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MAGAZINE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019

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CORRECTION

In the December Blue Reviews, **Papa's Pilar 24 Dark Rum Bourbon Barrel Finish** was incorrectly listed. This new expression of Papa's Pilar Rum, finished in ex-bourbon barrels, received **93 points**.

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UPFRONT

An Oddly

PERFECT PAIR



PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM

The Basil Hayden's Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, Rye Whiskey, Two by Two Rye, and Dark Rye expressions were paired with an assortment of cheese during the brand's recent tasting event at Employees Only in West Hollywood, CA.

BASIL HAYDEN'S WHISKEYS PLAY NICE WITH CHEESE AT TASTINGS IN SAN DIEGO AND L.A.

by Rich Manning and Abby Read

Pairing whiskey with cheese is an esoteric experience. For the uninitiated or unsure, it's a duo likely best enjoyed in a relaxed, unpretentious setting. Basil Hayden's took note of this notion when it hosted a pair of recent tasting events in Southern California, enlisting the help of two cheese-mongers to guide attendees through the pairing process.

In a private event space named The Lion's Share, a game-centric gastropub located in the southwestern tip of San Diego's Gaslamp District, cocktails emerged from behind a gold semi-circular bar as a record player spun vintage R&B. It felt less like an events venue and more like the home of a close friend right before the host puts out the appetizers and a solid couple of hours before the karaoke machine gets plugged in.

There were no karaoke machines to be found on the warm day of the tasting last year, however, which felt appropriate: The 20 or so souls gathered in one of the upper-level rooms weren't there to warble, but to experience the intriguing flavor possibilities of what seemed like a novelty combination. The fact that we viewed the afternoon's festivities as unconventional, however, inadvertently confirmed that none of us had lived in true bourbon territory.



Megan Breier, West Coast American Whiskey Ambassador for Beam Suntory, hosted the San Diego and L.A. events.

hospitable. Matching Basil Hayden's with cheese is an extension of that kind of hospitality."

The four-course tasting highlighted Basil Hayden's original Kentucky Straight Bourbon and the Port-infused Dark Rye, as well as two of its limited-edition ryes: the Quarter Cask-Finished Rye Whiskey and the Two by Two Rye, a blend of two aged ryes and two aged bourbons.

They represent the easy part of the pairing equation, as Basil Hayden's whiskeys are complex yet approachable and appealing across the board. Finding cheese to match these expressions is the tricky part, primarily because there aren't any intrinsic guidelines to help streamline the process. "It's more difficult to pair cheese with whiskey than it is with wine because nothing is based on regional matching," Getin Barlas, Master Cheesemonger at Venissimo Cheese in Del Mar, told us. "For example, Bordeaux wines match with Bordeaux cheeses because you can pick out similar regional characteristics in both. You can't do that with whiskey—instead, you really have to expand your search to find cheeses that can stand up to whiskey's strength and intensity."

Barlas' quest to match the quartet of Basil Hayden's spirits encompassed a global reach of cow's, goat's, and sheep's milk cheeses that spanned from Scandinavia to Wisconsin. "These aren't Costco cheeses," he joked as he introduced the first course. As the tasting progressed, it became increasingly clear Barlas had done his homework: The Dutch honey goat gouda cajoled nuanced sweetness from the traditional Kentucky Bourbon, while the barnyard funkiness of the German Sternschnuppe cheese made the Rye Whiskey's



Getin Barlas, Master Cheesemonger at Venissimo Cheese in Del Mar, CA, curated four rounds of cheese to pair with four Basil Hayden's whiskeys at the San Diego tasting event.

"Back when I lived in Kentucky, we would bring bottles of bourbon to dinner, not wine," said Megan Breier, the West Coast American Whiskey Ambassador for Beam Suntory. "If you were hosting a dinner, it would be common to create a meal with a bourbon pairing in mind—it was part of being



The cheese Getin Barlas served at The Lion's Share in San Diego's Gaslamp District included a global selection of cow's, goat's, and sheep's milk cheeses with origins spanning from Scandinavia to Wisconsin.

spiced notes more pronounced. The texture of a caramel cube-like mango-ginger Stilton from England, meanwhile, helped the Dark Rye cling to the tongue like a sweater freshly pulled from the dryer.

The afternoon's wildest discovery arrived via the Dutch Ewephoria sheep's milk, whose bold butterscotch notes joined the complexity of the Two by Two expression in creating a labyrinth of flavors that unfolded distinctively with each sip. And while the afternoon's pairing excellence resulted from thoughtful planning, Breier noted the existence of an underlying connection between whiskey and cheese.

"When you work your way through these pairings, you realize that everything you have starts from the farm, whether it's a grain for the whiskey or an animal for the cheese," she says. "They may be from different parts of the world, but the fact that they both originate from farming gives each a sense of place that binds them together. This bond allows their nuances to really stand out when they're paired."

Throughout the session, whatever preconceptions existed amongst us beforehand were steadily supplanted by feelings of sensory bliss: It turns out that whiskey and cheese do indeed work together, and they do so remarkably well. —*Rich Manning*



Guests in West Hollywood enjoyed Basil Hayden's with an array of cheeses curated by cheesemonger Tony Princiotta.

THE KENTUCKY WAY MEETS L.A.

In Los Angeles, pairing kale and quinoa might seem more crowd-pleasing than serving bourbon with cheese, but the city's event with Basil Hayden's proved the taste-bud tide might be turning.

West Coast newcomer Employees Only settles nicely into its surroundings on a stretch of Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood: Dark wood paneling and bronze accents create a sense of exclusivity and intimacy inside the retro-style bar. As we passed through a curtain into Henry's Room—a private area tucked in the back of the venue—we were greeted with a variation on the Paper Plane featuring Basil Hayden's Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, white peach puree, apricot liqueur, Campari, and lemon at the posh bar in the room's center. A light and refreshing cocktail ideal for Southern California's temperate winter weather, the drink immediately awakened our palates.

According to Breier, Basil Hayden's collaborated with The Cheese Store of Beverly Hills on the pairings to prove that "it's a misconception that you can't pair a spirit with food."

Breier then walked attendees through the steps for a successful tasting, first and foremost a method known as the “Kentucky chew.”

“[Master Distiller] Booker Noe looked like he chewed on his bourbon when he tasted it,” Breier explained, “because he allowed it to really spread around in his mouth and under his tongue.” After you taste, she continued, “then you swallow, which is the start of what I call the nice, long Kentucky hug.” (From then on, the welcome cocktail was fittingly referred to as The Kentucky Hug.)

The four-course tasting menu began with the Basil Hayden’s Kentucky Straight Bourbon. With vanilla and caramel notes developed during its time spent in barrel, it’s a smooth sipping spirit that requires little fuss, so it made sense when cheesemonger Tony Princiotta, The Cheese Store’s General Manager, selected a low-maintenance “pub cheese” to pair with it. The noticeably nutty English farmhouse cheddar brought out the bourbon’s mid-palate while intensifying the nuttiness of the corn in its mash bill. The peppercorns in the second cheese, the Marco Polo cheddar from Beecher’s Handmade Cheese in Seattle’s Pike Place Market, popped with flavor and enhanced the spirit’s finish.

During the second round of tasting, the limited-edition Basil Hayden’s Rye Whiskey, which has a crisp, almost menthol-like finish, matched well with an aged Comté from the Alpine area of France. According to Princiotta, the salty, long finish of the cow’s milk



The welcome cocktail served at the West Hollywood event was a variation on the Paper Plane featuring Basil Hayden’s Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, white peach puree, apricot liqueur, Campari, and lemon.

cheese works to smooth out and reinforce the delicate, clean character of the rye due to the moisture content left after 36 months of aging.

Next, for the Two by Two Rye expression, he first served Piave, a cheese from Italy’s Veneto region; very fruity and a little sweet, it complemented the caramelized notes of the rye. Princiotta took a big swing, however, with his second cheese: the bold *Castrum Erat Maximum*. A Spanish cheese made from raw sheep’s milk that he described as “rustic and a little funky,” it garnered mixed reactions and disrupted what had been a unanimous enjoyment of each previous cheese. After one attendee referred to it as a palate cleanser akin to “a slap in the face,” Princiotta reminded us that in the cheese business, “there is no right

or wrong. Cheese makes people happy.” (This one subjectively so.)

The final pairing married Basil Hayden’s Dark Rye with a variety of smoked cheeses. The California Port finish of the spirit leaves sugar lingering on the palate, so to counter this sweetness, Princiotta steered toward a naturally smoked raw sheep’s milk cheese, Fumaison, and a creamier yellow cheese from England called Shropshire Blue. The cheesemonger wrapped things up by suggesting that the first cheese of the evening would also make a nice pairing for this rye, bringing the tasting full circle. “All of our palates are different, so a tasting event may seem particularly subjective, but that is part of the fun and why we do pairings—to interact with one another,” Breier said. —*Abby Read* ■



Tony Princiotta.

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**A FAMILY SUCCESS STORY,
THIRTY VINTAGES AND COUNTING.**



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Appraising the Trends of 2019



PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM

Finding the right cheese to pair with bourbon: Read more on pages 4–7.

With the new year comes a new Managing Editor for *The Tasting Panel*. Meet Ruth Tobias, who has been working with us at *The Tasting Panel* and *The SOMM Journal* for several years now as our Rocky Mountain Editor.

Stationed in Denver, Ruth was formerly Managing Editor of the original *Sommelier Journal* before it morphed into *The SOMM Journal* under our auspices. We're thrilled to have her on board.

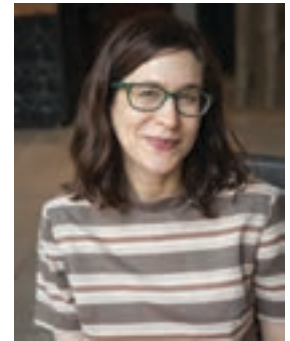


PHOTO: JEN OLSON

Ruth Tobias is the new Managing Editor of *The Tasting Panel*.

There are some other exciting surprises coming in 2019, among them our double-cover launches. Starting next issue and with others to follow, you'll see two cover stories, front and back! With a flip of the wrist, the magazine will read in both directions for lots of entertaining and educational—not to mention colorful—content.

Meanwhile, this January-February double issue features our annual Gin Category Report—which we have perpetually dubbed “Ginuary”—where botanicals serve as the leading performers in the many styles and expressions of this important and fascinating category (check it out beginning on page 89). And be sure not to miss our annual Yearbook, where our top-rated wines and spirits of 2018 gather at assembly for Honor Roll.

I want to thank all of our readers, the loyal supporters who have kept us strong as we head into our 12th year of publication. There are still so many stories to tell, whether it's the trend of the Tempranillo grape (our cover story on page 70), the unique pairing ability of bourbon and cheese (Up Front, page 4), or the introduction of a refined new Japanese shochu called iichiko Saiten that's made from barley and pure spring water (page 50).

In anticipation of another 2019 trend, we'll watch out for sangria to hit shelves and cocktail lists nationwide, especially as warmer weather approaches. In this issue, we paint a strong picture of this increasingly popular beverage with our first Sangria Showdown, a blind tasting that turned out particularly well for one brand: See page 54 for the results. ■■

*All the best,
Meridith May*

Meridith May

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Pictured from left to right at the L.A. Regional Food Bank’s “Eat, Drink and Support” event on December 22 are chefs Bruce Kalman, Tyler Anderson, and Nick Shipp; culinary emcee and producer Billy Harris; chefs Antonia Lofaso and Duff Goldman; and Los Angeles Regional Food Bank CEO Michael Flood.

All-Star Chefs, Musicians Attend “Eat, Drink and Support” at the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank

Talented chefs and musicians turned out in downtown Los Angeles on December 22 for “Eat, Drink and Support,” a food and music event benefiting the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. Roughly 500 guests were treated to an afternoon of culinary delights and musical entertainment, with many attendees bringing food to donate.

Participating chefs included Foo Fighters frontman Dave Grohl (representing his new barbecue venture, Backbeat Barbecue); Bruce Kalman and Tyler Anderson of Square Peg Pizza; Antonia Lofaso; Nick Shipp; and Duff Goldman. The event was organized by culinary emcee Billy Harris, Paul Vitagliano, and K.C. Mancebo of Clamorhouse, while the wine bar and beer garden were sponsored by Santa Margherita and Imperial Western Brewery, respectively.

Providing food to more than 300,000 clients on a monthly basis, the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank has distributed enough food for more than 1 billion meals since 1973. For more information, visit lafoodbank.org.

Omar Percich Succeeds Tom Hawkins as Don Sebastiani & Sons COO

Don Sebastiani & Sons CFO Omar Percich has been promoted to Chief Operating Officer of the company after former COO Tom Hawkins retired at the end of 2018. Percich previously worked as Controller and CFO for Foley Family Wines in Napa, California.

“It’s an honor to help lead an organization with so much history,” says Percich, who joined



Don Sebastiani & Sons in 2017. “Bringing great products to consumers has long been synonymous with the family and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to continue the company’s growth and future success.” For more information, visit donsebastianiandsons.com.



The New Tecate Titanium Delivers a Bold yet Refreshing Taste

Tecate has announced the February launch of a 7.5% ABV brew in a 24-oz. can. This new release was created specifically for sale in licensed off-premise accounts, specifically convenience stores, to capitalize on the growth of high-ABV beers in this channel.

According to Tecate Brand Director Belen Pamukoff, Tecate Titanium aims to capitalize on the continuing growth of Mexican imports as a “unique high-ABV option.” “Our core target, Hispanic convenience-store shoppers, are currently underserved by existing high-ABV options, as they are 13 percent less likely to have purchased than the average shopper and have spent 30 percent less on the segment. We are offering a superior liquid at a competitive price point in a segment our shopper target is familiar with,” Pamukoff said.



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Drnxmyth Pairs Cold-Pressed Juice with Top-Shelf Liquor



Los Angeles-based brand Drnxmyth (pronounced “drink-smith”) is innovating the experience of off-premise consumption by inventing the first truly fresh “craft cocktail in a bottle” that hasn’t been pre-mixed.

Drnxmyth’s patent-pending bottle technology, which separates fresh ingredients from their accompanying spirits, features a “twist-to-mix” mechanism that enables consumers to internally infuse their drink on demand. The cold-pressed juices are never pasteurized or heated, and Drnxmyth’s FDA- and TTB-certified bottling and distribution infrastructure is entirely refrigerated. As a result, the drinks, which are three-tier compliant, are bottled, distributed, and sold while remaining chilled.

Drnxmyth also collaborates with an illustrious lineup of acclaimed bartenders and drink-makers who will soon release their own co-branded and private-label cocktails. The brand is currently taking preorders to launch in early 2019 in select on- and off-premise channels. For more information, visit drnxmyth.com.

Heineken’s Alcohol-Free 0.0 Beverage Debuts in the U.S.

Heineken USA is launching its latest innovation, Heineken 0.0, an alcohol-free malt beverage brewed with natural ingredients for a balanced taste. The brand’s iconic label has been turned blue to match the color globally associated with the alcohol-free category.

Heineken 0.0 introduces a versatile brew for a variety of drinking occasions while connecting with the discerning tastes of a wide range of consumers. On sale now in 6-pack cans and bottles, Heineken 0.0 contains just 69 calories per bottle.



“For the U.S., the time has come for an innovation that disrupts the category and offers a new take on how people drink and enjoy beer,” said Jonnie Cahill, Chief Marketing Officer for Heineken USA. “Heineken 0.0 brings for the first time a truly incredible beer taste to the non-alcohol space and opens a world of opportunity for people to come together and enjoy a brew.”

3 Badge Beverage Corporation Appoints Eric Timmerman as National Sales Manager for Mixology

Sonoma-based 3 Badge Beverage Corporation has hired veteran sales executive Eric Timmerman as National Sales Manager for its spirits division, 3 Badge Mixology. Timmerman, who brings a wealth of experience from both the distributor and supplier side of the business to his new position, most recently served as Vice President of Sales for AmBravev, LLC, a leading importer of premium spirits based in Kentucky.

“Eric has an ideal skillset for leading our mixology team’s sales efforts as we continue our growth trajectory,” says August Sebastiani, President of 3 Badge Beverage Corporation. “We’re very pleased to have him join the 3 Badge team.”

The 3 Badge Mixology portfolio’s sales have increased by 30.25 percent nationally in the last year, according to Nielsen data, with notable growth led by Pasote Tequila (up 66.8 percent) and Bozal Mezcal (up 24.6 percent).



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A Youthful Newcomer

TRÈS CHIC ROSÉ SET TO DEBUT THIS YEAR



Le Grand Courtâge and Très Chic Rosé founder Tawnya Falkner.

Offering a sip of southern France and an escape to lavender fields, coastal vineyards, and Mediterranean beaches, Très Chic Rosé will launch its 2018 vintage nationally early this year. A delicate balance of Grenache and Cinsault from the Pays d’Oc region, Très Chic aims to evoke a state of mind that’s youthful, fresh, and avant-garde.

Winding along the Mediterranean Sea, the Pays d’Oc comprises four departments in the Languedoc-Roussillon: Pyrénées-Orientales, Aude, Hérault, and Gard. A rich combination of steep slopes, hilly peaks, and vineyards dotted with wild herbs, the area is home to diverse soils of sand, limestone, schist, clay, and gravel.

Grenache and Cinsault thrive in the windswept soils and Mediterranean climate of the region. Harvested at night, the grapes are gently pressed immediately to ensure optimal color before the juice is fermented at 16 degrees Celsius in stainless-steel vats to preserve the fresh flavors of red berries, citrus, and tropical fruit. Très Chic Rosé pairs exceptionally well with shellfish, grilled meats, salmon, sushi, charcuterie, pizza, creamy sauces, mild cheeses, and spiced dishes with Asian and Latin influences.

The face behind Très Chic Rosé is Tawnya Falkner, who gave up her career as a designer and real estate developer in San Francisco to move to Burgundy and join the winemaking business. There, she began studying the country’s wine regions to develop a sparkling wine blend that embodies the French spirit of *joie de vivre*. Her journey resulted in Le Grand Courtâge, the acclaimed French sparkling wine brand, and Falkner is now expanding into the popular, cuisine-friendly still rosé category with Très Chic Rosé.

As a consumer, Falkner was surprised by the prevalence of Old World-style French wines with traditional packaging and flavor profiles combined with expensive prices. By creating wines with appealing, modern character and appearances, she believed she could disrupt this staid market with approachable, affordable, versatile French wines designed to celebrate life’s everyday moments.

Led by an all-female team, Le Grand Courtâge has more than doubled its case volume in the past two years and is now sold in restaurants and retail stores in 44 states. The winery produces a sparkling Blanc de Blancs Brut and Brut Rosé, both available in 750-mL and 187-mL sizes, as well as the new Très Chic Rosé.

For more information, visit legrandcourtagetage.com. ■■



In early 2019, Très Chic Rosé will nationally launch its 2018 vintage, a delicate blend of Grenache and Cinsault from the Pays d’Oc.

Gordon & MacPhail Names Chopin Imports as Exclusive U.S. Distributor

Chopin Imports Limited (CIL), the exclusive marketing company for Chopin Vodka and other best-in-class spirits, announced a multiyear agreement with longtime Scotch whisky specialist Gordon & MacPhail, effectively bringing together two family-owned distillers that have pioneered their respective categories.

As part of the agreement, Chopin Imports will manage the extensive Gordon & MacPhail line of Scotch whiskies. The company will also introduce the Red Door Gin from Benromach Distillery and Dunkeld Atholl Brose from Gordon & MacPhail to the U.S. market; both spirits will be available in March at a suggested retail price of \$39.

“The United States is an important market and very much a focus of our long-term plan to build upon the Gordon & MacPhail single malt whisky brand status in the luxury sector while bringing attention to the Benromach brand,” said David King, International Director of Sales at Gordon & MacPhail. “I am confident that our unique spirits collection coupled with the expertise of Chopin Imports will bring great success in the U.S. market.”



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BOLD OR NOTHING

Strongbow Debuts 100 Cal Slim Cans for Health-Conscious Consumers



Leading global cider brand Strongbow Hard Ciders recently debuted its 100 Cal Slim Cans, a 12-can variety pack containing just 100 calories per 8.5-oz. can. Positioned at the intersection of cider, canned wine, and hard seltzer, this new release aims to appeal to the growing enthusiasm for healthy options and light refreshment.

The variety pack contains Strongbow's new mildly sweet pear-apple cider, Dry Pear, along with the highly rated Rosé Apple and the recently relaunched Original Dry. All

Strongbow products contain no artificial flavors or colors.

“Our 100 Cal Slim Cans meet an emerging consumer need,” says Jessica Robinson, Vice President of Emerging Brands. “Canned wine is up and hard seltzers are booming. With only 100 calories per can, our new 8.5-oz. size creates a full-flavored and fast-selling option.” To find Strongbow flavors near you, visit the brand's product locator at strongbow.com. ■■



Enjoy Responsibly

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Spirits to Keep Warm with This Winter

story and photos by David Ransom



Amrut is an Indian whisky brand founded in 1940.



A selection of Frapin Cognacs poured at Fine & Rare in New York City.

As readers of *The Tasting Panel* well know, I tend to cover wine in my column a lot more than I cover spirits. But I do love a good dram now and then (well, fairly often, to be honest), especially during one of the all-too-frequent Nor'easters that pummel the Eastern Seaboard in the winter months. With that in mind, I recently attended a couple of events that gave me cause for celebration—and expanded my upcoming repertoire. They'll also fit your bar program quite nicely, if they don't already.

At a dinner in New York City's Michelin-starred temple of Indian cuisine, Junoon, I had the pleasure of getting to know the whiskies of the subcontinent's premier single malt, Amrut. Founded in Bangalore in the 1940s, Amrut makes a number of different products. The Amrut Single Malt was first released in 2004 to tap into India's voracious thirst for whisky (did you know that India is the number-one consumer of single malt whisky in the world?), and now produces a variety of whiskies in various finishes, including the Indian Single Malt, Fusion Single Malt (made from both Scottish and Indian barley), and Naarangi (aged in Oloroso Sherry casks). Dinner included whisky and food pairings, as well as a lineup of Amrut-based cocktails expertly crafted by Junoon's resident mixologist and Director of Bar Education, Hemant Pathak.

Another event that really piqued my interest (and cemented my choice for this winter's after-dinner drink) was a tasting and dinner held by Cognac Frapin at Fine & Rare, Tommy Tardie's sanctuary of live music, fine food, and great spirits. Frapin can trace its winegrowing roots in southwest France back 21 generations to the year 1270, making it one of the oldest Cognac houses still under original family ownership.

Frapin Cognac is estate-produced from 600 acres of grapes (mostly Ugni Blanc) grown on the family's property in Grande Champagne, Château Fontpinot. I'm a big fan of France's brandies (Cognac, Armagnac, and Calvados), and tasting through Frapin's lineup gave me a rare opportunity to experience the different styles of Cognac side by side. Some favorites poured that evening were Frapin VSOP, Château Fontpinot XO, and Frapin Extra. Also served was the wonderful Frapin Millésime 1988 vintage Cognac, which might just grace my counter-top decanter for the remainder of the winter. ■■

CALAMITY GIN

Our combination of Old World and New World styles produces a unique taste, we call "Texas Dry". Calamity Gin is a premium craft gin infused with wildflowers including Texas Bluebonnets. The taste profile is well balanced with juniper, floral notes and a fresh complex citrus finish.

Bluebonnets offer a unique component in balancing out the floral undertones.

Cardamom creates a subtle foundation and leaves a hint of spice.

Lavender adds floral notes while bringing a pronounced spice.

Coriander seeds add a sweet, aromatic, taste with a touch of citrus.

Rose provides additional floral undertones and a delicate soft sweetness.

Juniper harmonizes with the other botanicals and makes Calamity Gin a gin!

Grapefruit adds a boldness and depth to the citrus finish.

Lemon is a dominate part of the citrus character providing fresh strong acidic tones.

Orange rounds out the various citrus notes making for a very soft touch of bitterness.

Lime Zest elevates the acidic flavor while blending with the other citrus botanicals.

Sicilian Bergamot compliments the lemon while adding to the base notes.



Award Winning



Please Drink Responsibly

Slow and Steady Wins the Race

CORPORATE SOMMELIER AND BEVERAGE DIRECTOR **SUSI ZIVANOVIC** PLAYS THE LONG GAME

story and photo by Lori Moffatt

As Corporate Sommelier and Beverage Director for Perry's Steakhouse & Grille, Susi Zivanovic oversees a creative craft cocktail program and a 250-label wine list where Napa Cab is king. With 14 locations in Chicago, Denver, Birmingham, and multiple cities in Texas—plus four more openings in the mix this year—Perry's depends on Zivanovic's combination of experience, business sense, and talent to design a beverage program suited to guests across the country.

Born and raised in the Toronto area, Zivanovic received a track scholarship at the University of Kansas in the late 1980s and initially planned to become a doctor. A trip to France after graduation opened her eyes to the worlds of hospitality and fine wine, however, and Zivanovic realized she sought more personal interaction than she thought medicine could offer. So she pivoted, working for a Parisian catering company and getting married before having the first of her two sons while working in fine-dining restaurants back stateside in Michigan.

Fifteen years ago, Zivanovic and her young family moved to The Woodlands, a northern suburb of Houston. There, she found her aspirations aligned with those of restaurateur Chris Perry, who operated four Perry's Steakhouse locations in Texas at the time and had a goal of slow growth. She joined the team and promptly rose through the ranks.

These days, regular responsibilities in her role include maintaining inventory, negotiating pricing on the wine and spirits lists, and building relationships and promotions—including a particularly well-received flight of Rodney Strong red blends—with distributors. Zivanovic says her priorities are twofold: to ensure the company is financially sound while helping guests have a great time with each visit.

"Our guests love Napa Valley Cab," she says, "but now I also see a lot of Burgundy going out, plus Chianti, Super Tuscan blends, and Rioja. We're not looking for an eclectic wine list necessarily, but we like to add new selections as they become available, new wine regions that are emerging, and also deals that become available, especially in our by-the-glass program."

It's not hard to detect a certain Old World philosophy to Zivanovic's patient approach. "In Paris, I learned that yes, you *do* have time for a cocktail, a glass of wine, a few courses. You *do* have time to relax. I like to help people learn to enjoy the experience." ■■



Susi Zivanovic, Corporate Sommelier and Beverage Director at Perry's Steakhouse & Grille, oversees 14 locations across Texas and the rest of the United States—with four more coming soon.



The Man Behind the Brands



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New Releases for a New Year

by Ian Buxton

I have some news of a famous old blended Scotch, once America's unchallenged No. 1.

I refer to **Cutty Sark**, created by storied wine merchants Berry Bros. & Rudd for their thirsty clients during the dark days of Prohibition. More recently, it's been owned by Edrington, but that company's priorities lie with its single malt brands, notably The Macallan and Highland Park. Accordingly, as reported here in our August 2018 issue, Edrington offered the brand for sale.

Cue La Martiniquaise-Bardinet, a French spirits group that oversees significant European sales of Label 5, Sir Edward's, and the Glen Moray distillery. This purchase catapults the company to a position of global significance, so expect to see renewed efforts to reinvigorate the iconic Cutty Sark brand in what was once its most important market.

That's a mere stripling, however, compared to the **Gordon & MacPhail Private Collection Caol Ila 1968**. Just 199 of the hand-blown crystal decanters, each encased within a handmade wooden veneer box, are available worldwide (52.5% ABV; £7,500). It partners with the even older **Glenlivet 1954** (41% ABV); with 222 decanters worldwide, the suggested SRP is £9,950. These venerable whiskies have been selected for



for the reliability and value offered by the brand and this limited release—just 9,000 bottles annually for the whole world—celebrates Distillery Manager Bobby Anderson's 18th year at the forefront of the distillery. Is it any good? Well, I'd be honored to have my name on it, so I'd assume Bobby is more than happy.



bottling by Stuart Urquhart, Gordon & MacPhail's Associate Director of Whisky Supply and fourth-generation Urquhart family member.

As you would expect from the reputation of Gordon & MacPhail, these expressions are nothing short of stellar whiskies built to grace any backbar and please any connoisseur. Hopefully, they'll be consumed in reasonable time instead of languishing in anonymity as part of a collection somewhere. I'm available to help.

At a more everyday level, it's time to welcome the new **Speyburn 18 Year Old** (46% ABV; \$120–\$125; available shortly). I featured Speyburn last issue

Finally, a brief salute to the tasty **Dalmore Port Wood Reserve** (46.5% ABV; \$99), which debuted last June. I don't know how I missed it, but I've enjoyed catching up—the use of former Port casks for maturation is seen from time to time with various single malts but has seldom been better done. Splendid stuff and a great value! ■■



Does the prospect of a very old **Caol Ila** single malt from Islay appeal? It's not a whisky seen that often but, remarkably, two have come along at once. Be prepared to move fast and dig deep—these beauties are scarce and pricey. First, Impex Beverages' single cask bottling of a 33 Year Old **Port Askaig** (50.3% ABV; \$800). Note the label doesn't actually say Caol Ila, but there's little doubt where the 115 bottles originated. To reiterate, you'd better be quick!

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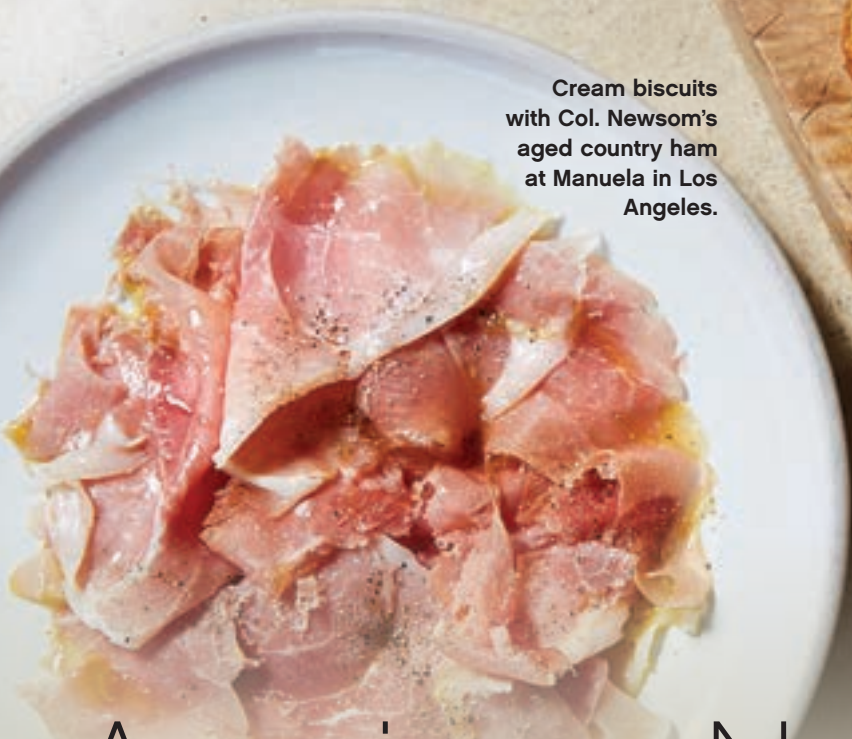


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Cream biscuits
with Col. Newsom's
aged country ham
at Manuela in Los
Angeles.



Americana New and Old

by Merrill Shindler

I do believe it's high time for us to rediscover the sundry pleasures of what may be the most foreign of foods here in America: that elusive pleasure known as American food, a cuisine that's hard to define, for it's a bit of a culinary whack-a-mole. Every time you think you've got it down, it turns out to be something else—Southern, New England, Heartland, Western, Texan, Floridian, and all the other regional categories that make up our national cuisine. We are an undefined nation with equally undefined food, and that's part of the fun.

Yet, there are plenty of places that can rightfully claim to be the real deal. Consider, for instance, Little Fib in the Renaissance Nashville Hotel in Music City. Little Fib is not an American restaurant that's been around since the Republic was founded: It's a newly opened tribute to culinary Americana with, of course, a Southern touch. The name comes from a quote describing the chord progression of country music: "From 'three chords and the truth,' it moves to 'five chords and a little fib,' to 'eight chords and an outright lie.'" But there's nothing

dishonest about the cooking. This is downhome chow—roadhouse cuisine in the big city.

Little Fib is where you go for shake 'n bake fried chicken served with buttery whipped potatoes and braised greens. It's the land of pimento cheese balls and fish 'n grits (made with Anson Mills Grits, of course!). If you've got



Downhome chow: the meatloaf at Little Fib in Nashville.

a hankerin' for praline-pecan French toast or buckwheat-banana waffles, this is where you go. Also opt for the old-school dish they call Southern Comfort: biscuits and gravy, two eggs, and a choice of meat. I do believe the house-smoked pork would do well in

this particular convocation; made with pork from Southeast Family Farms, it's a good neighbor of a dish.

