winery estate "in the rolling hills of the Geneseo District AVA on the east side of Paso Robles," says manager Stephan Glunz, "we generally see 40- to 50-degree temperature swings."

JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery sommelier/educator Jim Gerakaris, for his part, is quick to highlight the climatic variation found throughout the Paso Robles AVA:



Sorting grapes at Brecon Estate.



Brecon Estate winemaker/owner Damian Grindley.

"We source grapes from ten of the 11 Paso Robles sub-appellations, and so we make use of the full range of the region's mesoclimates. We'll use our best-of-the-best lots to begin the blends for our best wines—a very Bordeaux-centric way to make wine."

Paso Robles' cold nighttime temperatures, according to Achával, "close down the metabolism of the plant and mainly the acid respiration, the mechanism by which acid levels decrease during the ripening season. This influences two variables: total level of acidity and the flavor aspects of the acid structure, which are moved into the riper area without losing overall quantity. Think of how acid flavors move from sour to fresh as they ripen. The ideal

scenario, then, is to have diurnal swings that are high enough to allow you to both ripen your acids and retain a quantity high enough that will add freshness, elegance, and vibrancy to the wine."

Also directly affected by extreme diurnal swings, adds Achával, "are intensity and saturation of color. We don't have to worry about color extraction in our wines—we have very abundant anthocyanins, or color molecules, so we are free to focus on more important quality factors."

Grindley identifies four "ripeness curves" essential to his Bordeaux varieties: acid, sugar, tannin, and flavor. "We like to get our Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Petit Verdot truly flavor-ripe to get beyond the pyrazine character typical

of these grapes," he explains. "Our estate-grown Cabernet Franc consistently gets past the tea-leafy green characters and drying tannins into something much riper and more elegant. We certainly would not be able to do this without the diurnal range here in Paso Robles."

Lack of Rainfall During the Growing Season

When it comes to the region's annual rainfall pattern, Achával quips that "it is almost as if our seasons were designed by a winemaker. Autumn rains start falling in the Paso area some two weeks after they have started in Napa Valley. There is very low probability of rain affecting harvest decisions. In spring, rain normally stops by mid-April, so our growing season is almost completely dry. This allows for low-input viticulture with minimal use of fungicides—only contact ones, not systemic ones. This means less interference in the metabolism of the plants, overall better health of the soil, and more biodiversity. This leads directly to more complex and nuanced wines."

Adds Grindley, "We have some Pacific winter storms, but these occur almost exclusively between mid-November and late March. The appellation, though, is on the lee side of the Santa Lucia Range. The Pacific side can get 65 inches of annual rain, but the farthest western edge of the appellation gets 35 inches max—closer to 22–25 inches where we're at in Adelaida. The benefit of our dry climate during the growing season is that many of our blocks can be effectively dry farmed. The resulting small berries, with their bright acids and flavor concentration, speak to quality. Low disease pressure during the growing season enables much lower farming costs, as spray inputs are negligible and typically



organic in character, which also speaks to better grape quality.”

The advantage of seeing virtually no rain between April and October, according to Glunz, is that “vines begin to stress and push further down into the soil in search of water and nutrients.” The calcium-rich soils that are so pervasive in the Paso Robles AVA have the advantage of making moisture and nutrients stored up in the soil available to roots during the dry summer months. Matthew Glunz, who co-manages Glunz Family Winery with his brother Stephan, adds that “the long-term benefit of our dry climate and soils is healthy vines producing low-yielding, ripe fruit. This gives us great intensity and high phenolics, especially for Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot.” Finally, Gerakaris cites the fact that “mildew pressure is almost nonexistent, especially when compared to places like Bordeaux. We can concentrate instead on managing canopies and other mid-season practices to optimize grape quality.”

The Ageability of Paso Robles Reds

“We purchased Brecon Estate,” says Grindley, “with ageability in mind. The combination of dry climate and extreme diurnal swings gives us great fruit concentration and acidity. Calcareous soils that limit the potassium uptake of the plants gives us low pHs and balanced titratable acidity. All of these elements contribute to optimal bottle aging.”

Grindley cites a recent Brecon Cabernet Sauvignon clonal trial that also revealed the impact of high pH in soil and low pH in fruit on wine quality over time: “The trial involved the same clone grown in different vineyards, but with the same trellising and winemaking. The vineyards were separated by only a few hundred yards, so the rainfall and diurnal range were the same. However, one was clearly on the calcareous soils and the other on sandstone. The pH of fruit coming off the sandstone was over pH 4.1 and needed acidulation. The pH of the fruit off the calcareous site was closer to 3.55, and it was harvested a week later while we waited for acids to drop. The softer fruit grown in sandstone started off very approachable, but after six years it had completely fallen over. The wine [with a] calcareous pedigree remained very bright, lively, and youthful at the six-year mark, and was still clearly



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FARM WINERY

The Farm Winery winemaker Santiago Achával.

in need of time to reach its peak.” Ergo: Calcareous-derived acidity has a significant and direct impact on bottle aging.

It is terroir like that of Paso Robles, contends Achával, that adds up to “the ideal recipe for longevity. The wines that are the best balanced and don’t cause palate fatigue because of excessive alcohol or overripe flavors happen to be the ones that age best. . . . We always open the first wines we produced—the 2009s, 2010s, and 2011s—with pleasure, respect, and sometimes amazement. They are, at the most, still between juvenile and young, metamorphosing and developing tertiary flavors where texture is slowly migrating from velvet to silk. But it is the vibrancy of the fruit and acidity that was there from

the beginning that is still alive and fresh in these older wines.”

Speaking from experience, Gerakaris says, “We often hear people wrongly dismiss the generous styles of Paso Robles wines as not having the ability to age. The JUSTIN ISOSCELES blends easily age gracefully over ten, 15 years. I have [also] recently had some Eberle Cabernet Sauvignons from the 1980s that are holding up really well.”

In sum, Grindley says, “Temperature swings and rainfall are two of the connecting strands telling the Paso Robles story, and they are a big part of our diversity. You throw in the calcareous soils and you understand why you find such fresh, bright acidity in Paso Robles wines, especially when they are young, that they retain as they get old.” ❧

Newton Vineyard in Napa Valley's Spring Mountain District AVA experienced devastating losses from the Glass Fire. Neighboring vineyards were also heavily impacted by fire and smoke.

FEAR of the Unknown

IN THE WAKE OF A
DEVASTATING FIRE SEASON,
A NEW TASK FORCE AIMS
TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF
SMOKE DAMAGE

by Jonathan Cristaldi

AS I PREVIOUSLY reported in the October/November 2020 issue of *The SOMM Journal*, the LNU Lightning Complex fire, which impacted 363,220 acres in Napa, Sonoma, and Lake counties, was reported 100% contained on October 2—47 days after it began. A day earlier, Cal Fire had announced that the SCU Lightning Complex fire was also fully contained, having ravaged 396,624 acres in Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin, Merced, and Stanislaus counties.

But the Glass Fire, which erupted on September 27 in the hills north of St. Helena and east of the Silverado Trail, continued to induce anxiety across the state. Over the course of 23 days, it burned 67,484 acres in the North Bay, destroying more than 1,500 properties, including The Restaurant at Meadowood and Calistoga Ranch. Dozens of wineries were affected, among them Newton Vineyard, Chateau Boswell, Castello di Amorosa, Cain Vineyard & Winery, Melka Estates, and Behrens Family Winery.

Between these three major blazes and the thousands of others that ravaged the West Coast this year, burning over 1.2 million acres in Oregon alone, the impacts of both the flames and the smoke are being felt from Southern California's vineyards up to Washington State—and fear of the unknown is gripping vintners. The wine industry lacks any systematic plan of action for dealing with the impacts of smoke from fire events, but growers and wineries will need to work together to address widespread concerns about tainted grapes.

Enter the West Coast Smoke Exposure Task Force, an advocacy group formed two years ago that aims to do just that. Its members, who currently number more than 20, include John Aguirre, president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG); Vicky Scharlau, executive director of the Washington Winegrowers Association; Tom Danowski, president and CEO of the Oregon Wine Board; and members of the Oregon Winegrowers Association, the Wine Institute, and the Washington State Wine Commission. They're joined by several



PHOTOS: RACHID DAHNOU/RACHIDPHOTO.COM

Newton Vineyard estate director Jean-Baptiste Rivaill is pictured amid the damage the winery and the surrounding property sustained when the Glass Fire raged through the North Bay.

vintners and enologists, a contract lawyer, and crop-insurance professionals as well as leading researchers from the University of California, Davis; Oregon State University; and Washington State University. To date, the task force has convened four meetings over Zoom in conjunction with the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) in addition to hosting an in-person conference in Sacramento, California, in July.

Heading up the task force's research committee is Alisa Jacobson, winemaker for Joel Gott Wines and Turning Tide Wines. Her focus is on creating a list of questions that growers and vintners can ask themselves during fire events in order to optimize their response.

When Northern California experienced major fires during harvest in 2017 and 2018, the attention of both the media and the industry was understandably focused on that region; vineyards throughout the Central Coast, however, were deeply impacted by smoke drifting not only from the north but also from blazes in the southern parts of the state. "Central Coast growers and winemakers felt left out," contends Jacobson. "There was a lack of information and understanding, and that created hostility between growers and winemakers." Because she makes wines for Joel Gott from sites all along the West Coast, she personally witnessed devastating fires in Oregon and Washington and smoke impacts throughout all three states. Jacobson says she realized that if producers "work together to organize our methods of communication," they could better understand how to react to fire threats both individually and collectively.

