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upfront

Rabbit Hole Distillery
founder Kaveh Zamanian.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RABBIT HOLE DISTILLERY

Down the **Rabbit Hole**

A BOURBON UPSTART CARVES OUT ITS PLACE
AMONG KENTUCKY'S GREATS WITH ITS NEW
FOUNDER'S COLLECTION

by Allyson Reedy

The first release in Rabbit Hole's Founder's Collection is a cask-strength, six-plus-year-old version of its Boxergrail Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey.



Like many good love stories, the one behind Louisville, Kentucky, distillery Rabbit Hole involves a beautiful woman, a plot twist, and, oh, about 27,000 barrels of whiskey. Our protagonist is Kaveh Zamanian, and the object of his affection is that quintessential American spirit, bourbon—specifically, the bourbons and ryes that he's obsessively created at the company since he founded it in 2012, making a big impression on the American whiskey industry in the process.

But first, the beautiful woman.

Before Zamanian became a producer, he spent his 20s and 30s earning degrees and climbing career ranks as a respected clinical psychologist, psychoanalyst, and academic in Chicago, all while developing an appreciation of whiskeys from Scotland and Japan. Then he met his future wife, Heather—and as they fell in love, Zamanian became similarly captivated by bourbon, an emblem of her native Kentucky.

"Whiskey seduced me," Zamanian says. "I always knew about bourbon, but I didn't have a full understanding of the deep tradition and what it represents to Kentucky and America until I met her." That first attraction deepened, turning into the sort of all-consuming love that many can only dream of finding. Zamanian spent years researching, tasting, and obsessing over bourbon, honing his palate and knowledge until he decided to turn his life upside down—which brings us to the plot twist.

More than a decade ago, despite his successful medical career, lack of connections to the American whiskey business, and, by this point, three young children with Heather, Zamanian decided to take his family down the, well, rabbit hole by officially venturing into the distilling business. "I felt that was my opportunity, in my 40s," he says. "I thought, 'If I want to do something with my passion, I have to do it now.' I had a conversation with my wife, got her a little worried, [but] eventually she succumbed."

And so the family moved to Kentucky, pursuing Zamanian's goal of elevating the classic American spirit to the level of, in his words, "reverence" earned by Scotch and Japanese whisky. "There was something missing with bourbon," he says. "I felt it needed to go from the bottom shelf to where it belongs, which is on the top shelf with all the other great whiskeys of the world."

Embracing the fresh perspective that came with his outsider status, Zamanian shadowed bourbon makers and experts to learn the techniques and

"I use ingredients that inspire me. I think that's what's magical about Rabbit Hole—I don't want to do the same thing over and over again. I want to produce new and unique things."

—Kaveh Zamanian





Aging barrels at the Rabbit Hole facility.

Zamanian considers tasting “an emotional process . . . the liquid has to move us.”



traditions that define the category. When he was ready to launch Rabbit Hole, instead of buying existing spirits and labeling them as his own, as many brands do, he found a contract distiller to produce his own recipes, which marry heritage techniques with the innovative mash bills he created.

“You’ve got some basic rules with bourbon—51% corn, aged for so long in brand-new oak barrels—but outside of that, there’s a lot of room to improvise and play,” says Zamanian, who does exactly that by considering different yeast strains for fermentation, aging the liquid for various durations in small batches, trying out different types of barrels, tinkering with the cooking process, and exploring a variety of grains, the latter of which might be his favorite part of the process.

“I use ingredients that inspire me,” he says. “I think that’s what’s magical about Rabbit Hole—I don’t want to do the same thing over and over again. I want to produce new and unique things. When you buy a bottle of Rabbit Hole, you know that it’s one of a kind.”

His approach is working. Consider that, in the past year alone, Rabbit Hole has expanded its reach from 19 states

to 48, representing a 153% increase in distribution. For the distillery’s fiscal year beginning July 1, 2020, total business grew 216% in the first quarter compared to the same period in 2019.

Rabbit Hole’s core portfolio consists of four signature expressions: Cavehill Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, Heigold Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, Boxergrail Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey, and Dareringer Straight Bourbon Whiskey Finished in PX Sherry Casks. But because Zamanian continues to prioritize experimentation, he just introduced the Founder’s Collection, a limited-edition series that perfectly embodies everything he believes bourbon and the broader whiskey category can be.

“I’m a pretty restless guy, and I can’t sit still,” he says. “The Founder’s Collection was an avenue for me to take it to another level and make something even more special than our core products.” For the series’ inaugural release—a cask-strength, six-plus-year-old version of Boxergrail—Zamanian and his team tasted through countless barrels to find just seven “honey barrels,” as he calls them, from his first batches of rye. The liquid is bottled in

numbered editions to ensure connoisseurs that they’re experiencing it as he intended it to be, untouched; he describes it as “sublime” in the way it showcases the incredible dimensions of flavor that whiskey at its natural strength develops in wood-fired, toasted, and charred casks.

“We taste [so much] to make sure the poetry comes through. It’s a sensory and emotional process, and the liquid has to move us,” he says. “That’s my criteria for the Founder’s Collection: something that really feels extraordinary from a taste standpoint . . . and gives you a nice long finish that stays with you and makes you want to remember it.” Always innovating, Zamanian plans to release a new label for the Founder’s Collection every spring and fall to highlight his brand’s creativity and commitment to the art of whiskey making.