It is, of course, no surprise to find some tasty Americana in Nashville. But to find it in the terminally trendy Arts District of Los Angeles in a restaurant inside an art gallery, of all places, seems a bit like culinary cognitive dissonance. But that's what they serve at Manuela, which, despite its name, does not serve Mexican food; if anything, its roots are in Texas.

This is where the artistic cognoscenti go when they hear the call of cast-iron cornbread (made using butter flavored with Steen's cane syrup), cream biscuits with Col. Newsom's aged country ham, a pork collar from Peads & Barnetts, and a dish rarely (if ever) found in Southern California: grilled red-deer loin in a bacon vinaigrette. For dessert, there's a meringue, though it gets a contemporary twist with pomegranate sorbet. The browned-butter chocolate chip cookie with chocolate ice cream and toffee, however, would have been much enjoyed by Rhett and Scarlett—I can almost hear her responding with a lively "fiddle dee dee"! ■■



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THE BEST BAR IN THE WORLD SETS UP SHOP FOR A TWO-NIGHT STINT WHILE BLOOMINGDALE RESIDENTS GAIN A COZY LOCALE TO SWIRL, SNIFF, AND SIP



The Dandelyan team behind drinks like the Settling Stones (above) brought a “Modern Life of Plants” theme to their D.C. pop-up bar.

PHOTO: JAI WILLIAMS

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANDELYAN

Winter Warmth

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

Washington, D.C., is certainly no slouch in the craft cocktail department, with top bars like Columbia Room, barmini, and Morris American Bar dotting the city’s neighborhoods. So it wasn’t all that surprising when the team behind London’s Dandelyan—awarded the title of World’s Best Cocktail Bar at this year’s World’s 50 Best Bar Awards—decided to do its only American roadshow here after founder Ryan Chetiyawardana fell in love with The District during a visit.

For the locale, Chetiyawardana (more commonly known in the industry as Mr. Lyan) selected 14th Street bar The Gibson, an unmarked speakeasy which happens to be celebrating its tenth anniversary. The collaboration culminated in a two-night pop-up in late November, with drinks inspired by a “Modern Life of Plants” theme that melded Dandelyan’s penchant for infusing botanical flavor into drinks and The Gibson’s propensity to highlight the flavors and nuances in a spirit. (The Gibson’s Creative Director, Julia Ebell, had fun infusing North American flavors

The Diamondback cocktail at Tyber Creek features locally made spirits from Republic Restoratives.



like maple, cranberry, and yaupon into the offered libations.) The D.C. gig was the London bar’s last hurrah before it shutters to reinvent its concept, and this temporary gig was quite the swan song.

Capitalizing on the region’s insatiable thirst for wine, Tyber Creek Wine Bar & Kitchen in Bloomingdale is a welcoming neighborhood spot to grab a glass



PHOTO COURTESY OF TYBER CREEK

Wood-fired halloumi with figs and honey is a standout shareable plate at Tyber Creek.

and some Mediterranean shared plates. I popped in on a chilly fall evening and immediately felt at home in the comfy space, which is run by the husband-and-wife team of Jonathan and Jordan Stahl.

General Manager Leah Glantz is equally passionate and enthusiastic about showcasing the gems on the menu, but, as usual, I wanted to start with a cocktail.

I first opted for the Diamondback, which mixed Rodham Rye (a liquid homage to Hillary Clinton) and Chapman’s Apple Brandy, both from D.C. distillery Republic Restoratives, with Green Chartreuse. Next came fun finds like a fresh and textural Kaapzicht Chenin Blanc from Stellenbosch, a rare still red from Coteaux de Champagne producer La Voie de Chanay, and a smattering of funky amber bottles from Georgia and Spain.

Tyber Creek’s menu is designed for sharing, but it was admittedly hard to refrain from smacking my dining companion’s hands to keep him from the bowls of warm Castelvetro olive with shallots, garlic, and pink peppercorns; the curry and lemongrass PEI mussels (served in a broth that really should have a place on the menu as a soup); and a plate of wood-fired halloumi and figs drizzled with honey. Forecasters are predicting a brutal winter for the D.C. area, but I’d be happy settling into a table here all season long just to sip an earthy red and watch the snowflakes pile up outside. ■■

Kelly Magyarics, DWS, is a wine, spirits, and lifestyle writer and wine educator, in the Washington, D.C. area. She can be reached through her website, kellymagyarics.com, or on Twitter and Instagram @kmagyarics.



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE US GRANT HOTEL



CORY ALBERTO

Chef de Bar for Rendezvous Lounge at the US Grant Hotel in San Diego, CA

Q How did you get your start in the industry?

I spent my childhood in bars and restaurants—my father was a restaurateur for 30 years. The people I always looked up to were chefs and bartenders, so I was studying them constantly while folding napkins and “doing my homework.” I got my start bartending while working as a busboy with a man named Vinny Silletta at one of my father’s joints. Vinny was a classic old Bronx Italian who taught me to make classics like a Negroni or Manhattan. From there I just waited for a bartender to show up, let’s say “under the weather,” and got thrown into it. While I still loved to be in the kitchen, it just wasn’t comparable.

Q What were some important elements in reviving Rendezvous, which was originally part of the hotel in the 1930s?

I think we would have loved to recreate the original Rendezvous but understood it wasn’t realistic. We took the best example of the gold tiles that existed on the exterior of the space and incorporated them into the tiling of our bar. We also took the original photo of the bar and created a window cling that creates a beautiful resemblance on the glass exit doors; beyond that, we went through the archives and found an original Rendezvous menu, which is the template and cover for our current menu. But I think the biggest nod to the original space is our neon Rendezvous sign, which is a life-size recreation of the first.

Q Where does your inspiration come from when it comes to creating new drinks and cocktails?

My friends who don’t work in the industry get annoyed with me because everywhere I go and everything I see, taste, or smell is inspiring. I often comment, “This would make a great drink” and start taking notes.

JEFF JOSEPHANS

Director of Banquets, Restaurants, and Bars for the US Grant Hotel in San Diego, CA

Q What are the most challenging or rewarding parts of your job?

I find it rewarding to be involved in all aspects of the operation and to truly see the multiple facets in which food and beverage can take form. The challenge is controlling the ebbs and flows of business and deepening the bench strength of the team to handle it when it all comes at once—that and being able to keep a close eye on creative passion when logistics and finances can easily take priority.

Q You're also a certified cicerone. What advice would you give those interested in becoming certified in either beer or wine?

I would advise taking the Certified Beer Server Exam first, since that is relatively easy and quick. From there, take the Introductory Sommelier exam, which is going to take considerably more study time. This will give you a solid foot to stand on in the industry and help you determine where your passion lies. I also can’t emphasize enough to attempt to make your own wine and beer to better your understanding of the process, as well. ■■



If you are a mixologist or wine professional interested in being featured here or want more information on Chef's Roll and Somm's List, please email featured@chefsroll.com.

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Adventuring Beyond the Cocktail Basics

by Jesse Hom-Dawson



At Dyafa in Oakland, CA, the Bint Al Shalabeeya cocktail draws inspiration from an Arabic pastry similar to baklava.

PHOTO: CONNOR BRUCE

If I hear one more bartender describe a drink as “a twist on a Moscow Mule” or “a variation on an Old Fashioned,” my eyes might roll out of my head, onto the floor, and out the door of the bar. It’s not that I don’t enjoy a well-made version of either classic drink, it’s just that I’ve had tasted so many over the years that any newcomer is highly unlikely to differentiate itself from its predecessors.

These days, I find myself seeking out cocktails that bring unique flavors and textures or underused spirits into the mix while still maintaining a sense of balance, and it turns out that some of the most compelling contemporary cocktail programs hail from restaurants featuring international cuisine.

In search of drinks that would pique my interest, I spoke with Ajay Walia, owner of Rasa in Burlingame, California, to see how the Michelin-starred Indian restaurant’s cocktail menu was crafted. Among the drinks bringing some intriguing and unexpected flavors to the table is the Noir with reposado tequila, peach, lime, balsamic vinegar, squid ink, and Pinot Noir salt. According to Walia, “Rasa’s cocktails are inspired by Indian flavor profiles, so we designed a cocktail menu that showcases what we have in the pantry, like ghee, gunpowder spice, fresh herbs, and fruits like mango and habanero, to complement the food.”

Across the San Francisco Bay in Oakland, a similar caliber of creativity is unfolding behind the bar at Dyafa, a new Arabic restaurant from chef Daniel Patterson’s Alta Group that’s helmed by chef Reem Assil. Like at Rasa, Alta Group Beverage Director Aaron Paul draws inspiration from the restaurant’s cuisine. “Before we opened, Reem gave me a stack of cookbooks to look through, so I pulled all of the cocktail-friendly ingredients from the pantry sections and we went from there,” he explains. “To me, Arabic food is all about texture, so we wanted the drinks to be full-bodied and silky, like all of the dips and sauces in her food. That’s why we ended up using dairy and nut milk and lots of fruit.”

In Dyafa’s Bint Al Shalabeeya cocktail, figs, brandy, pistachio, Greek yogurt, and cinnamon combine to evoke an Arabic pastry similar to baklava. “In our fantasy, we are sipping this all day in the summer shade with our grandmas,” Paul adds.

As always, it’s encouraging to see innovative approaches and results as bar programs utilize international ingredients to bring nuanced and surprising flavors to the American cocktail world. Bartenders, take note: In this era, it seems like thinking outside the box demands nothing short of a global perspective. ■■



PHOTO COURTESY OF RASA

The bar team at Indian restaurant Rasa in Burlingame, CA, crafts innovative cocktails like the Noir with reposado tequila, peach, lime, balsamic vinegar, squid ink, and Pinot Noir salt.

JAUME SERRA CRISTALINO



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Jean-Charles Boisset takes a sledgehammer to the walls as he prepares his new brewery space.

Faith in Hops

by Jess Lander / photos by Alexander Rubin



Windsor Brewing Company poured two beers at its groundbreaking: English and American pale ales.



Attendees were sent home with an empty copper growler, which they can bring back and fill when the brewery opens this spring.

The vibe in downtown Windsor, California, on November 28 was rowdier than usual for a Wednesday evening, with sounds of banging followed by loud cheering emanating from the doors of what was formerly Old Redwood Brewing Company. The culprit behind the ruckus was a jovial Jean-Charles Boisset, who, standing between a pair of velvet ropes and donning a gold hard hat, repeatedly smashed a sledgehammer into a wall.

The ceremonious act marked the groundbreaking of the storied entrepreneur's latest project, Windsor Brewing Company. Boisset has partnered with Old Redwood Brewing Co. founders and fellow vintners Dominic Foppoli (owner of Christopher Creek Winery and Mayor of Windsor) and Clay Fritz (proprietor of Fritz Underground Winery) to transform the space into a more sophisticated venture.

A brewery has long been in the works for Boisset, who planted hops on one of his Napa Valley estate vineyards two years ago. He originally submitted plans to open a brewery in Yountville near his JCB Tasting Lounge and Atelier Fine Foods retail space, but ultimately decided that Windsor was a better fit.

With a population of roughly 28,000, the small town is rapidly becoming a destination for beer lovers. Expected to complete construction this spring, Windsor Brewing Company will open on the heels of Russian River Brewing Company's giant new mothership, located just a mile down the road. "We thought it made so much sense for us to be in Windsor. As much as I like Windsor for wine, I love the feeling of Windsor for beer," Boisset said. "We have a very open-minded town, a town which is very dynamic and very forward-thinking, and a town that wants tourism and experiences."

Windsor Brewing Company will be twice the size of its predecessor, and while the interior details have not been finalized, Boisset's personal sketches depict an upscale lounge area with red curtains, marble, black-and-white checkered flooring, and copper tanks. And while the space is sure to feature touches of JCB's signature flair, it will reportedly be a toned-down version of his luxurious wine estates and tasting lounges.

During the groundbreaking, attendees took turns with the sledgehammer—"You're helping us save on our contractor bill," Boisset joked—and previewed two approachable and refreshing pale ales, one English and one American (the partners are still seeking a permanent brewmaster). Guests were sent home with empty copper growlers, which they are encouraged to bring back and fill when the brewery opens in roughly five to six months. ■■



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In Down the Aisle, the editors at *The Tasting Panel* have set out to rate retail beverages based on a combination of elements that can increase or reduce off-premise potential, including packaging, branding/credibility, value, user-friendliness, and, of course, taste!

1 TALKIES

Clear, legible label, solid branding. Good overall for retail.

2 TALKIES

Eye catching label and memorable branding. Very good overall for retail.

3 TALKIES

Creatively inspiring in both packaging and branding. Great overall retail.

4 TALKIES

A near work of art and meaningful branding. Excellent overall retail.

5 TALKIES

A masterpiece in packaging and new benchmark in branding. A must have for retail.



Cuvée Grand Esprit Marquis de La Mystériale Champagne, France

(\$45) You don't see too many teal-colored labels on Champagne, but this unique color makes gold embellishments pop—particularly the star from this producer's heraldry, a unicorn. On the palate, a vigorous mousse-like texture envelops the rich expression of fresh Golden Delicious apples touched with lime peel. Brioche enters mid-palate and finishes with chalky, dry minerality. 59% Chardonnay/41% Pinot Noir.

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



J Vineyards California Cuvée Brut Sparkling Wine, California

(\$27) Simple and elegant, J Vineyards bottlings are always a standout in any refrigerated section. This blend of 61% Chardonnay, 36% Pinot Noir, and 3% Pinot Meunier is an excellent example of a no-fuss, domestic, traditional-method sparkling, especially considering the price. Ripe pineapple, green apple, sourdough, and smattering of white pepper finish with a smack of acid.

E. & J. GALLO



Cavaliere d'Oro Prosecco, Veneto, Italy

(\$12) A flamboyant, gold-and-teal knight waves his flag as his noble steed rears up on his hind legs as if to say, "Over here, m'lady, *this* is the Prosecco you're looking for!" At first sip, you'll be grateful for the knight's direction: Baked pear, star fruit, and white flowers accompany a Cool Whip-like texture, making this way too easy to drink. 100% soft-pressed Glera.

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



Maison de Grand Esprit L'être Magique Rosé, Côtes de Provence

(\$17) In the world of rosé, the bottle shape is akin to perfume design. Some can be distracting, but this one goes just far enough with its sexy, svelte shape. Inside, white raspberry, watermelon rind, and blood orange kibitz in a medium body. 55% Grenache/30% Cinsault/15% Syrah.

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



Dark Horse Brut Rosé, California

(\$13) It's pretty difficult to integrate a glass of wine into a logo and make it look good, but Dark Horse gives its wines—including this blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay—a great start right out the gate. Strawberries, cream, and a hint of rose combine in an almost creamy texture. The finish is dry and leaves the palate with a touch of chamomile tea.



Prophecy 2017 Rosé, France

(\$14) The pink and delicately detailed label features the Goddess of Fortune surrounded by various pets, which hold books that surely contain our futures. Inside the bottle, raspberry, green strawberry, white peach, and lemon rind encompass a lighter body. 55% Grenache, 30% Cinsault, 5% Merlot, 5% Caladoc, and 5% Marselan sourced from southern France. ■■

E. & J. GALLO



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For the second year of its popular Luxicon tour, Treasury Wine Estates (TWE) selected Miami and Dallas as the final two stops of its signature educational and tasting program for the sommelier community. Hosted by Director of Education Gillian Ballance, MS, Luxicon includes an educational workshop on preparing for the Master Sommelier exam from the Court of Master Sommeliers and a walkaround tasting of some of TWE's most iconic wines, including the legendary Penfolds Grange.

A LUXE *Curtain Call*

TREASURY WINE ESTATES' 2018
LUXICON TOUR MAKES ITS FINAL PAIR
OF STOPS IN MIAMI AND DALLAS



The Luxicon attendees in Miami, FL, which served as one of the tour's final two stops.

An *"Invaluable" Experience* in Miami

by David Ransom / photos by Ben Rusnak

The two-part Miami event, held at the Eden Roc Hotel on Miami Beach, was attended by local somms eager to glean tips from Ballance. Alongside guest speaker and fellow Master Sommelier Juan Gomez—who serves as Wine Director at The Breakers in Palm Beach—she led participants through key elements of preparing for the exam.

Topics discussed included tasting steps ("The nose is the most important element in tasting a wine, and accounts for 85 percent of flavor perception," Gomez said) and note-taking techniques. Of the latter, Ballance told attendees that "evaluating a wine is very different than appreciating a wine," adding that "learning to be a great evaluator helps you be a better buyer, better seller, better communicator, and better describer of the wine."



Penfolds Grange makes an appearance at the walkaround tasting.

Perhaps most importantly, the co-hosts also explored how to budget one's time during the exam itself: "You get 25 minutes to evaluate six wines, and the clock starts when you touch the first glass," Gomez said. "Before you pick up that first wine, spend more time on sight than you think you should, as the visual element is very important and goes a long way toward helping identify what's in your glass."

These valid points were not wasted on the savvy participants. "Just to be able to hear what it takes to navigate the process from Master Sommeliers who have gone through [it] is invaluable," said Cassandra Felix, a sommelier at The Breakers who holds an Advanced Certification from The Court and is currently working toward her MS diploma. "They've been there and know what works and what does not."

The workshop also included a mock exam with three TWE wines, offering attendees the chance to gauge their skills and test-taking efficiency. In the end, the three "winners" who received the day's top scores were each awarded \$1,200 by event partner SommFoundation to help further their education. The Miami victors were Jasmin Massee of Nusr-Et Steakhouse in Miami Beach, Salvatore D'Elia of Eat and Drink Consultants in Coral Springs, and Thomas Cruz of Okeechobee Steakhouse in West Palm Beach.

"We're thrilled with how year two shaped up," Ballance said. "The organic growth and repeat attendance were proof that this program, and also Treasury's portfolio, resonate within the sommelier community."



Advanced Sommelier and Luxicon attendee Cassandra Felix of The Breakers in Palm Beach, FL, is preparing for the Master Sommelier examination.



Master Sommelier Juan Gomez, Wine Director at The Breakers, discusses the importance of visual elements while tasting wine.



Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance, Director of Education for Treasury Wine Estates, discusses deductive tasting during the Dallas stop of the Luxicon tour.

Getting *The Lowdown* in Dallas

by Lori Moffatt / photos by Jason Kindig

In a sleek conference room at Uptown Dallas' Hotel Zaza, the sounds of chatter and tinkling glasses subsided as Ballance took the microphone before a crowd of 50-plus sommeliers and wine buyers on November 7. "How many of you love to do a blind tasting?" she asked, smiling as a mere smattering of hands rose.

Achieving consistent success with blind tasting is often a stumbling block for sommeliers seeking to advance, and Ballance's Techniques of Tasting seminar promised to give them an edge. "Start with sensory perceptions," she advised. "Don't try to guess which grape it is yet: Focus first on sight, nose, palate, and texture."

With white and red "control" wines breathing on the tasting mats (a Napa Valley Chardonnay and Australian Shiraz, but attendees didn't know that

yet), Ballance guided the class through the Court of Master Sommeliers' 42-point Deductive Tasting Grid. "Color gives clues to the wine's age, storage conditions, and possibly grape variety, but nose is the most important aspect of tasting," she said. "What is the intensity of aroma in the white? To me, it's moderate in terms of aromatics, so we can rule out certain things before we even taste it."

Following the seminar, Ballance and her team presented the somms with a blind-tasting challenge, providing a single clue: The three wines—later revealed as Cabernet blends from Italy, the United States, and France—were dominant varieties from three countries.

During a post-seminar tasting of some of TWE's recent releases, Ballance announced the three top

scorers as the winners of the organization's scholarship partnership with SommFoundation: Lea Elliott, Randy Reed, and Steve Murphey all reported that they have further wine studies on the horizon. "I thought it was clever that [Ballance] used all Cab blends," said Reed, who owns a wine bar in nearby McKinney called Zin Zen Wine Bistro. "It forced us to pay attention to details that suggest place, especially whether they were Old World or New World wines."

Murphey added that while the "nose didn't help [him] much" in identifying these particular wines, both the finish and the tannin did. And Elliott, who recently left her wine director post in Fort Worth to focus on education, said, "Honestly, for me it was refreshing to go through the whole grid again. I love that the knowledge is endless." ■■



The blind-tasting scholarship winners in Dallas from left to right: sommelier Lea Elliott; Randy Reed, co-owner of Zin Zen Wine Bistro (with Gillian Ballance, MS); and importer Steve Murphey.

"We're thrilled with how year two shaped up. The organic growth and repeat attendance were proof that this program, and also Treasury's portfolio, resonate within the sommelier community."

—Gillian Ballance, MS



Among the Dallas wines: Beringer's 2016 Luminus Chardonnay from the Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley.

INSIGHTS OF AN Industry Leader

LESSONS LEARNED FROM
STEVE SLATER, EXECUTIVE
VICE PRESIDENT AND
GENERAL MANAGER—WINE
DIVISION, SOUTHERN GLAZER'S
WINE & SPIRITS, LLC

by Meredith May

The Tasting Panel and its sister publication The SOMM Journal are proud media sponsors of the upcoming Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America 76th Annual Convention & Exposition, set for March 31–April 3 in Orlando, Florida. As part of our wholesaler spotlight series, we're honored to feature one of the industry's top leaders, Steve Slater, who also served as a judge at last year's Brand Battle competition.

Steve's backstory is as intriguing as his beginnings in this competitive industry. I recently sat down with my good friend, who I've had the pleasure of knowing for more than 17 years, to talk about his professional path and share his advice for suppliers.

The Tasting Panel: What's your background? Did you purposefully pursue a career in wine sales?

Steve Slater: Like so many of us in the wine industry, I simply fell into the business and then got addicted to it. I took a job at a place called the Wine Connection in San Diego 32 years ago because some friends of mine owned it. I knew absolutely nothing about wine, but I learned from the great salespeople who called on the account. This was in the late 1980s, and knowing I was hooked, I took any available time off to drive to Napa and Sonoma in a Volkswagen van with my wife and infant, camping out and buying wine I couldn't afford.



“ I remember [my father] always said that you have to treat everyone fairly, and I’ve tried to do the same through my career.” —Steve Slater

I then worked for Irvine Ranch Market when it opened in Horton Plaza in San Diego and was soon transferred to their Fashion Island store in Newport Beach. While we were expecting our second child, I wanted to stay in the wine business, but thought that working a normal work week for a distributor might be the answer. I interviewed with two companies. Jim Allen, Vice President/General Manager of Southern California, created a position for me and I decided that Southern Wine & Spirits offered the best opportunity.

What was your first role at Southern?

I was hired as an off-premise salesperson in a starter territory in Orange County. It was there that I learned how important teamwork is and really enjoyed growing the wine sections in convenience stores where I was assigned. Since I had some wine knowledge at that point, I was promoted to Wine Manager of that team and was later promoted to Wine Manager for Southern California. I moved to Riverside to run the branch, San Diego to run *that* branch, and back to Cerritos to run the entire wine business for Southern California—all dream jobs.

Patrick Daul and I were then appointed General Managers of the then-fledgling American Wine and Spirits. When Diageo/Moët Hennessy USA aligned with Southern, Patrick and I were promoted to run the new dedicated division. Following that, I was appointed General Sales Manager for Southern California under Brad Vassar. When Brad was promoted to Executive VP/General Manager for the company in Miami, I was given the opportunity to run Southern California’s business as VP/General Manager. After many rewarding years there, I moved to our corporate offices to work side by side with Mel Dick, President of the Wine Division and Senior Vice President of Southern Glazer’s, to oversee our wine business nationally. It’s an amazing experience and I learn daily from Mel and his inimitable style.



As the distribution business becomes more and more competitive, how do you stay on top?

The distribution business has always been competitive: The difference today is that there are many more outside disruptors to our traditional route to market. You have to be nimble to stay ahead of it, and we are focused on giving value to our customers through constant efforts to provide the best logistics and selections, as well having the most educated salesforce in the industry. Under Eric Hemer, MW, MS, we have a robust training and certification initiative with the largest number of Master Sommeliers on staff to execute this vision. As a result, we attract and retain the best professionals in the industry.

Additionally, because of our reach into so many markets, our data is the richest assessment for opportunity with our supplier partners. I’m fortunate enough to work for an extremely progressive family-owned company that provides support and sensitivity to the needs of our staff and our supplier network.

What’s your “signature” style of management?

My father was a manager for a chain grocery store and his people just loved him. I remember he always said that you have to treat everyone fairly, and I’ve tried to do the same through my career. I also try to share all that I can with my team and colleagues, because I’ve found that if they understand the how and the why, they can adopt the plan and offer their insights.

In a business of over-branding, quotas, and dependence on the

distributor to build brands, what’s your advice to suppliers for paving the best road to success?

My advice to all suppliers large and small is to have a clear plan. It’s difficult for a distributor to hit a bullseye on the visions and expectations of any producer unless they convey their short- and long-term objectives. Someone producing 5,000 cases or less is going to have a much different plan than one who produces 500,000 cases.

In today’s world of control labels, brand awareness is more important than ever. You also have to keep the retailer/restaurateur on point with the attributes of any brand. That can come through print advertising in a trade magazine such as *The Tasting Panel*, social media, or close personal contact with your respective markets. We can adapt to any clear plan and execute against it.

How does the WSWA fit in as an effective arm for the distribution and supplier network, and how does Southern Glazer’s use it to its best advantage?

To me it seems that WSWA is a common ground for all to submit ideas to advance our industry. To have one independent voice has great potential impact—addressing legislation, diversity, and so many other important topics serves us all. I’ve attended the annual convention for years and have gotten great value from the meetings and the supplier contacts during those days. And who doesn’t love the free elevator rides? ■■

For more information, visit wswaconvention.org.

Eugénio Jardim,

Ambassador for Wines of Portugal

by Michelle Metter

Q: You've had a diverse career as an educator and brand ambassador in addition to establishing award-winning wine programs as a sommelier. What advice would you give to those looking to branch out into other directions professionally?

Every facet of the industry has something unique to teach a wine professional. I started my career working in retail and evolved into working as a sommelier and wine director. I had to understand the business from the point of view of both the consumer and business owners. I've learned how to follow my instincts and my palate, as well as how to consider the vital fiscal aspect of the business.

Q: As a Brand Ambassador for Wines of Portugal, what do you feel has changed over the past ten years in terms of U.S. consumers' understanding of wines from the region?

I've seen appreciation for this incredibly rich wine culture grow steadily since I started. Portugal is no longer only known for Port and Madeira: It occupies a well-deserved position amongst the most interesting wine-producing countries. The dry wines have improved immensely, and buyers and consumers have taken notice. Statistics indicate that steady growth in the U.S. market will continue.

Q: You also split your time as an importer. Tell me a little about your portfolio.

I maintained a great list at Jardinière in San Francisco while working as the



PHOTO: FELIX SANCHEZ

Wine Director. After my departure, I joined Esprit de Champagne, a small importing company specializing in Grower Champagnes. We work with grower families throughout the region and discover some truly unknown treasures.

Q: What do you believe are the top Grower Champagnes every sommelier should try?

I think Champagne should only be enjoyed on days that end in a "y"! From the Esprit de Champagne portfolio, I highly recommend the wines of Doyard-Mahé and Eric Isselee (Ct. de Blancs); Bochet-Lemoine and David Coutelas (Marne Valley); and Jacques Chaput (Aube). Mind you, we are not the only ones importing great Champagnes from small houses. I must give a shout-out to Pierre Péters, Prévost, Michel Fallon, and Jacques Selosse.

Q: You have ten minutes and one glass of wine. Who are you with, what are you drinking, and what are you listening to?

A few nights ago I had one of these "moments" at home with my friends while enjoying a 1969 Viuva Gomes Ramisco from Colares, Portugal—one of the rarest wines in the world. It was magical. We were listening to the wonderful Brazilian singer Tulipa Ruiz and to M83, a French electronic group based in L.A. How's that for a mingling of cultures? ■■

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Successful F&B operators know the cost of every ingredient in every food and beverage item on their menus.



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Menu Writing vs. Menu Programming

DISCOVER THE BENEFITS OF ENGINEERING MENUS FOR PROFIT AT THE 2019 FOOD & BEVERAGE INNOVATION CONFERENCE IN LAS VEGAS by David Klemt

A menu is more than just a list of items for sale accompanied by their prices, as menus are valuable revenue-generating tools that can boost a restaurant or bar's bottom line.

There's a difference between writing a menu and programming a menu. That difference? Data. According to Mark Kelnhofer, President and CEO of Return On Ingredients, menu programming should start with cost management as a key concern. Successful operators know the cost of every ingredient, every element, and every food and beverage item on their menus.

It may seem obsessive or even borderline ludicrous, but there are indeed operators out there who factor in the costs of beverage napkins and straws for their cocktails. They're obsessed with tracking, battling, and eliminating costs as fanatical devotees of the recipe costing card, and their restaurants or bars are better off for their nonstop battle to lower operational costs.

However, there are still many operators who simply slap dollar amounts

onto the items on their menus with an approach that's less scientific and more akin to guesswork. Rather than using data, they assume guessing what the market will sustain in terms of pricing is good enough. What "good enough" turns out to be is a flawed version of wishful thinking that leads to permanently closed restaurant doors.

Accounting, it's safe to say, isn't the most appealing aspect of restaurant or bar ownership. For most, it's not as sexy as creating a signature dish or cocktail that becomes a hit among guests. But without accounting, cost management, and costing-card discipline, operators won't last long enough to enjoy the process of conceptualizing, realizing, and sharing their food and beverage offerings. In other words, failing to understand costs when programming a menu can—and will—cost an operator their business . . . and possibly much more.

To learn more, join Kelnhofer on Monday, March 25, at 2 p.m. during the Food & Beverage Innovation Conference in Las Vegas, co-located

with the Nightclub & Bar Show in the Las Vegas Convention Center. During his informative session, he'll discuss how engineering menus for profitability is crucial to the long-term success of a bar or restaurant. Using accurate recipe costing as a base, attendees will learn how to identify and utilize the proper data to make informed, methodical decisions about their menus.

Operators who seek to thrive rather than merely survive must understand that menu programming is a vitally important element of driving profit. ■■



Mark Kelnhofer is the President and CEO of Return On Ingredients.

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To register for the 2019 Food & Beverage Innovation Conference, visit ncbshow.com/fbic.

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IN LIKE CLINT


THE HEAD BARTENDER FOR **THE DRAYCOTT** IN LOS ANGELES INFUSES HIS PROGRAM WITH AN EYE FOR QUALITY

by Kyle Billings / photos by Cal Bingham

Los Angeles restaurant The Draycott lies at the center of concentric cultural circles as the focal point of the quaint and recently debuted Palisades Village, itself enclosed in the northwestern hamlet of L.A.'s Pacific Palisades neighborhood.

Evocative of a British pub with a SoCal twist, the venue exudes a breezy stateliness. Describing the ambiance and menu as a showcase for “high-quality ingredients with fine-dining service in a casual and fun atmosphere,” Head Bartender Clint Loker translates this ethos to his own medium when patrons sidle up to the bar, continuing to evolve the cocktail menu in a commitment to this elevated experience.

A new seasonal menu, for example, will keep just three of the 12 cocktails from the previous iteration. “Mainly the revamp is because I wanted to bring in higher-quality products,” Loker explains. “When you’re paying 16 bucks for a cocktail, you better get a premium product.”

A photograph of Clint Loker, the head bartender at The Draycott, sitting at a bar. He is wearing a white dress shirt and a light pink tie, and is smiling warmly at the camera. He is holding a cocktail in a glass with a garnish. The background shows a bright, modern bar interior with large windows and decorative lighting.

Clint Loker serves as the Head Bartender at The Draycott in Pacific Palisades, CA.

Like many denizens of the Southland, Loker is a transplant from beyond state lines. While majoring in restaurant management at the University of Wisconsin–Stout, he originally imagined wielding a wine key while navigating the floor with a gueridon, but after becoming a Certified Sommelier through the Court of Master Sommeliers, Loker was eager to broaden his knowledge of beer, spirits, and cocktails.

Making the proverbial trek west for perspective, Loker found it mixing cocktails and curating bar programs. “I started working for a company called Greenleaf Gourmet Chopshop,” he recalls. “That was probably my best experience—I got to develop their wine list, beer program, cocktail program, [and] liquor program from scratch, so it was a great to have that experience and dive into this. Obviously, this is more ‘fine dining,’ so I get to play a little bit more with high-quality ingredients, which is fantastic.”