The task force is currently prioritizing three main areas: crop insurance, contracts, and research pertaining to smoke impacts—all issues relevant to winegrowing in the western United States. Aguirre says the big-picture issue is that "we need to know more about how smoke from wildfires can affect the quality of wine grapes, because in the absence of scientific research there is a lot of uncertainty, and if you're a grower ready to harvest your grapes, that uncertainty is a real [financial] problem."

It also causes "wineries [to] behave very conservatively" and avoid producing wine from smoke-damaged grapes altogether in fear of consumer backlash, Aguirre notes. One of the task force's goals, then, "is to avoid experiencing losses greater than what the actual damage is." In other



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOEL GOTT WINERY

Alisa Jacobson, who serves as winemaker for Joel Gott Wines and Turning Tide Wines, is overseeing the West Coast Smoke Exposure Task Force's research committee.

words, they want to be sure that vintners do not also reject grapes that could have made good wine. "But when you lack the tools to assess the status of grapes, and those grapes are left in the vineyard, they begin to raisin and lose value, and that's a problem," he adds.

Current studies show that the most significant risk to wine grapes, caused by volatile phenols in fresh smoke, occurs 24–48 hours after a fire breaks out, "and the risk of smoke impact begins to decrease after that period of time," Jacobson says. She hopes that with federal grant money, the task force could help lead the charge on designing remote sensors that would detect volatile phenols in the vineyard, just as a spectrometer detects AQI. "That would give growers a tool and help balance out the power of the winery to argue that their fruit is impacted," she explains. Speaking of funding, Aguirre notes that Congress designated \$2 million in the current fiscal budget for the USDA Agricultural Research Service and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture to provide grant money for research on the impact of smoke on wine grapes. He says he's "optimistic [about] additional funding for the coming year."

For now, producers directly affected by the fires are mostly limited to conducting micro-fermentations, typically in 5-gallon buckets, over the course of a few days to determine if there are any obvious smoke impacts. But because these micro-ferments are both expedited and limited in scope, they can't mimic precisely how a traditional ferment with the same grapes would unfold in the winery. Adding to the uncer-

tainty is the lack of direct communication between producers and delays at testing labs; as a result, decisions on how to proceed based on those micro-ferments are essentially being made in a vacuum.

To help open up a dialogue, Jacobson assembled a group of 24 Oregon winemakers who submitted samples of smoke-impacted grapes. "In our meeting, we wanted to get winemakers to talk about what their cellar fermentation showed next to their micro-ferments in buckets," says Jacobson. "On the lower levels of smoke impact, there's not a lot of agreement. On higher levels, it was obvious. But that's why we need to talk it through in a group setting. Is it minimal enough to still bottle and have a good wine?"

In addition to improving the types of testing available and their efficiency, another goal of the task force is to draft a five-point scale of recommendations for responding to a fire event based on measured levels of smoke impact. A score of zero would indicate no impact; two to three would fall on the edge of acceptability, and a score of four to five would result in wine unsuitable for bottling. "For me, smoke taint is just a flaw at this point," says Jacobson, "[but] what level might be acceptable to one winemaker isn't to another, because winemakers have varying styles and levels of tolerance." Having specific guidelines to adhere to could potentially help codify a uniform approach.

Scharlau notes that such an approach is critical to the wine industry's economic survival, especially given the simultaneous threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. As she points out, "the Washington wine industry has estimated some \$855 million in total economic impacts from decreased grape and wine sales combined."

In the wildfire off-season, the threat to wineries and vineyards lessens, but the task force's work remains urgent. Its ultimate goal, Aguirre believes, is to help ensure that "everyone is being heard and so researchers can focus on the most practical and salient challenges facing the industry." The sooner that research is completed, the higher the likelihood that a set of guidelines for combating smoke impacts could be in place by next harvest season. For many producers, it could arrive not a moment too soon. **§**

For more information, visit cawg.org, wawinegrowers.org, and washingtonwine.org.

The Nino Negri winery in Chiuro, Lombardy.

Exploring the

LAKE EFFECT

**OUR WEBINAR
“FOR THE LOVE OF
LOMBARDY”
DOVE HEADFIRST INTO
AN UNDERAPPRECIATED
REGION**

by Lars Leicht

Many of us have enjoyed a Franciacorta or a Sfursat di Valtellina, but chances are that we did not immediately associate its provenance with the urban-industrial culture of Milan, Brescia, and Bergamo. Lombardy is a central-northern region of Italy that's perhaps better-known for manufacturing and high fashion than for bucolic landscapes and fine wines: Though the nation's most populous and wealthy region with the highest GDP, it ranks only 11th out of 20 in terms of volume of wine production.

Still, there's much more to the area than factories and finance. Lombardy boasts some of Italy's top Alpine ski resorts as well as its highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It's also lake country, sharing its southeastern border with Veneto on Lago di Garda, its western border with Piedmont on Lago Maggiore, and its northern border with Switzerland on Lago di Lugano. It shares its other borders with Trentino–Alto Adige to the northeast and Emilia-Romagna to the south, where it's bounded by the Po River; an important tributary stretching from the western Alps in Piedmont to the Adriatic Sea near Venice. Representing almost two-thirds of the plains of otherwise hilly Italy, the river's broad, fertile valley effectively separates the Alps from the Apennines; it's also an important cultural marker, dividing northern and central Italy into areas with distinct traditions, cuisines, and crops.

This stretch from valley floor to Alpine peaks endows Lombardy with a wealth of microclimates. The region's most prestigious wines come from the eastern banks of Lago d'Iseo, where sparkling Franciacorta is bottle fermented, and the northeastern Alpine area called Valtellina, which yields the Nebbiolo-based Valtellina Superiore and Sfursat, made like Amarone from dried grapes. These wines were the focus of "For the Love of Lombardy," part of *The SOMM Journal's* educational webinar series as well as of the 2020 SommCon Virtual Summit.



Maurizio Zanella is the founder and president of Ca' del Bosco.

THE AIR THAT DROPS FROM THE 13,000-FOOT PEAK OF MONTE ADAMELLO TO THE LAKE LESS THAN 40 MILES AWAY COOLS THE AREA, FACILITATING AN IDEAL DIURNAL TEMPERATURE SHIFT TO YIELD WINES WITH FRESH FLAVOR.

The Pure Sparkle of Youth:

CA' DEL BOSCO

In wine as in real estate, location is everything—as Ca' del Bosco founder and president Maurizio Zanella well knows.

Franciacorta is located about halfway between Lago di Garda and Lago di Como, roughly equidistant to Milan 67 miles to the southwest and Verona 62 miles to the southeast. Set on the southern shores of Lago d'Isèo at the foot of the pre-Alpine mountains, “[it’s] a beautiful place,” Zanella told the webinar audience. “The luck of this tiny area is the valley to the north and a mountain called Adamello.” The air that drops from the 13,000-foot peak of Monte Adamello to the lake less than 40 miles away cools the area, facilitating an ideal diurnal temperature shift to yield wines with fresh flavor.

Franciacorta’s vineyards, composed of stony soils pushed down by ancient glaciers, range in elevation from 300 to 1,650 feet, endowing Franciacorta’s sparkling wines with “both ripeness and freshness,” said Zanella. Made in the *metodo classico*, they undergo two fermentations—the first to convert sugar into alcohol and the second “to create the magic bubbles inside the bottle,” in his words.

Regional Background

Franciacorta’s name originates with the monasteries that dotted the area in the Middle Ages: The Latin term *francae* means “tax-free,” and the local towns were called *curtae*. “They were very smart,” Zanella said of the medieval monks. “For 400 years, they were luckier than us because they didn’t pay any tax.”

Sparkling wine production is also part of Franciacorta’s ancient history, he added, citing a book published in 1570 titled *Libellus de Vino Mordaci*, in which author Girolamo Conforti offered tasting notes on the “biting,” or effervescent, wines of the region. “He called them ‘biting’ because they had very high acid,” Zanella explained. “He described them as unlike any other wine, not so round and smooth . . . with a lot of bubbles. But the problem was that a lot of bottles exploded. This was about 80 years before another monk in France”—that would be Dom Pérignon—“was perseverant and resolved the problem.”

Franciacorta’s winemakers were less committed to producing bubbly after 1570, but viticulture continued, according to Napoleonic-era land registers that showed 2,500 acres under vine. “So it was already important,” said Zanella. “But it was more on red varietals; the change to white varietals arrived in the early 1960s.”

Today, Franciacorta—which was the first denomination in Italy to exclusively require second fermentation in bottle—permits the use of

Ca' del Bosco's La Sughera vineyard in the Franciacorta DOCG.