Because that’s what you do when you’re in love. To make any romance last, you have to work on it and dedicate your life to it, pouring your heart and soul into making it the best it can be. Zamanian is ensuring that the love story behind Rabbit Hole will continue to unfold for many years to come. **LV**



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contents

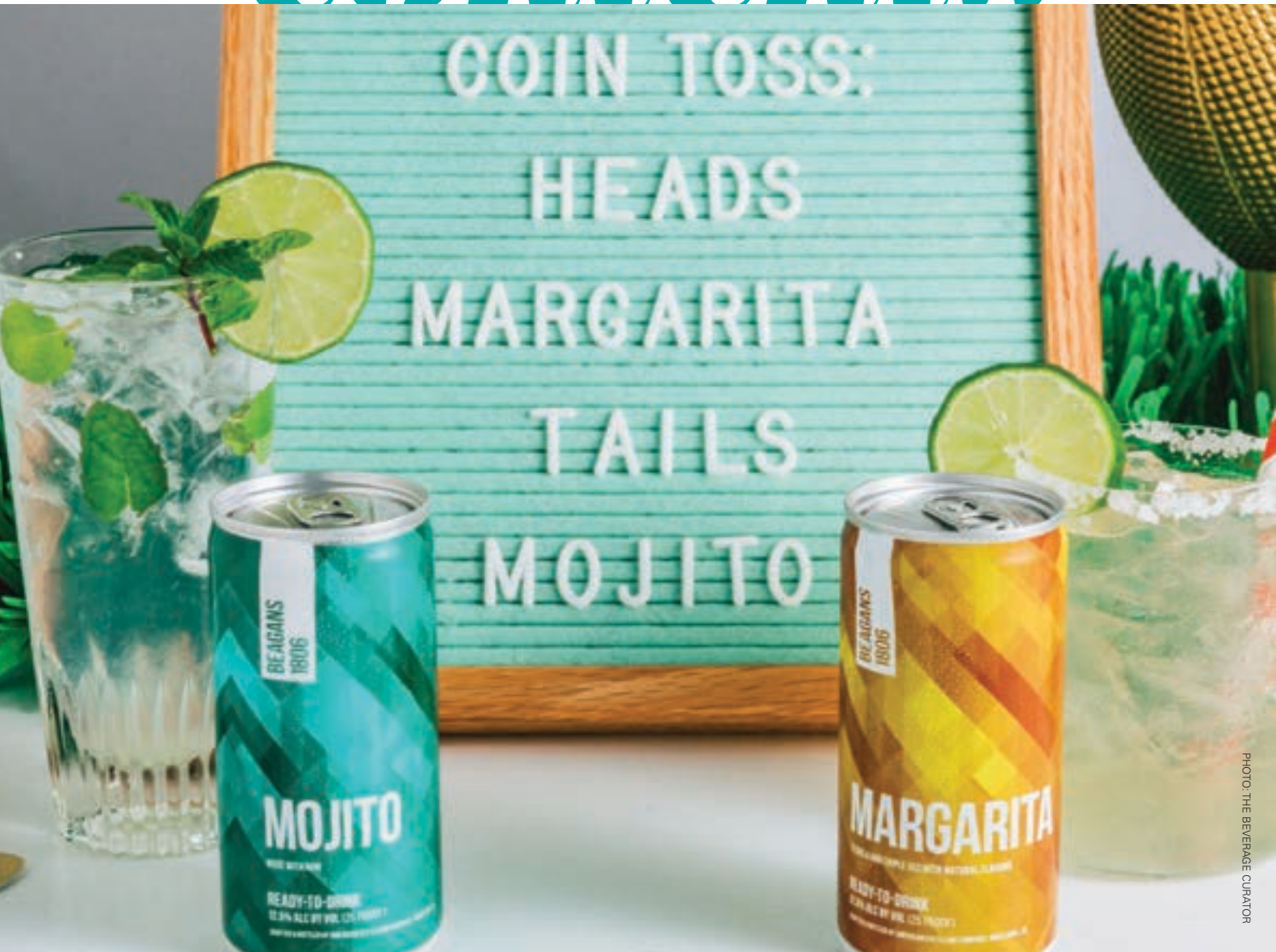


PHOTO: THE BEVERAGE CURATOR

68

cover story

AMORE FOR AMARONE

Masi's Boscaini Family Champions Terroir by Perfecting Technique

4

up front

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

A Bourbon Upstart Carves Out Its Place Among Kentucky's Greats With Its New Founder's Collection

124

in season

HOLIDAY BONUS

Four Sippers to See You Through the Season



131

category report

LOOK AT THE BRIGHT SIDE

Dark Spirits to Light Up Winter Nights

50

features

A SUPERCHARGED SUCCESS

Miller Family Wine Company Acquires the BNA Wine Group's Portfolio of Brands, Including Its Crown Jewel, Butternut

BATTLE OF THE BLENDS

JUSTIN ISOSCELES and JUSTIFICATION have a heritage of excellence. Grapes grown in the limestone-rich soil of Paso Robles, California, are hand-harvested, hand-sorted, and aged in fine French oak barrels in the classic old-world style. These unique blends have received 90+ points vintage after vintage and are yours to compare.

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features

86 PHENOL ENVY

Recapping SommCon's "Paso Robles CAB Collective" Webinar

92 MASTERS OF THEIR OWN DOMAIN

Toasting to the Success of Six Standard-Bearing Spirits Producers

98 A TASTE OF THE TRIED AND TRUE

Our "Big Names on Campus" Webinar with ECRM Delivers on Its Promise

104 ACCOLADES FROM AFAR

Like Most Ceremonies in 2020, Wente Family Estates' Legacy and RISE Awards Were Celebrated Virtually

110 DICHOTOMOUS QUESTION, COUNTLESS ANSWERS

"Technique or Terroir?" Found a Light at the End of a Long and Winding Tunnel

118 VIBRANT VALPOLICELLA

Showcasing the Italian Region's Rich Legacy of Ancient Methods and Modern Styles



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34

departments

- | | | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|---|
| 12 | Industry Spotlight | 40 | Portugal: Vinho Verde |
| 18 | The Ransom Note | 42 | Beyond the Barrel |
| 20 | Lone Star Libations | 44 | Brand Spotlight:
1924 Wines |
| 22 | Capitol Chill | 46 | Down the Aisle |
| 24 | A Voice Uncorked | 54 | Bev Biz: BIBO Beverage Group |
| 26 | Winning at Beverage | 58 | Restaurants: Baran's 2239,
Hermosa Beach, CA |
| 28 | Five Minutes With ...
Tuanni Price | 60 | Blue Reviews |
| 30 | Taking Inventory | 66 | Winery Spotlight:
Silverado Vineyards |
| 34 | Destinations:
San Luis Obispo, CA | 76 | Publisher's Picks |
| 36 | California: Testarossa | | |