Those ingredients are on display in the Draycott Rose, a new Belvedere Vodka-based cocktail that caters to his savvy clientele. “When you look at it, probably 50 percent of liquor sales are vodka,” Loker says. “Out here a lot of people are high-end, so they want vodka or Vodka Martinis. They want cocktails with vodka that aren’t too sweet, and they’re familiar with the branding, so they know exactly what these names are and what kind of product it is.”

True to his Midwestern roots, Loker is plain-spoken and self-effacing. In chasing a convivial *joie de vivre* both behind and beyond the bar,



Clint Loker prioritizes precision in even the smallest details of his program.



The Draycott Rose, the restaurant’s new Belvedere Vodka-based cocktail, caters to the restaurant’s upscale clientele.

he executes precision in even the smallest details of his program. “My favorite part about using a high-quality product is that you can make just about anything and it will taste good, but when you put it with other high-end ingredients, you can create an experience for a guest that they have never had,” he explains.

This includes the considered selection of vodka bases like Belvedere, which Loker posits can make all the difference in terms of taste. “American wheat is very hard and can be a punch in your face, as it were, where rye is going to be a little bit more mellow,” he says. “It’s going to have a slight sweet undertone to it, too. It usually goes better with vodkas because it mixes better.”

Like Loker, Belvedere is also a worldly transplant: this time from the Dankowskie Gold rye fields of Poland. As one of the world’s leading luxury vodkas, the brand continues to spotlight a commitment to its terroir—something The Draycott’s de-facto sommelier and his sage patrons surely appreciate. ■■

Mixing Up JAPANESE FLAVORS

The Sakura Negroni at Pacific Cocktail Haven in San Francisco is made with the newly introduced shochu iichiko Saiten.



JAPAN'S NUMBER-ONE BARLEY SHOCHU BRAND IS LANDING ON U.S. SHORES WITH THE COCKTAIL-FRIENDLY IICHIKO SAITEN

Every bar professional knows that Japanese whiskies are in high demand, but it's the Japanese spirit shochu that's the favorite of the country's own households and *izakayas* these days. Not to be confused with Korean soju, shochu is a high-quality distilled spirit that's been making waves in Japan for the past 15 years and is now poised to soar in the U.S. market.

Leading the shochu craze is iichiko, Japan's number-one barley-based brand in the category: Selling more than 8 million cases per year, it's grown into a global icon. As part of a new partnership with Davos Brands, iichiko is ready to introduce American consumers to iichiko Saiten, a high-proof shochu created to blend seamlessly with craft cocktails. With this expression's distinct yet accessible flavors—developed with feedback from top U.S. cocktail pros—consumers can make a resolution to add a new bottle to their bar carts while exploring the nuances of this Japanese spirit.

Masashiro Urushido, Managing Partner at Katana Kitten in New York, is an expert at incorporating Japanese ingredients into contemporary cocktails.

Quality in Tradition

Though shochu's resurgence in Japan is relatively recent, its origins date back centuries. Acknowledging this history is important at iichiko, which is owned by four families with roots in crafting shochu, saké, and wine through their shared company, Sanwa Shurui.

"This family-owned company's dedication to quality, as well as the art and science of distilling, was an ideal match with the best-in-class portfolio we've developed at Davos Brands," says Vice Chairman Guillaume Cuvelier. "We consider it an honor to bring this amazing spirit to the American consumer."

Like other distilled spirits such as vodka or whiskey, not all shochu is created equal. The key is to look for *honkaku*, or "authentic," shochu made from select base ingredients and distilled only once to create the highest grade of quality seen in the category. iichiko (pronounced "EACH-ko")—which means "It's good" in the local dialect—makes it easy to find a consistently exceptional expression, as it always classifies as *honkaku* shochu.



PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY

PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY



At Katana Kitten, iichiko Saiten is used in a Japanese-influenced take on the Martini.

Channeling the Elements

iichiko hails from Oita Prefecture on the island of Kyushu in southern Japan, the traditional home of shochu. It's easy to see why, as both water and air play important roles in the category's production: Characterized by verdant mountains that stretch up into fluffy clouds, the land here is carved through by narrow caverns, where light and water meet to create a mystical effect. At the iichiko distilleries, meanwhile, groundwater is naturally filtered through 1,000 feet of volcanic rock, combining with the region's fresh, clean mountain air to impart an incredible softness and purity in iichiko's shochus.

When asked to describe shochu, many draw comparisons to vodka, yet while both are clear, distilled spirits,



WITH THE DISTINCT BUT ACCESSIBLE FLAVORS OF IICHIKO SAITEN, CONSUMERS CAN MAKE A RESOLUTION TO ADD A NEW BOTTLE TO THEIR BAR CARTS WHILE EXPLORING THE NUANCES OF THIS JAPANESE SPIRIT.





Mixologist Kevin Diedrich is the General Manager at Pacific Cocktail Haven (aka P.C.H.) in San Francisco.

drawing a direct relationship between the two would be an oversimplification. While shochu can legally be distilled from a variety of base ingredients, including rice and sweet potato, iichiko chooses to exclusively use two-row barley, which is polished to yield a clean and elegant flavor. The distillery then utilizes barley koji, a version of the fragrant mold that serves as an essential component in Japanese food and beverage culture, to break the barley down into fermentable sugars. The use

of barley koji, which iichiko pioneered and for which it's created a proprietary culture, lends a certain umami-like character and richness to the shochu.

Also important to the quality and character of iichiko shochu is the single-pot distillation method. By distilling the shochu only once, the pronounced flavors of the barley base are more fully expressed in the spirit itself, making iichiko far more distinctive while adding unexpected character to cocktails of all kinds.

There are many ways to enjoy shochu—neat, on the rocks, or mixed with hot or cold water, for example—but bartenders and mixologists are increasingly embracing the category for its ability to create memorable cocktails. While most shochus fall between 25–30% ABV, the 86-proof iichiko Saiten sits in the range of other major spirits and is specifically built for use in craft cocktails.

To craft the well-balanced Saiten, iichiko blends raw shochus distilled following two separate methods: a unique low-pressure distillation, or *gen-atsu*, which is unique to shochu and results in delicate, smooth flavors and aromatics; and atmospheric distillation, or *jo-atsu*, which creates a more robust, richer shochu. The savory quality of the spirit comes through on both nose and palate, adding tones of seaweed, soy sauce, and ocean minerality to soft notes of melon and banana.

The combination of clean, fresh flavors and hints of umami makes iichiko Saiten an incredibly versatile shochu: Try subbing it in for vodka, gin, or rum in a classic cocktail or use it to create an entirely new concoction.

East Meets West

At Katana Kitten, a Japanese-American cocktail bar that opened in New York's West Village last summer, Managing Partner and bartender Masahiro Urushido blends bar traditions from both countries in a cheeky yet convivial way. This Japanese transplant, who most recently garnered recognition for his work at the acclaimed New York restaurant Saxon + Parole, combines ingredients like Japanese whisky, junmai daiginjo saké, and yuzu with familiar brands of vodka, rum, and gin to create a tidy menu of riffs on classic drinks like Gin & Tonics, spritzes, and Amaretto Sours.

The iichiko Saiten makes a fitting addition to the Katana Kitten concept, with Urushido using equal portions of the expression and Noilly Prat Extra Dry Vermouth to create a revised version of a Martini. "By preparing this 50-50 proportion, the aroma of barley from the Saiten opens up nicely, giving it a dry, citrusy quality on the palate," he says. Meanwhile, a quarter-ounce of *amazake*—a sweet, low-alcohol

beverage made from rice, koji, and water—“adds a nice roundness,” Urushido adds.

Beyond the cocktail spectrum, Urushido notes that iichiko Saiten would work well in *ocha-wari*, a classic Japanese drink made with shochu and tea that’s often iced. But while it’s easy to make, straight *ocha-wari* may be a shock to the system without a bit of sweetness, prompting Urushido to suggest adding “a quarter- or half-ounce of agave syrup here in the U.S. market.” “The syrup makes the drink rounder, and straight shochu with iced green or oolong tea is too dry for American palates,” he explains.

International Influences

Across the country in San Francisco, cocktail guru Kevin Diedrich has been crafting inventive drinks at Pacific Cocktail Haven (aka P.C.H.) since 2016 and long before that at numerous spots throughout the city. His Union Square spot is a neighborhood cocktail bar—that is, if your neighborhood bar had a comprehensive wall of high-end booze from around the world.

As a result, global influences abound on Pacific Cocktail Haven’s menu, which includes sections of drinks based on a specific spirit—gin, brandy, whiskey—as well as low-ABV cocktails or punches to share. Japanese products, however, make appearances throughout, from the three sakés served by the glass to the Miso Old Fashioned with miso butter.

Upon tasting iichiko Saiten, Diedrich says he first noticed its texture. “It has a great first sip and a long-lasting finish,” he says. “There are hints of melon, with salty, savory notes to balance it out.” This flavor combination of fruit and salt led Diedrich to create a spirit-forward twist on a Negroni using iichiko Saiten as a base spirit: The drink, dubbed the Sakura Negroni, balances the shochu with fragrant, limited-edition Mancino Sakura Vermouth and Aperol, the latter of which adds a desired level of bitterness.

As fusions of flavor play an increasingly powerful role in American food and beverage culture, the time has arrived to embrace this signature Japanese beverage with the country’s favorite barley shochu brand. ■■

PHOTOS: HARDY WILSON



PHOTOS: TIMOTHY MURRAY



Sakura Negroni

by Kevin Diedrich, Pacific Cocktail Haven, San Francisco

- ▶ 1½ oz. iichiko Saiten
- ▶ ¾ oz. Mancino Sakura Vermouth
- ▶ ¾ oz. Aperol

Stir and strain over a big rock.
Garnish with a lemon twist.

Karakuchi 50/50

by Masahiro Urushido, Katana Kitten, New York

- ▶ 1½ oz. iichiko Saiten
- ▶ 1¼ oz. Noilly Prat Extra Dry Vermouth
- ▶ ¼ oz. amazake
- ▶ 3 dashes grapefruit bitters

Stir and strain into frozen glass (Urushido recommends a Cocktail Kingdom Nick & Nora). Garnish with a pomelo twist.

The Great Sangria Showdown

LOCO LÓPEZ OUTGUNS THE COMPETITION IN LOS ANGELES

by Richard Carleton Hacker / photos by Cal Bingham



Sebastian "Loco" López reveals his winning brand at the end of a sangria-focused blind tasting at A.O.C. in West Hollywood, CA.

His friendly demeanor, warm smile, and firm, self-assured handshake notwithstanding, Chilean wine expert Sebastian "Loco" López was a bit apprehensive as he entered the private upstairs dining room at the James Beard-awarded restaurant A.O.C. in West Hollywood, California.

This was understandable: After all, he was there to observe a blind tasting that would pit his newly introduced sangria—made from his grandmother's secret recipe and named Loco López after his family nickname—against four sangrias already on the market. The 12 Los Angeles-area men and women invited by *The Tasting Panel* to serve as judges (see sidebar on page 56) were all experienced industry professionals; as mixologists, buyers, managers, and beverage directors, they'd been around and knew the ropes.

Complicating the issue was the fact that while sangria is the second fastest-growing wine category in the U.S. right after rosé, most consumers only know three things about it: It originated in Spain, is made with red wine and fruit, and should be served cold. As a result, López set out to explain exactly what sangria is and how his brand differed from others in terms of its recipe, taste, and texture.





Sebastian “Loco” López talks to the judges after his win. “I was so nervous,” he admitted as the group applauded. “After all, my name is on the package. But now I know my grandmother would be proud.”

However, no one in the room—not even López—knew which of the five sangria brands was his, as each judge sat before a tasting mat with five unmarked Riedel Cabernet Sauvignon glasses each filled with a different sangria. The contents were identified only by numbers one through five, and in true professional blind-tasting format, these sangrias would be tasted slightly chilled and without ice. The only hints to any of their differences were minutely varying shades of deep red, and in some cases, a few distinctive bouquets arising from the glasses. Yet there was much more to sangria than that, as López pointed out before the judging began.

“What is the best sangria?” he asked before providing an honest yet surprising answer. “It’s probably the one you make at home. Each one is so personal, so different. It’s a style that comes from a family’s tradition. And each has some key elements that together create the right combination. First, you need a simple but good red wine. It doesn’t have to be expensive, but it should be good quality, so that when you taste the sangria, you taste the wine. The next important ingredient is fresh fruit, so that you taste them on your palate. And for the third key element, there are the spices. In my home when I was growing up, my abuela [grandmother] María would always say that spices are what make the signature of the sangria.”



The invitation sent to the judges.

These elements held a special significance for López on this particular day, as the Loco López brand is produced using his late grandmother’s personal recipe. When they would make her sangria together in the family kitchen, no one else was allowed to enter, he recalled. Afterward, she would sit on the front porch and proudly offer glasses to the passing neighbors, who unanimously proclaimed it the best sangria in town.

BLIND TASTING

So, for López, this was more than just a sangria judging: It was an opportunity to validate his grandmother's family tradition on a global scale. "As a boy, I was the only member of my family who knew Abuela's recipe," López said, "and I was sworn to absolute secrecy. But after her passing, I wanted to share her incredible sangria with the world and keep her joyful spirit alive."

The judges were given 20 minutes to evaluate the sangrias using a scoring sheet listing them in order, with each to be ranked on aromatics, freshness/texture, and taste. Scores earned in these three categories were then totaled up by each judge for a ranking of No. 1 through No. 5, with No. 1 eventually named as the best sangria. At the end of the judging period, the scoring cards were gathered and tabulated before Meridith May, Publisher and Editorial Director of *The Tasting Panel*, announced the results.

"And the winner," she said, "was Sangria No. 4, with eight No. 1 choices and six No. 2 choices." The identities of all five "mystery" sangrias were then revealed, with Loco López unveiled as the winner.

"I was so nervous," López admitted as the judges applauded. "After all,



Chris Barragan, Mixologist at Petit Trois in Sherman Oaks, CA, takes notes during the tasting.

my name is on the package. But now I know my grandmother would be proud. She was extremely opinionated and she would say, 'Always use the best ingredients.' In this spirit, I will tell you the secret of my grandmother's recipe: She used mandarin oranges." At that point an approving murmur went up among the judges. "She liked her sangria to be naturally sweet," López continued, "and mandarin oranges provided the key element, along with



Katerina Dvorakova, one of the judges, serves as the Retail Manager for Wally's Wine & Spirits in Los Angeles.

some cinnamon. To bring this sangria to life, we used Syrah for the red wine, because Syrah brings a spiciness to the sangria that for me is so relevant, along with a deep color.

"And finally, we tried to do something unique with our packaging, something that had never been used before. We found Tetra Pak was more familiar to consumers, and makes our sangria easier to pour. But the other key difference in our packaging is the 1.5-liter size. After all, sangria is meant to be shared, so the Loco López container is large enough for everyone, at home or in a restaurant. And for

off-premise, it is large enough and colorful enough to attract a consumer's attention." With a suggested retail price of \$10, the sangria has an ABV of 8%, which complements today's trend of low-alcohol cocktails.

López said his Chilean brand plans to soon release a rosé sangria, but for now, the Syrah-based expression—with its balanced and refreshing flavors of strawberries, citrus, and cherries; its affinity for mixing with soda or as an ingredient in Scotch-based cocktails; and its penchant for mint garnishes—was a clear winner among a team of very discerning judges. ■■

The Judging Panel

Melanie Kaman, Beverage Director, Baltaire, Brentwood, CA

Sam Matatyan, Owner, Village Liquor, La Crescenta, CA

Nate Ostelle, Beverage Manager and Level 2 Sommelier, Manhattan Beach Post, Manhattan Beach, CA

Sharon Coombs, Beverage Director, E.P. & L.P., West Hollywood, CA

Austin Hennelly, Mixologist, Majordomo, Los Angeles

Katerina Dvorakova, Retail Manager, Wally's Wine & Spirits, Los Angeles

Chris Barragan, Mixologist, Petit Trois, Sherman Oaks, CA

Marlene Olarra, Bar Manager, Faith & Flower, Los Angeles

Jake Cheung, Marketing Manager, Gelson's Southern California

Ray Brych, Category Manager, Gelson's Southern California

Gina Cook, SOPAC Specialty Purchasing Agent, Whole Foods

Ricky Ortega, Beverage Director, Marina Del Rey Hotel, Los Angeles

To view the full version of this story, including comparative scores for all participating brands, visit tastingpanelmag.com/sangria-showdown.



Marlene Olarra, Bar Manager at Faith & Flower in Los Angeles, is pictured with Jake Cheung of Gelson's.



Gelson's Category Manager Ray Brych.



Gina Cook is a SOPAC Specialty Purchasing Agent for Whole Foods.

The Judges' Feedback

Sharon Coombs, Beverage Director, E.P. & L.P.

My favorite was Number 4. I thought that it had those amaro characteristics with orange peel and rhubarb and nice spices, but still showed ripe, fresh berry notes and, overall, had really good balance.

Austin Hennelly, Mixologist, Majordomo

Initially, I was surprised by the diversity of the offerings. Sangria is a category I'm not very familiar with. Tasting these sangrias was a little like tasting a cocktail before it was shaken or stirred, so that was an interesting aspect of this judging to me. As far as favorites are concerned, I'm going to go with Number 4. It's the only one that showed fruit characteristics that weren't just like ripe red fruit—it had pineapple and tropical fruit as well as notes of bell pepper and a little cured meat in the nose.

Marlene Olarra, Bar Manager, Faith & Flower

My favorite was Number 4, but then again, I do enjoy bitters.

Ray Brych, Buyer, Gelson's Southern California

My second favorite was Number 4 for something a little spicier, and it had a little longer finish to it. I also picked up some dark cherry and blueberry, which I thought was kind of neat.

Gina Cook, SOPAC Specialty Purchasing Agent, Whole Foods

Number 4, I think, would be great in bars, because for anybody who's a fan of Old Fashioneds or Manhattans or red vermouth on ice, you could easily steer them toward that if they don't want something high-proof.

On the Cutting

Edge

GUILLOTINE HERITAGE VODKA
PUTS A REVOLUTIONARY SPIN ON
CLASSIC COCKTAILS

by Jesse Hom-Dawson / photos by Cal Bingham



Amir Vahdani, Director of Food and Beverage for the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills, CA, uses Guillotine's barrel-aged Heritage Vodka to transform a Moscow Mule into what he calls The Seventeen89, named for the year the French Revolution began.

Amir Vahdani, who says he appreciates the uniqueness of Guillotine Heritage Vodka, also features the spirit in his Black Magic cocktail alongside Carpano Antica Vermouth and black walnut bitters.



The Seventeen89

Created by Amir Vahdani

- 2 oz. Guillotine Heritage Vodka
- ½ oz. lime juice
- 3 oz. ginger beer

Serve in a copper mug and garnish with candied ginger and a sprig of fresh rosemary.

Black Magic

Created by Amir Vahdani

- 2 oz. Guillotine Heritage Vodka
- ½ oz. Carpano Antica Vermouth
- 1 dash black walnut bitters

Serve in a coupe and garnish with a lemon twist.

Vahdani also uses Guillotine Heritage in his Black Magic cocktail with Carpano Antica Vermouth and black walnut bitters; however, he doesn't discourage serving the aged vodka by itself. "Its complex flavors and smooth finish make it perfect for a range of sophisticated cocktails, but Guillotine Heritage is one of the few aged vodkas that can be enjoyed on its own, so I frequently suggest experiencing this wonderfully aged vodka neat or over ice," he explains.

Whether you enjoy this spirit on the rocks, neat, or in a cocktail, one sip of Guillotine Heritage will prove you're tasting something revolutionary. ■■

While Classic American spirits like bourbon and rye have had their time in the spotlight, expressions that think outside the box have been taking the stage as of late. Leading this revolution is Guillotine Heritage Vodka, the amber-hued, aged sibling to Guillotine Originale.

Made with Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, and Chardonnay grapes from a village in the Champagne region of France, Heritage rests in Cognac and Armagnac barrels made from Limousin oak. The result is a smooth, golden liquid with notes of caramel and spice and hints of mandarin orange and licorice, ensuring Guillotine Heritage completely defies the traditional notion of vodka.

Following Guillotine Heritage's U.S. release this year, mixologists around the country have begun experimenting with the spirit in a range of cocktails. At Culina in the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills, California, classic Italian food is served with a modern twist in a luxurious setting. It's no wonder, then, that Guillotine Heritage has found a home behind the bar in the experienced

hands of Amir Vahdani, the hotel's Director of Food and Beverage.

"We wanted to have this spirit that's definitely a cut above the rest," Vahdani says. "One can't help but notice that Guillotine Heritage is different from all other vodkas. First of all, its amber hue is totally unique and a great conversation starter. People want to know why the vodka is brown, which allows us to delve into its amazing story." Vahdani also cites the fact that Heritage, like Guillotine Originale, is vegan and gluten-free, which are important selling points when accommodating the discerning clientele who visit the Four Seasons.

The brand borrows its memorable name from the device that became a symbol of the French Revolution, so Vahdani drew on this time period for his cocktail, The Seventeen89. Named after the year the revolution began and served in a copper mug, this inventive take on the Moscow Mule makes use of the full-bodied flavor of barrel-aged Guillotine Heritage to elevate itself above drinks made with standard vodkas.



The barrel-aged sibling of Guillotine Originale, Guillotine Heritage Vodka is named after the device that came to define the French Revolution.

Anthony Dias

BLUE *REVIEWS*

Presented by  BLUE LIFESTYLE


In each issue, Editor-in-Chief Anthony Dias Blue selects a wide range of the best wines and spirits from among the more than 500 he samples over the course of a month. The reviews are subjective editorial evaluations, made without regard to advertising, and products are scored on a 100-point scale:

85-89: VERY GOOD

90-94: OUTSTANDING

95-100: CLASSIC

Once products are selected for publication, producers and importers will be offered the option of having their review accompanied by an image (bottle photo or label art) for a nominal fee. There is no obligation to add an image, nor does the decision affect the review or score in any way.

 The "twisty" icon indicates wines sealed with a screwcap closure.

For additional Blue Reviews, go to www.bluelifestyle.com.

Prices are for 750 ml. bottles unless otherwise noted.

DOMESTIC

90 **WindVane 2015 Estate Crown Pinot Noir, Carneros (\$45)** Deep ruby color; smooth, crisp, and juicy with tart cherry and savory notes showing before a long finish.



93 **Ledson Winery & Vineyards 2015 Estate Ti Amo Red Wine, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$86)** Smooth, tannic, and edgy while remaining round and dense with tangy berry fruit and good structure. Another long and balanced winner from this fine producer.



93 **Groth 2015 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$140)** Smooth and creamy with luscious, tangy style, this is a long, linear wine with subtle elegance and finesse from a family-owned and -operated winery.

91 **Pedroncelli Winery 2016 Courage Zinfandel, Faloni Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley (\$32)** Sleek, juicy, and fresh with blackberry and spice; toasty, balanced, and generous from a winery that knows its way around Zin.



93 **Antica Terra 2014 Antikythera Pinot Noir, Eola-Amity Hills, Oregon (\$160)** Made by the legendary Maggie Harrison, it's bright, flavorful, and crisp with tangy cherry and racy acidity. An elegant wine with layered complexity, finesse, and style.

91 **Vina Robles 2016 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$26)** Intensely dark crimson color with a nose of spice and herbs; rich, dense, and zesty with fine structure and notes of plum and blackberry.

92 **Chateau Ste. Michelle 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Red Mountain AVA, Washington (\$50)** Lush, silky, and dense with rich and charming notes of plum and spice. Lavish, long, and refreshing, it's proof these guys can make killer wines.

94 The Vineyard House 2015 Chardonnay, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$75) Smooth, rich, and toasty with vanilla, a bright core of acidity, and silky texture with length and finesse. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak.



94 Merry Edwards 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley (\$36) Lush and layered with notes of pineapple, peach, and citrus, this is always one of the definitive Sauvignons of California. Rich, creamy, and balanced, it shows abundant notes of vanilla before the long finish.

96 Shafer Vineyards 2014 Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap District, Napa (\$295) The lush berry nose precedes a velvety and rich palate of ripe plum, vanilla, toast, and tangy acidity. A masterpiece of restraint and generosity, this makes an impression that lingers beyond its lasting flavors.



93 Dutton-Goldfield 2016 Rued Vineyard Chardonnay, Green Valley, Russian River Valley (\$55) Silky, fresh, and long from a vineyard planted in 1969 on Goldridge series soil, this lush wine shows tropical notes with floral hints.

96 Joseph Phelps 2013 Estate Insignia Bordeaux Blend, Napa Valley (\$250) The original proprietary Bordeaux-style blend produced in California (it debuted with the 1974 vintage) proves it's still one of the best. Silky-smooth and mellow with deep, elegant flavors of plum, spice, and toasted oak, it's a complex, lovely classic.

IMPORTED

91 Marco Felluga 2015 Cabernet Franc, Collio DOC, Italy (\$30) Creamy and succulent with tangy, crisp plum; juicy, earthy, and long with soft herbs and a fresh finish.

DALLA TERRA

92 Domus Aurea 2014 Viña Quebrada de Macul Cabernet Sauvignon, Upper Maipo Valley, Chile (\$50) Smooth and deeply colored with bright raspberry and plum notes; complex, intense, and long with balance and depth.

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTERS

93 Fritz Haag 2017 Riesling Spätlese, Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Vineyard, Mosel (\$42) A layered and stunning wine made from grapes picked in the "sundial" vineyard. Both sweet and tangy, it's a masterful and elegant knockout.

LOOSEN BROS. USA



93 Louis Jadot 2016 Meursault, France (\$75) Silky and creamy with lovely, pure fruit and soft, toasty vanilla oak. Juicy and balanced with notes of almond and pear; it captures the way Chardonnay should taste.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

94 Taittinger 2013 Brut Millésimé Champagne, France (\$103) A lovely expression of this house's Chardonnay-favoring style, this fresh, crisp wine possesses elegant style and racy acidity. Tangy, pure, and lively, it aged in bottle for five-plus years. 50% Chardonnay/50% Pinot Noir.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

92 Moët & Chandon Impérial Brut Champagne, France (\$40) With origins dating back to 1869, this wine is exceedingly refreshing, clean, and balanced. A charming, generous expression that's equal parts long, lush, and crisp.



MOËT-HENNESSY USA

94 Luce della Vite 2015 Luce, Toscana IGT (\$100) The winery's "icon" wine, it blends Sangiovese and Merlot and ages 24 months in hand-split oak barriques. Richly intense and dense with berry notes and tangy spice; luscious, bright, and elegant with a lengthy finish.

VINTUS

92 Château des Jacques 2016 Gamay, Morgon AOC, France (\$27) Smooth and juicy with lovely berry fruit and plush texture. Spicy, tangy, and charming, this is Beaujolais the way it should be. Serve chilled.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

VALUE

90 Viña Eguía Reserva 2014 (Tempranillo), Rioja DOC, Spain (\$19) Bright and smooth with crisp notes of black raspberry; tangy and fresh with a persistent finish.



QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

89 Patient Cottat 2015 Le Grand Caillou Sauvignon Blanc, Loire, France (\$16) Silky and bright with crisp, lively style; clean, racy, and refreshing with a long and balanced finish.

VINEYARD BRANDS

BLUE REVIEWS

91 Franciscan 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa and Monterey Counties (\$15) A citrus nose introduces this fresh, silky, and lively wine. Tangy and bright with style and lovely balance, it's a nicely made wine at a terrific price.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



88 Funckenhausen 2018 Dry Rosé, South Mendoza, Argentina (\$15) Pale pink color; dry, crisp, and dense with some herbal notes. A clean, fresh, and balanced blend of Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc.

GLOBAL VINEYARD

90 Flint & Steel 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$16) Smooth and juicy with lime, spice, and tangy grapefruit; bright, lush, and long with balance and style. ☺

89 Michele Chiarlo 2016 Le Orme Barbera, Barbera d'Asti, Italy (\$18) Deep ruby color with smooth texture and flavors of black plum, cherry, and spice. Earthy, long, and balanced, this is a delicious wine with great value.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

92 Croft 430th Anniversary Reserve Ruby Port, Douro, Portugal (\$25) Deep ruby color; smooth, lush, and rich with concentrated and intense blackberry. Ripe, spicy, and toasty, this is quite a stunning wine for the price.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

91 Parducci 2016 True Grit Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendocino County (\$25) On the heels of the herbal nose, plum and blueberry emerge with creamy texture. Toasty, juicy, and balanced with depth and finesse.

MENDOCINO WINE COMPANY

88 Luisi 2017 Moscato, Moscato d'Asti DOCG, Italy (\$18) Foamy and fresh with floral, spicy, and sweet flavors and a crisp, smooth, and dewy style. ☺

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

90 Lievland Vineyards 2017 Old Vine Chenin Blanc, Paarl, South Africa (\$19) Lush and tangy with bright acidity and smooth texture; fresh, juicy, and long with depth and balance. Aged sur lie for two months. ☺

VINEYARD BRANDS

92 Kim Crawford 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$18) Smooth and invigorating with lovely ripe fruit, this is a racy, tangy, and crisp wine with a long and balanced finish. Pretty fine considering Kim has left the building. ☺

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



88 Buscado 2016 Garnacha, Spain (\$10) A clean, juicy, and tannic wine with a fresh and lively palate showcasing ripe and tangy berry notes. ☺

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

92 Morgan Winery 2017 G17 Syrah, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$25) With its deep ruby color and lush, bright, and smooth palate, this is a delightful rendition of the variety poised to become the Pinot Noir of 2019.



SPIRITS

93 Graton Distilling D. George Benham's Barrel Finished Gin, USA (\$37) Gently aromatic nose; rich, deep, and long, this expression from a distillery based in west Sonoma County is layered with creamy texture and complex flavors.

92 Goslings Papa Seal Single Barrel Bermuda Rum, Bermuda (\$199) Deep amber color with a silky, dry, and toasty palate showcasing notes of tamarind and orange. Pure and rich with a lasting finish, it shows its age of 15-plus years. Drink this neat.

CASTLE BRANDS



97 Grain & Barrel Spirits Chicken Cock Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$250) Rich vanilla and toasted oak appear on the nose before the floral-tinged, creamy, and sweet palate emerges with amazing depth and finesse. With abundant honey and caramel, it's so rich that it's almost like a liqueur.



98 Laphroaig 28 Year Old Islay Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$799) Following the wood-fire nose, the palate's first impression is smooth, briny, smoldering peat and spice. With elegant hints of salted clover honey, creamy texture, and lovely structure, this classic single malt deserves an entire evening of contemplation.

BEAM SUNTORY

94 Whip Saw Rye Whiskey, USA (\$48) Rich amber color with a polished rye nose. Mellow yet flavorful with smooth texture, toasty grains, sweet oak, and notes of dried flowers and brioche. 76% rye, 21% corn, 3% malted barley.

SPLINTER GROUP SPIRITS



93 Sugarlands Distilling Co. Roaming Man Tennessee Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$50) Lush and intense yet mellow with expressive spice and rye when watered. Toasty and balanced with threads of dried fruit and vanilla oak. Aged three years and two months, it's long with finesse and style.



91 Maggie's Farm 50/50 Pineapple Rum, USA (\$40) First, there's the inviting pineapple nose, then the smooth, floral, tropical-inflected flavor. This spirit presents a very pleasant experience that should enhance any rum-based cocktail. ■■

25 Coming Home
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In each issue, The Tasting Panel's Publisher and Editorial Director Meridith May selects her favorite wines and spirits of the month. Check here for the latest arrivals in our offices, the hottest new brands on the market, and an occasional revisited classic.