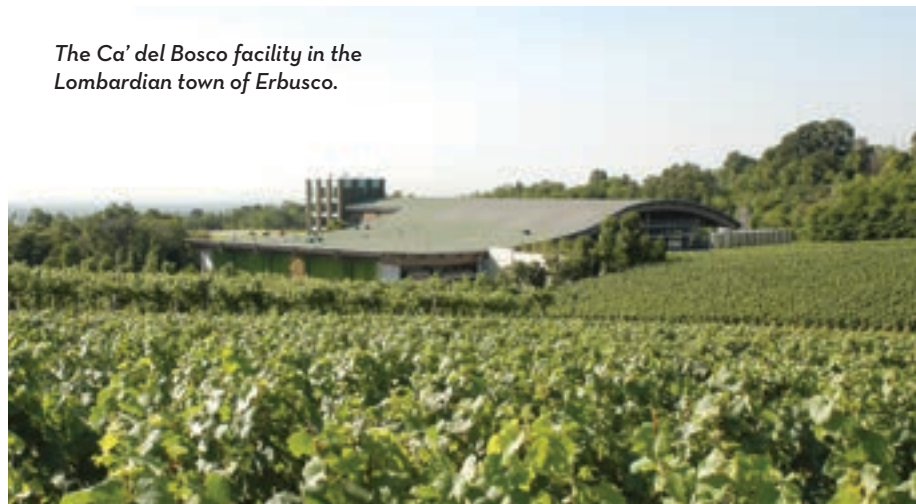
PHOTOS COURTESY OF CA' DEL BOSCO

up to 100% Pinot Noir and/or Chardonnay and up to 50% Pinot Bianco. In 2017, regulators added the option of 10% Erbatamat, a historical variety Zanella described as having an aromatic profile somewhere between neutral Trebbiano and green Sauvignon Blanc. Erbatamat was probably a component of the original “biting wines,” he explained, and is seen as a possible solution for winemakers battling climate change because it ripens ten to 15 days later than the other accepted varieties. But with fewer than 8 hectares (20 acres) currently planted and plenty of uncertainty about its influence, the grape’s role in the blend is limited for now. “We don’t know how Erbatamat’s huge acidity will [affect] the wine—it is all a work in progress. We’ll see the results in ten years,” Zanella said, adding that at about 60 years old, Franciacorta is still evolving. “It takes about 100 years to get a handle on a denomination,” he asserted.

The Wines

Suffice it to say that Franciacorta doesn’t bite anymore, at least not at Ca’ del Bosco. On the contrary, Zanella developed a “berry spa” to pamper his grapes. The concept was a direct result of the relatively recent move from conventional to organic farming in Italy, he explained; because “it was not strong tradition or culture [there],” the transition led to infighting and even the resignation of a veteran vineyard manager who was convinced that organic farming lowered overall grape quality. “He said we are going backwards,” recounted Zanella. “To a certain point he was right. But we were going in this direction not for the grape but for the environment. It was not about the quality of the fruit but the philosophy of our approach; as someone who works the land and thinks about the future, we want to [keep] our environment as pure as possible.”

The Ca’ del Bosco facility in the Lombardian town of Erbusco.



Troubled that his wines risked losing aromatic intensity but determined to continue farming organically, Zanella enlisted researchers from the University of Milan who determined that copper sulfate, though allowed in organic farming to fight fungus and bacteria, was interfering with the ability of the grape’s natural yeasts to develop aromatics during fermentation. “The only way for sure that we found to take away this copper was to wash the grapes,” he said. “So this was a kind of scandal because it is blasphemy to use water in winemaking.”

Reasoning that commercially grown fruit is washed before consumption, however, Zanella experimented with not only washing but, more importantly, drying the fruit so it would not dilute the wine. For 13 years now, Ca’ del Bosco has been using its “berry spa” to remove the residues of heavy metals and dirt, allowing the team to reduce the use of sulfur dioxide in turn; they’re very pleased with the results, particularly in terms of aromatics.

“It is the terroir that makes the wine,” asserted Zanella. “In the cellar, let’s just say we have to play our part in order to do something better—so perhaps the fact that we are washing the grapes makes some controversy. But we make the wine in the vineyard.”



Danilo Drocco is director and winemaker for Nino Negri.

Viticulture at the Extremes:

NINO NEGRI

Valtellina is a steep Alpine valley located 1,000–2,500 feet above sea level on Italy’s northern frontier. As the crow flies, it is about 15 miles in either direction to two of the highest points in the eastern Alps: Pizzo Coca (10,000 feet) and Switzerland’s Piz Bernina (13,000 feet). Viticulture here dates back to the ancient Romans who settled in the region, where almost all of the vineyards—which average about a half-acre—are terraced, many on slopes of 30 or more degrees. “It is a difficult place to grow grapes,” admitted Danilo Drocco, director and winemaker for Nino Negri. “The only [way] to do so is to build stone terraces, so over [the course of] 2,000 years, we have built 2,500 kilometers of walls without concrete, only the stones of the valley.” That’s 1,500 miles—about two times the length of mainland Italy!

The region was formed by the collision of the African and Eurasian tectonic plates, which created the Alps and brought together a mix of soil and rocks that make Valtellina geologically unique. Located on its southwestern border, Lago di Como also plays a vital role in the terroir: “Lakes have a big say in the wines of Lombardia,” Drocco explained. “They greatly influence our climate.” And still another factor is orientation. Unlike most Alpine valleys, which run

PHOTO: GIUSEPPE LA SPADA



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The Valtellina DOC is influenced by both a morning wind coming down from the Alps and an afternoon wind that blows up the steep slopes from Lago di Como.



To transport freshly harvested grapes as quickly and economically as possible, Nino Negri often uses helicopters.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NINO NEGRI

from north to south, Valtellina runs east to west, giving the vineyards southern exposure. “We have in the Valtellina the same quantity of sunshine as Pantelleria, Sicily,” he pointed out. “This is the main reason why it is possible to grow a pretty difficult grape like Nebbiolo.”

Regional Background

In fact, he added, “It is incredible to think about growing Nebbiolo in a place like this.” A native of Piedmont who made wine in the Langhe for over two decades, Drocco “was very curious to come to Valtellina to see if Nebbiolo was the same here as [at home]. I had a beautiful surprise because the University of Torino checked the DNA and confirmed that Nebbiolo from Valtellina and the Langhe have the same origin.” But because their terroir obviously differs, the clones that each region uses do too.

Drocco described Nebbiolo from Valtellina as being more aromatic with “mountain character,” noting that the late-ripening grape is particularly well adapted to the growing season, marked by a cold spring and fall, intense sunlight, and dramatic diurnal temperature swings. Unlike that of the Langhe, Nebbiolo here has a thick skin that’s vital in these cooler conditions; certain clones also develop larger berries suited to the *appassimento* or withering process used for Sfursat. Another difference is that while Piedmont grows only three clones of Nebbiolo, the ancient terraces of Valtellina offer up many more, selected by individual farmers working independently in different sites over generations. (It’s worth noting that the local name for the grape is Chiavennasca, which according to Drocco derives from

the phrase *ciú vinasca, piú vino*: “the grapes that give more wine.”)

“I love to say that Valtellina is a little [like] Italian Burgundy, because our land is painted by these terraces,” Drocco declared. “If you study the selection of grapes that come from them, it is possible to have many wines with very different taste profiles. This combination of land, rocks, mountains, and a fantastic grape makes the outstanding wine of Valtellina.”

The Wines

Even by the standards of prestige winemaking, which is often labor- and capital-intensive, conditions in the region are extraordinary. Drocco estimates that production in Barolo requires 400–500 hours of manual labor per hectare, while Valtellina calls for about three times that. Few, if any, vineyard operations can be mechanized, and grapes must be transported from vine to winery over considerable distances without the support of four-wheeled vehicles or even four-legged beasts of burden. To transport freshly harvested grapes as quickly and economically as possible, Nino Negri often uses helicopters. “The helicopter costs less than bringing the harvest to the winery on a worker’s shoulder and gets it there faster,” he said. “The final result gives us great satisfaction.”

Preserving the character that develops on the vine is key for Drocco. “The secret is not in the winery,” he said, but rather “completely in our vineyards. Nebbiolo, thanks to this particular climate, gives very complex character, starting from the bouquet. It is rich in tannins, and only full ripening gives us a very well-balanced wine.”

Nino Negri’s wines age in medieval-era cellars carved out of mother rock, which

Drocco said provides a perfect and constant balance of humidity and temperature. He uses a mix of oak types and barrel sizes to preserve and highlight the aromatic profiles of Valtellina Nebbiolo. But first he harvests, soft presses, ferments, and ages the fruit from each vineyard separately. Grapes destined for Sfursat are picked slightly earlier than those used for Valtellina Superiore wines; they then undergo *appassimento* in air-cooled lofts scattered around the countryside.

“This is very important because we must have very good, ripe tannin but not too much sugar,” Drocco said. “In a minimum of 100 days we lose 30% of the weight, and the final result is a greater percentage of sugar. We don’t want to have super-alcoholic wine, so [by] picking the Nebbiolo a little earlier, only in the right places, it is possible to have a wine around 15% or 16% maximum [ABV], balanced between power and freshness.”

The drying lofts are caressed by a morning wind coming down from the Alps and an afternoon wind called La Brega that blows in the opposite direction, from the lake up to the mountaintops. “This balance between these two different winds permits a very slow drying,” Drocco explained. “This happens at very low temperatures, close to freezing, in November and December, which helps preserve a very fresh bouquet. The balance of Sforzato is a beautiful aroma from *appassimento* but a very strong taste of fresh black fruits. That is the real secret of our Nebbiolo here.”



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CÀ MAIOL: INVESTING IN LUGANA

Lake Garda is often associated with the Veneto, but Lombardy occupies its western shore. Geographically sprawling and viticulturally surprising, Lombardy also shares with the Veneto one of Italy's few multiregional appellations: Lugana. Cà Maiol represents its Lombardian heart and vanguard.