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South Los Angeles Beverage Company Launches a Beer Brand That Gives Back to the Local Community

Black-owned independent craft brewery

South Los Angeles Beverage Company recently announced the launch of its first beer label, People's Republic of South Central (PRSC). The line will feature a quarterly release, with 100% of net proceeds benefiting charitable initiatives in South Central Los Angeles for those negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

South Los Angeles Beverage Company has pledged to donate 100% of net profits from the sale of PRSC's inaugural beer—LEGACY, a hazy IPA featuring Motueka, Simcoe, and Mosaic hops—to purchase Chromebooks for students who reside in the city's Ninth District and South Central area and do not have access to a home computer to participate in virtual classroom activities this fall. LEGACY (\$20/4-pack) will be available for purchase at prscbrand.com for a limited time.

"We're committed to putting our money where our mouth is," says chief beverage officer Samuel Chawinga, who co-founded the company with chief executive officer Craig Bowers. "Thirty-six percent of the residents in South Central lived below the federal poverty line before COVID-19, and the pandemic has brought even more hardship to the area. We remain focused on reducing inequality, lowering poverty levels, and building a community of support."



PHOTO: ANDREW ZINN

Samuel Chawinga and Craig Bowers co-founded South Los Angeles Beverage Company and serve as chief beverage officer and chief executive officer, respectively.

Napa Valley Vintners Makes a Historic Commitment to Increase Diversity in the Wine Industry

Napa Valley Vintners (NVV) recently announced that it is investing more than \$1 million in new scholarship and mentorship programs to increase diversity, inclusivity, and opportunity in all aspects of the wine industry.

NVV is partnering with the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) to create a new scholarship program for people of color to pursue college degrees in subjects ranging from grape growing and winemaking to marketing, business, and more. The NVV has com-

mitted \$200,000 to the fund each year for the next five years and will begin a fundraising effort with its members to build the fund beyond that initial investment.

The nonprofit trade organization also announced that it will invest more than \$100,000 in two new mentorship programs being created by Wine Unify, which aims to amplify the voices of underrepresented minorities, and Bâtonnage, which fosters solutions for a more inclusive industry wherein women

and ethnic and racial minorities achieve equal representation, opportunities, and access to leadership positions.

To donate to the long-term future of the scholarship program and to match the support for Wine Unify and Bâtonnage, visit give.uncf.org/2020NVV. To learn more about the industry mentorship programs, donate, or sign up to be a mentor or mentee, visit wineunify.org/general-inquiry-form-and-batonnageforum.com/mentorship-program.

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MAGAZINE

91

POINTS

JULY/AUGUST 2020

VINTAGE 2017



Giesen Releases Its First Non-Alcoholic Wine: Giesen 0% Sauvignon Blanc

New Zealand's Giesen Estate is poised to release the first alcohol-removed Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, a culmination of four decades of innovation from the family-owned and -managed winery as well as a bold venture into the burgeoning nonalcoholic category.

Grapes sourced from the region's Wairau and Awatere valleys make for a base wine with the aromatically expressive, crisp, and refreshing characteristics consumers expect from Sauvignon Blanc. Under the oversight of Giesen winemaker Nikolai St George—four-time winner of the New Zealand Winemaker of the Year award—the wine then undergoes a process in which advanced spinning-cone technology “separate[s] the fragrance and alcohol from the wine,” according to a press release from the brand. “This advanced form of distillation allows us to . . . maintain the integrity of our distinctive flavor palate and texture throughout the process. Once the alcohol has been removed, we re-add the delicately distilled aroma and conduct vigorous taste testing to ensure the final product has great mouthfeel and flavor.”

The result is a light and invigorating nonalcoholic wine with just 10.6 calories per 125-milliliter serving and no more than 0.5% ABV—less than the amount naturally occurring in most fruit juices. On the nose, Giesen 0% features subtle aromas of fresh lime, red currant, and lemon shortbread that give way to a citrus-forward flavor profile with distinct notes of black currant and passion fruit followed by a bright, dry finish. St George and his winemaking team recommend serving it alongside fresh garden salads or seafood dishes like linguine and clams, but the wine can also be served chilled on its own, poured over ice with fresh mint or a slice of lime, or as the base of a passion fruit-mint cooler.

Trade members interested in placing orders for Giesen 0% can call +64 3 344 6270; for more information, visit giesen.co.nz.



Second Annual International Canned Wine Competition Gives Gold to Aluminum

More than 200 canned wines flexed their aluminum muscles at the second annual International Canned Wine Competition, held July 21–23 at the Mendocino County Fairgrounds in Boonville, California—the only event of its kind in the world. Seventy producers sent in a total of 226 entries from countries around the globe; while California and Oregon producers took their share of honors, many of the 96 gold medals went to wines from less prominent regions, according to competition founder Allan Green. He also noted that 30% of the entries were rosé, which “lends itself to cans.”

The Best of Show White Wine title went to Archer McRae Beverages' Joiy Savvy Society Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough, New Zealand. Best Rosé was HALL Wines' BACA 2019 Ring Around the Rosé from California, and Best Red was Fourth Wave Wine's Take It to the Grave 2018 Shiraz from Langhorne Creek, Australia. Erosion Wine Co. from Napa, meanwhile, took home five gold medals and a package design award for its jewel-like cans. The Uncommon sent a series of four wines from England, all of which won gold medals, while the line as a whole won package design recognition for its charming illustrations.

The competition judges came from academia, marketing, and the wine trade. Wine and spirits consultant Mark Bowery noted that he has “been judging wine professionally for 36 years, but this was my first foray into the canned category. And I've got to say, I was pleasantly surprised by the quality across the board.”