Publisher's PICKS

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



WINES



Palazzo 2016 Master Blend Series Left Bank Red Cuvée, Napa Valley

(\$50) Primarily Cabernet Sauvignon with Merlot and Cab Franc added, this wine is perfumed with ripe blue and black fruit. Dark chocolate comes in initially, melding with sweet-tobacco tannins and a deluxe texture. Blue flowers dazzle on the finish. **94**



Château Minuty Cuvée 281 Rosé, Côtes de Provence, France

(\$79) Cultivated from a clonal selection of 25-year-old Grenache vines, it offers up a nose of fresh berries and fennel root. Heightened acidity paves the way for notes of raspberry and a kiss of caramel apple alongside peaches and salted brioche. **95**



TREASURY WINE ESTATES



DAOU Vineyards 2017 Reserve Chardonnay, Willow Creek District, Paso Robles

(\$46) Aromas of honeyed pear and tangerine introduce this rich, mouth-filling white. The flavor profile speaks to charred marshmallow, lemon drops, and crème brûlée. Decadently good. **93**



Folie à Deux 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley

(\$23) Red fruit is unleashed in a bath of violets, creating a perfume that persists through the palate. High-toned acidity shows youthfulness, but in a bold, mineral-driven expression, as graphite and leather waltz in mid-palate. Elegance reigns—and overdelivers—in this red. **92**



TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



Pomelo 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, California

(\$14) Light and ripe, this Sauv Blanc is energetic and bright. White grapefruit and a line of minerality keep it geared up while making it a magical pairing with seafood and appetizers. White peach is perky on the finish. **90**



TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



Louis Jadot 2016 Pommard, Côte-d'Or, Burgundy

(\$67) Pinot Noir grown on high-clay/calcareous soils underwent a long maceration and aged ten months in French oak and stainless steel followed by six months in bottle. Aromas of sage, herbs, and forest leaves create a savory nose while notes of spiced cranberry, cherry, and coffee emerge under an earthy tonality. A generously endowed red with big, dry tannins. **94**



KOBRAND WINE & SPIRITS

Worthy of a smooch.

French-style double bizou.

Wildly infatuated.

Seriously smitten.

Head over heels in love.



St. Huberts 2016 The Stag Cabernet Sauvignon, North Coast (\$25)

A blend of grapes (82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Merlot, 6% Petite Sirah, and 3% Tannat) is sourced throughout California's fine wine regions, primarily Red Hills and High Valley in Lake County. Matured in American oak and stainless steel, this full-bodied red engages with aromas of earthy chocolate and cedar. Its depth of character shows through a lush mouthfeel as structured yet supple tannins glide alongside flavors of coffee, sage, and violets. **92**



TREASURY WINE ESTATES



LVE 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$85)

Anise and slate are divided by a luxe blackberry perfume. The flavors mirror the aromas of this dark and shadowy red, which is blanketed in a sensual, earthy mouthfeel. Notes of violets, boysenberry, and caramelized fig become juicier as the wine opens up, and elegance ensues. **94**



BOISSET COLLECTION



Gehricke 2015 Pinot Noir, Los Carneros, Sonoma (\$32)

This small-production Pinot Noir aged 20 months in French oak, which shows through in the nose and palate, rounding them out and caressing them with vanilla bean and cinnamon stick. Cherry-cobbler notes accent a savory mid-palate reminiscent of clove-scented orange peel. **93**



3 BADGE BEVERAGE



Bogle Non-Vintage Reserve Petite Sirah, Quick Ranch Vineyard, Clarksburg, California (\$42)

The largest producer of Petite Sirah in the world, Bogle commemorates its 50th anniversary with this release: The family planted their first red grapes in 1968. The big rush of creamy boysenberry and blue floral notes is generous and rich, creating a dramatically textured palate and fragrance that endures through the finish of caramel and cedar. **92**



Cedar + Salmon 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Horse Heaven Hills, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$25)

A voluptuous nose of tilled soil and redwood further enhances the lush mouthfeel of creamy mocha, spiced black cherry, and blueberry silk. Interweaving with the fruit, mocha-covered figs are a treat mid-palate. This is a textural dream. **92**



3 BADGE BEVERAGE



Chamisal Vineyards 2016 Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$24)

Winds from the appropriately named Mistral Vineyard in the Salinas Valley funnel through from the Monterey Bay and show in the bountiful nature of this wine. Lush notes of apple pie and honeyed lemon greet the nose as caramel apple and crème brûlée accented by croissants, Italian herbs, and cinnamon intertwine with a fine acidity, hailing this region as a prime locale for this variety. **93**

CRIMSON WINE GROUP



Lignum Red Blend, Terre Siciliane IGT, Italy (\$16)

A blend of 40% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 30% Shiraz makes this "super" Sicilian wine one to notice. Translated from ancient Latin, "Lignum" means wood, and, accordingly, this uniquely authentic, wood-crafted label is embellished with cut-outs. Texturally alluring and complex layers of dark chocolate and sandalwood are preceded by aromas of earth and graphite that merge well with the flavor profile. Grainy, melting mocha and a swathe of blackberry plumpness fill the mid-palate and stride through the long finish. This overdelivers on value. **91**



ENOVATION BRANDS



Louis Jadot 2016 Gevrey-Chambertin, Côte de Nuits-Villages, Burgundy (\$72)

Showing the energy and powerful "grace" of the commune, this 100% Pinot Noir is steely and edgy with teeth-gripping chalkiness. High-toned blueberry and rhubarb take on sturdy tannins, but the wine's juicy nature and top-of-palate acidity keeps everything in check. **95**



KOBRAND WINE & SPIRITS



Finca Decero 2015 The Owl & The Dust Devil, Remolinos Vineyard, Agrelo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$33)

A single-vineyard blend of 39% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Malbec, 19% Petit Verdot, and 10% Tannat aged 18 months in French oak (40% new). The name refers to the dust devils that keep the vineyard dry and the predatory owls that protect the vines. Aromas of iron, grilled meat, and cherry cola lead to a plush, pretty palate of fennel and red flowers with fruity tones of raspberry and plum. **91**



VINTUS



Domaine Rütz 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Morisoli Vineyard, Rutherford Bench, Napa Valley (\$150)

Black-purple inkiness shows in the power of this 100% Cab aged 19 months in new French oak. Decanting is suggested for this big wine, which features a nose of blueberry cobbler and black tea. The palate shows notable acidity, finely grained tannins, and chewy notes of leather, slate, and espresso chocolate before finishing with sweet cooking spices and earthy oak. **94**



Shafer 2016 TD-9, Napa Valley (\$60)

Our favorite "tractor" wine, this proprietary blend of 58% Merlot, 26% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 16% Malbec was named for John Shafer's transition from commuter train to farm vehicle. This is the second vintage, and we think it's even better than the first. Aromas of ripe strawberry and cinnamon rolls launch exuberantly from the glass as meaty notes and dry, dusty tannins emphasize flavors of sassafras, spearmint, licorice, and plum. Lean acidity shows in the structured, upright body. **94**



Buena Vista 2016 Pinot Noir, Carneros (\$25)

Aged 13 months in French and Hungarian oak, this Pinot Noir opens up with aromas of cranberry, mushroom, and heather. Its forest-floor nature comes through on the first sip with dried roses, jasmine tea, and white pepper following through to the finish. **92**



BOISSET COLLECTION

Publisher's PICKS



Steele Wines 2016 Stymie Syrah, Lake County (\$38)

Aged in French and American oak for 22 months, this small-production red from Jed Steele is something we look forward to every year. The nose greets with chocolate and heather before the palate engages with ripe red and blue fruit. Black pepper and fine acidity shine through delicately on the generous mouthfeel through a finish of cinnamon and sandalwood. **92**



Kim Crawford 2017 Signature Reserve Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$25)

From selected lots along Marlborough's coastal plain, this white imparts rich, tropical fruits that aid in broadening the palate feel. Grapefruit makes a dramatic entrance mid-palate and endures through the clean finish. Due to its sensational acid structure and explosive fruit, this sipper is a unique expression of this grape and its terroir. **93**



CONSTELLATION BRANDS



Peju 2016 The Experiment, Napa Valley (\$100)

This 100% Cabernet Sauvignon's name represents Winemaker Sara Fowler's yearly experiment with her cooperage program. For this vintage, she worked with 30 barrel-toasting styles and 21 coopers before holding a comparative tasting with her colleagues, making this wine a collaborative effort. White pepper plays an integral role in this lush, juicy, and fragrant red, interacting with bright red fruit, blue flowers, and a coffee-mint finish. **95**



Bonterra 2016 The Roost Chardonnay, Biodynamic Blue Heron Vineyard, Mendocino County (\$40)

From Sanel Valley's fertile riverbank in Mendocino's interior, this Burgundian-style white is grown with holistic farming practices in a temperate climate on ancient soil. Crafted from free-run juice, it was 100% barrel-fermented for 18 months. On the nose, toasty oak is indulgent with marshmallow and pear tart; toffee and lemon cream pie then merge on the palate, preceding notes of apple tart tartine and summer peach that prove even more enticing. Cashew and fig linger on the long finish. **94**



FETZER VINEYARDS



Y. Rousseau 2015 Le Roi Soleil Cabernet Sauvignon, Stagecoach Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$100)

Named after the Sun King, Louis XIV, this wine makes the Stagecoach Vineyard the Versailles of Napa Valley. With its noteworthy reputation and high elevation, the site proves itself as terroir royalty. Graphite and a savory animale tone on the nose give way to plum and saddle-leather aromas. This big, outgoing red possesses black fruit fueled with inky, teeth-gripping tannins reminiscent of espresso beans. **95**



Benziger Family Winery 2015 Merlot, Sonoma County (\$17)

Benziger is known for its certified-sustainable farming methods, which promote natural vineyard management, land restoration, and biodiversity on the estate. Aged in American and French oak for 16 months, this fully formed red exudes bright fruit with a strawberry-jam nose. While the structure on the palate is concentrated, it expresses itself through a satiny mouthfeel. Seasoned by white pepper, licorice and plum play hand in hand as violets chime in on the vanilla-charmed finish. **92**



THE WINE GROUP



Torbreck 2017 Woodcutter's Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia (\$25)

This wine is blueberry-raspberry heaven: lightly peppered, juicy, and user-friendly spicy. **91**



Wines from Le Grand Courtage, South of France



Très Chic 2018 Rosé, Pays d'Oc IGP, France (\$19)

A blend of 70% Grenache and 30% Cinsault, this wine shows delicate and bright aromas of watermelon and peach. Minerality leads the way on the palate with sweet berries tangled in high-toned acidity. Apricot and peach notes are dotted throughout the lean finish. **91**

LE GRAND COURTAGE



Le Grand Courtage NV Grande Cuvée Blanc de Blancs Brut, France (\$22)

Perfumed and crisp, white rose petals and vanilla-peach loom in the glass and bless the palate. Dainty bubbles pop with grace and reveal notes of aromatized lemon tart. **92**



Le Grand Courtage Grande Cuvée Brut Rosé, France (\$22)

From scents of slate and lavender to notes of freshly picked strawberry with racy acidity, this sparkling pink wine is an energetic soul that blends Chardonnay, Ugni Blanc, and Gamay. Bubbles instantly dissipate, leaving a trace of berries and violets. **90**

*Read more about these wines
on page 18.*



Cecchi 2013 Coevo, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$130) Coevo translates as “contemporary,” and while this Super Tuscan may be a modern style, its Old World charm and acidity meet traditional standards. In this blend of 60% Sangiovese, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, and 10% Petit Verdot, each variety was fermented separately in small tanks on the skins. The wine aged for 18 months in oak and 12 months in bottle before release. After the aromas offer up heather and bright red fruit, notes of fennel root, cigar smoke, tart cranberry, and earthy dark cherry line up on the palate with tightly knit tannins that remain lush and don't dry out the palate. This wine has heart. **96**



TERLATO WINES

SPIRITS



Michter's 20 Year Kentucky Straight Bourbon, USA (\$700) Michter's Master Distiller Pamela Heilmann and Master of Maturation Andrea Wilson released a 20-year-old two years ago, and it's back again this year. At 114.2 proof, it's a gentle giant that offers up a nose of honeyed wheat bread and charred caramel. On the palate, the developed sweetness shows through marshmallow and orange peel coated with almond and dark chocolate. Cigar leaf adds a more serious tone to this luxe sipper. **100**



Rolling River Coffee Spirit, USA (\$30) Rolling River vodka is distilled with a custom blend from Coava Coffee Roasters in Portland, Oregon. Aromas of espresso dark chocolate captivate as this 80-proofer shows a pillow-light, buoyant mouthfeel. The bittersweet coffee-bean flavors engage through the long, memorable finish. **92** ■■



Surprising Values from California's Central Valley

SMALL-LOT, FAMILY-FOCUSED, and value-oriented, the wines coming out of the McManis Family Vineyards winery in Ripon, California, are quite special. Five generations of family farmers have worked to produce premium wines at a consumer-friendly price point, ensuring this portfolio is filled with winners perfect for both retail and by-the-glass spaces. Stock up and toast to wines your customers will love!



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCMANIS FAMILY VINEYARDS



McManis Family Vineyards 2017 Chardonnay, River Junction, California (\$12) On the heels of aromas of baked apple, pineapple upside-down cake, and vanilla cream, the palate offers a generous dose of oak and battered cookie dough flecked with lemon tart. It's clean and delicious with nice acidity and a small amount of Muscat Canelli blended in. **92**



McManis Family Vineyards 2017 Estate Grown Pinot Noir, Lodi (\$12) Accompanied by white-peppered tomato leaf, rhubarb and spiced cranberry lilt on the nose. The spice continues on the palate and turns into a bundled bouquet of heather, lavender, and jasmine. Raspberry is delicate on the long, silky finish. **92**



McManis Family Vineyards 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$12) Boysenberry gushes out of the glass, dense and aromatic, with just a hint of violet on the back end. Juicy and concentrated notes of violets persevere with blackstrap molasses winding through toasty oak. On the finish, black licorice and ripe plum integrate with mocha on a bedrock of silky tannins. More than three-quarters of the fruit hails from Lodi; also blended in is 14% Petit Verdot, 5% Petite Sirah, and 4% Tannat. **92**



McManis Family Vineyards 2017 Petite Sirah, California (\$12) Purple-black in color, this densely sumptuous red offers up a nose of blueberries and blue-floral tones. Chalky, teeth-gripping tannins work well with a mouth-watering array of ripe blue and black fruit. Dark chocolate and a streak of graphite lend gravitas as Tannat (16%) and Teroldego (3%) add body and color. **92**

Jack Daniel's

Carlos Calvo, Joe Brooke, and Jack Daniel's U.S. Brand Ambassador Eric "ET" Tecosky spent many a night bonding over a glass of Jack Daniel's at Jones Hollywood in West Hollywood, CA.

PHOTO: TODD WESTPHAL



Whiskey **LIFERS**

THREE REGULARS AT JONES HOLLYWOOD IN WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA, BOND OVER JACK DANIEL'S

by Eric Marsh



PHOTO: JOSH REYNOLDS

Nathan Woodard at The Cellar in Cambridge, MA, his new go-to spot for ordering his beloved shaken Manhattan.

The ideal home away from home is one with a well-stocked bar: a warm, inviting place where the maestro behind the bar is affable, attentive, hospitable, and genuine, with an honest opinion to share when queried. In short, where most other denizens know your handle.

It's as old as mead, the relationship between bartender and regular. It's kind of a paradox: Without the regular, there would be no bar, and without the bar, there would be no regular. Business aside, some serious connections and friendships are made between bartenders and these patrons, and on rare occasions, lasting or even lifelong friendships are formed. There's no exact recipe for how they come to be—after all, this is the big cocktail, the one called life, and while Jack Daniel's adds zest and gives people a reason to come together, the most integral ingredient is human connection.

Longtime Los Angeles barman and Jack Daniel's U.S. Brand Ambassador Eric "ET" Tecosky has a simple policy when it comes to bartending: Treat everyone as a friend. That's how he begins in fostering a relationship with potential regulars, and it's up to them if they stick around. Here are some brief excerpts from three who did, and not just for the drink or for the scene, but for the bona fide sense of community.

The Contemporary

Tecosky started working at West Hollywood bar and restaurant Jones Hollywood in 2001. The walls of the establishment, which exudes a timeless feel, are adorned with framed black-and-white photos of '70s rock icons. Jack Daniel's bottles are lined on a truss above the bar, illuminated by soft, ethereal light—indicating this is a sanctuary for aficionados of Jack.

Joe Brooke, who has been a regular at Jones since 2006, explains what first drew him to the bar, as well as what made him want to return: "Jones is a cozy spot—red leather

PHOTO: DANYA MORRISON



The interior of Jones Hollywood is known for its dark, sexy décor.

booths, squat lamps on red-and-white checkered tablecloths. It's not at all pretentious, instead very rock 'n' roll. They have a great jukebox and affordable drinks made quickly and well." Brooke's now-wife, Jennifer, has also been a loyal patron of Jones—the couple even stopped in for Jack and Gingers on the night of their wedding.

When Brooke first met Tecosky, he was an up-and-coming barman himself who saw Tecosky as *the* paradigmatic bartender. "He just had that X-factor. He was always hospitable, always remembered our last conversation, and just knew how to create and maintain a good vibe," Brooke recalls.

Brooke went on to bartend for more than a decade before moving into managing and consulting. He currently serves as the Southern California Brand Advocate for Fords Gin, and he and Jennifer, years after befriending Tecosky, purchased a house down the street from him. They haven't bought sugar since.

The Collaborator

Carlos Calvo lived in West Hollywood years before Jones opened and had frequented Ports, the artsy bar that had previously occupied the space Jones is now in. It's a challenge to welcome the new bar that opened in the ghost of your old haunt, but over time Calvo acclimated.

Calvo and Tecosky bonded over Jack Daniel's and music when the former mentioned that he was a seasoned musician. Tecosky looked into Calvo's oeuvre, and after seeing Calvo perform live, Tecosky had somewhat of a revelation: "We had an event coming up for Jack Daniel's that we needed a band for. I was watching Carlos onstage and thought, 'He'd be perfect for it,'" Tecosky recalls.

Calvo soon became part of the Jack family. "ET approached me about creating a house band for special events at the Jack Daniel's private lounge. Together, we curated a repertoire of music that reflects the ethos of Jack Daniel's," he explains. "ET coined it the Jack Daniel's Songbook. It's a great collaboration: I'm the musician; he's the rock star."

The Houseguest

A physicist by day and musician by night, Nathan Woodard made Jones the first bar he stopped into after moving from Boston to L.A. in the early aughts. It immediately became his go-to.

Shortly after settling in L.A., Woodard picked up a weekend gig moonlighting as the bassist for a blues band that held residency at the infamous South Central blues club Babe's and Ricky's Inn. "It was a professional affair and I was expected to wear a good suit. I went with a black suit, black shirt, gold necklace, and a banker haircut," he says.

Every Friday and Saturday night after his gig, Woodard would drive up to Jones where Tecosky was waiting behind the bar. "Bill Clark, the bandleader, did not take kindly to drinking, so I drank only black coffee during those shows," Woodard says forlornly. At Jones, Woodard would always order the same drink: a Jack Daniel's Manhattan, shaken.

This ritual went on for months and didn't go unnoticed. "I was like, who is this wacky cat wearing a black suit, coming in the same time every weekend night, drinking the same drink?" Tecosky recalls. Like Calvo, Woodard and Tecosky first got to know each other due to their shared passion for music and love of whiskey. On nights when the bar closed but the party was still in full swing, Woodard would end up at the legendary after-parties at Tecosky's nearby pad. After a long night of drinking, Woodard would eschew driving across town and opt to crash on Tecosky's couch. "There were a lot of mornings and a lot of coffee and a lot of good conversation," Woodard says.

Woodard has since moved back to Boston, where he still orders his shaken Manhattan at his new standby, The Cellar, in Cambridge. But he's not at all worried that a few thousand miles will tarnish his friendship with Tecosky. "I'm absolutely sure that we'll stay in close touch," Woodard says, "until one of us drinks his last Jack Daniel's." ■■

Pedro Garcia is the Managing Director for USA and Canada at Félix Solís Avantis. The concept behind the FYI name is built on **#FindYourInspiration.**



For Your INFORMATION

How Félix Solís Avantis Is Bringing Spanish Wine to the American Table While Showcasing Its Signature Grape, Tempranillo



Pedro Garcia and Juan Carlos Restrepo, owner of Happy Wine in Miami, FL, enjoy FYI with braised boneless beef short ribs, wild mushrooms, and shaved Pecorino Romano cheese.

FYI:

BY RUTH TOBIAS / PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN RUSNAK

The acronym is so common in the English-speaking world that it's used more than three million times a day on social media alone, according to Pedro Garcia, Managing Director for USA and Canada at Félix Solís Avantis. These days, however, it stands for a lot more than just "for your information" thanks to the Spanish wine giant, which is leveraging what Garcia calls the "downloaded equity" of the phrase to redefine it in vinous terms.

A playful red blend launched in the U.S. in spring 2018, Félix Solís Avantis' FYI label encourages American consumers to #FindYourInspiration and #FreeYourInhibitions. Designed to facilitate a sense of personal connection, the brand's hashtag-friendly campaign aims to embolden its audience to explore the world of Spanish wine—starting, of course, with the products of Félix Solís. In the words of Gabriela Fernández, a Commercial Assistant at the company, FYI "embodies the individuality of wine lovers" who might "see a little bit of themselves" in the bottle and "come up with a catchphrase that starts with the letters *F*, *Y*, and *I* to describe them."

Granted, the success of the campaign depended from the get-go on the #FruityYummyIrresistible quality of the wine itself. According to Garcia, FYI had to be "a 100 percent authentic Spanish product" while "competing with Apothic and 19 Crimes in a market where the red-blend category is robust, growing, and more important than the Tempranillo category." In short, it had to represent the best of both worlds to truly thrive in its new territory.



FYI pairs well with Happy Wine's signature dish, *pulpo con aji amarillo*: Spanish octopus cooked for seven hours and served over *patatas bravas* with aji amarillo sauce and a pickled jicama garnish.

**THIRD-GENERATION VINTNER
FÉLIX SOLÍS RAMOS ESTIMATES THAT
THE COMPANY WILL BE EXPORTING
30 MILLION BOTTLES ANNUALLY
TO THE STATES A DECADE FROM NOW.**

OLD WORLD TRADITION MEETS NEW WORLD TREND

With this in mind, FYI set out to serve as what Garcia calls “a stepping stone” to an appreciation of Spain’s signature red grape, with Tempranillo making up 60 percent of the blend. Half of its fruit is sourced from Toro, “a very special DO because it wasn’t affected by phylloxera,” Garcia explains, adding that the region’s old bush vines respond well to the abundant sunlight and large diurnal temperature swings. Their thick-skinned, concentrated berries are then hand-picked to yield “an incredibly powerful backbone for [the company] to build on,” he says.

The remaining half comes from Valdepeñas, a region Garcia explains is “very close and dear to the Solís family,” as it serves as both their place of residence and their company headquarters. The Tempranillo grown here, he continues, is “very easy to drink with lots of red fruit. Combining Toro’s intense base with Valdepeñas’ fruit-forward approachability, you really start to create something special.”

Spain’s other key red grape, Garnacha, comprises 20 percent of the blend; sourced from 70- to 100-year-old Toro vines, “it brings that brightness, that cherry to the mix,” Garcia says. The final 20 percent, meanwhile, is none other than Cabernet Sauvignon from Valdepeñas, which, in addition to being “great for structure and great for balance,” provides an element of familiarity: Incorporating a grape that “Americans are already comfortable shopping for gets them over that hurdle of purchase,” Garcia explains.

The same could be said of the fresh and modern packaging. Black and white with a red capsule, the bottle bears a “very clean, textured label with embossed lettering and a grape bunch over the *I*,” according to Garcia. Its easy charm extends to accompanying promotional materials, including the playing card-style deck of shelf talkers Garcia’s team created for both on- and off-premise accounts. Illustrated and printed with dozens of *bon mots* like “According to chemistry, wine is a solution” and “Wine stoppers are for quitters,” they’re designed to disarm consumers and “[make] them laugh while they’re shopping the wine shelves or having some tapas,” Garcia

says, adding that “people are taking pictures with [the cards] and sharing them on social media [by tagging @FYIWINE on Instagram and Twitter].”

That mischievous spirit carries over to FYI’s website, whose landing page is cheekily titled “Get Your Temp On,” as well as to the brand’s social media accounts, where hashtags like #FeelYourselfIgnite and #FYIWINE abound. Garcia says the effort to “organically stimulate customers to

HONORING SPANISH HERITAGE

Third-generation vintner Félix Solís Ramos, who serves as the company’s global Commercial and Marketing Director, acknowledges that FYI represents a departure from his family’s usual viticultural style. To appeal to consumers who are “looking less and less for certain appellations and more for a style of wine that could come from any country,” the brand is “more structured and fruitier”

than your average Tempranillo, he says, in addition to having a bit more residual sugar and a higher ABV. The expectation, however, is that Félix Solís can eventually go full circle precisely by striking out in a new direction, leading newfound FYI fans toward more traditional Spanish expressions. “There’s huge potential for people to dig more into the grape, go deeper, and start tasting other wines,” Ramos explains.

They’ll have plenty to explore. Over the course of nearly seven decades, Félix Solís has grown to become the seventh-largest winery in the world, with facilities in seven DOs—including Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Rueda, Toro, Valdepeñas, La Mancha, and Rías Baixas—producing more than 40 core brands, among them Viña Albali, Los Molinos, Blume, and Altos de Tamarón. Behind it all is a flesh-and-blood legacy ripe for Americans’ dis-

covery: From the company’s founding by Félix Solís Fernández and his wife Leonor Yáñez in Valdepeñas in 1952 to today, the business has remained 100 percent family-owned. “[This is] a real family with a genuine desire to extend Spanish wine culture to the world by making wines across all DOs at all prices,” Garcia says.

By positioning FYI at just \$11, Félix

Solís has put its money where its mouth is on that score. “I really believe that Spain offers the best value, but the U.S. still has to discover that,” Ramos says. “The Spanish government hasn’t been very successful [with stateside wine promotion], and this is why we have to do it ourselves.”

“THE FUTURE OF SPANISH WINE”

If the company’s global track record is any indication, that shouldn’t be a problem: With a presence in more than 120 countries, Félix Solís Avantis is Spain’s number-one exporter of still wine. Of the roughly 350 million bottles it produces per year, about 70 percent goes to Europe while 20 percent is exported to Asia and Africa, according to Ramos. “The U.S., for us, still doesn’t have a large share,” he adds, but those numbers seem poised to rapidly shift: Ramos estimates that the company will be exporting 30 million bottles annually to the States a decade from now.

Now available in 14 markets with a planned expansion to five or six more this year, FYI will set the tone not only for future growth, but for Félix Solís Avantis’ overarching approach to business. “The past four years, we’ve seen a lot of growth coming from new product development, and FYI is part of that,” Ramos says. “The next stage for FYI is to create a white blend.” Composed of Verdejo and Sauvignon Blanc, it will be released this year alongside a still rosé and two sparklers: a Charmat-method, Viura-based Brut and a Brut Rosé made with co-fermented Tempranillo and Verdejo.

Add these new additions to Félix Solís’ forays into organic and low-alcohol wine production, and you’ve got all the makings of a majorly buzzworthy brand. They also provide a glimpse at the proactive and personalized approach to changing consumer tastes that Ramos sees as “the future of Spanish wine,” and as far as “FYIs” go in this business, that’s about as enlightening as it gets: After all, a campaign built on #FindYourInspiration holds more weight when it’s steeped in a company’s own sense of discovery. ■■

For more information, visit getyourtemp.com and felixsolisavantis.com.



The second and third generations of Félix Solís (from top to bottom): Manuel Solís Yáñez, Juan Antonio Solís Yáñez, Félix Solís Ramos, and Pedro Solís Yáñez. Standing is CEO Félix Solís Yáñez.

have fun with FYI” is paying off: “We surpassed our goal for 2018 thanks to the support the brand has received from our partners at RND, Empire, and Opici Distributing, and, most importantly, also from the activations FYI has been able to secure in major retail accounts like ABC Fine Wine & Spirits, Harris Teeter, and Food Lion. So, we’re off to a very nice start.”



FALCONS TO THE FORE

AT THE END OF EACH GROWING SEASON, **WENTE VINEYARDS** RELIES ON THE ANCIENT ART OF FALCONRY TO PROTECT ITS HARVEST

by David Gadd

Sustainability is a ubiquitous buzzword these days, but at Wente Vineyards, it's more than a trendy catchphrase. In fact, according to the Wente family, the concept is deeply rooted in five generations of winegrowing in California's Livermore Valley and Arroyo Seco appellations.

"We've been living sustainably for 135 years now," says Niki Wente, Fifth-Generation Winegrower and Viticulturalist. The daughter of Phil Wente, Niki studied wine and viticulture at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo before graduating in 2014. In addition to a stint at Huneus Vintners in Napa Valley, she interned for three summers at her family's winery, where she now manages the buying and selling of grapes and winegrower relations under Senior Viticulture Manager Keith Roberts. "It was a job offer I couldn't refuse," Niki says with a laugh.

When it comes to controlling the vineyards' mammalian and avian pests, Niki advocates for natural solutions compatible with the family's ethos. "About 15 years ago, we started putting up owl boxes and raptor perches for native birds," she says. "Even the first year we had the highest rates of inhabitancy for owl boxes in the state."



Kaede, a gyrfalcon-peregrine hybrid from Aero Falconry, heads up pest control during harvest at Wente Vineyards.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AERO FALCONRY

Owls make short work of ground pests such as gophers and ground squirrels, which gnaw on vine roots and nibble on green leaves during bud break. (Both pests also wreak havoc on the roads throughout the vineyards, causing safety issues for machinery and workers.) The raptor perches, meanwhile, serve to attract hawks that scare away feisty birds such as starlings, which fly in huge swarms called murmurations and can devastate an entire grape crop in a matter of days.

In addition to these natural measures, Wente Vineyards uses electronic squawk boxes that broadcast the shrieks of predators and the alarming cries of birds in distress, both signals bird pests take heed of. (Older “cannon” technology has proved inefficient in scaring away avian pests: “The birds get used to the sound of the cannon going off regularly,” Niki explains.)

Beginning around August 1, as the grapes near ideal ripeness, Niki calls in Jana Barkley, a Master Falconer and owner of Aero Falconry, for additional pest control. In addition to working with wineries, Barkley’s company provides bird abatement services for airports, shopping malls, and fruit orchards. “Jana had been falconing on our property for sport,” Niki recalls, “and she reached out to us to see if she could be of help.”

During the critical late summer and early fall months of harvest, Barkley’s presence in the vineyards complements Wente’s other pest-control measures,



“I really love working with and for my family,” says Niki Wente, Fifth-Generation Winegrower and Viticulturalist. “I don’t think there’s anything better than being able to call my dad, who planted these vineyards himself and has been through every situation I could possibly face. There’s no career that could be more fulfilling.”

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

creating what she refers to as “a predatory presence” that makes the vineyards a no-fly zone for starlings. “It’s an easy way to get rid of all the birds that are taking away our crop, so that we can maintain our crop load,” Niki says.

Barkley’s well-trained dog, a Pointer named Doc Holliday, routs birds from the vines, while her birds of prey—gryfalcon-peregrine hybrid Kaede, Lanner falcon Aero, and Harris’ hawks Serenity and Cowboy—chase them out of the vineyard. “The falcon is like a heat-seeking missile,” says Barkley, explaining that these birds fly high and dive down on their prey, while hawks fly lower and drag prey to the ground with their powerful talons. Each type of bird is flown at different times to avoid predator-on-predator attacks.

“During harvest you really have to put the pressure on, sunrise to sunset. We patrol, and as soon as the starlings show up, we fly,” Barkley says, adding that she remains in the vineyards with

her birds and dog for the duration of the season. “We live like gypsies, in a trailer. My birds are my family.”

The birds get breaks during the hottest part of the afternoon, when starlings are less active. Barkley is able to call the birds back to her arm on command: “It’s all about the food,” she explains.

Because Barkley likes to “keep things intimate,” she says Wente Vineyards provides “the ideal-size vineyard.” The welcoming family environment at the company is also appealing to the master falconer, who eagerly looks forward to returning for the next harvest season.

The Wentes, meanwhile, are equally appreciative of Barkley. “We’ve been very happy with the falconry project,” says Niki, who, coincidentally, is also an animal lover. While working in the vineyards, she’s rescued stray cats, lost dogs, and even two kestrels she turned over to a falconer for adoption after they fell from their nest. ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF AERO FALCONRY



Aero Falconry owner Jana Barkley with her lead falcon Kaede after a successful flight at the Eric’s Ranch property.

VINO**SUMMIT**

PRESENTED BY FLORIDA WINE ACADEMY



THE BILTMORE HOTEL, MIAMI

MARCH 18, 2019

Presented by Florida Wine Academy, VinoSummit is the first conference dedicated to wine professionals in the southeastern United States. This one-day conference, which will take place in the lively city of Miami in March 2019, aims to investigate trends in the wine industry while exploring important regions and grapes.

“We are excited to launch VinoSummit and be the pioneers in organizing the first conference for wine professionals and serious enthusiasts in Florida.”



Alessandra Esteves is the Director of Wine Education at Florida Wine Academy, which she co-founded.