Lugana is dedicated to a single grape variety officially known as Trebbiano di Lugana, locally called Turbiana. Though it's genetically identical to both Trebbiano di Soave and Verdicchio, terroir—as is so often the case in Italy—makes all the difference.

"Trebiano is planted throughout Italy but achieves tremendous minerality and sapidity in Lugana," said Cà Maiol technical director Andrea Bettoli when we spoke in early October. Lugana's flat basin is surrounded by Garda to the north and low hills to the south. Soils are almost uniformly morainic, composed of gravelly silt, sand, and clay with mineral content; as Bettoli elaborated, "Closer to the lake, the soils are sedimentary silt, but heading south, there are more rocks and sand that

make less structured wines." The Cà Maiol team safeguards that soil by eschewing herbicides and chemical fertilizers while planting cover crops to activate microbes favorable to the vines. "The secret is in the soil," he said. "[It] has everything the plant needs."

As the majority of vineyards weren't planted here until the boom years of the 1990s, old Turbiana vines are rare, and there isn't much clonal variation. Established in 1967, Cà Maiol is one of Lugana's most historic producers and a founding member of the consorzio. Its Molino vineyard, made up of two 25-acre blocks planted about 40 years ago, boasts some of the region's oldest plantings, and massal selection is underway to obtain cuttings from which to propagate vines in newer sites.

With a sizable team dedicated to handpicking the grapes and transporting them the short distances between its vineyard and its winery, Cà Maiol is able to harvest quickly at optimal ripeness. A brand-new, state-of-the-art cellar, whose two levels extend 43 feet below ground,

uses gravity-flow technology throughout the vinification process. Combined with the rigorous attention paid in the vineyard to achieving ideal ripeness, this treatment results in greater balance and elegance.

The grapes are placed first in gently vibrating bins and destemmed; then the whole berries are gravity-fed to a gentle pressing under nitrogen, a technique that guards against oxidation as well as the astringency otherwise easily drawn from Turbiana's thick skins. The must is left on fine lees and chilled to 41 degrees Fahrenheit for a week, then racked to a battery of 5,000-gallon stainless-steel fermenters that vinify vineyard blocks separately. For the flagship label, Molin, a percentage of the wine is fermented and aged in oak casks to add balance and structure.

At harvesttime, Bettoli sounded giddy with his new "toys," saying he never saw such clean musts. The new equipment, he believes, allows him to improve upon the house style, making softer, more balanced wines. "Trebiano is a territorial wine," he affirmed. "We do not want to standardize that. It must be authentic and respect what has been given by nature." SJ

The Cà Maiol estate comprises about 345 acres in the northern Italian appellation of Lugana.



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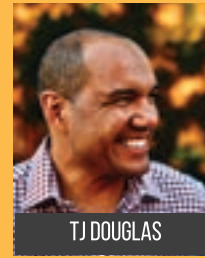
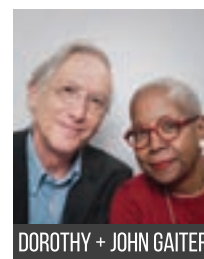
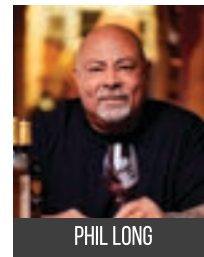
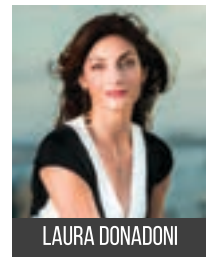
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Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

I'm not saying that my family is dysfunctional, but I'm usually glad to use work as an excuse to get out of spending time with them over the holidays. That's not an option this year, as they're well aware I have a little more free time on my hands. Which beverages should I serve to break the ice?

Signed,
I'll Be Somm for the Holidays

Good Somm

Dear I'll Be Somm for the Holidays,

One thing 2020 has taught me is to slow down and appreciate every moment, especially the time we spend with family—and despite all of the unpleasant surprises this year has brought, there's still much to celebrate if you can do so safely. My go-to for the holidays is Le Montrachet, but at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what you're drinking but whom you're with. Whatever the libation of choice—punch, beer, wine, or cocktails—enjoy spending quality time when you would otherwise be working. There's really nothing like sharing a homecooked meal with your loved ones, laughing at inside jokes or simply savoring the warmth and cheer of being together. This is what should fill your cup. Count your blessings and happy holidays!

Best,
Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear I'll Be Somm for the Holidays,

First off, aren't the holidays basically canceled due to the pandemic? Seems like the perfect excuse for avoiding gatherings for yet another year, but if your family's solution to that is to subject you to an equally uncomfortable Zoom or FaceTime call, here are some strategies for navigating the experience with minimal awkwardness:

1) Make sure you have a tasty beverage on deck. My recommendation is to share a recipe for a Cherry Bomb Fizz, Cranberry Mimosa, or Peppermint Eggnog Punch with everyone on the call so that when the inevitable squabbles over political differences or annoying questions about your love life begin, at least you all have the most important thing in common: the drink in your glass.

2) Whenever a serious question comes your way, deflect by turning yourself into a baked-potato icon or bringing up your TikTok video that recently went viral. Anyone over the age of 25 will be so disoriented that they'll immediately move on.

3) When all else fails, stick with the holy trinity: football, basketball, and baseball. Sports transcend all.

Yours truly,
Bad Somm

Dear Good Somm/Bad Somm,

I'm so happy this year is coming to an end—I'm done with the drama of 2020 and cannot wait for a fresh start. Which wines will you be ringing in the New Year with and do you have any resolutions in mind?

Sincerely,
Goodbye 2020, Hello 2021!

Good Somm

Dear Goodbye 2020, Hello 2021!

My biggest hope for the new year is for us to collectively move forward with compassion and unity. We have all endured many obstacles and stresses this year, but we can only progress one step at a time as we bid farewell to 2020—it wasn't easy, but we made it! My resolutions are to write more poetry; unplug from social media more often; bask in the glory of friends, family, and colleagues; and enjoy self-care in the form of a bubble bath or two. I'll be ringing in the New Year with the biggest bottle of Taittinger Comtes de Champagne that I can find—hopefully my bathtub can handle it!

Cheers,
Good Somm

BAD SOMM

Dear Goodbye 2020, Hello 2021!

Pardon my French, but this year was pretty f****d up. My resolution, believe it or not, is to be a nicer and more positive person and, more importantly, to pet more dogs and to wake up hungover as few days as possible. I'll be ringing in the New Year with my face shield on and my girl by my side, not to mention an unlimited quantity of Ace of Spades. If that doesn't set the tone for a better year, I don't know what will. ☺

Regards,
Bad Somm

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story by Jessie Birschbach
introduction by Orsi Szentkiralyi, editor,
The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia



Editor's note: The first in our series of webinars with National Geographic and The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia set out to virtually explore the world of winemaking. Our aim was to bring attention to regions that each speak their own language—languages we can then interpret through the uniqueness of their wines. We're continuing this series in a time when we cannot travel to see these places of origin and taste their expressions alongside those who made them, but our connection to them remains: We can continue to purchase wine, to dedicate our time to evaluating and studying one of the world's most beloved beverages—even from a distance.

"A SENSE OF PLACE":

This is probably the most concise definition of terroir, a much-used yet oft-debated term in wine circles.

The magical constellation of climate, soil, human contribution, and the numerous other factors that give wines from a specific place their own identity has been recognized by winemakers and wine drinkers alike for centuries. The way sunshine, minerals, organic nutrients, and countless individual decisions made by the vigneron translate to unique flavors and scents in the glass is why wine is such a fascinating subject. Classic regions make wines that are recognizable because their character was formed by the same natural and human environment. They affect your senses in a similar way, almost evoking a memory of the place they came from.

The horizon of special terroirs where great wines are grown is fast expanding. Climate change has not only made well-known regions struggle to remain true to their traditional styles but has also, aided by technological advances, made winemaking possible in more places than ever before. Today, new commercial vineyards are popping up all over the world, from Norway and Sweden to Ethiopia and Puerto Rico, all the way to Myanmar. We don't know yet how these new trials will stand the test of time, but it is certainly exciting to see how local winemakers adapt their practices to their respective terroirs.

If we were living in normal times, I would urge you to travel to old and new wine-producing areas, to go and visit the places your favorite wines come from. Seek out locales you've never been before and taste wines you've never heard of, wines that were born from the soil your feet touch. Talk to the winemakers who know more about their own terroir than anyone else. Collect the memories that can be evoked by returning once again to a wine you enjoyed so much in the past.

Sadly, at the time of this writing, physical travel is still extremely limited for most of us; borders and businesses are largely closed, and we may need to stay home to stay safe. But that shouldn't stop us from discovering new wine regions or "revisiting" a beloved place. Webinars, particularly when combined with online tastings, can bring a brand-new experience to the lover of wine who's also a lover of travel.

In this article, which is part of the Geographical Digest webinar series by *The SOMM Journal* and *National Geographic*, eight unique wine regions are introduced through the eyes of an iconic producer. Our imaginary journey takes us from the Douro Valley in Portugal to Australia's McLaren Vale to Paso Robles and Napa's Oak Knoll District, among other exciting terroirs. For enophiles seeking to explore even further, *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia* covers every wine region of the world (including Norway, Ethiopia, and Myanmar!) so that even the most serious case of vinous wanderlust can be satisfied.

BON VOYAGE!



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Orsi Szentkiralji is editor of *The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia*.