The International Canned Wine Competition will return July 20–22, 2021, with *The Tasting Panel* serving as media sponsor. The full results of the 2020 competition will appear in the January/February 2021 issue. Stay tuned for more details on how to enter the 2021 contest and be part of *The Tasting Panel's* Category Report on canned wines in the March 2021 issue.

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New Sustainable Tequila Brand Mijenta Releases Two Small-Batch Expressions

Mi gente is Spanish for “my people,” a term that sums up the inspiration behind new tequila brand Mijenta. According to a statement from its team, “Mijenta is an artisanal, small-batch tequila from the highlands of Jalisco that celebrates the traditions of Mexican culture and embodies the best of the land and its people. Crafted from the best possible ingredients [and] using zero pesticides or herbicides, Mijenta is harvested by our dedicated team of jimadores.”

For both its Blanco and a soon-to-be-released Reposado made by maestra tequilera Ana Maria Romero, Mijenta exclusively uses fully mature Blue Weber agave, which grows in Jalisco’s signature red clay soils in an arid, high-elevation microclimate. Here, intense sunlight increases the level of residual sugars in the agave and ultimately yields a complex and viscous tequila featuring notes of ripe tropical fruit, honey, vanilla, and caramel tinged with hints of spices and fresh roses. Romero oversees a lengthy fermentation process before the spirit undergoes triple distillation in pot stills and then rests for at least 45 days, after which the Reposado is aged in a combination of new oak and American whiskey and bourbon barrels. Both expressions are unfiltered, enhancing their distinctive character.

The company aims to reduce its environmental impact through sustainability-focused initiatives, including making its labels and other paper components with agave waste and using locally produced, eco-certified packaging. It has also established a nonprofit, the Mijenta Community Foundation, that’s committed to “promoting the preservation and protection of the ancestral skills” of tequila producers in the area, according to its website. For more information, visit mijenta-tequila.com.



Constellation Brands Acquires Kentucky-Based Craft Spirits Producer Copper & Kings

Constellation Brands, Inc., has acquired the Copper & Kings American Brandy Company, a cutting-edge distillery that also runs a tasting room and restaurant in Louisville, Kentucky. Founded in 2014 by beverage industry entrepreneurs Joe and Lesley Heron, it uses small-batch copper pot distillation and unconventional methods like sonic aging and solera blending to craft a variety of nontraditional, highly differentiated American brandy, absinthe, gin, and liqueurs.

Copper & Kings American Brandy was initially a minority investment through Constellation’s venture capital group. Since 2017, Constellation and Copper & Kings have been working to gain a deeper knowledge of the American craft brandy category and increase awareness and distribution of the Copper & Kings brand. “As an innovative distillery regarded for its experimental attitude and highly rated craft spirits, Copper & Kings American Brandy represents a significant growth opportunity for us and reinforces our continued commitment to premium spirits,” says Constellation Brands president and CEO Bill Newlands. **LZ**

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Getting Back to Business

NEW YORK SEES A RETURN TO NORMALCY—FOR NOW

story and photos by David Ransom

I recently did two things that I hadn't done since March. First, I traveled, leaving home to visit and taste with winemakers. The other—and maybe more significant—experience was going to a restaurant and having a cocktail. While these would have been everyday occurrences in a normal year, it's safe to say that in 2020, standing in a tasting room or sitting at a bar feels like a big accomplishment.

Having been holed up for months on end, my wife, Melanie (on Instagram @wineandfoodtraveler), craved a get-away, so with the easing of restrictions in New York this fall, we hit the road with our pooch Sazerac (@sazeracsays) to tour a few of the state's excellent wineries and eateries. The former got the green light to host socially distanced tastings outdoors in June and indoors in late summer; many we visited actually had great turnout this



The author (right) and his wife, Melanie (left), with Meaghan Frank of the Dr. Konstantin Frank winery in Hammondsport, NY.



Cindy West-Chamberlain is the winemaker-owner of Black Willow Winery in Burt, NY.



Christian Willmott and his partner, bar manager Megan Lee, at Marble + Rye in Buffalo, NY.

year, as more people were taking road trips. "It was great for us even with the social-distance requirements," said Cindy West-Chamberlain, owner of and winemaker at Black Willow Winery in

the Niagara County town of Burt north of Buffalo. "We adapted our spaces to accommodate visitors, and on busy weekends we set up tables in the winemaking rooms for overflow." In the Finger Lakes region, most wineries maintain reservation-only policies; some have signage out front informing would-be walk-ins if they are full for the day. "We actually redesigned our whole tasting structure to accommodate the state's guidelines," says Dr. Konstantin Frank's Meaghan Frank of the Hammondsport winery's themed progressive-tasting format, "and we

like it so much we may keep it in place permanently."

As for restaurants, dining is now allowed both outside and indoors, though capacity and operating hours are limited. Suffice it to say that most customers are supportive. The first professionally made cocktail I'd had since March was at Marble + Rye in Buffalo—a 75-seat farm-to-table restaurant and whiskey-centric beacon of the expanding fine-dining scene in that revitalized city, which owner Christian Willmott said "has been very accommodating in letting us expand our sidewalk footprint, and we've been doing what we can indoors considering the limitations." Still, he added, "Who knows what will happen as Buffalo's famous winter rears its head and outdoor dining is no longer an option?" [V](#)



Give the Gift of a Bourbon Tasting this Holiday



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PHOTO COURTESY OF BIG THIRST MARKETING

The team at Milam & Greene Whiskey: head brewer Jordan Osbourne, CEO Heather Greene, master distiller Marlene Holmes, and founder Marsha Milam.

Virtual Victories

MILAM & GREENE WHISKEY STRIVES TO STAY CONNECTED WITH CONSUMERS WHILE RELEASING A NEW BOURBON **by Lori Moffatt**

After months of fending for myself at my home bar, I long for the sights and sounds of a *proper* drinking establishment, where clattering shaker tins and popping corks punctuate laughter and conversation with friends and strangers alike. Unfortunately, as of mid-October, most bars in Texas are still closed. Although some counties have lifted restrictions to allow for reopening at reduced capacity, it will be some time before full crowds are able to gather.