VINOSUMMIT

PRESENTED BY FLORIDA WINE ACADEMY

PRESENTERS:

- **Philippe André**, U.S. Ambassador for Champagne Charles Heidsieck
- **Eric Hemer, MW, MS**, Senior Vice President/Director of Wine Education at Southern Glazer's Wine and Spirits of America
- **Kristina Sazama**, DipWSET, Wine Educator at Santa Margherita USA
- **Raffaella Benassi**, Director of European Business Development for Breakthru Beverage Florida
- **Lisa Airey**, CWE, FWS, Education Director for Wine Scholar Guild
- **WSET** representative

AGENDA (8:30 A.M. TO 6:30 P.M.)

- ◆ **Welcome & Registration**
- ◆ **Passport to Reims:** Tasting the Wines of Charles Heidsieck
- ◆ **Coffee break** sponsored by Cantina Mesa (of Sardinia) and Cà Maiol (of Lugana and Valtènesi)
- ◆ **Discovering Biodynamic Winemaking** in the Languedoc
- ◆ **Lunch** sponsored by Folio Fine Wine Partners, featuring wines from Bibi Graetz and Ricasoli
- ◆ **Panel Discussion:** "Trends in the Wine Industry"
- ◆ **Walkaround tasting** featuring more than 80 wines



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importers and exporters with supplier and service providers
in the most value-packed event for our industry.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue floral top and a red flower in her hair, is flexing her right bicep with a joyful expression. The background is dark and slightly blurred.

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SURPRISING

Salento

IN PUGLIA'S
SOUTHERN
PENINSULA, THE
WINES OF SALICE
SALENTINO DOC
AND SALENTO
IGT ARE BEING
REVITALIZED

by Laura Donadoni

When one thinks of southern Italy, they often envision endless miles of coastline, olive groves as far as the eye can see, and clusters of beautiful Baroque architecture. Salento—the southern, peninsular part of the region of Puglia (the heel of the Italian boot) that encompasses cities like Lecce, Brindisi, and Taranto—offers these attributes while also serving as a haven for exquisite regional foods and wines.

The area's lush and fertile soil allows for the production of some of the finest Italian wines, including those from the region's most distinguished appellation, Salice Salentino DOC. Salento has a storied history of winemaking that dates back to roughly the sixth century B.C., when it's estimated that Negroamaro grapes were first introduced in the region (the variety, which translates to "black and bitter," was originally called *niuru maru* in the local dialect). Much of the influence in the Salento region can be traced back to the Greeks, including the distinctive architecture and regional dialect, which even today help to retain a taste of ancient Greece in Italy.

Surrounded by both the Adriatic and Ionian seas, Salento has a warm and dry climate that shortens the length of time grapes need to reach full maturation. Primitivo grapes, for example, need even less time to mature, as they ripen and reach their desired sweetness more quickly than other varieties. In turn, the wine is better enjoyed with less aging.

Much of the Salento region's wine culture is still being adapted and revitalized even today, as producers had often previously aimed for higher quantity rather than quality. While roughly 25 wines in the overall Puglia region have met DOC standards, only about 2 percent of the wine produced in Salento earns this status. Today, however, wineries are attempting to redevelop traditional methods of production in a way that helps the wines of Salento garner a more prestigious reputation.

Salice Salentino DOC

This full-bodied expression is the best-known DOC wine in the Salento peninsula. While it's most commonly found in the form of red wine, it can also be produced as a rosé, white, dessert, or sparkling wine, though these are rare to find. Some wineries also produce a Riserva version aged for a minimum of 24 months.

Interest in Italy's southern-region wines, including those from the Salice Salentino DOC, increased in the 1980s and 1990s—coinciding with a rise in winemakers' attention to detail and consistency in following their respective viticultural methods.

Consorzio di Tutela of Salice Salentino, the local wine producers' association, is currently focused on promoting this new wave of Salento winemaking. "Salento's producers worked hard in the last ten to 15 years to improve their production techniques," explains Consorzio President Damiano Reale. "Many of them chose indigenous varieties over the international ones, lowered the yields per hectare, and focused on quality over quantity. Today we can witness the results: Salento wines are more refined, elegant, and ready to gain the spotlight on the international wine scene."

Salice Salentino DOC Rosso (red) wine almost exclusively comprises Negroamaro grapes, with a minimum of 80 percent required. However, DOC regulations allow for a 20 percent addition of Malvasia Nera grapes, which enhance aromatics while lessening the tannic qualities of a given wine.

The Rosato versions of Salice Salentino wines require a minimal presence of 75 percent Negroamaro, whereas the monovarietal Salice Salentino Negroamaro and Negroamaro Rosato wines require minimums of 90 and 85 percent Negroamaro, respectively. Salice Salentino Bianco (white) wines, meanwhile, require 70 percent Chardonnay for the Bianco wines and 85 percent of the respective dominant grape for each of the monovarietal Chardonnay, Fiano, and Pinot Bianco wines.

Rosé Is Synonymous with Salento

Salento is also the motherland of non-DOC Rosato, which is sold under the Salento IGT. Best known for being the first Rosato bottled in Italy and exported to the United States after World War II, Rosato from Salento is typically a rosé made from about 90 percent Negroamaro grapes and 10 percent Malvasia Nera grapes. The Leone de Castris Winery was the first to bottle and export Rosato to the U.S. and is known around the world for its Five Roses Rosato label.

Salento's Rosato wines tend to have a smooth finish, bright acidity, and a touch of minerality; as a result, they provide a refreshing way to beat the heat of southern Italy during the summer months. Salento is also one of the few regions in Italy to produce rosé on a significant level, so much so that Italian rosés are typically associated with the area. ■■

PHOTO COURTESY OF CONSORZIO DI TUTELA DI SALICE SALENTINO



Damiano Reale serves as the President of Consorzio di Tutela of Salice Salentino.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LAURA DONADONI



Meet Laura Donadoni

Laura Donadoni is an Italian wine journalist and blogger based in San Diego, California. She is the founder of *The Italian Wine Girl* blog and La Com Wine Agency, a licensed importing company and a strategic PR and communications firm focused on the wine industry.

A Certified Sommelier with the North American Sommelier Association and the World Sommelier Association, a Certified Wine Educator, and WSET Level Three Advanced Sommelier, Donadoni is one of just a few Vinality International Italian Wine Ambassadors in the world. In addition, she's an Italian and Spanish Wine Specialist, a member of the Los Angeles Wine Writers Association, and the Director of the Wine Education Program at the Pacific National Food and Beverage Museum in Los Angeles.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WSWA

Michelle Korsmo joined WSWA as its new President and CEO last year.

Shaking Things Up

A Q&A WITH
MICHELLE KORSMO,
WSWA'S NEW
PRESIDENT AND CEO

After officially assuming her role as the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America's new President and CEO last fall, Michelle Korsmo is preparing to attend her first WSWA Annual Convention & Exposition (set for March 31–April 3 in Orlando, Florida) this year as the head of the leading industry trade association. *The Tasting Panel* caught up with Korsmo, formerly the Chief Executive Officer of the American Land Title Association and the Deputy Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Labor, to pick her brain on a range of topics before the convention returns for its 76th year.

Q *The Tasting Panel:* How has your previous experience across a spectrum of industries, organizations, and governmental agencies prepared you for your new role?

Michelle Korsmo: Thank you for the opportunity to connect with you and your readers! I'm excited about the future of WSWA and, of course, I'm very excited to connect with all our industry partners at the upcoming 76th Annual Convention & Exposition. Founded in 1943, WSWA has more than 370 member companies in 50 states and the District of Columbia, and its members distribute more than 80 percent of all wine and spirits sold at wholesale in the U.S.

So much of my past experience has provided me with the opportunity to lead

Natalia Cardenas, Beverage Development Manager at Breakthru Beverage Illinois, celebrates after Tony Abou-Ganim announces her as the winner of the Iron Mixologist competition at last year's WSWA Convention & Exposition. This year's event will be held March 31–April 3 in Orlando, FL.



organizations with similar missions. Changing consumer expectations has affected every industry, but an additional challenge for the alcohol industry is that most consumers don't understand the reasoning behind the regulatory structure in place or the fact that each state determines how alcohol is bought and sold within its borders. WSWA has been working on addressing changing consumer demand in a compliant manner and I am looking forward to working with our leadership as we explore the future marketplace.

Q How would you describe WSWA's strategy toward "recruiting, retaining, training, and promoting a workforce that reflects its customer base," in the words of WSWA Chairman Barkley Stuart, in the coming year and beyond?

In our membership ranks, our Women's Leadership Council has served as a networking, educational, and development group engaging rising leaders from all over the country. This member-created, member-led arm of WSWA has grown by leaps and bounds in just a few short years. I hear so many companies' leaders talk about the outstanding women who work within their ranks, and the Council wants to know more about how to help those women excel.

Last year, WSWA also welcomed Sue McCollum of Major Brands (Missouri) onto the Executive Committee, the first female Executive Committee member in our 75-plus years. Among the WSWA team, more than half of our senior leaders are women and, importantly, the pipeline for future women leaders is strong, as more than half of our employees are women.

Q Coming off of a milestone 75th-anniversary convention, can you share details regarding any new elements this year?

While the convention has been around for three-quarters of a century, it evolves each year to reflect the needs

of wholesalers, suppliers, and industry service providers. This year we have added a retailer and consumer day on Sunday, March 31, which will feature a master mixology class, a wine education seminar, and an exciting wine and spirits marketplace. We will also roll out our new Supplier Leadership Series on craft beverage and distribution, which will provide real value to participating suppliers. It's exciting for us to be able to provide relevant education and networking for all of our convention attendees.

For wholesalers, we will once again offer a members-only leadership series on Monday, April 1, which will feature leading speakers and panelists on the latest business, market, regulatory, and consumer information. As always, all attendees will experience our popular general sessions with well-known speakers, and our exciting competitions will showcase the industry's best talent. Please check out wswaconvention.org for full details!

Q Competition plays a vital role at the convention in terms of connecting brands with suppliers and wholesalers. How do you recommend prospective participants take advantage of these various opportunities?

The convention provides numerous opportunities for brands of all sizes to showcase their products. Everything starts with an exhibit space, whether that's a booth in one of our two Exhibit Halls or one of our Suites. Each offers a little something different that's appropriate for brands at different stages of development. On our website, we also have a great "how-to" video featuring Tony Abou-Ganim and "Tito" Beveridge

of Tito's Handmade Vodka that shares what they think makes a successful convention experience.

What really separates us from any other event in the industry is the ability for brands to connect with wholesalers. Our competitions are a great way to get noticed and winners can leverage the added marketing cachet that comes with winning an award. Taste of the Industry is a grand tasting which allows brands to interact with distributors in an evening environment, while Brand Battle is where an exhibitor's pitch and product are reviewed live onstage as a panel of industry leaders offer feedback.

Beyond this, we are always looking for creative ways to help brands highlight their unique qualities and achieve maximum value from their time at convention. We offer custom sponsorships of all descriptions, and our seasoned convention team is available via phone to help plan a sponsorship or exhibit package.

Q Finally, what are you most looking forward to in attending your first convention?

Long before I worked for WSWA, I knew of the association's reputation and of the work our members do around the country as brand builders and local marketing experts. I am looking forward to getting to know the full scope of our membership and working with our industry peers and partners from the supplier, retailer, and service-provider sectors. One thing is for sure: With all we have packed on the convention calendar, it's going to be a busy few days in Orlando, and I couldn't be more excited to jump in! ■■



Grouse is a specialty at The Game Bird in St. James's Place.

English Dining, *Revisited*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE STAFFORD LONDON

TAKING A SPIN THROUGH LONDON'S RESTAURANTS

by Anthony Dias Blue

London used to be the place where good food went to die, but, surprisingly enough, the cuisine I've tried as of late has been both delightful and modern—a huge shift from what it used to be. Here's a rundown of restaurants visited on a recent trip:

Le Caprice

I've been going to this glamorous restaurant tucked into a corner just off St. James's for at least two decades. Not having been there for half a dozen years, I figured it would be a hollow shadow of its former self.

How wrong could I be? At more than 35 years old, it's as chic and buzzing as ever, so much so that you almost expect Princess Diana—once a regular—to come breezing through the door at any minute. The staff is impeccably tailored in uniforms from nearby Jermyn Street, and service is just as crisp. The menu runs the gamut from a plump hamburger to dressed Dorset crab and bubble and squeak (a traditional dish of boiled potatoes and cabbage) to monkfish and prawn curry. It's all good, but I couldn't help but sit in high anticipation of dessert: iced berries drizzled generously with hot white-chocolate sauce. Heaven.

The River Café

This is my favorite London restaurant (an opinion formed over a quarter-century). What makes it so great is a conflation of elements: the Italian cuisine of Ruth Rogers and the late Rose Gray; the stunning setting on the banks of the Thames in Hammersmith; the outstanding wine list; the eager-to-please young staff; and the bright openness of the dining room.

I particularly love the *fritto misto*, a platter of fried and lightly battered red mullet, scallops, and crisp lemon slices. As you would expect, the pastas are fresh, bursting with interesting flavors, and perfectly cooked. The seafood dishes are also amazing (my choice is the wood-roasted Dover sole) and there are game birds, a massive pork chop, and chargrilled lamb. It's a great experience for the stunning simplicity and purity of the food. Pro-tip: Make sure you don't miss the lemon tart.

The Game Bird

This handsome 19th-century dining room is in The Stafford in St. James's Place, one of the city's most elegant hostelrys. The best time to go is during the fall season, when fresh game is readily available. Pheasant, partridge, quail, and, best of all, grouse are carefully prepared and accompanied by artful vegetable constructions. Regardless of these specialties, however, Chef Josef Rogulski is a master all year long.

The wine list is a romp through the classics, but The Stafford is also home to one of London's most celebrated bars. The specialty is the Martini, but the other libations are precise and masterful; the ceiling, meanwhile, is hung

with the neckties of former customers, who apparently were too snookered to put them back on.

Harrods

This huge, overstuffed shopping emporium may or may not be the greatest store in the world, but what is certain is that the "food halls" are in a class all their own. In fact, they're the model for every "gourmet" department in every store worldwide. Bars can be found all over this vast spread: an oyster bar, a purveyor of roasted chicken, a grill, a pastry bar, and a coffee bar (I wonder where Eataly got the idea?). I can vouch for all of these various stations, especially the oysters, which are deftly opened in front of you at the handsome bar in the seafood department.

Otto's

This was the discovery of the week. I don't know how we got to this place, but we're glad we did. It's a small, sort-of-kitschy French spot way out in Clerkenwell that offers precise, skilled preparations of classic bistro dishes. To start, there's lobster bisque, escargot, and foie gras—*tons* of it. Patrons can step up to a boned pig's foot stuffed with sweetbreads and morels in a Madeira sauce, but if that's too much, the soufflé made with goat cheese and doused with Mornay sauce is heavenly. If you don't mind the pricey Uber ride, you must make the trek.

The Ivy

A meal after theater is traditional: In New York, it's Sardi's, and in London, it's the 100-year-old The Ivy. The Ivy is the better of the two, and a 10:30 reservation for seven is no problem.

The menu is massive and traditional English with a little Asian thrown in.

I recommend Martinis, one glass each of Champagne and rosé, then citrus-cured salmon and wild mushroom soup or a bao. The most famous main course is the lush shepherd's pie, but there's also very good chicken curry, perfectly cooked calf's liver, lovely Dover sole, roasted duck, and Aylesbury lamb rump. Among the offerings on the long dessert list are burnt banana and butterscotch tatin and passion fruit tart.

J Sheekey

Another theater-district tradition is J Sheekey, a 122-year-old seafood restaurant. During our visit, we found out that Le Caprice, The Ivy, and J Sheekey are all part of Caprice Holdings, a large group of high-end eateries, so we expected that this place would be as good as the other two. How wrong we were! The food seemed tired and the service was rushed, disinterested, and gruff. Oh, well.

Little Social

I wrote last year about Jason Atherton's "bistro" right across the street from his fancy flagship, Pollen Street Social. I quite liked it then, but the return wasn't quite as successful. The food was OK yet nothing special: sparsely sauced *vitello tonnato*, decent pork chop and cod, and pretty good pesto pasta. The problem was the service—it wasn't just bad, it was nonexistent. After a long wait, we had to get up and walk across the restaurant to grab a server to take our order. During the meal, finding an employee continued to be an issue. Well, you can't win 'em all! ■■

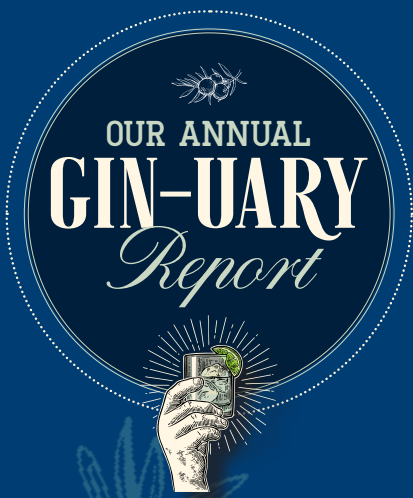
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WOLSELEY



The Wolseley

Just around the corner from Le Caprice, The Wolseley is located in a rather grand space that was formerly an automobile showroom and Barclays Bank. Designed by William Curtis Green in 1921, the dramatic venue features shiny marble columns and high vaulted arches. The menu, meanwhile, features a cross-section of Western cuisines—French, English, Viennese, and Swedish, as well as a few swipes at Hungarian, Swiss, and more. Crowded for breakfast at 7, bustling at midday, and still full at dinner, this delightful, incredibly English place is a must-see, especially if you're interested in observing the natives in their natural habitat.

The Wolseley occupies a former automobile showroom in Piccadilly.



OUR ANNUAL GIN-UARY *Report*



Be-Gin Your Year with *Stellar Sips*

A ROUNDUP OF 2019'S MUST-TRY GINS

The arrival of a new year always sets the stage for fresh starts and even fresher cocktails. To make your guests' year long before the first signs of spring arise, look to add these incredible gins from around the world to your shelf or backbar.

Born in Texas: **ROXOR** Gin

Good friends who share a love of gin, art, and architecture, Don Short and Robert Del Grande formed New Artisan Spirits, a Texas-based artisanal spirits company dedicated to modern interpretations of plant-based spirits.

As an international executive for Coca-Cola and Minute Maid, Short held CEO positions in India, Africa, and the Middle East. Now overseeing marketing and strategy for New Artisan Spirits, he designed ROXOR's unique "skyline" bottle and conceived the brand's name, a palindrome that comes from "on the ROX, shaken OR stirred."

Del Grande, a James Beard-awarded chef who also holds a Ph.D. in biochemistry, oversees product development for the company. He also curated ROXOR's incredible gin recipe, which blends 12 botanicals—including Texas grapefruit zest, Texas pecans, and sarsaparilla—to create a canvas of distinctly Texan flavors that meld seamlessly for a modern, signature taste.



The Best of Amsterdam: **Damrak Gin**

The world's oldest distilled-spirits brand, Lucas Bols, was established in the mid-16th century just as Amsterdam was becoming a leader in international trade. The main harbor, the Damrak, which still occupies the center of the city, served as the arrival point for herbs and spices from faraway lands.

Based on this exotic trading tradition yet made for present-day palates, Damrak Gin (\$22) is crafted right by the port and behind the famous Dam Square. Made with 17 botanicals, the spirit creates a balance between the category's usual juniper-heavy flavor profile and more contemporary citrusy notes. A prominent player on the palate, the orange in the spirit pays tribute to the Netherlands' national color and royal family, the House of Orange, while bringing a crisp, invigorating quality to the gin. These botanicals blend together in five separate distillates from five pot stills, resting for two weeks before bottling.

A refreshed take on hundreds of years of history, Damrak Gin adds a twist to your classic Gin & Tonic—just don't forget to garnish it with a slice of orange or two.



Flying Through the Years: **Aviation American Gin**

While a nostalgic faction of the mixology community is increasingly seeking out tributes to the pre-Prohibition era in their preferred cocktails, they're hesitant to leave the current time period altogether, especially with so much exciting innovation on display. Thankfully, Aviation American Gin is one of those rare labels that can transport consumers to the past as it sets its sights firmly on the future.

The spirit's namesake is the Aviation Cocktail, which made its debut in Hugo Ensslin's *Recipes for Mixed Drinks* (widely published in 1917, the book was revived with a new centennial edition in 2017). Considered to be the last known book of its kind published before Prohibition, *Recipes for Mixed Drinks* evolved from a

little-known pamphlet of both standard and unconventional cocktails to a staple revered by many a modern mixologist.

The handcrafted, small-batch gin is produced at House Spirits Distillery in Portland, Oregon. Conceptualized a decade ago by co-founders Ryan Magarian and Christian Krogstad (who also serves as Aviation's Master Distiller), Aviation Gin forgoes the juniper-heavy characteristics of traditional English gins in favor of a more balanced, smooth taste.

This brings other enticing flavor notes, including French lavender and Indian sarsaparilla, to the forefront after the blend of globally sourced botanicals is macerated and distilled. The resulting versatility enables the 84-proof spirit

to meld seamlessly into both contemporary cocktails and nostalgic drinks, its namesake among them.

Ensslin would no doubt be surprised by the influence his book holds in the industry all these decades later, considering he spent his days as the inconspicuous head bartender of the Hotel Wallick in New York City's Times Square (a victim of Prohibition, the hotel closed in 1939). But the Aviation—which mixes gin with lemon juice, maraschino liqueur, and crème de violette—is one of many creations he popularized that continue to pop up on bar counters today. With the option to feature Aviation Gin as its base, it's no wonder the cocktail is still flying high in 2019.

DAVOS BRANDS





Fit for Royalty: **Empress 1908 Gin**

Off the coast of British Columbia, Vancouver Island has no end of beautiful scenery and incredible places to visit. Perhaps its most famous site, the majestic Fairmont Empress Hotel in downtown Victoria, sits overlooking the Inner Harbor. This striking structure has been called the heart and soul of the city and has stood the test of time. Inspired by this Canadian icon, Empress Gin (\$40) begins with the same foundation as a classic tea blend found at the hotel; used during the daily tea service, the blend features handcrafted teas chosen to fit the season.

Of the two teas featured in Empress 1908 Gin, the first, produced by the Metropolitan Tea Company, mixes ingredients from the Indian state of Assam, Kenya, South India, Ceylon, and China. The second is the butterfly pea blossom, which imparts a uniquely earthy layer and gives the expression its beautiful, natural blue color. These teas, along with six other botanicals—juniper, rose, coriander seed, grapefruit peel, ginger root, and cinnamon bark—create the flavor profile for this spirit. The gin itself is micro-distilled in small-batch copper pot stills without any additives or artificial colorings.

Empress 1908 Gin's depth of flavor and stunning appearance will bring even a simple Gin and Tonic to another level; it also adds a twist to everything from a Martini to a Negroni, offering ample room to infuse your own creativity into a new creation. No matter where you enjoy this spirit, it will bring a touch of elegance to any drink and occasion.

Tasting Notes

The second-to-last color of the rainbow is indigo, and thanks to infusions of butterfly pea blossoms, the hue of this 85-proof spirit from Victoria Distillers lights up the glass. After the delicate scent of wildflowers and juniper on the nose, the palate goes floral and is kissed by cinnamon and salinity. Add citrus or tonic and this chameleon changes to purple or pink. **92** —*Meridith May*



EMPRESS GIN

Practice Makes Perfect: **Loch & Union Distilling**

Several years ago, Colin Baker, founder and Master Distiller of spirits producer Loch & Union Distilling, quit his job at a Big Four accounting firm in Orange County to pursue a career he actually loved: craft brewing. After traveling to London, his studies eventually took him to Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, where he entered a graduate program in brewing and distilling and later switched the emphasis of his master's degree solely to distilling.

Upon returning to the States, Baker sought to realize his dream of opening his own distillery. After he appointed long-time friend Matt Meyer as co-founder, three more personnel additions soon followed: Jesse Saunders and Gordon Russell joined on as Lead Distiller and Head Distiller, respectively, while Gian P. Nelson was hired as Chief Distiller.

Loch & Union's American Dry Gin expression exemplifies the notion that exceptional works of art take time to create and even longer to perfect. The team spent three years developing a product to fit their vision of a new caliber of American spirits, testing more than 150 botanicals and distilling 100-plus ingredients to ensure the final product had the exact flavor profile they sought.

After navigating through this extensive process, they landed on the perfect balance of 12 botanicals sourced from farms in ten countries. These ingredients yield a clean spirit with layers of complexity, beginning with the traditional backbone of juniper and leading into warming spice, floral, and citrus notes. Combining a meticulous attention to detail during distillation with a fine-tuned blend of botanicals, Loch & Union creates a high-quality gin built for the connoisseur while also remaining approachable for the casual spirits drinker.

Since the initial localized release of the American Dry Gin in the Napa area last March, Loch & Union has already received a number of awards and accolades. Now the team is rolling out its newest expression: Barely Gin. This unaged malt base melds with piney and deeply warming botanical flavors to produce a spirit that will challenge previous notions of the category. Once consumers are introduced to Barely Gin, there's little doubt it will become a go-to for gin lovers across the country—proving good spirits come to those who work hard for them.

LOCH & UNION DISTILLING





REGISTERED DISTILLERY No. 209.

A Piece of the Past with an Eye on the Future: **Distillery No. 209**

Inspiration often strikes in the most unusual and unexpected places, and the late Leslie Rudd, founder of Distillery No. 209, knew this all too well. When he came across a stone hay barn in Napa Valley one fateful day, something written on its side in faded letters piqued his interest. After learning the site was once home to a former St. Helena distillery that in 1882 had acquired the 209th permit of its kind in the U.S., Rudd was inspired to open Distillery No. 209—now located on Pier 50 in San Francisco—in 2005.

Following Rudd's passing last year, Distillery No. 209 was acquired by Vintage Wine Estates (VWE) in November 2018. CEO Pat Roney intends to carry on the vision of his longtime business partner and friend in producing artisan spirits, and Distillery No. 209 gins have joined the growing VWE portfolio of bespoke expressions, including Straight Edge Bourbon Whiskey, Slaughter House American Whiskey, Whip Saw Rye, and Partner Vermouth.

Using the largest copper pot alembic still on the West Coast (the still was custom-crafted in Scotland), the distilling team is led by Master Distiller and "Ginerator" Arne Hillesland. Their flagship expression, **No. 209 Gin (\$30)**, incorporates 11 botanicals from four continents, including juniper and bergamot orange from Italy, lemon peel from Spain, cardamom pods from Guatemala, cassia bark from Indonesia, and coriander seeds from Romania.

Utilizing the flagship expression as a base, the distillery also produces a line of barrel-reserve gins. The **Sauvignon Blanc Barrel Reserve Gin (\$35)** rests for three to four months in casks previously filled with Rudd Mt. Veeder Estate Sauvignon Blanc, while the **Chardonnay Barrel Reserve Gin (\$35)** ages four to five months in Edge Hill Bacigalupi Chardonnay barrels. To add even more depth, the **Cabernet Sauvignon Barrel Reserve Gin (\$35)** picks up citrus-spice layers from the Rudd Oakville Estate Red casks it rests in for six to seven months. Future Barrel Reserve expressions will have access to barrels from VWE's extensive luxury portfolio, which includes Clos Pegase, Swanson, and Delectus, among many others.

Distillery No. 209 also distinguishes itself from competitors by producing **Kosher-for-Passover Vodka and Gin (\$33)**, both of which are certified kosher for Passover by the Orthodox Union. Since kosher dietary law prohibits leavened grains and the consumption of spirits fermented with grains during the holiday, the spirits are made with sugarcane and substitute bay leaves for cardamom seeds.

Tasting Notes

Distillery No. 209 Gin 5 X D Following breathtaking aromas of tangerine, lilac, and vanilla toffee, the palate is sweetened by candied blue-floral notes as juniper gets kissed by spearmint for a refreshing wash on the palate. This flavor profile is highly original. **95**—*M.M.*

Distillery No. 209 Barrel Reserve Gin Finished in Sauvignon barrels, this 92-proof spirit has a medium toast and a light golden-copper hue. Clove and cinnamon season mango on the nose as flavors of mandarin orange and pepper cascade on the tongue. There's a mild echo of juniper and apricot on the finish. **94**—*M.M.*

Distillery No. 209 Chardonnay Barrel Reserve Gin Perfumed peach pie warms the senses as pepper accents coffee bean-kissed mocha and toasted oak. This 92-proof spirit is finished in Chardonnay barrels. **93**—*M.M.*

Distillery No. 209 Cabernet Sauvignon Barrel Reserve Gin This expression finishes in Cabernet Sauvignon barrels. Sensuous scents of mango, sandalwood, and caramel precede the pink peppercorns that temper the sweetness on the palate. Notes of cassis come through, creating a profile that's fittingly reminiscent of a red wine. **94**—*M.M.*



DISTILLERY NO. 209

The Storied Life of the Tom Collins

by Denny Daniels

It takes a special breed to order a Tom Collins: It's an antiquated drink that lacks the panache of most modern libations. To many, it's something that should be improved with modern techniques and designer ingredients, yet there's beauty in its simplicity. The sum of its parts—gin, lemon juice, sugar, soda water, and ice—equates to much more than a cocktail.

As simple as the drink may appear, its history is a riot of a good time. To know Tom Collins, you must know the John Collins, a 19th-century cocktail named for the headwaiter of Limmer's Old House, a hotel and coffee house popular in London at the time. The original John Collins had essentially the same basic ingredients as the modern Tom Collins, with one major difference: The John Collins instead contained malty, sweet genever, a Dutch spirit made with juniper that most consider the predecessor of gin.

Over time, English tastes evolved and the use of the Old Tom Gin recipe became more prevalent. Indicative of this shift, *The Steward and Barkeeper's Manual of 1869* detailed how to make a John Collins with Old Tom Gin:

Teaspoonful of powdered sugar
The juice of half a lemon
A wine glass of Old Tom Gin
A bottle of plain soda
Shake up, or stir up with ice.
Add a slice of lemon peel to finish.

The John Collins turned into the "Old Tom" Collins based on this gin preference, and people eventually began referring to it as the Tom Collins. This story satisfied beverage historians for more than 135 years, until an article published in *Class* magazine in 2006 claimed that the Tom Collins actually got its name from a mischievous joke that circulated in New York and Philadelphia around 1874.

To paraphrase, the conversation would go like this:

"Have you seen Tom Collins?"
The unsuspecting victim: "Never heard of him."
"You should find him, as he has been tarnishing your good reputation around town."

Ready for fisticuffs, men would then inquire at local bars for "Tom Collins." The problem? He simply didn't exist. Instead, the slighted victim would be introduced to the cocktail and hilarity would ensue, prompting the joke to circulate so widely that it was considered "the great Tom Collins hoax of 1874."

Unfortunately, in this day of increasingly complex cocktail menus, the drink's backstory is typically only discussed among beverage historians. Let us remember the likes of Mr. Tom Collins, who lived a life full of adventure and mischief long before we tasted our first cocktail.



An editorial cartoon published July 7, 1874, in *The Atlanta Constitution*.



A 19th-century article from *The Gettysburg Compiler*.



Blazing Its Own Trail: Calamity Gin

Famous American frontierswoman Calamity Jane was known to be daring and bold, but she also had a compassionate side that contrasted with her wild nature. To pay homage to this trailblazer—who showed great confidence and determination in paving her own way—Calamity Gin (\$25) showcases a unique approach to gin-making without overdoing or masking the juniper notes. “We think of our style as a twist to London Dry—we call it Texas Dry,” says Mike Howard, President of Southwest Spirits (the makers of Calamity Gin).

Distilled seven times, Calamity Gin blends 11 botanicals—juniper, cardamom, lavender, rose, Texas bluebonnets, grapefruit, lime zest, orange, lemon, coriander, and bergamot—to produce a floral-tinged and refreshing spirit. Grown at Water Boy Farms in Texas, the bluebonnets are the dominant wildflower among the botanicals; part of the lupine family, they got their name from the hats worn by pioneer women. These wildflowers round out the floral tones of the gin and give it an unmistakably Texan flavor profile.

To celebrate the annual blooming of the bluebonnets, Southwest Spirits will launch a co-branded mixer pack for Calamity Gin this spring; each will include both a traditional tonic and a flavored mixer from Q Drinks or Fever-Tree, depending on the market. On its own, however, Calamity Gin offers the opportunity to improve upon any cocktail: The floral and citrus notes add a touch of freshness to traditional drinks like a Tom Collins or Martini, but they also play well in unexpected or newly developed drinks. After all, Calamity Jane was never one for convention, and Calamity Gin follows suit, encouraging mixologists to craft their own legacies.