Terroir: McLaren Vale, South Australia

Winery: Angove Family Winemakers

Presenter: Richard Angove, Managing Director and Fifth-Generation Winemaker

Richard Angove was surprisingly alert and cheerful while delivering his presentation at 3 a.m. from South Australia. But perhaps time seems inconsequential when you're sharing a family legacy that spans five generations. His great-great-grandfather, Dr. William Thomas Angove, planted grapes in the foothills of Adelaide to produce medicinal tonics in 1886, but "he soon realized there was more money in selling wine than in the medical industry, and that's how our business began," said Angove.

The managing director and winemaker shared a black-and-white image of his family's original cellar, which was built into

the side of a hill about 40 kilometers from McLaren Vale, now considered the most important Geographical Indication (GI) in the Fleurieu zone of South Australia. Bordered by the Mount Lofty Ranges to the east and Gulf St Vincent to the west, this region has "a classic Mediterranean climate [that's] very well suited to Grenache and Shiraz," in Angove's words. The resulting wines are known for their full body and rich texture; the Angove Warboys Vineyard Shiraz possesses just that and then some.

All of the fruit comes from the namesake vineyard, planted in the 1930s. Warboys is certified organic and Biodynamic; the holistic approach to viticulture makes for a better wine but does come with a few challenges, according to Angove, who shared a picture of himself and his family in the vineyard amid a small

flock of Indian Runner ducks. "We have a snail problem in the wintertime, but these hungry guys do a fantastic job of getting rid of them for us," he said.

Another image of the Warboys Vineyard revealed soil that looked very much like molten chocolate. "It's dark, rich loam over calcitrate, a limestone, chalky sort of soil," said the winemaker, adding that this dual profile "acts as a sponge. The vine gets right into that chalky limestone and pulls the water out when it needs it. So you get beautiful, balanced wines. These lovely old Shiraz vines give us low yields, small berries, and small bunches, which [in turn] give us good color and a lovely minerality, because the polyphenol content is high as a result of a good skin-to-juice ratio. This will also produce wines that are going to age well."

Richard Angove with his family and a flock of hungry Indian Runner ducks in Angove's organic, Biodynamic Warboys Vineyard.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANGOVE FAMILY WINEMAKERS



Angove 2017 Warboys Vineyard Shiraz, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$75) Aromas of plum-kissed violets are mirrored on the palate. White pepper persists through vivid notes of black cherry, dark chocolate, and cinnamon as a flow of velvet-lined tannins creates a creamy mouthfeel. Aged ten months in French oak, the 2017 vintage may be one of the most lithe, aromatic, and elegant yet for this label. **96**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



Terroir: Rheingau, Germany
Winery: Schloss Johannisberg
Presenter: Stefan Doktor, Estate Manager

When *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht, who moderated the discussion, called the wines of Schloss Johannisberg “textbook Rieslings,” he wasn’t kidding. With 50 south-facing hectares planted in 1720, the historic winery is the first and oldest Riesling producer in the world, according to estate manager Stefan Doktor. In fact, it grows only Riesling, as is typical in the Rheingau; skirting the 50th parallel, the region is one of the coolest winegrowing areas in the world, and nearly 80% of its vines are devoted to the white grape.

Considered the Rheingau’s most famous winemaking village, Johannisberg is virtually synonymous with Riesling in the region. According to Doktor, there are two important reasons the grape thrives here. “The first is the absolutely cold nights, which slow down the ripening process—Riesling needs lots of time to build up its aromas [and] flavors,” he said. “The second is the length of the daylight: Riesling needs [a minimum level] of daylight to reach the golden color in the berries. The sun rises in the north at 5 a.m. and sets at 10 p.m. That’s a lot of sunshine, and Riesling needs that to reach its potential.”

Doktor’s eyes twinkled at an image of the winery, situated at the top of a green hill and surrounded by several carefully parceled, parallelogram-shaped blocks overlooking the Rhine River. “Why do I present two wines?” he asked. “We may have only one vineyard and grow only one grape, but we offer many different styles.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF SCHLOSS JOHANNISBERG

Schloss Johannisberg 2018 Riesling Trocken, Silberlack, VDP Grosses Gewächs, Rheingau, Germany (\$85)

On the brink of austerity, this trocken (dry) white from the first Riesling estate winery in the world shows a purity on the nose, with restrained fruit throughout. It opens up with aromas of poached pears, rosemary, basil, and a hint of beeswax; crisp, taut acidity gives a good bite on the palate, aligning with orange cream, dill, and barely ripe apricot. Lean and poised, with a finish of bright citrus and white peach. **95**

FREIXENET MIONETTO USA



Schloss Johannisberg 2016 Riesling Spätlese, Grünlack, Deutscher Prädikatswein, Rheingau, Germany (\$50)

This mouth-filling wine’s mild sweetness dresses the palate in notes of apricot nectar and orange cream. A great balance of acidity and sweet fruit, with a hint of minerality and blooming white flowers. **95**

FREIXENET MIONETTO USA

Terroir: Napa Valley, California

Winery: Black Stallion Estate Winery

Presenter: Ralf Holdenried, Winemaker

You couldn't blame German-born Black Stallion Estate Winery winemaker Ralf Holdenried for diving so deeply into the details of his adopted home region: Napa Valley is just as special to the rest of the world as it is to Holdenried. The AVA was established in 1981 and contains more than 100 soil variations and 33 soil series, he told the audience; flanked by the Mayacamas and Vaca mountains, its topography defines its microclimates, being cooler in the south and warmer in the north. There are 46,000 acres under vine in Napa (compared to 280,000 acres in Bordeaux), yielding only 4% of California's grapes.

Paramount to Black Stallion Estate Winery is site-specific production, which is perhaps why Holdenried went to so much trouble in covering the territory. "For me as a winemaker, all of this diversity [of] terroir within this single valley really means that it's crucial for me to preserve the distinct character from the original vineyards and microterroirs from which we source,"



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLACK STALLION ESTATE WINERY

he said. "I'll blind taste the wines and then blend them to achieve a wine that's the best expression of each variety for Napa in that vintage."

Black Stallion's flagship label, Transcendent, is just that—"a multi-terroir vineyard made from the very best lots of the vintage," he continued, primarily from hillside sites. "To me, layering the different vineyard characteristics creates that perfect wine." Similarly, the 2017 Limited Release Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon he shared "rep-

resents Napa to its fullest . . . as a blend of both the valley floor—that dark-berry fruit that's really approachable—and the hillside vineyards, which should give more weight and tannins to the structure."

The small-production estate itself, meanwhile, is located in Napa's Oak Knoll District; its name honors the Silverado Western Center, an equestrian site that once stood on the 32-acre property. In fact, the former riding arena currently houses the winery's fermentation building.

The equestrian-centric entrance to Black Stallion Estate Winery.



Black Stallion Estate Winery 2017 Limited Release Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$60) The fruit for this broad-shouldered red comes from all over Napa Valley—the high elevations of Atlas Peak and Diamond Mountain as well as prestigious valley-floor vineyards in the Oak Knoll and Stags Leap districts. Aged 21 months in (64% new) French oak, it possesses a sense of grace and elegance that emerges with each sip. Velvet-lined tannins and notes of dark chocolate and licorice make for a creamy texture. Blackberry, cinnamon, and cedar are generously swathed across the palate. **95**

TRANSCENDENT WINES



PHOTO COURTESY OF RAMOS PINTO

Terroir: Douro/Porto, Portugal

Winery: Ramos Pinto

Presenter: Jorge Rosas, CEO

“Let’s start by saying the Douro is the most beautiful wine district in the world,” asserted Jorge Rosas, CEO of Ramos Pinto, before admitting his statement was polemical. But then the fifth-generation member of the family business presented the audience with a stream of images of lush, terraced hillside vineyards, many of them split apart by the snaky, cobalt-blue Douro River. Whether we agreed with Rosas or not, we could not deny the region’s beauty.

A few more superlatives apply to the Porto DOP, which is actually a part of the Douro within the larger Duriense IGP: It’s not only Portugal’s first appellation but one of the first to be recognized in Europe, as its original boundaries were drawn in 1756.

Finally, according to Rosas, the Douro Valley is one of the largest areas of mountain viticulture in the world. Thanks to the relatively small yields that grow on its steep slopes as well as the common occurrence of schist in its soils, he feels strongly that “we can produce wines that age for many decades.” (For more on Ramos Pinto, see the cover story on page 54.)

Ramos Pinto 2018 Duas Quintas Reserva, Douro DOC (\$30)

This stunning, memorable white is made from 73% Rabigato, 11% Viosinho, 10% Còdega, 4% Arinto, and 2% Gouveio. Aromatics come in waves, with cashew, toffee, and yellow apple emerging as the most arresting. The palate is creamy yet marked by striking acidity and a mineral base. Lemon ice and a garden of white flowers are high notes, with dried pear and tangerine winding up on the finish. **95**

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES

Ramos Pinto’s Quinta de Ervamoira estate in the Douro Superior region.



PHOTO: RAO VERDE



The underground caves of Bouvet Ladubay in Saumur maintain a constant temperature of 55 degrees Fahrenheit.



Terroir: Saumur, Loire Valley, France

Winery: Bouvet Ladubay

Presenter: Juliette Monmousseau, CEO

Only Champagne makes more sparkling wine than does France's Loire Valley, with Saumur, the easternmost appellation of the Anjou subregion, dominating production. In fact, more than half of the grapes grown in Saumur will become either Saumur AOP sparkling wine or Crémant de Loire AOP.