Of course, the relative lack of traffic impacts not only proprietors but also affects producers as they launch new products. Since they can't depend on in-person tastings, on-premise or off-, to connect with consumers, online tastings have filled the void. I recently participated in one hosted by Big Thirst Marketing and Blanco, Texas-based craft distillery Milam & Greene Whiskey, which just released its first grain-to-glass straight bourbon and is set to expand its distribution this fall and winter. It was a blast to sample this robust, cask-strength spirit in the

virtual company of whiskey fans across the United States while simultaneously interacting with the team who made it. Distanced intimacy: the theme of 2020.

"Even with the market beginning to open a bit, virtual tastings will remain an important way to reach consumers," says Matt McGinnis, president of Big Thirst Marketing. "Nothing replaces face-to-face customer interaction for a distillery or winery, but a well-run virtual tasting can go a long way to build human connection. The best [ones] stick to a specific goal of education or entertainment and create moments when the production teams genuinely bond with participants. We focus our energy on creating those emotional links; [it's] easier for people to buy the products once they care about the producers."

Master distiller Marlene Holmes, who spent the early years of her career at Jim Beam in Kentucky, is a witness to the impact that technology has had on the production process, with human experimentation giving way to automated consistency. So when a job

opened at Milam & Greene in 2018, the opportunity to be hands-on again—barrel-sampling for flavor, working directly with blender Heather Greene, and interacting with visitors—appealed to her. She says she treasures making personal connections, whether live in the distillery or online; as she puts it, "People who taste along with us from their own homes are in their comfort zone, which is a good place to learn about something they love."

After all, whiskey—like any product that requires time to make—represents a certain inherent optimism, a commitment to looking to the future when today's worries may be but a memory. "In the summer of 2017, we set out to create a bourbon that would complement our current product line and compete with the very best in its class," notes head brewer Jordan Osbourne. "We didn't expect to release it during a pandemic, but it's still a thrill to share it with others."

Here's a toast to the here and now—and to what tomorrow brings. **LT**

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Falling Back into the Swing of Things

VISITING A WINERY, A MEZCALERIA, AND A NEW RAMEN SHOP, OUR WASHINGTON, D.C., CORRESPONDENT GETS OUT AND ABOUT AGAIN

story and photos by Kelly Magyarics



At Bluemont Vineyard in Bluemont, VA, guests can book a whole row to themselves for a safe tasting experience.

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

What better way to social distance than by soaking up the sun between vineyard rows on a mild fall afternoon? At Virginia's Bluemont Vineyard, visitors can book the new Rent-a-Row experience online in order to enjoy sweeping views of Loudoun Valley and the Blue Ridge Mountains—as well as a little privacy. After being escorted to Row #2 (amid ripening Norton grapes that we sampled off of the vine), my companion and I sipped our way through a flight and sampled a meat-and-cheese board before deciding on an elegantly dry bottle of Viognier, delivered to our picnic blanket in an ice bucket. Director of hospitality Becca Rally told me it's been a super-popular program that will continue as long as the weather is agreeable for groups of up to ten people (including dogs and kids), though it's ideal for six—and, I can attest, incredibly romantic for two.

Back in D.C., I sampled what's new on the menu at Espita, a mezcal mecca in the Shaw neighborhood that, like so many other concepts in the city and beyond, has turned to GoTab for contactless ordering and payments. Though partner, general manager, and mezcalier Josh Phillips swore he would never employ the platform, he changed his mind once he realized how it would free up servers to work the floor, educating guests about the nuances of mezcal and helping them customize that perfect flight. It also meant that Phillips could spend more time at the table I occupied with a fellow writer, updating us on new offerings like a refreshing bottled gin-and-grapefruit cocktail, wings in Fresno chili butter, and the “spooky sauce”-topped burgers available from Espita's new takeout concept, Ghostburger.

Finally, global chain Santouka Ramen was set to open its first DMV-area shop last March, but, well, 2020—so it wasn't until August that the new outpost finally launched in mixed-use Tysons Corner development The Boro. The brand, which was founded in Sapporo in 1983 and now has 61 locations around the world, specializes in tonkotsu, a silky broth made with pork bones simmered for almost a full day. General manager Junichiro Kawakami stopped by our patio table to express his excitement about opening his doors at last, explaining how the chefs used the extra time to undergo extensive training in Japan. We tried several iterations, including the vegetarian and spicy miso ramen as well as the signature version topped with a marinated soft-boiled egg and pork cheeks. The verdict? Ramen is indeed the steaming bowl of comfort we can all use right about now. *Arigatou gozaimasu.* 

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All spirits are not created equal. One of the reasons Chopin's spirits are superior can be explained in one word:

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PHOTO: TIFFANY CODY

Jennifer McDonald, owner of and winemaker at Jenny Dawn Cellars in Wichita, KS.

“Wine Is a Storyteller”

JENNY DAWN CELLARS IS PLANTED IN THE RICH SOILS OF KANSAS HISTORY

by Paris Vasser

Inside every bottle of wine, there’s a story. From the soil through the vine to the glass, a narrative unfolds with each passing sip. For Kansas vintners, that story begins with a legacy of winemaking that goes back to the 1800s, when the state began sending vines to aid growers in France during the phylloxera outbreak.

Such surprisingly rich history is the backdrop for Jennifer McDonald, owner of and winemaker at Jenny Dawn Cellars in Wichita, who puts her own spin on the idea that “wine is a storyteller.” Her job, she believes, “is all about connecting people with the experience of wine. It’s meant to be enjoyed and savored.”