Tasting Notes

With a name that should garner praise in and of itself, this white spirit is a play on the American folk hero and Wild West pioneer woman who befriended Wild Bill Hickok. Scents of violets, cheery peppered freesia petals, and honeyed white grapefruit make up the olfactory music of this 80-proof Texan. The pepper gains ground on the palate with grapefruit rind and an elaborate bunch of blue flowers while the finish of vanilla and bread dough adds textural buoyancy. **95** —*M.M.*

GIN POLLINATOR

Created by Harvest restaurant in McKinney, Texas

- ▶ 2 oz. honeycomb- and wildflower-infused Calamity Gin*
- ▶ 1 oz. fresh lemon juice
- ▶ ½ oz. basil simple syrup
- ▶ ¼ oz. Aquafaba
- ▶ ½ oz. St. Elder elderflower liqueur

Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker. Shake and double-strain into a coupe. Add a pinch of chopped flower as a garnish.

*Infuse two 1.75-liter bottles of Calamity Gin with one honeycomb and a handful of wildflower petals.



SOUTHWEST SPIRITS



Homegrown: Dry Fly Distilling

Known as the Evergreen State, Washington has a bounty of locally grown produce. It makes sense, then, that when the team at Spokane's Dry Fly Distilling went about creating their flagship expression, they sought to use as many products from the region as possible. Working closely with the Washington Department of Agriculture to identify products they could infuse into a gin, they tested a dozen ingredients before landing on a blend of six for **Dry Fly Gin (\$30)** that would showcase the best of the state.

Those ingredients include Washington-grown Fuji apples from a branch of grower-owned co-op Tree Top; coriander seeds sourced from the Tri-Cities and purchased through a botanical co-op; primarily Simcoe or Simcoe-derivative hops from Loftus Ranches in Yakima; peppermint from Moses Lake; and lavender from Camden Lavender Farms in northeastern Washington. The only element sourced from outside the state is juniper, as no Washington companies possess the USDA permit needed to pack the plant. As a result, the distillery makes a point of sourcing its juniper from West Coast growers in either Oregon or California.

Using the standard Dry Fly Gin as its base, **Dry Fly Barrel Reserve Gin (\$40)** ages in single-use wheat whiskey barrels for approximately 14 months, imparting both color and hints of whiskey on the palate.

Tasting Notes

Dry Fly Gin Lemon blossoms perfume the air alongside heady scents of apple tart further enhanced by peppermint. On the palate, lemon oil caresses with a hint of coriander and sweet lavender. This is a true tribute to the Pacific Northwest. **96** —*M.M.*

Dry Fly Barrel Reserve Gin Vibrant aromas of honeyed pears, apples, and a hint of spearmint emerge from the glass. These honeyed notes continue to pamper on the palate with a peppercorn note that seasons an apple-and-brioche character. **94** —*M.M.*



DRY FLY DISTILLING

High Fidelity Gin: Hepple Gin



Created by internationally renowned bartender Nick Strangeway and foraging chef/best-selling cookbook author Val Warner, Hepple Gin (\$45) brings together the best that the land and distilling techniques have to offer to produce a gin that redefines the premium category.

To produce the spirit, the distillery team forages green juniper, Douglas fir, lovage, and blackcurrant leaf on the 5,000-acre Hepple Estate in the remote and pristine Northumberland Moors of England.

Hepple is a classic juniper-based gin revolutionized through modern technology. While most gins start and end with copper pot distillation, the brand goes beyond by employing additional processes to bring freshness and flavor back into the gin through the Hepple "Triple Technique":

copper pot distillation to add smoothness, glass vacuum distillation to add freshness, and supercritical CO₂ extraction to add depth of flavor.

A Double Gold winner at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition, Hepple is renowned as one of the very best Martini gins, as well as one of the most coveted expressions to come out of the great gin revolution.

Tasting Notes

A gentle breeze of perfumed juniper, lemon oil, and peppercorn are incredibly inviting. Satin sheets of vanilla and pine coat the tongue, followed by salty heather and fennel root. It's remarkably balanced and agreeable with half-shadowed notes of blackberry and coffee bean. **96** —*M.M.*

COMPASS POINT IMPORTS



The Prettiest Southern Belle: Seersucker Southern Style Gin

While nose-deep in a tumbler of Seersucker Southern Style Gin, you'll detect the light, pine-forest scent of juniper softened by a floral bouquet of orange peel, coriander, honey, and mint. The spirit is a bright, pleasing sipper—and a versatile one, too. Mixed in a classic Negroni, it adds a soft, citrusy cushion to the botanicals in vermouth, and in a lime-garnished Gin & Tonic, the spirit's mint, coriander, and peppery juniper shine. If Seersucker were a person, it'd be the best friend who enlivens every party.

When Trey and Kim Azar, the founders of San Antonio-based Cinco Vodka, decided to add gin to their Azar Family Brands portfolio, they knew they wanted to create a balanced, cocktail-friendly expression. "The gin market was pretty flat, but we were seeing an interesting trend," Trey says. "Bartenders wanted to make drinks with gin, but customers were ordering vodka, so we thought, 'Why don't we invent our own style and trademark it? Let's balance out the flavor profiles and make our gin more approachable.'"

Since debuting Seersucker Southern Style Gin in 2017, Azar Family Brands has developed two additional products: Southern Style Lemonade and Southern Style Limeade, both of which, at 70 proof, incorporate fresh juices. "We landed on flavor and aroma profiles you'd find in a Southern kitchen," Trey explains. "It makes you think of sunny days, sitting on a porch, going boating, and gathering with friends."



AZAR FAMILY BRANDS



From the Heart: KOVAL Cranberry Gin Liqueur



KOVAL Distillery is a rare breed. Not only is it one of the few woman-owned and family-operated distilleries in the U.S., the brand's entire lineup of products is also 100% certified organic and kosher. Its Cranberry Gin Liqueur is no different: Made with KOVAL Dry Gin as a base with 13 signature botanicals, including rose hips, star anise, and coriander, this expression sees the addition of locally sourced cranberries to create a bittersweet and aromatic gin unlike anything else on the market.

In every bottle of KOVAL's spirits, the drinker will solely experience the "heart cut" of each distillate, creating a cleaner, purer expression of every *objet d'art* the Chicago-based distillery produces. Sustainability is key to the company, which sources ingredients locally wherever possible and implements resource conservation at every step of the production process. Perfect for year-round cocktail menus, KOVAL Cranberry Gin Liqueur resides in a bottle worthy of distinction on any backbar.

KOVAL DISTILLERY

KOVAL CRANBERRY SPRITZ

- ▶ 1½ oz. KOVAL Cranberry Gin Liqueur
- ▶ 3½ oz. sparkling wine
- ▶ Splash of soda

Add all ingredients to a wine glass with lots of ice. Serve garnished with a sprig of rosemary and a twist of lemon.



Golden Age: Great Base Bristlecone Gin

From Utah's Dented Brick Distillery, Great Base Bristlecone Gin (\$26.95) pays homage to its namesake pine trees (enduring for thousands of years in difficult climates from Utah to California, they are believed to be among the oldest non-clonal organisms on earth).

Production of the gin starts with a base of Cache Valley red winter wheat and pumpnickel rye from Idaho Falls, Idaho, as well as pristine water from the Wasatch Range on the border of Idaho and Utah. The distillers then cold-macerate the spirit with organic juniper, fennel, angelica root, coriander seed, and citrus peel. Like the trees themselves, this gin will have you rethinking all of life's possibilities.



Tasting Notes

Aromas of plum and musky vanilla warm and soothe the nose. Without an edge, this satin-textured, 90-proof spirit features delicate pine notes—thanks to the profile of the bristlecone—with a touch of key lime, white pepper, and blue-floral tonality on the back stretch. Elegant and unique.

94—M.M.

DENTED BRICK DISTILLERY

From the Garden: NOLET'S Silver Gin

We often reserve refreshing flavors for the spring and summer months, forgetting that they work well all year round. Developed by tenth-generation distillery owner Carolus Nolet, Sr., and his sons Bob and Carl, Jr., NOLET'S Silver Gin (\$49) proves that a fruit- and floral-forward spirit can thrive no matter the season.

Crafted using more than 325 years of Nolet family tradition at the Nolet Distillery in Schiedam, Holland, NOLET'S Silver features real botanicals of rose, peach, and raspberry. It's an elegant and approachable gin made for modern palates. *Proost!*



Let Freedom Ring: Old Elk Dry Town Gin

We like to think of the western United States in the Wild West days as a frontier relatively free of rules, but that was never the case for Fort Collins, Colorado. The city kept Prohibition in place for 73 years, long after the constitutional ban's national repeal in 1933.

To celebrate Fort Collins' retraction of this law in 1969, Old Elk Distillery aimed to create a gin liberated from tradition. For its Dry Town Gin (\$34.95) expression, ten botanicals—juniper, sage, orris root, orange, lime, angelica root, black pepper, ginger, lemongrass, and French verveine—soak for 18 hours before undergoing a vapor-extraction process, resulting in a bright gin with herbal undertones.

"We did 75 single botanical runs and looked at everything from roots to flowers, from hot chili peppers to grains themselves," Head Distiller Kate Douglas says of the spirit's creation. "We had the freedom to choose which style of gin we wanted and ultimately chose a botanical bill that highlighted our home state with Colorado sage. It then took us 64 runs to get the perfect balance." Upon sipping the spirit, guests will thank the entire town of Fort Collins for finally coming to their senses so that this gin could be shared with the world.

Tasting Notes

With dynamic aromas of spearmint, orange peel, and ginger root, Dry Town Gin leads to a palate that sparks a sweetness in its core. Lemon blossoms and salted sage ignite a flavor profile that's both unique and texturally creamy. At 92 proof, this vibrant gin cleans the palate with a breezy finish of vanilla, corn, and lavender. 94

—M.M. ■■

OLD ELK DISTILLERY





Sipsmith's juniper-forward V.J.O.P. Gin was used to craft a hot Gin and Ginger cocktail with spices and lemon juice at an outdoor wreath-making event in San Diego, CA.

BRINGING

GIN

Full Circle

**SIPSMITH
EXPLORES
THE WINTRY
POTENTIAL OF
GIN AT COCKTAIL
PARTIES IN
SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA**

PHOTO: MICHAEL MORSE



Charcuterie on rustic cutting boards served as sustenance for hungry wreath-makers in San Diego.

by Rich Manning and Abby Read

Gin may not immediately strike one as a wintry spirit or a category that can be served hot. As a result, many see Martinis, Gimlets, and Gin & Tonics as tipples typically meant for warmer days and longer nights.

Sipsmith Gin, however, respectfully disagrees. As Lucy Ellis, Beam Suntory's West Coast U.S. Brand Ambassador for the brand, told *The Tasting Panel*, "Gin, especially our London Dry, is full of all of the necessary spices and natural sweetness you associate with winter seasons. Juniper, cinnamon, sweet citrus, and licorice all lend to a warming and festive flavor profile, especially when heated!"

These seasonal libations also have a history: Between the 17th and early 19th centuries, hot gin drinks were a highlight at "frost fairs" in London, where ice skating and other winter activities unfolded alongside tented vendors on the frozen River Thames. "It was so cold and their love of gin so strong," says Ellis, "that river dwellers were known to heat their gin with hot metal pokers to stay warm." (Ellis, however, prefers sticking to enameled mugs and teaware for her own gatherings with family and friends.)

In keeping with tradition, Sipsmith Gin hosts Hot Gin Nights for the public every winter at rooftop bars—equipped with heaters and blankets, of course—around London. After attending the pop-ups, some people have started mulling gin as a substitute for their standard mulled wine, Ellis notes.

These festivities crossed the pond this winter to Southern California, where Ellis recently hosted two events for Sipsmith Gin in Los Angeles and San Diego. While heavy rain kept those gathered at Eataly's L.A. outpost inside—creating the ideal environment for enjoying warm drinks and good company—the weather proved just mild enough for an outdoor wreath-making event in San Diego, where attendees learned about the art of hot cocktails and door-side decorations.



Lucy Ellis, Beam Suntory's West Coast U.S. Brand Ambassador for Sipsmith Gin, hosted the San Diego and L.A. events.

Crafting Hot Gin Cocktails

The holiday season looks different in San Diego than it does in other parts of the country: Your only shot at frostiness comes when the name of L.A. Chargers owner Dean Spanos is uttered to a local football fan. And snow? . . . How about no. Yet while some see these elements as the tragic loss of Bing Crosby's White Christmas dreams, it does provide a rather appealing backdrop for unconventional winter activities—among them outdoor wreath-making and wintry cocktails made with Sipsmith Gin.

On a mid-November afternoon, the promise of both pastimes lured a group of local bartenders to the historic Casa del Prado building, located within the city's sprawling Balboa Park. Most attendees arrived in short sleeves, as one does in San Diego this time of year. The crisp breeze pushing through the Casa's rectangular courtyard, however, downgraded the sun's rays to a gentle pulse while creating an instant case study in relativism: It may have been downright chilly by San Diego standards, but the conditions were perfect for showcasing Sipsmith's ability to work wonders in the winter months.

It's a trait the British-born Ellis believes is a no-brainer despite gin's American reputation for being a warm-weather indulgence. "I think it's very ironic that gin is associated with the summer in the States," she told the group. "Think about where gin and gin

culture originate—a lot of it stems from London. Now, think about London and its weather. It's not exactly a place to go in the summer months, is it?"

While Ellis' logic alone should prevent people from shoving gin to the back of their liquor cabinet after Labor Day, the trio of Sipsmith-based cocktails poured during the event made another strong case for stocking up on the spirit as the mercury drops. Each mixed drink featured a different Sipsmith expression: The brand's classic London Dry Gin provided the base for a Hot G&T; Sipsmith Sloe Gin went into the Hot Mulled Sloe; and Sipsmith V.J.O.P. served as the main ingredient in the Gin & Ginger cocktail.

The various gins shined through these distinctive beverages, leaving no doubt as to which spirit the barkeeps were sipping. At the same time, each radiated with calendar-appropriate character. The Hot G&T's simple formula of gin, tonic reduction, and hot water felt both familiar and fresh on the palate, yet the inner heat generated with each sip lent an unmistakable coziness. The Mulled Sloe's "holiday spices" weren't disclosed, but they played nice with the beverage's known ingredients, including warm spiced apple. Last but not least, the Gin & Ginger tasted like a clever variation of a hot toddy.

Despite their differences, all three cocktails created a sense of place, an attribute Ellis said is critical to their enjoyment. "A good hot gin drink will



PHOTO: MICHAEL MORSE

In San Diego, Sipsmith Sloe Gin was used to craft a festive drink complete with warm spiced apple cider and holiday spices.

have balanced flavors and aromas," she explained. "Some of these notes directly come from our botanicals, like licorice and cassia. These notes allow the beverage to stand up to the climate."

The cocktails also gave the bartenders some necessary inspiration for a different type of creativity than they're used to, helping them craft wreaths deserving of any front door. Their creations also proved rather camera-worthy, with every circular masterpiece

PHOTO: MICHAEL MORSE



San Diego attendees gathered outside to try their hand at DIY wreath-making.

PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM



Lucy Ellis stirred up hot libations for guests in L.A.

PHOTO: MICHAEL MORSE



Just add tonic reduction and water: The hot Gin & Tonic served in San Diego showcased Sipsmith London Dry Gin.

PHOTO: CAL BINGHAM



Guests at Sipsmith's L.A. event huddled together inside to take cover from the rain while enjoying food and hot gin drinks.

getting its own moment to shine in the photo booth. A faint whiff of evergreen floated though the air as the event wrapped, but whether the scent came from a wreath or a spilled cocktail was hard to determine.

What was certain, though, is how much appreciation Ellis has for the

bartending community's willingness to share the joys of gin-based winter cocktails with their customers. "Bartenders play such a critical role in turning the public onto gin's possibilities," she said. "The bar is where you're going to find out about new things—you're never going to get

info on winter gin drinks from your local grocery store. Fortunately, we're living in a time where more people are interested in what they're putting in their bodies when they go grab a drink, so there is plenty of opportunity for bartenders to talk about having gin all year round." ■■

PHOTO: ALEXANDRA CANCRO



Tapping into the Gin Craze

Myles Burroughs, Beverage Director for The Derschang Group in Seattle, Washington, keeps dreaming up new ways to serve gin. Over the years, the company has embraced tap cocktails for consistency and efficiency while reducing its environmental footprint. At Queen City, one of six Derschang properties, Sipsmith Gin has made the cut as a featured spirit in these unique drinks.

The bar's Nitrogen Sipsmith Martini features Sipsmith London Dry Gin, Boissiere Extra Dry Vermouth, filtered water, and a bit of fresh lemon oil. "Ingredients are combined in a small Cornelius keg, pressurized with nitrogen using a modified lid with a diffusion stone, and then dispensed from a stout faucet," Burroughs explains. The cocktail was inspired in part by a dinner he attended, where cocktail historian and Sipsmith's own Master Distiller Jared Brown demonstrated making thrown cocktails.

Burroughs says he's seen the "overall perception of gin changing for the better" in his home city. "I think Sipsmith strikes a nice balance because its profile is easy enough for a newcomer to gin to wrap their head around, but it's also exceptionally well made and speaks to seasoned gin lovers as well," he adds. "Being able to serve traditionally stirred cocktails in this manner really opens the door for us to elevate the tap cocktail experience."

In Seattle, WA, Myles Burroughs serves as Beverage Director at Queen City, a bar that's part of The Derschang Group.

SHOW AND TELL

A CAST FULL OF CHARACTER

DISSECTING THE
DECONSTRUCTING SPIRITS
SEMINAR AT SOMMCON
SAN DIEGO



**BY JESSIE BIRSCHBACH
PHOTOS BY JAMES TRAN**

At SommCon 2018 in San Diego last fall, Rachel Burkons, *The Tasting Panel's* crackerjack Business Development Director, set the pace for the event's sole spirits seminar by quickly introducing the panel. Having attended my fair share of typically wine-based discussions as a seasoned symposium attendee, I immediately took note of the seminar's presenters during Burkons' swift, enthusiastic opening.

The experts on the Deconstructing Spirits panel consisted of a colorful cast of characters. Not that winemakers are boring—quite the contrary—but, generally speaking, they tend to be a tad more reserved, especially compared to this particular collection of larger-than-life master distillers and owners who were chomping at the bit to share their respective brands with the audience.

Once my palate calibrated to the welcomed sting of a spirit on the tip of my tongue at 10 a.m. and my remaining senses took in the panel's vibrant personalities, I could feel this was going to be a memorable conference.



Karthik Sudhir, creator/owner of Ron Izalco Rum, is a former engineer who traded coding for distilling.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RON AND RUM

No, the rum Ron Izalco is not named after Central America's most interesting man. In fact, it may emulate the most interesting man from India. According to Karthik Sudhir, the brand's owner, "rum can be called 'ron'" depending on its origin. "Ron comes from Latin American countries, and like rum, which comes from English colonies, is made with molasses," Sudhir explained. "Rhum or rhum agricole is made from pure sugarcane and comes from French colonies. It's estimated that 97 percent of the world's rum is made with molasses."

What the charming and enthusiastic owner of Ron Izalco did not mention, however, is that the "ron" style tends to offer a slightly lighter and gentler flavor profile. But perhaps he let his rum speak for itself: Whether it's a result of the spirit's origins, the high quality of its molasses, or its time spent aging in charred ex-bourbon barrels, the outcome is a honeyed, stone-fruited ron that lives up to its smooth typicity with a long, extended finish.

Currently available in France and the U.K., Ron Izalco will soon debut in Denmark, Germany, and the United States.

MORE RON IZALCO TAKEAWAYS

- Aged for ten straight years, the spirit consists of a blend of the finest rums from Central America.
- Inspired by the Izalco volcano, the name Izalco is dedicated to Central America, primarily the region's volcanic black soil and sugarcane. To read more about the volcano, visit izalcorum.com/volcan-izalco.



Rachel Burkons, Business Development Director for *The Tasting Panel*, introduces the Deconstructing Spirits panel at SommCon San Diego.

A WORTHY CHALLENGE

Elegantly dressed British expat Ginny Sweeney, owner of Ginny's Gin, was the next presenter to graciously address the seminar attendees. "Whence I hail, gin is mother's milk," she quipped. "In fact, it was my mother who introduced me to her favorite tippie, the Gin & Tonic, and I've been drinking them ever since for decades now."

I suspect, though, that the gin Sweeney's mother introduced her to was quite different from her thoughtfully made brand. Over the course of seven years, it took five winemakers, some foraging in the Sierras, and a large sampling of botanicals from various suppliers to develop an ideal ratio of ingredients mutually agreed upon by the Ginny's Gin team.



Ginny Sweeney, owner of Ginny's Gin, displays her grape- and grain-based spirit during the seminar.

During this meticulous process, they also decided to use grain distillate in addition to grape distillate, which they started out with; this decision required further adjustment to reach the desired end product.

As if this wasn't enough, they also crack their juniper, grains of paradise, and coriander in-house for optimum extraction of flavor. "This is a true labor of love," said Sweeney before raising an eyebrow. "Or, a pain in the arse, to be honest with you, because juniper is very resinous and we only have a very small mill, so it gets clogged frequently!"

Gin connoisseurs will agree it's worth it, however, as the resulting spirit is appealingly balanced just slightly to the botanical side—yet not overly so, which is too often the case with recent releases in this category. Sweeney suggests enjoying it in a "Ginny & Tonic," which is simply a very strong version of the classic cocktail. (A British accent will likely ensue.)

MORE GINNY'S GIN TAKEAWAYS

- During production, cracked juniper and coriander macerate for 24 hours in the grape spirits before the essence of lemongrass, lemon peel, orris root, angelica root, licorice root, sage, cubeb berries, and grains of paradise are extracted with a gentle vapor infusion. Then, with a final distillation, the grain spirits are married with the botanical concentrate.

BUILDING SPIRITED HOMES

Likely the most modest character on the panel, Sean Fagan, Master Distiller for Sombra Mezcal, was also the biggest do-gooder. The seasoned professional began by addressing how drastically the mezcal industry has grown. "When we first started out, nobody wanted to try it. They'd say 'thank you very much' and walk away," he said. "Now it's become quite a good industry to be in."

Following a review of the distillation process and Fagan's humble claim that his mezcal is "much simpler than all of these complex spirits" produced by other members of the panel, the most striking aspect of Fagan's approach to his role arose: his stewardship of the land and people of Oaxaca. According to the Master Distiller, his biggest reasons for producing

mezcal are to create an award-winning spirit—herbal and slightly smoky with hints of mango and green pineapple—and to build adobe bricks made from waste created during the distillation process.



Sean Fagan, Master Distiller for Sombra Mezcal, grows roughly half of the agave used in his mezcal.

"There are indigenous people that have nothing left [as a result of recent earthquakes in the region] and we replace their vacant land with an adobe [house] made from the byproducts of our mezcal," Fagan says. "We've built 20 houses so far, so it's kind of a funny balance—there's the mezcal on the one end and the adobes on the other. Someone asked me why I make mezcal and I jokingly said, 'Well, at this point, it's for adobes.'"

MORE SOMBRA TAKEAWAYS

- Sombra grows roughly 50 percent of the agave sourced for its mezcal, planting more than 50,000 agaves annually.
- Only certified-sustainable firewood sourced from black Encino trees is used during the roasting process.
- The brand employs solar power and uses a mechanical tahona (instead of a donkey) to crush the agave. Copper stills are used during the fermentation process, which utilizes only native yeast.

“THE ULTIMATE MOST DECADENT AND INSANE LIQUID”

Jean-Charles Boisset, owner of JCB Spirits, proudly displays his JCB Truffle Vodka.



Seventeen years ago, Jean-Charles Boisset set out to make a distillate from what he calls “the elixir of God.” Perhaps his Burgundian background becomes obvious once one learns he was referring to Burgundy with this ambitious description. “The goal is for it to really feel like a wine,” Boisset said of his JCB Spirits collection. “I’ve always had a complex because I really only drink wine or bubbles—hardly ever spirits. I find spirits in general to be too alcoholic and the mouthfeel to be very aggressive.”



Jean-Charles Boisset leads the seminar attendees in a Burgundian song.

Fortunately, Boisset’s “complex” paved the way for JCB Truffle Vodka, an umami-kissed and incredibly pure vodka that unfolds exquisitely on the middle of the palate, gaining complexity as it rests. In Boisset’s words, it’s “the ultimate most decadent and insane liquid you’ve ever tasted.” He playfully suggested featuring the JCB Truffle Vodka in a French 69, a hedonistic version of the classic French 75 cocktail, but something tells me he was in fact quite serious.

MORE JCB SPIRITS TRUFFLE VODKA TAKEAWAYS

- JCB Spirits sources its black truffles from Périgord, France.
- The Burgundian Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are fermented separately into wine and aged for six months in neutral oak barrels before being blended and distilled seven times.
- Only 4,000 bottles were made.
- The vodka is infused with black truffles to produce a perfectly subtle umami experience in the glass.

“ALL RYE, ALL RYE, ALL RYE”

Usually when presenting a wine or spirit, a bit of history helps provide context. However, in the case of Sagamore Spirit, history—particularly Maryland’s history—is at the very core of the brand. Before Prohibition, Maryland was the top whiskey-producing state, and according to Key Account Manager Brian

Ponzi, it was one of the few producing rye whiskey on a substantial level during the 1700s. In 1912, roughly 5.6 million gallons of whiskey were sold in Maryland, but the spirit’s sweeter, approachable style differed from the spicier rye made in Pennsylvania at the time. Once Prohibition hit, Maryland pressed on in producing its signature rye, which is also why it’s referred to as the “Free State” today. Its status dropped after World War II, however, as most of Maryland’s distilleries were converted into ethanol manufacturers and Kentucky emerged as the dominant whiskey producer.

In an effort to revitalize the category while remaining true to the signature Maryland style, Sagamore Spirit has made water “the lifeblood” of its products, Ponzi said. The company sources its “natural limestone water” (Maryland rests on a limestone bench) from a spring just 20 miles from the distillery on the Sagamore Farm property.

So closely are rye whiskey and Maryland intertwined that you could say, as Ponzi declared at the start of his presentation in a Matthew McConaughey–esque inflection, they’re “all rye, all rye, all rye.”

MORE SAGAMORE SPIRIT TAKEAWAYS

- Sagamore Spirit is a blend of two distinct rye whiskeys. The first is almost 100% rye grain with malted barley; the second is a barely-legal rye combined with corn and malted barley. Proofed with spring-fed water from Sagamore Farm, the final product is smooth and approachable.
- Penny, Sagamore Spirit’s 45-foot copper still, is tied for the tallest piece of equipment of its kind in the U.S.



Sagamore Spirit Key Account Manager Brian Ponzi.

“NOT JUST TOFFEE, BONFIRE TOFFEE”

Boondocks Master Distiller Dave Scheurich says the first thing people usually ask him about the brand is, “Why the name Boondocks?” The Kentucky native offered a bit of background: “In the old days, most distilleries needed to be near the water source and the grain source, so normally you didn’t build these distilleries in the city; you built them outside of the city, in the boondocks.”

During the seminar, Scheurich presented the Boondocks 8-Year Port Cask Bourbon, an expression he created along with three others after coming out of retirement eight years ago. The sole bourbon tasted that day, it offered a classic caramel character with a nice Port twist reminiscent of berries on the back end.

Scheurich added, “Normally I don’t tell people what to taste, but one time during a tasting a fella said it [reminded him of] ‘toffee, but not just toffee, bonfire toffee.’ I said, ‘Where’d you get that description? You write [about wine] for a livin’?” He said, ‘No, I’m from England,’ and after World War II he’d get together with friends, mix up some butter and sugar, start a bonfire, and cook [the mixture] on a hard piece of metal. He’d let it cool and then snap it up for candy to share. What a beautiful way to remember what a bourbon does: It has caramel brown sugars and a smoothness of butter, and it’s woody and smoky.”



Master Distiller Dave Scheurich came out of retirement to make Boondocks 8-Year Straight Bourbon.

MORE BOONDOCKS 8-YEAR PORT CASK BOURBON TAKEAWAYS

- The mash bill consists of at least 70 percent corn with rye mostly comprising the rest. (Scheurich did not give the exact ratio, as this is a secret recipe.)
- Aged in charred oak barrels for eight years, the spirit finishes in Port casks for roughly five months.

DEBUTING A BRAND-NEW BLEND



Master Distiller David Warter presented both the Germain-Robin Coast Road Alambic Brandy and the Select XO Barrel at the seminar.

There are a lot of things that David Warter, Master Distiller for Germain-Robin, loves about brandy. To start, he said at the seminar, “it’s a spirit that to me has the raw material with the most flavor,” which is why choosing the right grapes and ripeness level is critical to the early stages of the production process. “The trick is capturing the ripeness of the fresh fruit because what distills over is the freshness of the fruit, not the cooked berry and jam flavor,” Warter added.

After a comprehensive introduction of the Mendocino grape varieties used and their respective growers, Warter explored the character that the French Colombard grape, which serves as the base for the Coast Road Alambic Brandy, typically imparts. Notes of orchard fruits like pear and apple were certainly apparent, but what was most surprising was the incredible, silky-smooth mouthfeel, a result of the spirit being distilled on the lees. This perhaps added a tad more creaminess to the predominant apple-caramel flavor.

Warter then presented the richer Select XO Barrel, its darker color indicative of its 70 percent Pinot Noir base, with some lots originating in the 1990s. The payoff in this 20-plus-year-old brandy is its mélange of cherry, leather, and spice.

Both blends debuted at SommCon, and given the reception from the seminar attendees, they’re recipes Germain-Robin will likely keep around for good.

MORE GERMAIN-ROBIN TAKEAWAYS

- Germain-Robin possesses a series of barrels more than 100 years old.
- The company utilizes Charentais copper alembic stills, the same type used to make Cognac.
- All Germain-Robin fruit is sourced from Mendocino. ■■

SOMM REACTION: “THE PANEL REPRESENTED UNIQUE OUTLIERS WITHIN THEIR OWN SPIRITS CATEGORY. FOR SOMMELIERS, WE ARE BOMBARDED WITH BRANDS—MOSTLY WINES. IT TAKES A NOTEWORTHY LINEUP TO GET OUR ATTENTION. THESE SEVEN SPIRITS CERTAINLY WERE IMPRESSIVE AND LOADED WITH CHARACTER. THE PANELISTS THEMSELVES WERE SIMPLY A JOY TO HEAR. EACH WAS ENERGETIC AND ENTHUSIASTIC TO BE SPEAKING AT A ‘WINE CONVENTION.’”

—KENNY DANIELS, CERTIFIED SOMMELIER, SAN DIEGO



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Looking Back at the Class of 2018



In each January-February issue, we take a nostalgic look back over the previous year to signal the top-rated wines and spirits we've seen and tasted. Last year brought a wealth of new spirits to our attention, as well as a chance to revisit some of our favorite classics. Our Yearbook is replete with brands that deserve space on your backbars and retail shelves, especially those that we've spotlighted with superlative profiles—they are truly the class of the class!