Juliette Monmousseau's family began making sparkling wine in nearby Touraine in 1886; her father purchased Bouvet Ladubay in the 1930s. The fifth-generation vintner and current CEO began her presentation in a very French way: "Bouvet Ladubay starts with a love story," she said, explaining that the estate was founded in 1851 by Etienne Bouvet and his wife, Celestine Ladubay, with the purchase of 8 kilometers of underground caves carved from tuffeau during the Middle Ages.

As this stone was used to build castles and homes, Monmousseau noted, there are at least 1,000 kilometers of such caves in Saumur today—many of which are used to store wine, as they remain at a constant 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Above them, thriving in limestone and clay soils, are Saumur's vineyards. "In the Loire, the vineyards never [suffer from] hydric stress because they can always dig into this limestone," she said. "The clay then seals in the moisture to nurture the vines. This is one of the key points of the Loire, which enables freshness and minerality in the wines."

These factors among others give the *méthode traditionnelle* Bouvet Excellence Brut Rosé she presented its crisp, high-toned notes of red fruit. Though up to 15% of Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Pineau d'Aunis are permitted by regional regulations, she pointed out, Bouvet Ladubay "only use[s] Cabernet Franc for rosé. In our Cabernet Franc you have this cracking red fruit, almost as if you were biting into the fruit itself."



The entrance to Bouvet Ladubay.



Bouvet Ladubay Signature Brut, Loire Valley, France (\$16)

A stunning blend of 90% Chenin Blanc and 10% Chardonnay produced in the traditional method. Aromas of croissant, lemon blossom, and vanilla wafer. Soft yet lively bubbles, with notes of salted pear and lime zest. Brioche and yellow apples are pleasant on the finish. **92**

KOBRAND



Bouvet Ladubay Excellence Brut Rosé, Loire Valley, France (\$17)

Cherry skins and figs scent this 100% Cabernet Franc rosé. An energetic effervescence releases sweet cherry and tart cranberry. Minerality plays a key role on the long finish. **92**

KOBRAND

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUVET LADUBAY

Terroir: Sardinia, Italy

Winery: Agricola Punica

Presenters: Salvatore Santus, Export Manager; Giorgio Marone, Winemaker

Although its ancient name was *Insulit Vini* ("Wine Island"), Sardinia mainly produced bulk wine until about 30 years ago. But this hot, dry Italian region has quickly made up for lost time with respect to producing quality wines from the Spanish grapes planted here by the conquistadors in the 1700s.

Of its two most successful reds today, Cannonau (the local name for Garnacha/Grenache) and Carignano (Cariñena/Carignan), it was the latter that renowned Tuscan enologist Giacomo Tachis felt had great potential when he first started visiting the island in the 1980s, just as its wine renaissance was beginning. He spent years consulting for the Sardinian wine consortium before partnering with Cantina di Santadi president Antonello Pilloni to establish Agricola Punica in 2002. Located in the southwestern area of Sulcis Meridionale, the 370-acre estate produces two Carignano-based red blends classified under the IGT of Isola dei Nuraghi, named for the stone structures found in the area.

Presenting its Barrua expression along with export manager Salvatore Santus was Giorgio Marone, who was Tachis' assistant winemaker in Tuscany for five years before becoming Agricola Punica's



Winemaker Giorgio Marone.



Export manager Salvatore Santus.

Agricola Punica's Barrua vineyard in the Sulcis Meridionale area of Sardinia.

consulting winemaker: "We [have] a Mediterranean climate similar to Napa, but we have different soils, because Sardinia was the first land to emerge in Italy, to be born—[and] the Sulcis was the first part of Sardinia to emerge," he explained. "That means we have sedimentary soil, volcanic soil, schist, alluvial, limestone, pebbles. We have all of them."

Although Marone acknowledges that Carignano is used mostly for blends in Europe, he strongly agrees with his mentor that it has incredible potential, particularly in Sulcis. Dangling a deep-blue, tightly clustered grape bunch, he said, "These grapes struggling to grow on sands create wines with concentration, complexity, and aging potential—and [do so] only in Sulcis."

**Agricola Punica 2016
Barrua, Isola dei Nuraghi
IGT, Sardinia, Italy (\$55)**

Lush, opulent notes of violet, roasted coffee, and black plum are surrounded by black cherry-skin tannins. Exotic cardamom, bay leaf, and five spice season the palate. The blend of 85% Carignan, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 5% Merlot leaves a glistening note of licorice and slate on the finish. **94**



KOBRAND

**Agricola Punica 2018
Samas White Wine, Isola
dei Nuraghi, Sardinia, Italy
(\$20)**

Crackling with energy, high-toned acidity marks this blend of 80% Vermentino and 20% Chardonnay. The wine stays on the lees for about 40 days before resting in small concrete vats for three months. Highly aromatic notes of lemon cake and sage are followed by just-squeezed tangerine and a vanilla-cashew creaminess. **92**



KOBRAND

Viña VIK's winery, designed by Chilean architect Smiljan Radić, includes elements like this reflection pool at the entrance, which helps cool the barrel room below.



Terroir: Millahue Valley, Cachapoal Valley, Rapel Valley, Southern Chile

Winery: Viña VIK

Presenter: Cristián Vallejo, Chief Winemaker

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VIÑA VIK



Located in Chile's Cachapoal Valley, Millahue Valley is "the golden place," according to the translation of its name. Proprietors Alex and Carrie Vik, like the Mapuche natives who named it, saw something special in the land and purchased 4,300 hectares in 2007, planting 327 of them to vines. "We have six valleys within the property," said chief winemaker Cristián Vallejo. "We

have hills around [it] and a creek in the middle of them. The beautiful thing about this place is all six are very different. We have more than 32 different types of soils. These different microclimates are why we have a lot of different flavors." Within them, you'll find high-density plantings (10,000 per hectare, to be exact) of Cabernet Sauvignon, Carménère, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot; this density reduces yields to create wines with more structure.

The Viks spared no expense in developing not only the vineyards but the state-of-the-art winemaking facility with an eye toward both aesthetics and sustainability: Among its points of distinction are a reliance on solar power and a reflecting pool that flows above the barrel room, also acting to cool the space. Speaking of barrels, Vallejo's team runs a thoughtful aging program, using French oak that's toasted with firewood sourced from the property and amphorae made with clay also found on the premises. "In that way we are giving some natural Millahue flavor to the [vessels]," said Vallejo.

VIK's Milla Cala red blend is mostly

Cabernet Sauvignon with a small percentage of all of the aforementioned grapes that varies by vintage. Spending 20 months in barrel, it's a product of "no intervention," Vallejo asserted; unfiltered and unfined, it's fermented with wild yeasts "that come from our terroir. Because the idea is to show the flavor of our terroir."



VIK 2016 Milla Cala, Millahue Valley, Chile (\$50)

Led by sturdy tannins, a determined structure and a rich, earthy sweetness define this blend of 68% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 9% Carménère, 5% Syrah, and 3% Cab Franc, boosting notes of blackberry and bittersweet dark chocolate. Dark and deep flavors of truffle and creamy fennel come in mid-palate. A spicy, minty ripeness on the finish leaves you wanting more. **94**

GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



Terroir: Paso Robles, California
Winery: J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines
Presenter: Steve Peck,
Director of Winemaking

“What I’m going to talk about today is really a vision set out by our founder, Jerry Lohr,” said J. Lohr director of winemaking Steve Peck. The 83-year-old’s vision? A single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon from Paso Robles “that would rank with the best in the world.”

The fact is that you can’t really talk about Paso Robles without talking about Lohr, who is considered one of the pioneers of the Central Coast region. He first planted Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties in the area in 1986, not long after it was established as an official AVA in 1983. Some 30 years later, California’s largest geographic appellation, with over 40,000 acres under vine, is planted to about half Cabernet Sauvignon, which thrives amid its large diurnal swings—said to be the greatest day-to-night temperature difference in the state.

J. Lohr itself farms more than 2,700 acres in Paso Robles; its Signature Cabernet is sourced from its Beck Vineyard, located at 1,700 feet in elevation on the

southern end of the Creston District sub-AVA. Peck pointed out that only 5% of the planted acreage in Paso Robles is above 1,500 feet while displaying images of the vineyard that illustrated its relatively close proximity to the Pacific Ocean and its friable, calcareous soils, “which give us a high pH of 8,” he noted. “[There are] a lot of fossils in that white-colored soil. We’re on an ancient, elevated seabed just off the coast of the Pacific Ocean; we’re about 20 miles inland over the Santa Lucia mountain range that separates the coast from Paso Robles.”