As the first Black winery owner in Wichita, she has set out to do just that. The idea for Jenny Dawn Cellars began crystallizing in 2016 after years of research into the Kansas consumer market. McDonald started hosting educational events to gauge the palates of her community on a personal level, ultimately pinpointing their taste for

Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon as well as for sweeter wines overall. This affinity might reflect the state’s storied past of sweet wine production due, in part, to its climate: As McDonald points out, “The wine tends to be bold because we have this extreme heat—a lot of sugar builds up in the grapes.”

From 2017 to 2019, McDonald made trips out to Napa Valley—whose winemakers she’s always admired—where she consulted with an expert to craft Jenny Dawn’s first six bottlings as well as to develop her branding. After connecting with a distributor, she brought the wines back to Wichita to sell online and at local liquor stores. “It was a good test run to see if the wines I was making would be viable in the market,” she explains—one that would allow her to write the next chapter in the story of Jenny Dawn Cellars by giving her “the confidence to invest further in an urban winery in downtown Wichita,” which opened in November 2019.

She also began connecting with

Kansas farmers and discovered that the local terroir mimicked that of France in places, thanks to limestone-rich soils. “I have a Chardonnay grape that I got from a grower in northeast Kansas that tastes like a Chablis,” she says, while acknowledging that it can be difficult to source certain European grapes in the state: “A lot of the grapes that do well [here] are French hybrids like Marquette, Traidente, and Chambourcin.”

McDonald now makes and bottles her wines in her facility at Wichita’s Union Station, incorporating nods to the building’s history into her branding. The Black Locomotive, for instance, is a dry red made with locally sourced Crimson Cabernet and Norton grapes, while the namesake Union Station is a dry white made with Kansas Chardonnay. Though the railroad is no longer in operation, McDonald is still providing a place for the community to explore new horizons, opening their palates up to the enjoyment and experience of wine in an upscale yet inclusive setting. **LD**

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Time to Sizzle

USING TRANSACTIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
TO IMPROVE PROFITABILITY

by Erik Segelbaum

There's a fairly pervasive lack of understanding among restaurateurs about what they're selling and what guests are buying. Most think they are selling food and drinks; only the great ones realize that they are actually selling experiences—and only the very best understand how to use psychological tactics to ensure that those experiences are both top-notch and top-dollar.

Well regarded as one of the “pioneers of persuasion,” legendary salesman and author Elmer Wheeler put it best when he said, “Don’t sell the steak; sell the sizzle.” This bon mot is particularly apropos in the restaurant business. For the sake of our argument, the beef is the wine program, the sizzle how it is organized and described—and sadly, most lists don’t even bubble, let alone sizzle. But it’s not for lack of quality; more often than not, it’s because the service team is not equipped with the proper tools and verbiage they need to really get things crackling. So grease up your brainpan and turn the heat to high, because we are about to sizzle away!

The concept that money equals comfort and security is reinforced throughout our lives. As a result, we often (consciously or subconsciously) hesitate before we spend it. This has nothing to do with how significant the transaction is or what percentage of our net worth it represents; rather, it is an innate aversion to the reduction of a valuable resource. One of the easiest ways to induce this reaction in your guests is to organize your wine list by price. This triggers their brains in a way that shuts down their willingness to make transactions—not unlike the emergency brakes on a runaway elevator—and will actively reduce the likelihood of high-value sales.

There is no one right way to organize your list, and your chosen method should depend on the concept, scope, and scale of your program—but there’s no question that designing it to be a sales tool, not simply an informational document, is a great first step. Still, you cannot stop there. It is vital to also arm your team with the communication skills to drive revenue. I am not advocating for heavy-handed selling—quite the opposite, in fact. For example, when talking about two different bottles of wine, focus on what sets them apart while highlighting which is the better match for the guest’s experience. In order to transition them from, say, a \$50 bottle to a \$70 one, say something to the effect of: “In addition to your selection, may I also point out this option? The difference works out to just \$4 a glass, but the increase in quality is dramatic.” Who wouldn’t pay a few more dollars a pour for a much better wine? By couching it in terms of the relative cost of each glass, the transaction no longer seems daunting. Therefore, your guest’s subconscious safety trigger is less likely to prevent them from accepting your advice.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of ways you can use consumer psychology to your advantage. In successive columns, I’ll continue to explore other ways you can put mind over money and build successful pathways to profitability. **W**

I am not advocating for heavy-handed selling—quite the opposite, in fact. For example, when talking about two different bottles of wine, focus on what sets them apart while highlighting which is the better match for the guest’s experience.



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92 POINTS

TASTING PANEL
2018 CABERNET SAUVIGNON



92 POINTS

TASTING PANEL
2018 RED WINE BLEND



92 POINTS

TASTING PANEL
2018 OLD VINE ZIN



91 POINTS

TASTING PANEL
2018 CHARDONNAY

Tuanni Price

OWNER OF ZURI WINE TASTING,
LOS ANGELES, CA, AND CAPE TOWN,
SOUTH AFRICA

by Michelle Metter

PHOTO: KIMBERLY CHISIRI



As the founder of Zuri Wine Tasting, Tuanni Price aims to demystify wine for consumers. Pre-pandemic, her schedule was filled with tastings, tours, and other events; now, the same drive with which she launched her business is propelling her down a new path as she finds ways to connect her passion with her entrepreneurial spirit.

Q What led you to a career in wine?

Curiosity. I simply wanted to learn more about the lifestyle and the culture—[and] the more I learned, the more passionate about wine I became. That led me to start a wine-lifestyle business, because I wanted to bring people on this journey with me.

Q As both an entrepreneur and a beverage professional, you have been doubly impacted by the pandemic. How are you finding your way forward?

COVID hit hard and impacted my business and finances immediately. After taking a couple of weeks to get over the initial shock, I pivoted and changed my business model to focus on online wine experiences. The silver lining is realizing [that] there is a market for people who want to engage online and [are] happy to build wine communities online. Currently, my most popular product is my Wine Discovery Kit, which comes with a season of deductive tasting classes held each week online. The “tasting tribe,” as I call them, has become similar to a family. My way forward [is one that] enables me to host [events] in three different time zones on two continents.