CLASS OF 2018 WINES

- 93** Ackerman Family Vineyards 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Coombsville (\$85)
- 94** Acumen 2014 Mountainside Cabernet Sauvignon, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$60)
- 92** Acumen 2014 Mountainside Red, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$45)
- 97** Acumen 2014 PEAK Cabernet Sauvignon, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$150)
- 92** Acumen 2017 Mountainside Sauvignon Blanc, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$30)
- 94** Aesthete 2016 Sauvignon Blanc, Dry Stack Vineyard, Bennett Valley, Sonoma County (\$55)
- 92** Agricola Punica 2016 Montessu, Isola dei Nuraghi IGT, Italy (\$35) KOBRAND
- 93** Altamana 2015 Constanza Vineyard Malbec, Maule, Chile (\$46) KOBRAND
- 92** American Vintage 2015 Red, California (\$35) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 94** Anaba 2015 Turbine Red, Sonoma Valley (\$35)
- 94** Ancient Peaks 2014 Oyster Ridge Cuvée, Santa Margarita Ranch, Paso Robles (\$60)
- 94** Ancient Peaks 2016 Zinfandel, Santa Margarita Ranch, Paso Robles (\$20)
- 95** Angwin Estate 2013 The Kissing Trees, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley (\$70)
- 98** Angwin Estate 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley (\$120)
- 94** Argyle Winery 2015 Nuthouse Chardonnay, Lone Star Vineyard, Eola-Amity Hills, Oregon (\$40)
- 92** Aridus Wine Company 2014 Petite Sirah, Cochise County, Arizona (\$40)
- 94** Badia a Coltibuono 2013 Montebello, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$60) DALLA TERRA
- 94** Baldacci Family Vineyards 2015 Allwin Syrah, Honey B Vineyard, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$45)
- 92** Balletto Vineyards 2016 BCD Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$46)
- 93** Barrymore 2016 Pinot Grigio, Monterey County (\$22) JACKSON FAMILY WINES
- 92** Benessere Vineyards 2016 Black Glass Vineyard Zinfandel, St. Helena (\$42)
- 93** Benziger Family Winery 2016 Reserve Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45) THE WINE GROUP
- 92** Berton Vineyards 2017 Metal Label The Black Shiraz, Limestone Coast, Australia (\$15)
- 92** Black Kite Cellars 2015 River Turn Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley (\$60)
- 94** Black Kite Cellars 2016 Gap's Crown Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$60)
- 93** Black Kite Cellars 2016 Sierra Mar Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County (\$45)
- 92** Black Stallion 2016 Chardonnay, Napa Valley (\$20) DELICATO FAMILY VINEYARDS
- 92** Bodega Chacra 2017 Barda Pinot Noir, Patagonia (\$30) KOBRAND
- 93** Bodega Chacra 2017 Lunita Pinot Noir, Patagonia (\$45) KOBRAND
- 92** Bonny Doon Vineyard 2016 Vin Gris de Cigare Reserve, Central Coast (\$35)
- 95** Brancaia 2012 Ilatraia IGT Rosso Maremma, Toscana, Italy (\$70) BRANCAIA WINERY AND WINES
- 95** Brandlin 2014 Henry's Keep Proprietary Red Wine, Mt. Veeder, Napa Valley (\$110)
- 92** Brassfield Estate 2015 Pinot Gris, High Serenity Ranch, High Valley (\$22)
- 95** Buena Vista Winery 2016 The Sheriff of Buena Vista, Sonoma County (\$40) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 96** Buena Vista Winery 2015 Chateau Buena Vista Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$50) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 96** Buena Vista Winery La Victoire Brut Champagne, France (\$50) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 92** Buglioni 2012 Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOC (\$58) WILSON DANIELS
- 93** Buty 2014 Rediviva of the Stones Rockgarden Estate Red, Walla Walla Valley, Washington (\$60)
- 94** Cadaretta 2015 Southwined Syrah, Walla Walla Valley, Washington (\$60)
- 96** Calabria Family Wines 2014 The Iconic Grand Reserve Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia (\$151)



MOST CONGENIAL

Edna Valley Vineyard 2016 Chardonnay

CENTRAL COAST (\$15)



Although Edna Valley Vineyard produces numerous food-friendly varietal wines found in retailers and restaurants across the U.S., its award-winning Chardonnay remains its mainstay and claim to fame. The winemakers maintain a goal of showcasing their Chardonnay wines as standard-bearers of the brand, building on an approach established by founder Jack Niven.

Edna Valley Vineyards' Chardonnay grapes benefit from the longest growing season in California; the San Luis Obispo location just 5 miles from the Pacific Ocean is characterized by warm sunshine and a constant flow of refreshing breezes. Each year, the winemaking team strives to apply what they've learned about Chardonnay from past vintages to make future expressions of the grape that are both balanced and exceptional.

"Winemaking is the perfect mix of science and creativity, especially at Edna Valley Vineyard, where we are able to work with some truly amazing fruit sources throughout the Central Coast," says Edna Valley Vineyards Winemaker Kamee Knutson. "It's really the greatest reward to craft Edna Valley Vineyard wines and see them enjoyed by wine lovers everywhere."

After tasting more than 75 Chardonnays over the course of the year, the *Tasting Panel* team found the Edna Valley Vineyard 2016 Chardonnay stood out in taste, character, mouthfeel, balance, and all of the other important attributes that differentiate an exceptional Chardonnay from a good one.

Ranked among our "Top Ten Fave Chardonnays Under \$17," this wine will perform brilliantly for retailers and restaurateurs alike by offering outstanding value for customers in this competitive, high-volume segment.

Ginger, chamomile, and savory lemon verbena make a cocktail for the soul and the nose. The palate offers a plethora of flavors—including ripe pineapple, a rare appearance of apricot nectar, and toasty-creamy oak on the finish—with green apples serving to spruce things up. The effect is reminiscent of grandma's summer pies with that little bit of crust firming up on the mid-palate. Ripe pineapple notes are juicy and sweet, but it's the apricot nectar blending seamlessly with subtle hints of toasty oak that separates this entry from the competition. Texture also plays an important role in this wine, which significantly overdelivers with finesse and quality for its price. **94** —*Meridith May, July 2018*

96 Calera 2015 Mt. Harlan de Villiers Vineyard Pinot Noir, Central Coast (\$60) DUCKHORN WINE CO.

92 Campo Alle Comete 2015 DOC Bolgheri Superiore, Italy (\$57) VIAS IMPORTS

94 Cannonball Eleven 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County (\$35)

97 Cardinale 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$275) JACKSON FAMILY WINES

92 Cashmere by Cline 2016 Red Blend, California (\$15) CLINE CELLARS

93 Castello di Amorosa 2017 Rosato Pinot Noir, Morning Dew Ranch, Anderson Valley (\$39) VIAS IMPORTS

93 Castoro Cellars 2015 Reserve Syrah, Whale Rock Vineyard, Paso Robles (\$30)

92 Castoro Cellars 2017 Rosé, Paso Robles (\$20)

93 Cedar + Salmon 2017 Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$19) 3 BADGE BEVERAGE

92 Cellardoor Winery 2013 Grenache/Garnacha, USA (\$22)

93 Chappellet 2016 Chardonnay, Napa Valley (\$35)

92 Château de Pizay 2017 Morgon, Beaujolais, France (\$16) DAVID MILLIGAN SELECTIONS

95 Château La Nerthe 2015, Clos de Beauvenir Vineyard, AOP Châteauneuf-du-Pape, France (\$140) KOBRAND

92 Château La Nerthe 2016 Châteauneuf-du-Pape, France (\$60) KOBRAND

92 Château La Nerthe 2017 Châteauneuf-du-Pape, France (\$60) KOBRAND

92 Château Lascombes 2015 Margaux AOC, France (\$125) ROYAL WINE CORP.

95 Château Minuty 2017 Rose et Or, Côtes de Provence, France (\$92) TREASURY WINE ESTATES

92 Chronology 2015 Red Wine, California (\$25) BOISSET COLLECTION

93 Cline Cellars 2016 Ancient Vines Zinfandel, Contra Costa County (\$15) CLINE CELLARS

97 Clos De La Tech 2012 Domaine du Docteur Rodgers Vineyard Pinot Noir, San Francisco Bay (\$102)

96 Clos Du Val 2014 Three Graces, Hironnelle Vineyard, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley (\$75)

93 Clos Mesorah 2014 Montsant DO, Spain (\$70) ROYAL WINE CORP.

93 Coeur de Terre Vineyard 2017 Rustique Rosé, McMinnville, Oregon (\$21)

92 Contour 2016 Pinot Noir, Mendocino, Monterey, and San Luis Obispo Counties (\$16) M.S. WALKER

94 Cordon 2016 Syrah, White Hawk Vineyard, Santa Barbara (\$32) HOLLYWOOD AND WINE

92 Craggy Range Vineyards 2015 Pinot Noir, Te Muna Road Vineyard, Martinborough, New Zealand (\$45) KOBRAND

95 Croft 2016 Douro, Portugal (\$100) KOBRAND

92 Cusumano 2014 Noa Sicily, Italy (\$60) TERLATO WINE GROUP

95 Cuvaision 2015 Adda Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$50)

95 Cuvaision Estate 2016 Chardonnay, Los Carneros, Napa Valley (\$26)

96 Cuvaision Estate 2016 Pinot Noir, Los Carneros, Napa Valley (\$42)

93 Cuvaision Estate 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Los Carneros, Napa Valley (\$24)

97 Dal Forno Romano 2011 Amarone della Valpolicella DOC (\$400) WILSON DANIELS

99 Dalla Valley Vineyards 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$200)

98 DAOU Estate 2015 Patrimony Cabernet Sauvignon, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$275)

94 David Bruce 2016 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$50) TERLATO WINE GROUP

92 Digression 2017 Côtes de Provence Rosé, France (\$30) BOISSET COLLECTION

93 Diora 2015 La Petite Grace Pinot Noir, Monterey (\$30)

92 Dolin 2012 The Troubadour Red, Malibu Coast (\$45)

93 Domaine Delaporte 2017 Sancerre Chavignol, Loire Valley (\$32) VINEYARD BRANDS

92 Domaine J.A. Ferret 2016 Pouilly-Fuisse, France (\$51)

96 Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Pouilly-Fumé Les Terres Blanches, Loire Valley (\$41) FREDERICK WILDMAN

93 Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Pouilly-Fumé, Loire Valley (\$30) FREDERICK WILDMAN

97 Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Sancerre Le Chêne Marchand, Loire Valley (\$46) FREDERICK WILDMAN

96 Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Sancerre Les Caillottes, Loire Valley (\$41) FREDERICK WILDMAN

92 Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Sancerre Rosé, Loire Valley (\$23) FREDERICK WILDMAN

93 Domaine Pascal Jolivet 2017 Sancerre, Loire Valley (\$29) FREDERICK WILDMAN

MOST PASSIONATE

Tenuta di Biserno



Roughly two decades ago, Marchese Lodovico Antinori reunited with his brother Piero to create not only their first joint venture, but what Lodovico calls his last winemaking project: Tenuta di Biserno, a Super Tuscan estate where Cabernet Franc plays the lead role.

Elder brother Piero, who serves as President of the family business, Marchesi Antinori, created the groundbreaking Super Tuscan Tignanello in the mid-1970s. Lodovico, who is known for creating Super Tuscan Ornellaia in Bolgheri in the 1980s with help from legendary winemaker André Tchelistcheff, also developed iconic Bolgheri Merlot Masseto with assistance from Pomerol-based Michel Rolland.



Marchese Lodovico Antinori says Tenuta di Biserno is “a playground for expression.”

after recognizing that the geography and geology were markedly different from Ornellaia’s much hillier and stonier terrain, he concluded that he would have to utilize the site for a separate project. With financial help from Piero, Ludovico began to breathe new life into the Biserno estate while helping it reach its full potential.

Planted between 2001 and 2005, Tenuta di Biserno has exceeded all expectations, making a mark on wine history as influential as the brothers’ previous Super Tuscan creations. Lodovico—who refers to the estate and its vineyards as “a playground for expression”—planted principally Cabernet Franc followed by Merlot, some Cabernet Sauvignon, and surprisingly high proportions of Petit Verdot. The heart of the estate, where Rolland serves as consulting winemaker, is the eponymous Vigna Lodovico vineyard, which offers 6 hectares (15 acres) of spectacular terroir.

A Latin inscription on the label of the flagship Lodovico wine sums up this astounding project from two master vintners: *LUDOVICUS ET PETRUS DE ANTENORIBUS MAGNO CUM STUDIO FECERUNT*, meaning “Lodovico and Piero Antinori made this with great care.”



Tenuta di Biserno 2015 Il Pino di Biserno (\$75) Dense, black-fruited, and inky, this wine is muscular and chewy with a satin soul. The plum notes go preternaturally sweet and juicy as violets bloom mid-palate. **96**—*M.M.*



Tenuta di Biserno 2012 Biserno, Toscana IGT (\$175) Glossy and lush; supple, elegant, and rich with hints of earth and spice. Seamless and generous, it shows great finesse. **97**—*Anthony Dias Blue*

Tenuta di Biserno 2013 Biserno (\$180) This wine shows great depth and balance with ripe black fruit overlaid with spiced cedar. **96**—*M.M.*



Tenuta di Biserno 2013 Lodovico (\$425) Only available in limited quantities, with the Cab Franc and Petit Verdot hailing from a distinct parcel with a singular expression called Vigna Lodovico. Bold, dusty tannins surround notes of graphite and textural plushness. The blackberries are ripe and marked by iron, cherry cedar, espresso bean, and lavender. The liquid’s delivery is luxurious across the palate. **100**—*M.M.*

The 49-hectare (121-acre) Biserno estate in coastal Tuscany borders the historic village of Bolgheri and features beautiful views toward the Tyrrhenian Sea.

BEST HOMETOWN HERO

Gehricke Wines

While Gehricke Wines proprietor August Sebastiani partially attributes the success of the winery's Sonoma-focused 2016 releases to his lifelong reverence for the region, he's also quick to credit the talents of veteran winemaker Alex Beloz, whose knowledge of Sonoma varieties helps elevate the family-owned label to the next level.

"I remember the excitement of discovery I experienced thoroughly studying our small town, the outskirts, and the dusty roads that led to forgotten vineyards and properties when I was young," Sebastiani, a fourth-generation vintner, explains. "We're vested in finding fruit from the finest vineyards located in the best winegrowing subregions throughout Sonoma County. When crafting small-lot wines made from these special varietals, we do so with minimal intervention so one can enjoy the truest expressions of each appellation and terroir."



Gehricke 2016 Zinfandel, Russian River Valley (\$30) A vibrant blend of old-vine Zinfandel and a whisper (5%) of Petite Sirah grown in Ponzo Vineyard's iron-rich soils. After 17 months of aging in French oak, the final, well-structured wine displays the best of Zinfandel's fruity and jammy sensibilities balanced by dark fruit flavors and density imparted by the Petite Sirah. A nose of berries and brambles leads the way as white pepper and cinnamon serve as seasoning for a maple-cedar core. Plum and mulberry are joyfully fruity with an addition of earthy tonality. **92** —*M.M., December 2018*

Gehricke 2016 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$32) The nose opens with the cheerful scents of lemon meringue, lime oil, floral jasmine, and tuberose. As the 100% Chardonnay wine, aged for eight months in French oak, rests in the glass, it transitions into a more tropical expression with pineapple and mango notes. This white draws you in with its intensely sensual aromas of lemon or lime tart, jasmine, and chamomile. Mouth-filling flavors then enter the light as this Chard shines with notes of pineapple upside-down cake, toffee, pear, and Rainier cherries. The beautiful acidity balances it all out: This is the best yet for Gehricke. **95** —*M.M., April 2018*

Gehricke 2015 Pinot Noir, Los Carneros, Sonoma County (\$32) This marvelous, small-production 100% Pinot Noir wine's deep garnet hue is enhanced by seductive fragrances of blood orange, red plums, and rhubarb. With time, aromas of cherry pie laced with vanilla, cinnamon, and nutmeg come forth. While the first flavors on the palate are savory and spicy hints of clove and nutmeg, the palate ultimately blossoms with ripe plum flavors and a dried-cranberry center. Twenty months of aging in French oak shows through the nose and palate, rounding it out and caressing with vanilla bean and cinnamon stick. Cherry-cobbler notes accent a savory mid-palate alongside a ringing of clove-scented orange peel. **93** —*M.M., January 2019*

- 97** **Domaine Zind-Humbrecht 2016 Pinot Gris Clos Windsbuhl, Alsace, France (\$80)** KOBRAND
- 98** **Domaine Zind-Humbrecht 2016 Riesling Grand Cru Rangen de Thann Clos Saint Urbain, Alsace, France (\$120)** KOBRAND
- 98** **Dominus Estate 2014 Napanook, Napa Valley (\$219)** MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES
- 93** **Doña Paula 2017 Los Cardos Chardonnay, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14)** TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES
- 92** **Doña Paula 2017 Los Cardos Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14)** TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES
- 93** **Doña Paula 2017 Smoked Red Blend, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$19)** TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES
- 92** **Doña Paula 2018 Rosé of Malbec, Lujan de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14)** TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES
- 92** **Dr. Loosen 2016 Riesling Spätlese, Ürziger Würzgarten Vineyard, Mosel (\$34)**
- 97** **Duckhorn Vineyards 2014 The Discussion Red Wine, Napa Valley (\$140)** DUCKHORN WINE CO.
- 93** **Dutton Estate Winery 2016 Karmen Isabella Pinot Noir, Dutton Ranch, Russian River Valley (\$25)**
- 92** **Dutton Estate Winery 2016 Kylie's Cuvée Sauvignon Blanc, Dutton Ranch, Russian River Valley (\$25)**
- 93** **Echo Bay 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$18)** TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES
- 93** **Eden Rift Vineyards 2016 Estate Pinot Noir, Cienega Valley, Monterey County (\$48)**
- 94** **Edna Valley Vineyard 2016 Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$15)** E. & J. GALLO
- 95** **Eighty Four 2014 Malbec, Napa Valley (\$48)**
- 93** **Elk Cove Vineyards 2016 Pinot Noir, Five Mountain Vineyard, Chehalem Mountains AVA (\$60)**
- 93** **Estancia Vineyards Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$12)** CONSTELLATION BRANDS
- 94** **Evoluna 2015 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$30)**
- 92** **Farmhouse 2017 White, California (\$13)**
- 92** **Fel Wines 2016 Chardonnay, Anderson Valley (\$32)**
- 92** **Fetzer 2016 Anniversary Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$13)**
- 92** **Fetzer 2016 Flatbed Red, California (\$10)**
- 96** **Flora Springs 2014 St. Helena Rennie Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$150)**
- 94** **Flora Springs 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Hillside Reserve Vineyard, Rutherford (\$150)**
- 92** **Flora Springs 2015 Merlot, Napa Valley (\$30)**
- 93** **Flora Springs 2015 Trilogy, Napa Valley (\$85)**
- 93** **Foley Estates 2014 Barrel Select Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$60)** FOLEY ESTATES
- 92** **Foley Johnson 2013 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford (\$75)**
- 97** **Fonseca 2016 Vintage Port Douro, Portugal (\$120)** KOBRAND
- 92** **Fort Ross Vineyard 2015 Sea Slopes Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$35)**
- 92** **Four Graces 2016 Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley (\$20)**
- 92** **Francis Ford Coppola 2014 Syrah, Nimble Vineyards, Dry Creek Valley (\$40)**
- 95** **Francis Ford Coppola 2015 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Stuhlmuller Vineyard, Alexander Valley (\$62)**
- 92** **Francis Ford Coppola 2016 Reserve Pinot Noir, Dutton Ranch, Russian River Valley (\$45)**
- 93** **Franciscan 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$23)** CONSTELLATION BRANDS
- 93** **Frankland Estate 2014 Olmo's Reward Red, Frankland River, Australia (\$55)** QUINTESSENTIAL
- 92** **Frankland Estate 2015 Shiraz, Frankland River, Australia (\$40)** QUINTESSENTIAL
- 93** **Gamba Vineyards and Winery 2015 Old Vine Zinfandel, Russian River Valley (\$45)**
- 93** **Gamba Vineyards and Winery 2016 Old Vine Zinfandel, Russian River Valley (\$45)**
- 93** **Gary Farrell 2016 Russian River Selection Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)**
- 93** **Gehricke 2014 Los Carneros Pinot Noir, Sonoma County (\$39)** 3 BADGE BEVERAGE
- 93** **Gehricke 2015 Pinot Noir, Los Carneros, Sonoma County (\$32)** 3 BADGE BEVERAGE
- 95** **Gehricke 2016 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$32)** 3 BADGE BEVERAGE
- 92** **Gehricke 2016 Zinfandel, Russian River Valley (\$30)** 3 BADGE BEVERAGE

- 92** Gnarly Head 1924 Limited Edition Double Black Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi (\$15) DELICATO FAMILY VINEYARDS
- 92** Gnarly Head 2016 Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$15) DELICATO FAMILY VINEYARDS
- 95** Goldeneye 2015 Pinot Noir, The Narrows Vineyard, Anderson Valley (\$85)
- 94** Goldschmidt Vineyards 2014 Game Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$89)
- 94** Goldschmidt Vineyards 2014 Yoeman Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$75)
- 94** Gratus Vineyards 2014 Estate Petite Sirah, Napa Valley (\$45)
- 95** Guarachi Family Wines 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon, Beckstoffer Las Piedras Heritage Single Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$250) GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS
- 98** Guarachi Family Wines 2014 Beckstoffer Las Piedras Heritage Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$250) GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS
- 97** Guarachi Family Wines 2015 Sun Chase Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$75) GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS
- 96** Guarachi Family Wines 2016 Sun Chase Vineyard Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$50) GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS
- 98** Guarachi Family Wines 2015 Sun Chase Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$75) GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS
- 99** Guarachi Family Wines 2016 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS
- 93** Hanna Winery 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$38) TERLATO WINE GROUP
- 95** Hanna Winery 2015 Saint Macaire, Red Ranch, Alexander Valley (\$68) TERLATO WINE GROUP
- 93** Hawk & Horse 2014 Petite Sirah, Red Hills, Lake County (\$65)
- 93** Henriot Blanc de Blancs Champagne NV, France (\$59)
- 92** Herzog Lineage 2016 Chardonnay, Clarksburg (\$20) ROYAL WINE CORPORATION
- 93** Herzog Lineage 2016 Choreograph, Clarksburg (\$20) ROYAL WINE CORPORATION
- 92** Herzog Lineage 2016 Pinot Noir, Clarksburg (\$20) ROYAL WINE CORPORATION
- 92** Herzog Lineage 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Lake County (\$20) ROYAL WINE CORPORATION
- 93** Hickinbotham 2014 The Revivalist Merlot, Clarendon, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$75) JACKSON FAMILY WINES
- 95** High Dive 2014 Red Blend, Napa Valley (\$95)
- 95** High Dive 2015 Red Blend, Napa Valley (\$95)
- 93** Highlands Forty One 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$20)
- 92** Hunt & Ryde Winery 2014 Trophy Red Wine, Rockpile AVA Vineyard, Sonoma County (\$75)
- 92** Ilaria 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$65)
- 92** Ilaria 2014 Malbec, Napa Valley (\$40)
- 93** Inama Vigneti di Foscarino 2015 Soave Classico, Veneto, Italy (\$25) DALLA TERRA
- 98** J. Lohr 2015 Signature Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$100)
- 94** J. Lohr Cuvée PAU Red Blend, Paso Robles (\$50)
- 94** J. McClelland Cellars 2013 Malbec, Oak Knoll District, Napa Valley (\$45)
- 92** J. Street Wines 2016 XIX Chardonnay, California (\$16)
- 93** JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset No. 69 Brut Crémant de Bourgogne, France (\$25) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 93** Jordan 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$56)
- 92** Kangarilla Road 2016 The Devil's Whiskers Shiraz, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$40) M IMPORTS
- 93** Kay Brothers Amery Vineyard 2014 Shiraz, Amery Block 6, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$120) QUINTESSENTIAL
- 92** Kelly Fleming 2014 Big Pour Cabernet, Napa Valley (\$90) BW WINE GROUP
- 93** Kettmeir 2017 Müller-Thurgau, Alto Adige-Südtirol, Italy (\$22)
- 93** Kettmeir 2017 Pinot Blanc, Alto Adige-Südtirol, Italy (\$22)
- 92** Kettmeir 2017 Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige-Südtirol, Italy (\$22)
- 93** Klinker Brick Winery 2015 Old Ghost Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi (\$37)
- 94** Ladera Vineyards 2015 Chardonnay, Pillow Road Vineyard, Russian River Valley (\$50)
- 93** Landmark Vineyards 2015 Kosich Pinot Noir, Carneros (\$55)
- 93** Lang & Reed 2016 Chenin Blanc, Napa Valley (\$27)
- 95** Lang & Reed 2017 Chenin Blanc, Napa Valley (\$27)
- 94** Le Duc Noir 2016 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$30) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 95** Ledson 2015 Estate Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, Alexander Valley (\$110)

THE HOMECOMING QUEEN & COURT

Merry Edwards Winery

Although Merry Edwards, one of California's first female winemakers, has been in the game for more than 45 harvests—20 of which she's spent at her namesake winery—she shows no signs of slowing down. In recent years, she's experienced national prominence after being inducted into the Culinary Institute of America's Vintners Hall of Fame and receiving the James Beard Award for Best Wine, Beer or Spirits Professional in the United States.

At the beginning of the 2018 harvest, Edwards named her Associate Winemaker, Heidi von der Mehden, as the winery's new Chief Winemaker. Edwards, who will remain CEO/CFO of the winery, is sharing her ambitious winemaking approach with the next generation as she continues capturing selective wine drinkers' interest with her regal expressions of Sonoma varieties and terroir.

"Every day, Heidi shows me more of her own attention to detail, passion for the craft of winegrowing, and clear-cut dedication and respect for our brand," Edwards says. "Even with what we've accomplished, we're not resting on our laurels and instead are focused on refining our process of growing and producing the finest wines possible."



Merry Edwards Winery 2016 Olivet Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$68) A complex, showy wine with exciting aromas of baked cherry pie, dark blackberry jam, and cherry cordial. Profuse scents of violet, lavender, and red roses add elegance while lush hints of olive tapenade, cola, black pepper, and rich French oak complete the portrait. With its Russian River Valley acidity, it's a lovely, food-friendly expression of this famed vineyard that's deep with abundant minerals and spices and ripe with soft tannins and great depth. **94** —A.D.B., August 2018



Merry Edwards 2015 Olivet Lane Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$66) This Chardonnay's heady perfume of baked apples and crème brûlée is mouthwatering and enticing, thanks to extended time on the lees and biweekly stirring. This complements the underlying, expansive spectrum of orchard fruits: white peach, nectarine, Golden Delicious apple, and Anjou pear. It is also highly textural, with a voluptuous palate that's rich with toasty vanilla oak and a bright core of juicy acidity. Complex, deep, and memorable as well as very long and precise. **94** —A.D.B., January 2019



Merry Edwards 2016 Vintage 20 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$120) This special anniversary-edition Pinot Noir offers a one-of-a-kind, kaleidoscopic personality shaped by the melding of five vineyards, eight clones, and 12 lots. The effort pays off with a bouquet of ripening blackberry fields, berry compote, and warm plum clafoutis. The palate, smooth and round on the entry, is powerful yet supple with a balanced acid profile and lush notes of dried fig, sarsaparilla, and a lingering toastiness. It culminates in a smooth and juicy finish with elegant cherry and silky texture. **95** —A.D.B., August 2018

MOST WELL-TRAVELED

Talbott Vineyards

For more than three decades, Talbott Vineyards has brought out the best in Monterey County's storied coastal terroir through its estate-grown Burgundian varieties. Its distinctive melding of Old World and New World winemaking traditions and techniques has made it one of the most formidable California wineries on an international scale.



Talbott Vineyards' wines are cultivated with carefully selected grapes from its estate-owned and -operated vineyards, included the renowned Sleepy Hollow Vineyard. For the 2016 Kali Hart releases, the fruit was transformed into unforgettable Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines under the direction of Head Winemaker David Coventry, who has boosted Talbott's already solid reputation by maximizing the impact of terroir and climate in the wines he crafts.

The moderate coastal terroir of Monterey brings a special twist to wines made here: one distinctive to the Central Coast and one Talbott has committed to honor in the glass. Close proximity to the cold waters and strong winds of Monterey Bay creates one of the coolest climates and, by extension, one of the longest growing seasons in California.

Talbott Vineyards 2016 Kali Hart Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$23)

The nuances of the grapes guide the way with minimal influence, resulting in a bright and luscious wine with aromas of vanilla and brioche that give way to notes of mandarin orange, pineapple, and melon in an inviting palate. Following the dense tropical flavors, a soft, wonderfully clean finish arrives with a touch of minerality and hard spice notes. Aging for nine months in 70% stainless steel tanks and 30% French oak barrels results in a pure mouthfeel that's surprisingly lean. While the aging process and stirring give it richness, the toasty oak adds depth. The texture itself, meanwhile, weaves a mineral edge with green-apple tartness and MacIntosh roundness. **92** —*M.M., April 2018*

Talbott Vineyards 2016 Kali Hart Pinot Noir, Monterey County (\$26)

This wine gets your attention with its beautiful, deep ruby color and bright, fruity aromas of cranberry, currant, and plum with hints of vanilla. On the heels of the earthy, ripe, and savory nose, the flavors lead to an inner core of Old World acidity. Strawberry rhubarb fills the mouth with spiced accents of cinnamon as dark chocolate emerges slowly. Crisp red fruit persists on the palate—where it's accentuated by soft, smooth tannins—and eventually streamlines the finish. **92** —*M.M., April 2018*

- 96** Levendi 2015 Sweetwater Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$70)
- 96** Levendi 2015 Symphonia Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$60)
- 94** Lloyd by Robert Lloyd 2015 Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$50)
- 94** Locations E. Spanish Red Wine, Spain (\$20) E. & J. GALLO
- 92** Louis M. Martini 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County (\$20)
- 92** Loveblock 2016 Pinot Gris, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$23) TERLATO WINE GROUP
- 95** LVE 2015 Red, Napa Valley (\$50) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 93** LVE 2017 Côtes de Provence Rosé, France (\$25) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 95** Lyeth Estate 2016 Red, Sonoma County (\$20) BOISSET COLLECTION
- 93** MacLaren 2014 Heather Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)
- 92** MacLaren 2017 Lee's Sauvignon Blanc, Roger's Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County (\$30)
- 92** Maddalena 2016 Pinot Grigio, Monterey (\$18)
- 92** Maddalena 2016 Zinfandel, Paso Robles (N/A)
- 97** Maison Louis Jadot 2015 Chapelle-Chambertin Grand Cru, Burgundy (\$285) KOBAND
- 95** Malene Wines 2017 Mourvèdre Rosé, Camp 4 Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$35)
- 93** Marqués de Cáceres 2014 Rioja DOC, Spain (\$31) VINEYARD BRANDS
- 92** Maryhill 2014 Malbec, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$24)
- 96** Masi 2011 Champolongo di Torbe Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOC, Italy (\$160) KOBAND
- 93** Masi 2012 Costasera Riserva Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOC, Italy (\$80) KOBAND
- 93** Masi 2013 Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DCG, Italy (\$65) KOBAND
- 92** Matchbook 2016 Old Head Chardonnay, Dunnigan Hills, Yolo County, California (\$15)
- 93** Maximin Grünhäuser 2016 Riesling Spätlese Abtsberg, Mosel, Germany (\$46) LOOSEN BROS.
- 93** Maximin Grünhäuser 2016 Riesling Superior Abtsberg, Mosel, Germany (\$64) LOOSEN BROS.
- 94** Mayacamus 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Mt. Veeder, Napa Valley (\$125)
- 95** Meiomi 2016 Reserve Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$50) CONSTELLATION BRANDS
- 92** Meiomi 2017 Pinot Noir, California (\$25) CONSTELLATION BRANDS
- 92** Ménage à Trois 2016 Lavish Merlot, California (\$14)
- 93** Merry Edwards 2014 Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley (\$48)
- 94** Merry Edwards 2016 Olivet Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$68)
- 94** Metz Road 2015 Riverview Vineyard Pinot Noir, Monterey (\$35)
- 92** Metzker Family Estates 2015 Laurent Fort Ross Vineyard Pinot Noir, Fort Ross-Seaview AVA, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$55)
- 93** Milbrandt Vineyards 2015 Clifton Hill Cabernet Sauvignon, Wahluke Slope, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$42)
- 93** Miner Family Vineyards 2013 The Oracle Red, Napa Valley (\$100)
- 93** Mira Winery 2014 Merlot, Hyde Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$65)
- 94** Monticello Vineyards 2014 Corley Family Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$90)
- 93** Morgan 2016 Double L Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$64)
- 94** Morgan Winery 2015 Syrah, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$22)
- 92** Moss Roxx Vineyards 2015 Ancient Vine Reserve Zinfandel, Lodi (\$26)
- 92** Mulderbosch 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Western Cape, South Africa (\$17) TERROIR SELECTIONS
- 93** Nobilo Icon 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$22) CONSTELLATION BRANDS
- 93** Noble Vines 2016 446 Chardonnay, San Bernabe Vineyard, Monterey County (\$13) DELICATO FAMILY VINEYARDS
- 92** Nobles Vines 2015 337 Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi (\$15) DELICATO FAMILY VINEYARDS
- 94** Opaque 2015 Darkness Red Blend, Paso Robles (\$30) RIBOLI FAMILY WINE ESTATES
- 95** Palazzo 2013 Right Bank Reserve Red, Napa Valley (\$90)
- 94** Palazzo 2014 Reserve Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley (\$115)
- 95** Palazzo 2015 Left Bank Red Cuvée, Napa Valley (\$50)
- 93** Pamplin Family Winery 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley (\$50)
- 93** Panther Creek Cellars 2016 Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley (\$20)
- 92** Parker Station 2017 Pinot Noir, 67% Monterey County/17% SLO County/16% Santa Barbara County (\$15)