Included in the Cab-dominant blend are Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and the rarely seen Bordeaux variety Saint-Macaire, each offering different notes that come together in J. Lohr’s dense, plush house style. For its character, Peck also tipped his hat to the winemaking team’s approach to berry sorting and open-top punchdowns. “I look at our berry classification as a way to move our ripeness levels higher but also discard those berries that start to shrivel and give those baked flavors or high alcohol,” he said. This phenolic profiling is part of what lends J. Lohr its edge, yielding “dark, pigmented wines that translate into a rich attack but soft finish.” SJ

PHOTO: GORDON LIM



J. Lohr’s Beck Vineyard is located at 1,700 feet in the Creston District AVA of Paso Robles.

PHOTO: JOSHUA BALDOVINO





indian accent

New Delhi by Way of New York

THE PAIRING EXPERIENCE AT **INDIAN ACCENT** IS WELL WORTH THE WAIT

by Michelle M. Metter

EARLIER THIS YEAR, just one week prior to New York's shutdown due to COVID-19, I visited sommelier Anibal Calcagno at the famed Indian Accent—where he serves as beverage manager—for one of the most eye-opening pairing experiences of my life. Elaborate meals are a perk of the trade that one can begin to take for granted, but once in a while, an utterly unique encounter can revitalize your perception of pairing as an art form. I was equally captivated by Calcagno's presentation, the flight of craft cocktails that started the meal, and the Broadbent Rainwater Madeira he served, but above all I reveled in the discovery of new favorites such as the Cuvée Flora—a Dornfelder from old vines planted half a century ago (more from Calcagno on that below)—and the St. Laurent Dornflagen from Austrian producer Weingut Pittnauer.

I hold much respect and admiration for the team that connects these beautiful wines with the complex spices and depth of flavor of the restaurant's transportive cuisine. It shouldn't come as a surprise that Indian Accent's executive chef, Manish Mehrotra, is considered by many to be among the most exciting talents of modern Indian cuisine in the world today. His signatures, which reimagine traditional specialties from across the country, include pepper chicken with Kerala vegetable stew, a savory dish featuring roasted chicken thighs that are frenched and dressed in a tomato- and onion-based pepper masala sauce with a hint of clove; as the dish is served to the guest, the creamy ginger, onion, and coconut stew is poured around it.

Like many others, I'm longing for the languid dining experiences we enjoyed before the world turned sideways, so I chose to revisit Indian Accent for this month's column. If you're able to make a stop there during your future travels to New York, keep the following pairing recommendations from Calcagno and three more sommeliers from across the country in mind.

The restaurant's signature pepper chicken is served tableside with Kerala vegetable stew.



PHOTO: ANIBAL CALCAGNO



Manish Mehrotra is the executive chef at Indian Accent, which has locations in New York, NY, and New Delhi, India.

PHOTO: MUSTA KAPOOR



PHOTO: MUKTA KAPOOR

Anibal Calcagno

Beverage manager, Indian Accent, New York, NY

"The Weingut Brand NV Pfalz Cuvée Flora is an amazing wine that sings with Indian food and presents very differently from a traditional sweet Dornfelder. It is dry, made in a serious style from low-yielding vines, and opaque with an intense dark color; yet the wine is surprisingly light. Juicy, dark fruit [appears] on the palate with citrus, minerals, and an herbal edge—think of a marriage between Cabernet Franc and Gamay. The finish is more raspberry-driven, with mouthwatering freshness.

The juicy fruit matches the pepper masala sauce perfectly and plays well with the clove, and the mineral and herbal notes sing with the creamy coconut stew. The energy and brightness of this wine cleanses your palate in between bites of [the] rich dish."



PHOTO: ALE DELGADO

Courtney Quinn

President, Women's Wine Alliance, San Diego, CA

"South Africa has one of the largest Indian communities in the world. Last year when I was there and eating in Indian restaurants, our tables were filled with stews and bottles of South Africa's predominant white wine, Chenin Blanc. Ken Forrester's The FMC Chenin Blanc from low-yielding old bush vines in Stellenbosch is one of my favorite wines; typically, it's matured on the lees and in barrel for ten to 12 months, where it develops a weight to match [that] of the stew. [An] estimated 7% residual sugar reduces spiciness, while the lively acidity magically calls you back to your glass."



PHOTO: MATTHEW CURTIS

Jason W. Smith

Wine director, Wild Ginger, Seattle, WA

"The Finca La Carrodilla Shiraz from Valle de Guadalupe comes from one of just two Mexican wineries certified as both organic and Biodynamic. Pretty and lithe, it showcases Shiraz's spicy side with floral violets; pink peppercorns; and clean, cedary smoke, a flavor bridge to the spicy pepper foundation of the dish. Bright acidity and savory freshness support the tomato tang, and 12 months of aging in French and American oak add touches of warming coconut and clove. The fruit is secondary, allowing the prominent piquant elements to mesh and let the rest of the dish shine through."



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERTO HERNANDEZ

Roberto Hernandez

Beverage director, Vinum, Staten Island, NY

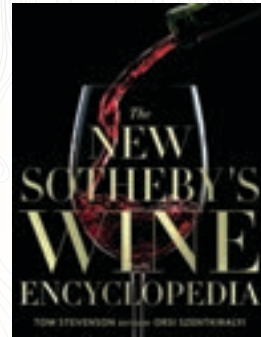
"My recommended pairing is the San Felice 2015 Il Grigio Chianti Classico Riserva from Tuscany. This vintage will be remembered as one of the warmest in recent years, showing a great versatility in pairing with Indian food. Redolent of violets and wild red berry, it will give great balance to the spice [as the] classic star-anise notes give harmony to the coconut and ginger. The tangy acidity and weight of Il Grigio make the dish, with its rich, creamy marsala sauce, shine." *SM*

*Would you like to be featured in Pairing Up?
Contact Michelle M. Metter at metter@fastforwardevents.com.*

THE SOMM JOURNAL

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In the spirit of continuing education for beverage professionals, *The SOMM Journal*, in association with SommCon, invites you to participate in a one-of-a-kind webinar series that will take you on a virtual tour of the unique terroirs of the wine world, guided by what has been called one of the most essential wine reference books:
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Renowned Single Vineyards
(recap in April/May issue)

February 18:
Technique or Terroir:
Is It Production or Nature That
Makes These Wines Great?
(recap in April/May issue)

March 18:
Italy: North to South
(recap in June/July issue)

April 22:
Luxury from Remarkable Sites
(recap in June/July issue)

May 20:
A World of Bordeaux Blends
(recap in August/September issue)

June 24:
Western Europe
(recap in October/November issue)

Co-Hosted by **SOMMICON**



Flyover Finds

PUT THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS AVA ON YOUR RADAR by Anthony Dias Blue

IF YOU FLY from Los Angeles to San Francisco as often as I do, you're familiar with the view that unfolds as the plane begins its descent between Monterey Bay and San Francisco Bay. Looking closely at the heavily forested, mountainous area, you can see neat, orderly patches of green hidden among the trees. These are the vineyards of the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation.

Often overlooked, this region produces an excellent array of wines with a character all their own. Yes, this is where Ridge Vineyards' Monte Bello, one of America's greatest wines, comes from—but many other fine examples are grown on its 1,500 farmed acres. Here are some tasting notes:

Alfaro Family Vineyards & Winery 2018 Chardonnay, Lindsay Paige Vineyard (\$30) Bright golden color; toasty nose, and silky texture; lively, crisp, and juicy, with fresh, tangy flavors as well as good acid structure and length. **90**

Clos de la Tech 2013 Pinot Noir, Twisty Ridge Block, Domaine Lois Louise (\$65) Deep and lush; complex, toasty, and elegant. Perfumed and robust, with plenty of finesse. **95**

Clos de la Tech 2013 Pinot Noir, Cote Sud Block, Domaine Lois Louise (\$85) Herbal yet rich; smooth, stylish, and juicy. Complex and earthy, with remarkable depth and length. **95**

Clos de la Tech 2013 Pinot Noir, Domaine du Docteur Rodgers (\$130) Intriguing mint on entry, followed by bright cherry; juicy and ripe, elegant and long. An exciting wine. **96**

Eden Estate 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$50) Medium garnet color. Silky and bright with racy acidity and notes of plum, strawberry, and raspberry. Rich, deep, and smooth; balanced and charming. **93**

Eden Estate 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (\$100) Aromas of earth and plum. Spicy, complex, and layered with notes of sweet vanilla, new oak, licorice, and mocha. **96**

Gali Vineyards 2016 Estate Pinot Noir (\$40) Deep color and a ripe cherry nose; fresh, lush, and tangy, with deep flavors of black cherry and spice as well as great structure; balanced and smooth. **92**

Gali Vineyards 2016 Estate Tempranillo (\$40) Spiced berry nose. Bright, juicy, and pure, with a silky texture and generous flavors of plum, cherry, and black raspberry culminating in a long, precise finish. **93**

La Honda Winery 2019 Chardonnay (\$26) Dark golden color; smooth and toasty, with good acid structure and tangy citrus. A slight note of oxidation adds complexity. **90**

La Honda Winery 2018 Exponent Red Table Wine (\$26) Deep color and a soft herbal nose. Juicy, clean, and smooth yet racy, with notes of plum, berries, earth, and herbs; long and impressive. **92**

La Honda Winery 2018 Salinian Block Cabernet Sauvignon (\$24) Medium garnet color and a gentle herbal perfume. Smooth and rich with plum, cherry, and blackberry; fresh, balanced, and long—lovely from beginning to end. **92**

Mount Eden Vineyards 2015 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (\$90) Toasty plum and herbal nose; silky and generous, with

more tangy plum and toasted oak; clean, pure, and classic. **95**

Ridge Vineyards 2017 Monte Bello, Monte Bello Vineyard (\$230) Refined, spicy nose; velvety texture. Fresh and tangy, elegant and complex, with layers of juicy plum and berry; wonderful now, it will be spectacular in a few years. **98**

Ridge Vineyards 2017 Klein Cabernet Sauvignon, Monte Bello Vineyard (\$85) Deep color; spicy, rich nose; smooth, dense texture. Notes of plum and a deep, chewy style; toasty, long, and lovely. **95**