Q What has been your biggest “aha” moment this year?

The biggest professional “aha” for me this year is the realization that there is no such thing as “normal”: All concepts and ideas can be reimaged. . . . For example, I designed a physical product, [the Kit,] that people could use to evaluate wine for nuances and quality, [and then found] an online community that makes discovering these characteristics fun and interactive. I also hosted my annual wine festival online . . . [using] the same model that I used for in-person: a cooking demonstration and sommelier pairing Friday, on Saturday a virtual wine tour with a winemaker, and on Sunday a live tasting and Q&A session featuring 12 winemakers.

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

I’d drink Syrah from South Africa with Beyoncé. (I hope this would be after a dance lesson.) **W**

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

TASTING PANEL MAGAZINE
95
POINTS
As ranked by

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TAKING INVENTORY YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR VOICES

FROM MEETING WITH SUPPLIERS AND PURCHASING TO STAFF TRAINING, HOW ARE YOU MANAGING YOUR BEVERAGE PROGRAM THESE DAYS?

Brent Karlicek

*director of beverage, Upward Projects,
Phoenix, AZ*

In addition to Postino WineCafe [in Arizona, Colorado, and Texas], we operate a stellar neighborhood gastropub, a pizzeria, [and] a SoCal taco place [among other concepts]—so when it comes to our purchasing over this period, we've really had to adapt in a big way. We're still operating on-premise in all of our markets, but we've embraced the opportunity to expand people's perceptions of our restaurants, specifically Postino, through retail. Four Ways to Rosé is a mix-and-match selection of four rosé expressions we sell for \$55 in this absolutely beautiful box; there's also the Lucky 7 program, which we believe gives people the optimum expressions of [a given category] that they can purchase for \$15, and the Spritz Kitz for them to make their own cocktails poolside. We also operated a Postino Wine Wagon in Arizona: We took this vintage VW bus and tricked it out with Postino branding and music blasting—at a respectable level—to kind of bring the party to people, safely delivering in a contactless environment. We do our best to keep the magic alive and give people the energy they'd experience in the restaurants.

So our purchasing has been centered on identifying these amazing opportunities, both from a qualitative and financial perspective, and passing the value on to our guests. We've

continued on page 32 >

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TAKING INVENTORY

actually been engaging *more* frequently with our importers and distributors than we have in the past, with more intention—not only about the supply chain, because things have been more complicated, but also really trying to understand how to be the best partner to the regions and winemakers we know and love over the next 12, 18 months. For instance, we're about to implement new by-the-glass programming, and we felt it was important to support South Africa on our lists, knowing how difficult this [year] has been for them. And we've got a Napa Valley education course scheduled for our beverage managers in three weeks to help them tell the story of one of America's greatest wine regions during a period of great challenge.

Training occurs at many levels, whether it's daily preshift meetings or wine, spirits, and beer basics classes [for new employees]. We've definitely had to adapt to execute those in a socially distanced way; they're very interactive normally, with [group samples of] fruits, vegetables, and spices for wine and hops and yeast strains for beer. Now [attendees] have their own signature setting with all the materials they'll need—individual access to the touchpoints of the class. When it comes to preshift, we've just had to distance appropriately and develop our vocal cords [laughs]. And our team has developed a fantastic set of materials pushed through our LMS [Learning Management System] platform; whether it's video content, tech sheets, or testing materials, we've been able to directly communicate with our [staff], ensuring not only a constant flow of dynamic information but engagement.

A significant part of our program is the wine we craft in collaboration with some of our favorite winemakers; we take part in the blending trials and have influence over the cuvée. We've been doing that virtually, sending samples back and forth. This period has meant a lot of Zoom sessions, but when I'm meeting someone in the restaurant, the pull of hospitality is always there to help that next guest; being able to focus, whether from our office or at my kitchen table, on the dialogue with a given supplier or winemaker has been beneficial.



PHOTO COURTESY OF XIQUET DL

Danny Lledó

owner and executive chef, Xiquet DL and Slate Wine Bar, Washington, D.C.

One of the areas that we've been able to excel at during this pandemic is working with three suppliers instead of our usual 12. You can do more with less and maintain your par levels; the key is knowing which vendors you need to work with, the people who you feel can do you justice. We have a wine list that touches all areas of the world—I built something for everybody. If you want a Burgundy, it's there; if you want a Bordeaux, it's there. But Xiquet is a Spanish restaurant, and in this environment you are really seeing a specific trend. For every party of five and six [we see], I would say that 90% are families—parents who come in with kids. While 70% of our guests get our tasting menu and half of them get the pairing options, [these parties] are doing the a la carte menu and they're not getting such a diverse selection of wine as three couples might; they're ordering more Spanish wine. We haven't sold a red Burgundy since March.

[So it's a matter of] analyzing what you are selling and adjusting to it. The other wines that don't necessarily go with the theme, you're not going to order as much, and that's going to impact your number of suppliers. In order to get Sancerre back, we have to do a minimum order from this [vendor we normally work with]. Well, that's just going to have to wait. If you stay within your theme during this time, you lessen your administrative work. And you don't have to try 12 different wines with the staff in one day: "Hey, let's learn about this [one wine] today." As long as you do something every day, it keeps them engaged and on their toes.