- 96 Patel 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$175)**
- 92 Pedroncelli Winery 2016 Zinfandel, Bushnell Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley (\$26)**
- 94 Pellet Estate 2014 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, St. Helena (\$95)**
- 93 Pellet Estate 2015 Henry's Reserve Red, St. Helena (\$125)**
- 95 Pellet Estate 2015 Sunchase Vineyard Chardonnay, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$68)**
- 95 Pellet Estate 2016 Un-Oaked Sunchase Vineyard Chardonnay, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$42)**
- 95 Penner-Ash Wine Cellars 2015 Pas de Nom Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$125) JACKSON FAMILY WINES**
- 92 Perfusion Vineyard 2016 Pinot Noir, San Francisco Bay AVA (\$36)**
- 93 Perfusion Vineyard 2014 Pinot Noir, San Francisco Bay AVA (\$40)**
- 92 Peter Yealands 2016 Pinot Noir, New Zealand (\$19) PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL**
- 92 Peter Yealands 2016 Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand (\$15) PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL**
- 92 Peter Yealands 2017 Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$19) PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL**
- 92 Peter Yealands 2017 Pinot Gris, New Zealand (\$15) PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL**
- 92 Peter Yealands 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$15) PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL**
- 92 Pike Road Wines 2016 Pinot Noir, Fairsing Vineyard, Yamhill-Carlton (\$50)**
- 92 Pike Road Wines 2016 Pinot Noir, Fairsing Vineyard, Yamhill-Carlton (\$50)**
- 92 Piña Napa Valley 2014 Cahoots Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$49)**
- 95 Ponzi Vineyards 2015 Abetina Vineyard Pinot Noir, Chehalem Mountains AVA, Oregon (\$105)**
- 93 Ponzi Vineyards 2015 Abetina Vineyard Pinot Noir, Chehalem Mountains AVA, Oregon (\$105) VINTUS**
- 95 Ponzi Vineyards 2015 Avellana Vineyard Chardonnay, Chehalem Mountains AVA, Oregon (\$63) VINTUS**
- 92 Ponzi Vineyards 2015 Classico Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$43) VINTUS**
- 92 Ponzi Vineyards 2015 Reserve Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$65) VINTUS**
- 93 Provenance Vineyards 2016 Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$35) TREASURY WINE ESTATES**
- 93 Qupé 2016 Y Block Chardonnay, Santa Barbara County (\$22)**
- 93 Ravenswood 2015 Big River Zinfandel, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$39) CONSTELLATION WINE USA**
- 94 Ravenswood 2015 Old Hill Zinfandel, Sonoma Valley (\$60) CONSTELLATION WINE USA**
- 94 Résonance 2015 Pinot Noir, Yamhill-Carlton (\$70) KOBRAND**
- 93 Robert Hall 2016 Cavern Select G.S.M., Paso Robles (\$45)**
- 92 Robert John Vineyards 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$90)**
- 93 Robert Mondavi Winery 2014 Merlot, Napa Valley (25) CONSTELLATION BRANDS**
- 93 Robert Mondavi Winery 2015 Fume Blanc, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$40) CONSTELLATION BRANDS**
- 92 Robert Mondavi Winery 2015 Maestro Premium Red Blend, Napa Valley (\$40) CONSTELLATION BRANDS**
- 98 Robert Mondavi Winery 2015 The Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, To Kalon Vineyard, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$175) CONSTELLATION BRANDS**
- 92 Rock Wren 2013 Solano Syrah, Green Valley (\$25)**
- 95 Rodney Strong Vineyards 2014 Brothers Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$75)**
- 92 Rodney Strong Vineyards 2016 Upshot Red Blend, Sonoma County (\$28)**
- 92 Rusack Vineyards 2014 Pinot Noir, Solomon Hills Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley (\$48)**
- 92 Ryan Patrick 2015 Elephant Mountain Vineyard Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Rattlesnake Hills, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$45)**
- 93 Ryan Patrick 2015 Red Heaven Reserve Syrah, Red Mountain AVA, Washington (\$35)**
- 94 San Simeon 2014 Estate Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$30) RIBOLI FAMILY WINE ESTATES**
- 98 San Simeon 2014 Stormwatch Estate Reserve Red, Paso Robles (\$70) RIBOLI FAMILY WINE ESTATES**
- 93 San Simeon 2015 Estate Reserve Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$18) RIBOLI FAMILY WINE ESTATES**
- 92 San Simeon 2017 Grenache Rosé, Stefano Vineyard, Paso Robles (\$18) RIBOLI FAMILY WINE ESTATES**
- 93 San Simeon 2017 Pinot Noir, Monterey County (\$24) RIBOLI FAMILY WINE ESTATES**

ECO-FRIENDLIEST

Yealands Family Wines

Yealands Family Wines, the New Zealand winery founded in 2008 by Peter Yealands, talks the talk and walks the walk when it comes to its goal of becoming the most sustainable wine producer in the world. The Yealands estate, located in the famed Marlborough region, is certified carbon-neutral, with its solar panels generating enough kilowatts per year to power 86 households. Babydoll sheep, meanwhile, help control grass levels in the vineyards, which are planted with wildflowers as a natural form of pest control.

It doesn't hurt that the innovative winery crafts affordable and well-made wines, as well. An astounding six wines from Yealands scored a 92 or above from *Tasting Panel* Publisher Meridith May this year, proving that caring about the environment and caring about your product can go hand in hand.



Peter Yealands 2018 Sauvignon Blanc (\$15)

This light straw-colored beauty features a classic petrol-to-grapefruit nose with a hint of baby's-breath flowers and a kiss of wet stone. Grapefruit peel gives a pleasant texture to the mouthfeel while dill, tarragon, and chamomile add zest, zing, and tonality. **92** —*M.M., November 2018*

Peter Yealands 2017 Pinot Noir (\$19)

Unique aromas of chocolate cherries arise with a thread of graphite built in. Precise acidity points to savory and juicy notes of cranberry and coffee before spiced plum takes over on the pleasant finish, lingering with a long note of sweet tobacco. **92** —*M.M., November 2018*



GENERATIONAL GEM

2014 50 Harvests Meritage

NAPA VALLEY (\$50)

In 2013, the Scotto family produced a wine both to honor their 50th harvest in California and memorialize the family's winemaking heritage, which originated in 1883 on the island of Ischia just off the Italian coast. First crafted with the 2011 vintage in Napa Valley's Oak Knoll District by Winemaker Paul Scotto, the 50 Harvests transformed into a true Meritage blend reflecting the model of Old World Bordeaux in 2014, when Scotto teamed up with fellow winemaker Mitch Cosentino. The family's five-generation history of viticulture culminates in the 2014 50 Harvests Meritage, making it *The Tasting Panel's* "Generational Gem" of 2018.

Vivid, fresh flavors of juicy plum and spice; tangy and nicely structured; a lovely, well-balanced effort. **92** —A.D.B., *September 2018*



BEST ROOTS

Ancient Peaks Winery

Ancient Peaks Winery is located in Santa Margarita Ranch, the southernmost AVA in the Paso Robles wine region. Family-owned, its proximity to the Pacific Ocean means ancient sea fossils can be found in its soils, imparting a unique minerality. Given this striking sense of place, Ancient Peaks earns "Best Roots" of 2018.

Ancient Peaks 2014 Oyster Ridge, Santa Margarita Ranch, Paso Robles (\$60)

Oyster fossils are ubiquitous along the Santa Margarita Vineyard. While the tannins are developed, the liquid is plush with layers of flavors from lavender to mulled plum and blackberry to dusted cocoa-cedar. **94** —M.M., *April 2018*

Ancient Peaks 2016 Zinfandel Santa Margarita Ranch, Paso Robles (\$20)

This stellar red shows off an array of exciting flavors. Aromas and flavors of lavender and cocoa nibs charm as cherry and plum generously wash across the mouth, preceding a finish of cola and toasted oak woven into a bouquet of blue flowers. **94** —M.M., *August 2018*



COOLEST OF THE BUNCH

Balletto Vineyards 2016

Pinot Noir

BCD VINEYARD, RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY (\$26)

Family-owned Balletto Vineyards was established in 1977 as a vegetable farm in the celebrated Russian River Valley AVA of Sonoma County, California. Derived from the area's cool climate, the brisk natural acidity present in Balletto Vineyards' expressive grape varieties yields a Pinot Noir with depth and structure, prompting *The Tasting Panel* to name this wine 2018's "Coolest of the Bunch."

Tilled with chocolate? That's the initial impression of this special, sustainably farmed, single-vineyard Pinot Noir. Additional scents of dark summer plum also appear in the flavor profile with blueberry, cherry, and sweet tobacco. There's structure to this wine's round body, which has fine acidity and a bold nature. **92** —M.M., *July 2018*



BIGGEST CHART-TOPPER

Z. Alexander Brown

Delicato Family Vineyards and Grammy Award-winning artist Zac Brown teamed up several years ago to release wines under the Z. Alexander Brown label. With Napa Valley winemaker John Killebrew behind the wheel, the following trio proved our "Biggest Chart-Toppers" of the year.

Z. Alexander Brown 2016 Uncaged

Chardonnay, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$20) Expressive aromas of pineapple upside-down cake, caramel, and baked apple exude an imaginative air of depth and agility. Acidity pops through the sumptuous flavors of tangerine, vanilla candles, and stone fruit. **92** —M.M., *June 2018*

Z. Alexander Brown Uncaged 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$20)

This red overdelivers from nose to palate. Deeply rich aromas of dark chocolate lead as blackberry jam pervades. The acid is bright for food-pairing. **93** —M.M., *June 2018*

Z. Alexander Brown 2017 Uncaged Sauvignon Blanc, North Coast (\$20)

Lemon verbena defines the citrus-floral perfume of this lighthearted white. On the palate, tart, mineral-driven stone and lime notes ascend with a vibrant acidity. Reminiscent of a Sancerre. **93** —M.M., *June 2018*



STAR OF SANGIOVESE

Ambrogio e Giovanni Folonari Tenute

Ambrogio e Giovanni Folonari Tenute displays the excellence of Tuscan wine by capturing the character of the region's top viticultural areas. The family-owned company purchased the historic Nozzole estate in Chianti Classico in 1971: Its great Sangiovese is its undisputed star.



Tenuta di Nozzole, Nozzole 2015 Chianti Classico DOCG Riserva (\$30) Ripe berries and spice; tangy, racy, and complex with a long finish. **92** —A.D.B., July 2018

Tenuta di Nozzole, La Forra 2013 Chianti Classico DOCG Riserva (\$50) Deep earth and berry nose; polished and flavorful with complex structure and tangy fruit. **92** —A.D.B., July 2018

Torcalvano 2015 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG (\$30) Silky-smooth with elegant, juicy cherry and berry fruit; lush and earthy. **93** —A.D.B., November 2018

Tenute del Cabreo, La Pietra 2016 Chardonnay Toscana IGT (\$40) Gentle and smooth with notes of toasty oak; juicy, bright, and elegant. **93** —A.D.B., September 2018

MOUNTAIN MAJESTY

Elk Cove Vineyards 2016 Five Mountain Pinot Noir

CHEHALEM MOUNTAINS, OREGON (\$60)

Founded in 1974 by Joe and Pat Campbell, Elk Cove Estate, named for the majestic Roosevelt elk that roam the nearby hills, was the first vineyard and winery established in what would become Oregon's esteemed Yamhill-Carlton AVA. Today, the company remains family-owned under second-generation winemaker and fifth-generation farmer Adam Campbell. For the Pinot Noir we deemed this year's "Mountain Majesty," fruit from Five Mountain Vineyard is fermented in small, temperature-controlled steel tanks, punched down by hand twice daily, and aged in 23% new French oak barrels.



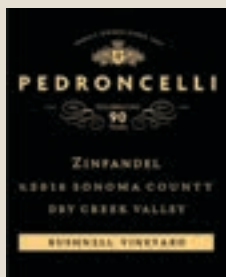
Silky, succulent, and refreshing with cherry and savory notes, this is a testament to what Oregon can accomplish in the hands of a fine winemaking tradition at a great winery. **93** —A.D.B., November 2018

MOST NEIGHBORLY

Pedroncelli Winery 2016 Zinfandel

BUSHNELL VINEYARD, DRY CREEK VALLEY (\$26)

Located in Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley AVA, Pedroncelli Winery was founded in 1927 by Giovanni and Julia Pedroncelli and has been family-owned and -operated for four generations. The 12-acre Bushnell Vineyard has been closely associated with the Pedroncellis for more than 50 years, and the property's elegant Zinfandel demonstrates signature Dry Creek characteristics.



Farming sustainably for 91 years, the Pedroncelli family focuses on fruit from their estate vineyards as well as longtime neighbors' grapes: In this community, tending the land, making wine, and sharing the literal fruits of your labor is a way of life worth sticking to.

Very fluid texture; lush, dense, and flavorful with a long finish; a friendly, balanced wine aged 16 months in 40% new American oak barrels. **92** —A.D.B., September 2018

MOST STYLISH

Surf City Still Works California Gin

USA (\$32)

As the first distillery to open in Huntington Beach, California, Surf City Still Works strives to reflect its local culture of surf, sun, and spirits in the light, citrusy, floral-forward flavor profile and colorful packaging of its California Gin.



In an effort to connect to the community through local artists, the team behind Surf City Still Works met Huntington Beach resident and muralist Melissa Murphy at Dumpsters on Parade, a 2017 project by the Huntington Beach Public Art Alliance. Murphy's artwork is now featured on the brand's bottles, helping consumers hang ten with flair while earning California Gin the title of 2018's "Most Stylish."

Vibrant nose with a silky texture and elegant flavor profile dominated by citrus; more finesse and style than you would expect from a first-time effort. This pretty bottle should be on every bar in Southern California. **92** —A.D.B., September 2018

MOST TENACIOUS

Woodinville Whiskey Co. Straight Bourbon Whiskey

USA (\$40)

In the fall of 2009, lifelong friends and Woodinville, Washington natives Orlin Sorensen and Brett Carlile invested their life savings into their dream of crafting their own handmade bourbon brand. When the pair teamed up with late industry icon Dave Pickerell, Woodinville Whiskey Co. took off, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Woodinville Whiskey began by producing White Dog Whiskey and Microbarreled Whiskey before releasing its 5-year-old Straight Bourbon Whiskey and Straight Rye Whiskey expressions. Both flagship products have received numerous accolades, including “Whiskey of the Year” in 2016 and 2017, respectively, by the American Distilling Institute, a national competition featuring more than 500 spirits entries. A true small-batch bourbon, Woodinville’s Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$40) features a base of traditionally grown corn, rye, and malted barley, with all staple grains cultivated exclusively for the brand on the Omlin Family Farm in Quincy, Washington.

While the company was acquired by Moët Hennessy USA in July 2017, Sorensen and Carlile continue to run it as they always have while they strive to build the next iconic American whiskey brand. With its tenacity and spunk, this craft distillery continues to prove that good things often come in small packages.

Made in Washington State, this release is silky and bright with lovely notes of vanilla and lightly toasted oak. Fresh, racy, and clean with hints of dried fruit and light spice preceding a long and generous finish. **93** —*A.D.B., October 2018*



- 92** Sangiacomo Family Vineyards 2016 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$55)
- 94** Schramsberg Vineyards 2012 Burt Rosé Magnum, North Coast (\$92) SCHRAMSBERG VINEYARDS
- 92** Scotto Family 2014 50 Harvests Meritage, Napa Valley (\$50)
- 96** Sea Smoke Cellars 2015 Southing Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$64)
- 95** Sea Smoke Cellars 2015 Ten Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (82)
- 93** Sergio 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Arcano Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$125)
- 94** Sergio 2014 Malbec, Dr. Reid Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$75)
- 95** Shafer Vineyards 2013 Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley (\$285)
- 93** Shafer Vineyards 2014 Relentless, Napa Valley (\$92)
- 95** Shafer Vineyards 2015 One Point Five Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley (\$95)
- 93** Siduri 2015 Pinot Noir, Rosélla’s Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$55) JACKSON FAMILY WINES
- 95** Siduri 2016 Pinot Noir, John Sebastiano Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills (\$55) JACKSON FAMILY WINES
- 92** Silver Wines 2013 Cabernet Franc, Santa Barbara County (\$28)
- 92** Silver Wines 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon, Santa Barbara County (\$45)
- 94** Silverado Vineyards 2014 Estate-Grown Merlot, Mt. George Vineyard, Coombsville (\$40)
- 93** Smith-Madrone 2015 Chardonnay, Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley (\$34)
- 93** Sobon Estate 2015 Rocky Top Zinfandel, Amador County (\$18)
- 92** Sokol Blosser Winery 2014 Thistle Vineyard Pinot Noir, Dundee Hills AVA, Willamette Valley (\$38)
- 96** Sonoma-Loeb 2016 Sangiacomo Vineyard Pinot Noir, Fedrick Ranch, Sonoma Coast (\$60)
- 92** Spoken Barrel 2015 Meritage Blend, Columbia Valley (\$20) CONSTELLATION BRANDS
- 95** Spring Mountain Vineyard 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain District (\$85)
- 94** St. Supéry 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Dollarhide Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$100)
- 93** Stags’ Leap Winery 2015 The Investor Red Blend, Napa Valley (\$58) TREASURY WINE ESTATES
- 92** Steele Wines 2015 Zinfandel, Mendocino County (\$20) WINE SPOKEN HERE
- 92** Susana Balbo 2015 Signature Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20) FOLIO WINE PARTNERS
- 92** Tablas Creek Vineyard 2016 Côtes de Tablas, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$35) VINEYARD WINE BRANDS
- 98** Taittinger 2007 Blanc de Blancs Champagne Comtes de Champagne, France (\$215) KOBRAND
- 92** Talbott Vineyards 2016 Kali Hart Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$23)
- 92** Talbott Vineyards 2016 Kali Hart Pinot Noir, Monterey County (\$26)
- 96** Taylor Fladgate 1968 Single Harvest Port, Douro, Portugal (\$300) KOBRAND
- 97** Taylor Fladgate 2016 Vintage Port, Douro, Portugal (\$120) KOBRAND
- 92** Tenshen 2016 White, Central Coast (\$20)
- 92** Tenshen 2016 Red, Santa Barbara County (\$25)
- 97** Tenuta di Biserno 2012 Biserno, Maremma, Toscana, Italy (\$175) KOBRAND
- 96** Tenuta di Biserno 2013 Biserno, Maremma, Toscana, Italy (\$180) KOBRAND
- 100** Tenuta di Biserno 2013 Lodovico, Maremma, Toscana, Italy (\$425) KOBRAND
- 96** Tenuta di Biserno 2015 Il Pino di Biserno, Maremma, Toscana, Italy (\$75) KOBRAND
- 92** Tenuta di Nozzole 2015 Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG, Italy (\$30) KOBRAND
- 92** Tenuta di Nozzole 2013 La Forra, Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG, Italy (\$50) KOBRAND
- 92** Tenuta di Salviano 2015 Turlo Lago di Corbara DOC, Italy (\$20) KOBRAND
- 93** Tenuta Torcalvano 2015 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG, Italy (\$30) KOBRAND
- 93** Tenute del Cabreo 2016 La Pietra Chardonnay, Toscano IGT, Italy (\$40) KOBRAND
- 92** Teperberg 2013 Legacy Petite Sirah, Samson, Israel (\$70) ROYAL WINE CORP.
- 92** Tercero Wines 2017 Mourvèdre Rosé, Santa Barbara County (\$30)
- 92** Terlato 2017 Friulano, Friuli Colli Orientali DOC, Italy (\$29) TERLATO WINE GROUP
- 93** Testarossa Winery 2016 Chardonnay, Fogstone Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$51)
- 95** Testarossa Winery 2016 Nicaire Barrel Selection Pinot Noir, California (\$90)
- 99** The Dalla Valle Vineyards 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley
- 96** The Frostwatch 2015 Ophira Reserve Chardonnay, Bennett Valley, Sonoma County (\$45)
- 92** The Prisoner Wine Company 2015 Cuttings Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$55) CONSTELLATION BRANDS

- 92** The Prisoner Wine Company 2016 Saldo Zinfandel, Northern California, USA (\$32) CONSTELLATION BRANDS
- 95** The Westerhold Family Vineyards 2015 Pinot Noir, Bennett Valley, Sonoma County
- 93** Three Sticks Wines 2015 Gap's Crown Vineyard Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$55)
- 92** Three Sticks Wines 2015 One Sky Chardonnay, Sonoma Mountain, Sonoma County (\$50)
- 92** Three Sticks Wines 2015 Durell Vineyard Origin Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$50)
- 92** Three Sticks Wines 2015 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$65)
- 95** Three Sticks Wines 2015 Cuvée Eva Marie Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$90)
- 94** Three Sticks Wines 2015 Durell Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$70)
- 94** Three Sticks Wines 2015 Gap's Crown Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$70)
- 93** Three Sticks Wines 2015 PFV Estate Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$65)
- 93** Three Sticks Wines 2015 The James Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$65)
- 94** Three Sticks Wines 2015 Walala Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$70)
- 93** Three Sticks Wines 2016 PFV Estate Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$65)
- 94** Tongue Dancer 2016 Pinot de Ville, Putman Vineyard, Annapolis, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$65)
- 92** Trinity Hill 2015 Gimblett Gravels Syrah, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$30)
- 92** Van Ruiten Family Winery 2016 Chardonnay, Lodi (\$14)
- 95** Vietti 2014 Perbacco Nebbiolo, Langhe, Piedmont (\$26) DALLA TERRA
- 93** Villa Ragazzi 2014 Faraona, Napa Valley (\$54)
- 92** Vitkin Winery 2016 Red Israeli Journey, Sharon, Israel (\$24) ROYAL WINE CORP.
- 95** Wayfarer 2015 Pinot Noir, Wayfarer Vineyard, Fort-Ross Seaview AVA, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$90)
- 92** Westerhold Family Vineyards 2015 Pinot Noir, Bennett Valley, Sonoma County (\$52)
- 96** Yangarra 2014 High Sands Grenache, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$140) JACKSON FAMILY WINES
- 92** Yangarra 2014 Old Vine Grenache, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$30) JACKSON FAMILY WINES
- 93** Yangarra 2014 Shiraz, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$30) JACKSON FAMILY WINES
- 94** Yealands Estate 2014 Single Vineyard Pinot Noir, New Zealand (\$35) PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL
- 92** Yealands Estate S1 Single Block 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand (\$30) PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL
- 92** Yealands Estate Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand (\$25) PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL
- 93** Youngberg Hill 2015 Natasha Pinot Noir, McMinnville AVA, Willamette Valley (\$50)
- 93** Z. Alexander Brown 2016 Uncaged Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$20) DELICATO FAMILY VINEYARDS
- 92** Z. Alexander Brown 2016 Uncaged Chardonnay, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$20) DELICATO FAMILY VINEYARDS
- 93** Z. Alexander Brown 2017 Uncaged Sauvignon Blanc, North Coast (\$20) DELICATO FAMILY VINEYARDS

CLASS OF 2018 SPIRITS

- 92** 1792 Full Proof Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$45)
- 92** 3 Kilos Vodka Gold 999.9, Netherlands (\$36) BLACK SEA IMPORTS
- 93** Aeremoor Cloud Sourced Vodka, USA (\$37)
- 92** Amaro dell'Etna, Italy (\$40) M.S. WALKER
- 94** Astral Tequila Blanco, Mexico (\$40) DAVOS BRANDS
- 92** Bimini Gin, USA (\$32)
- 93** Bols Genever, Netherlands (\$39) LUCAS BOLS USA
- 95** Booker's Batch 2018-02 Backyard BBQ Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$65)
- 93** Bowmore The Vintner's Trilogy Single Malt Scotch Whisky Double Matured Manzanilla 18 Years Old, Scotland (\$127) BEAM SUNTORY
- 96** Bowmore The Vintner's Trilogy Single Malt Scotch Whisky French Oak Barrique 26 Years Old, Scotland (\$540) BEAM SUNTORY
- 92** Broken Shed Vodka, New Zealand (\$27)
- 93** Bulleit Rye Whiskey, USA (\$28) DIAGEO NORTH AMERICA
- 95** Caorunn Gin, Scotland (\$35) IBHL USA
- 98** Casa Noble Tequila Selección del Fundador Volume II, Mexico (\$1,500) CONSTELLATION BRANDS
- 94** Chinaco Blanco Tequila, Mexico (\$35) HOTALING & CO.

BEST-DRESSED TRAILBLAZER

KI NO BI Kyoto Dry Gin

JAPAN (\$80)

Meaning “the beauty of the seasons,” KI NO BI Kyoto Dry Gin is distilled, blended, and bottled at Kyoto Distillery; located in Minami-Ku in the southern part of Kyoto City, it’s Japan’s first facility dedicated to artisanal gin.

Mastering both the science of distillation and an age-old traditional approach to blending, Kyoto Distillery separates KI NO BI’s botanicals into six categories—base, citrus, tea, herbal, spice, and floral—and distills each individually before blending them to create the balanced and distinctive KI NO BI flavor. The distillery sources water from the famed sake-brewing district of Fushimi to create its rice-based spirits.

Featuring 11 botanicals ranging from yuzu peel and bamboo leaf to juniper berry and ginger, this gin and its sophisticated, sleek packaging tinged with intricate metallic detailing get our stamp of approval.

Exquisitely luscious with yuzu citrus on the nose; exotic and layered with sansho pepper, bamboo leaf, and Gyokuro tea on a rice-spirit base. A superb creation with balance and great depth. **97** —A.D.B., December 2018



BIGGEST PARTY ANIMAL

Laughing Glass Cocktails

Best friends Sydney Rainin-Smith and Carey Clahan think ready-to-serve cocktails can and should be the life of the party. While seeking a fun product that would bring people together, they set out to create Laughing Glass Cocktails, which features super-premium blanco tequila sourced from the lowlands of Mexico. Formulated with the finest agave piñas, the spirit is fermented in allergen-free stainless-steel casks, distilled six times, then aged to perfection for superior flavor.

Laughing Glass Margaritas are low-calorie and include all-natural flavors with no artificial sweeteners, preservatives, additives, or colors. Joining Classic Lime and Pomegranate in the company's portfolio, the newly added Firecracker Margarita is made with smoky ancho chilies and tropical pineapple. You can spice up any celebration or special occasion with Laughing Glass Cocktails, which is why we named the brand 2018's "Biggest Party Animal."



Laughing Glass All-Natural Pomegranate Low Calorie Margarita, USA (\$16) Pink with a bright fruit nose; juicy and fresh with vibrant pomegranate and citrus. Made with all-natural ingredients and blanco tequila, it's fresh, tangy, and also low-calorie. **92** —A.D.B., January 2017

Laughing Glass All-Natural Margarita, USA (\$16) Bright, fresh, and juicy with clean lime, triple sec, and blanco tequila; tangy and delicious with depth and an all-natural impression; delightful and low-calorie! **91** —A.D.B., November 2017

Laughing Glass Cocktails Firecracker Margarita, USA (\$16) This blend of blanco tequila, ancho chilies, and tropical pineapple packs some serious heat—add ingredients as you wish or just drink it as is. This is another exciting product from the talented women behind this gluten-free, non-GMO brand. **92** —A.D.B., November 2018

- 96 Chinaco Reposado Tequila, Mexico (\$55)** HOTALING & CO.
- 93 Chinaco Tequila Añejo, Mexico (\$65)** HOTALING & Co.
- 94 Dancing Goat Limousin Rye Whiskey Barrel Aged with French Oak Staves, USA (\$45)**
- 93 Dimmi Liquore di Milano Liqueur, Italy (\$34)** SAZERAC COMPANY, INC.
- 92 Dryfly Distilling Washington Wheat Vodka, USA (\$30)** DRYFLY DISTILLING
- 92 Eastside Distilling Hue-Hue Coffee Rum, USA (\$20)** EASTSIDE DISTILLING
- 94 El Fumador Tequila Reposado, Mexico (\$40)** DON SEBASTIANI & SONS
- 95 El Macho Tequila Añejo, Mexico (\$50)** DON SEBASTIANI & SONS
- 93 El Tesoro 80th Anniversary Edition Extra Añejo Tequila Aged 8 Years, Mexico (\$200)**
- 94 Elijah Craig 18-Year-Old Single Barrel Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$120)** HEAVEN HILL
- 93 George Dickel Original Tennessee Whisky No. 12, USA (\$20)** DIAGEO
- 94 George Remus Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$45)**
- 94 Glen Grant 15 Year Old Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$77)**
- 94 Glenmorangie Signet, Scotland (\$200)**
- 95 Glenmorangie Spios Private Edition Matured in American Ex-Rye Whiskey Casks, Scotland (\$99)**
- 95 High West Distillery Bourye, USA (\$80)**
- 95 Highland Park Valknut Single Malt Whisky, Scotland (\$80)**
- 94 Jack Daniel's Old No. 7 Tennessee Whiskey, USA (\$20)**
- 95 Laphroaig Lore Single Malt Whisky, Scotland (\$86)**
- 92 Laughing Glass Firecracker Margarita, USA (\$16)** MOMS ON THE ROCKS
- 92 Los Nahuales Método Antiguo Mezcal, Mexico (\$72)** CRAFT DISTILLERS
- 92 Los Sundays Blanco Tequila, Mexico (\$38)**
- 93 Low Gap Rye Whiskey, USA (\$75)** CRAFT DISTILLERS
- 92 Lvov Vodka, Poland (\$20)** ROYAL WINE CORP.
- 94 Mezcal Verde Momento Mezcal, Mexico (\$32)** HOTALING & CO.
- 93 Ming River Sichuan Baijiu, China (\$34)** PARK STREET IMPORTS LLC
- 93 New Amsterdam Grapefruit-Flavored Vodka, USA (\$15)** E. & J. GALLO
- 93 Old Elk Blended Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$50)** OLD ELK DISTILLERY
- 94 Papa's Pilar 24 Dark Rum, USA (\$47)** HEMINGWAY RUM CO.
- 92 Patrón Gran Patrón Smoky Tequila, Mexico (\$199)** THE PATRÓN SPIRITS COMPANY
- 94 Pikesville Straight Rye Whiskey 6 Years Old, (\$50)** HEAVEN HILL
- 93 Pomp & Whimsy Gin Liqueur, USA (\$40)** POMP & WHIMSY
- 94 Prairie Organic Vodka, USA (\$20)** ED PHILLIPS & SONS CO.
- 96 Rabbit Hole Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$49)** RABBIT HOLE DISTILLERY
- 98 Remus Repeal Reserve Series II Bourbon 100 Proof, USA (\$85)**
- 96 Rossville Union Barrel Proof Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$70)**
- 95 Santa Teresa 1796 Solera Rum, Venezuela (\$45)**
- 92 Sierra Norte Single Barrel Mexican Whiskey, Mexico (\$49)** CABALLEROS INC.
- 92 Slaughter House American Whiskey, USA (\$39)**
- 93 Sombra Joven Mezcal, Mexico (\$39)** DAVOS BRANDS
- 93 Springfield Manor Lavender Gin, USA (N/A)**
- 92 Stillhouse Spirits Co. Black Bourbon Mellowed in Coffee Beans, USA (\$30)** STILLHOUSE SPIRITS CO.
- 92 Suerte Blanco Tequila, Mexico (\$30)** COLORADO SPIRITS IMPORTERS LLC
- 93 Suerte Añejo Tequila, Mexico (\$50)** COLORADO SPIRITS IMPORTERS LLC
- 92 Surf City Still Works California Gin, USA (\$32)**
- 95 Tequila Chamucos Reposado, Mexico (\$50)**
- 93 Tequila Honor del Castillo Reflexión Blanco, Mexico (\$45)**
- 96 The Last Drop Aged Blended Scotch Whisky 1971 Blend, Scotland (\$3,999)** THE SAZERAC COMPANY
- 95 The Macallan Distillers LTD Edition No. 4, Scotland (\$100)** EDRINGTON AMERICAS
- 93 The Sexton Single Malt Irish Whiskey, Ireland (\$28)** PROXIMO SPIRITS
- 95 Tommyrotter Napa Valley Heritage Cask Straight Bourbon, USA (\$70)** ESPRIT DU VIN (TAUB FAMILY)
- 93 Virginia Distillery Co. Cider Cask Virginia-Highland Whiskey, USA (\$58)** VIRGINIA DISTILLERY CO.
- 92 VOGA Vodka, Italy (\$40)** ENOVATION BRANDS
- 98 West Cork Irish Bourbon Cask Irish Whiskey, Ireland (\$27)** M.S. WALKER
- 93 Woodinville Whiskey Co. Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$55)** MOËT HENNESSY USA

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