Russian Ridge 2017 Cabernet Franc (\$80) Medium garnet color; floral nose; silky-smooth and juicy with classic structure and lush flavors of plum, spice, and toasty oak plus hints of chocolate. A stunning wine with impressive balance and length. **95**

Sante Arcangeli Family Wines 2018 Pinot Noir, Split Rail Vineyard (\$49) Complex berry nose, silky texture, and racy style, with fresh cherry and lovely floral and earth notes; a pure and complete wine. **93**

Waxwing Wines 2018 Pinot Noir, Lester Family Vineyard (\$48) Pale ruby color. Silky and smooth with light, clean, slightly green flavors; fresh and balanced, if modest. **90**

Waxwing Wines 2019 Pinot Noir, Deerheart Vineyard (\$55) Deep, rich, and ripe with lush cherry; balanced, long, and lovely, with real finesse. **92**

Waxwing Wines 2018 Syrah, Lester Family Vineyard (\$35) Smooth, dense, and spicy, with clean yet powerful earthy flavors. **91** SJ



Calling the Adult Beverage Industry

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Bridging the Distance



*Tasting Bisol's Jeio Brut Valdobbiadene
Prosecco Superiore DOCG and
Ferrari's Perlé Trentodoc with
colleagues on Zoom.*

SOMMFOUNDATION AND CONSORZIO ITALIA DEL VINO TEAM UP TO TAKE SOMMS ON A VIRTUAL TOUR OF ITALY

by Michael Markarian

WITHOUT A DOUBT, 2020 has been a year like no other, with restaurants closed, sommeliers out of work, exams canceled, and lives lost and upended across the world. The pandemic has also imposed limits on international travel—but thanks to SommFoundation and the Consorzio Italia del Vino, I was able to join a group of fellow sommeliers on a four-week virtual enrichment trip across Italy.

It was a new format for a new reality. Rather than visiting one or two wine regions, we got to know 18 producers from areas as diverse as Alto Adige and Veneto in the north to Sicily and Calabria in the south. Rather than navigating the country's winding roads, we explored its geography and vineyards remotely through SommFoundation's Global Diagram of Wine. And rather than gathering in tasting rooms, we received wines at home and tasted along with the winemakers on Zoom.


It was especially helpful to compare examples of the same variety from different regions. For example, the saltiness, rich texture, and tropical flavors of Sardinian Vermentino—with its thick skins developed in harsh winds—diverge completely from the bright acidity, light freshness, and floral notes of Ligurian Vermentino. The round, fruit-forward style of Sangiovese from Emilia-Romagna, meanwhile, stands in contrast to its classic and structured counterparts from Chianti Classico and Montalcino.

Moderated by SommFoundation board member James Lechner, our online discussions were organized around four themes. In a session on heroic viticulture and high-altitude wines, we considered the difficult manual labor involved in managing pergola-trained vines on steep slopes as well as the climatic influences of mountainous regions such as Valtellina in Lombardy. During our discussion on strategies for addressing the effects of climate change, we learned that Corvina is susceptible to sunburn in Valpolicella, while Corvinone performs better at high altitudes and in warmer vintages. And to better understand the evolution in Italian farming and winemaking practices, we reviewed clonal studies of Sangiovese in Montalcino and learned about the increased emphasis on Charetto in the Lake Garda region as a response to rising global demand for rosé.

But perhaps the timeliest discussion concerned COVID-19 and its impact on the Italian wine industry. With restaurants and tourism suffering, sales continue to unfold primarily off-premise and online, and consumers are seeking to stock their homes with “comfort food” and “comfort wine,” in the words of Santa Margherita USA senior director of fine wines and business development Vittorio Marzotto. The sommeliers in our group chat then engaged in a lively conversation about what we are seeing in our own markets. Agreeing that restaurant guests these days are either looking for good entry-level wines or splurging on premium expressions to celebrate the nights they choose to venture out, we asked ourselves, what is happening to the middle tier? Opinions differed, but there was some concern about its decline.

The common thread linking every discussion was a very Italian one—food! Our chat box was full of pairing suggestions for every wine we tasted, and the winemakers of the consorzio sent us some of their own recipes for dishes they enjoy with their wines, among them vegetable couscous with Santa Margherita’s Pinot Grigio; a savory tart of cherry tomato and Tropea red onion with Duca di Salaparuta’s Passo delle Mule Nero d’Avola; and wild boar *peposo* (pepper stew) with Castello di Albola’s Chianti Classico Riserva.

It all amounted to a wonderful reminder of just how exciting it will be when we can travel again to visit wine regions in person: to see the land and touch the soil, to commune with the people, to taste wine together while enjoying the local cuisine. In the meantime, SommFoundation and the Consorzio Italia del Vino brought a taste of Italian warmth and hospitality right into our homes and into our studies.

For more information, visit sommfoundation.com/enrichment-trips/virtual-enrichment-trips/italia-del-vino/. 



The Week 3 tasting lineup featured Cantine Lunae’s Colli di Luni Vermentino, Duca di Salaparuta’s Passo delle Mule Nero d’Avola, and Castello di Albola’s Chianti Classico Riserva.



Vittorio Marzotto of Santa Margherita USA discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the Italian wine industry.



The Nigiri Approach

HOW **JASON KOSMAS**, BEVERAGE DIRECTOR FOR TEXAS-BASED GROUP HAI HOSPITALITY, JUGGLES MULTIPLE PROGRAMS by Ruth Tobias

AS BEVERAGE DIRECTOR for Austin, Texas-based restaurant group Hai Hospitality, Jason Kosmas has his work with not one but two James Beard Award-winning chefs cut out for him. Founder Tyson Cole gained renown with modern Japanese megahit Uchi in 2003, which now has locations in Dallas, Houston, and Denver as well as two spinoffs, Uchiko and Uchiba; in 2018, he opened Asian smokehouse Loro with the equally renowned Aaron Franklin of Franklin Barbecue, and—pandemic be damned—he'll soon be opening Uchi number five in Miami, while Loro is expanding to Dallas and Houston. In short, Kosmas is now juggling the wine, beer, saké, spirit, and cocktail programs for ten venues in five cities in three states. Yet when I interviewed him recently, he seemed the very picture of calm—perhaps because, like any juggler, he's mastered the skills of concentration and coordination, allowing him to distill multiple moving parts down to their essence.

No doubt the Jersey native has been honing them throughout his career; not only at such legendary New York establishments as Pravda and Employees Only but also as a co-founder of The 86 Co., which created Fords Gin, among other brands. But it wasn't his experience behind the bar so much as his first day of training with Uchi's sushi chefs that helped him crystallize his plan for Hai. "Nigiri summarizes what Uchi is about," he told me. "You have well-made, well-seasoned rice; then the *neta* [toppings]—the fish, the avocado; and then the *yakumi* [garnish]—a tiny bit of yuzu kosho. It's just the perfect bite. So I thought, I'm going to take the nigiri approach to cocktails [too]. The spirit is

the rice, the foundation. Maybe the drink is going to express cucumber; that's the *neta*. What we need next is a *yakumi*, maybe ginger or mint, that ties it all together." The result, he pointed out, "can be exciting and complex, but it has a simple direction. There shouldn't be too much going on."

Such straightforwardness serves Kosmas especially well at Loro, where the wildly eclectic, Texas-meets-Thailand menu can overwhelm first-timers at the order counter. To help streamline the process, then, he built the beverage list around "super-relatable" batched cocktails, slushies, and highballs: As he surmised, even customers who are struggling to wrap their brains around, say, candied kettle corn with bris-ket burnt ends and togarashi can instantly grasp a Mandarin Margarita or "our most popular cocktail," a frozen Gin & Tonic that "works so perfectly with the food," he said. "It's bright and citrusy with a little bitterness to it."

And so on: Kosmas' ability to neatly summarize every aspect of his program underscores the clarity of his vision. His saké and wine lists, for instance, revolve around storytelling. For the former, he explained, "We try to pull things that teach you about the [saké-making] process or that have a memorable anecdote. Otokoyama, for instance, tells the story of incredible water." And the latter is curated according to the concept of "sommakase": Giving the servers an opportunity to weave a narrative around a meal through pairings, he said, "We want to have something for them to play with, be it a Grüner or a Gewürz or a different Cab Franc, that would be unexpected for the guest." All told, it seems Kosmas has his juggling act down pat. *sj*



*Hai Hospitality
beverage director
Jason Kosmas.*

JASON KOSMAS' TOP FIVE FAVES

1. The idea of time and place. I don't have a favorite drink, but I love oysters with bubbles; I love having a beer after work.
2. Knowledgeable guests. Sometimes they know as much as the expert.
3. The democratization of restaurants: You don't have to go to a fancy restaurant to have an incredible meal. There's a hawker in Singapore with a Michelin star.
4. Genuine hospitality: When you see it, embrace it.
5. Tiki cocktails: They're fun to make [and] they're fun to drink.

JASON KOSMAS' TOP FIVE PET PEEVES

1. Pretension. There's a lot more to be gained by being hospitable.
2. Marketing-driven brands.
3. Straws: If you're not getting your nose over the drink, you're missing out.
4. Champagne in flutes or coupes: Give me a glass I can dive into.
5. The loss of the neighborhood bar—[these days] it seems like everything has to have a theme. A bar can just be a bar.



The Man Behind the Brands



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