We have two whites, two reds, and two sparkling wines by the glass, and we have other things that we change up on the tasting menu on a daily basis; we're constantly printing menus [with an eye toward] moving what we have. I think one thing that has prepared me for this moment is that, even though I've had different somms working me over the years, I've always been the one in charge and put limits on [buying]; since I'm the one writing the checks at the end of the day, I can say, "No, this is the strategy we're going for." I've seen restaurants go through three somms in two years, and all of a sudden they look at the inventory of bottles that aren't even on the wine list anymore or that don't move. For us, as a small restaurant, that was never an option. I've always had to consider: "Oh, we have two bottles left. What do we do? Hand-sell it, offer it on the tasting menu?" Knowing how to manage those one to three bottles has been an advantage for me in the pandemic. **LD**

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SLO Down and Stay Awhile

TWO NEW HOTELS OFFER STYLISH SOPHISTICATION IN THE HEART OF SAN LUIS OBISPO **by Hana-Lee Sedgwick**

Located halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo—often referred to as SLO—has long charmed visitors with its relaxed vibe. However, this funky, easygoing college town ten minutes from Edna Valley isn't quite as sleepy as its nickname may suggest, especially now that two chic hotels have opened in the heart of downtown, bringing with them a dose of urban sophistication that visitors are sure to appreciate once they're ready to travel again.

Contemporary design meets modern convenience at the 78-room **Hotel San Luis Obispo**, located one block from the historic Mission San Luis Obispo. Developed by the same group behind Sonoma County's Hotel Healdsburg, the Hotel SLO beckons with a sleek yet playful aesthetic marked by inviting communal areas and deluxe amenities such as a 50-foot pool, a day spa, wellness classes, and complimentary bikes for cruising around town. The bright, airy rooms and suites come outfitted with white oak floors, original artworks, and complimentary snacks, while thoughtful details throughout the property include eco-friendly fill stations for both still and sparkling water and a grab-and-go pantry stocked with daily-baked breads and pastries, a portion of whose sales go to a local

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOTEL SAN LUIS OBISPO



food bank. Two on-site restaurants, the Cal Ital-focused Piadina and modern steakhouse Ox + Anchor, are led by Thomas Keller alum Ryan Fancher; also notable is the rooftop High Bar, a go-to spot for both tourists and locals looking to savor specialty cocktails and locally made wines while playing bocce ball or taking in 360-degree views of the surrounding area.

Another new hotel cementing SLO's destination-worthy status is the luxe yet unpretentious **Hotel Cerro**, located just steps from neighboring downtown restaurants and shops. In a contemporary setting that reflects a sense of place thanks to historical architectural elements and works by local artists, each of the 65 rooms and suites are spacious and serene, with highlights such as goose-down duvets, plush bathrobes, organic bath prod-

ucts, and complimentary beverages. Most impressive, however, are the 750-square-foot Garden Suites, which feature deep soaking tubs that fill from the ceiling and private patios that open out to the hotel's thriving gardens.

Those plots yield vegetables and herbs that are used in the kitchen and behind the bar at signature Mediterranean-inspired restaurant Brasserie SLO—which operates its own distillery—while an on-site pie shop serves both sweet and savory creations. Other amenities adding to Hotel Cerro's allure are a 4,000-square-foot spa, a 24-hour fitness studio, and complimentary bike service. Certainly the most coveted feature, though, is the cabana-lined rooftop pool—a leisurely place for sipping cocktails while enjoying panoramic views between dips. **LV**



Left: On the grounds of the Hotel San Luis Obispo. Top: Thomas Keller alum Ryan Fancher oversees both restaurants at the Hotel SLO.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOTEL CERRO



Hotel Cerro preserved the brick façade of the 1920s structure it occupies.



Poolside cocktails at Hotel Cerro.


THREE FINGER JACK



90

POINTS

Tasting Panel

2018 LIMITED RELEASE



“Aromas of charred vanilla bean, boysenberry preserves and nutmeg...”

– Tasting Panel, July/August 2020



Rob and Diana Jensen are the owners of Testarossa in Los Gatos, CA.

Redhead Wines Shine

REVIEWING TESTAROSSA'S CURRENT RELEASES

by Anthony Dias Blue

It's a familiar story. Diana and Rob Jensen were both working in tech while making wine as a hobby in the garage of their home in the Santa Cruz Mountains—until 1994, when their pastime became a business with the commercial release of their first 200 cases.

The couple named their winery Testarossa, or “Redhead,” after the nickname Rob earned during a stint in Italy for his hair color. They decided to specialize in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and bought the historic Novitiate winery, a huge facility. They needed it; current annual production is 30,000 cases.

Along with winemaker Bill Brosseau, the Jensens have cultivated relationships with some of California's top vineyards. They've also established a thriving retail business at the winery, where they sell 80% of their output; sales are still booming in the pandemic. Here are my tasting notes for most of their current releases:

Testarossa 2018 Chardonnay, Soberanes Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$51) Smooth, rich, and dense, with tropical fruit and good acidity. Deep and complex yet fresh and charming. **93**

Testarossa 2018 Chardonnay, Rosella's Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$51) Lush, toasty nose and a silky texture; subtle toast and a core of firm acidity.

Rich yet totally balanced, with a long, graceful finish. **94**

Testarossa 2018 Chardonnay, Rincon Vineyard, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$51)

From a celebrated vineyard, this shows smooth, elegant tropical fruit buttressed by firm acidity. Creamy and dense, complex and rich. **94**

Testarossa 2018 Chardonnay, Rosemary's Vineyard, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$51) This equally famed vineyard yields an elegant, silky expression very close to the true Burgundian model; bright and lively, with graceful style and a long, tangy finish. **95**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Brosseau Vineyard, Chalona (\$68) Smooth yet dense and meaty, with minerals and dried cherries. **92**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Rosemary's Vineyard, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$68) Fresh and tangy yet lush and dense with juicy cherry. **93**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Tondre Grapefield Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$68) Spicy cherry nose. Crisp, bright, and pure, with racy acidity. **93**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Gary's Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$68) Silky and juicy, with fresh cherry and raspberry; smooth texture and a long, earthy finish. **93**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Rosella's Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$68) Succulent and crisp, with racy

acidity and tangy cherry; bright, long, and fresh. **94**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Rincon Vineyard, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$68)

Red cherry nose. Smooth and elegant, this is a lovely expression of its site: graceful, balanced, and pure. **94**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Cortada Alta Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$68)

Soft cherry nose. Remarkable depth for such a young wine, from the silky texture to the mature cherry notes; rich and complex. **94**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, La Rinconada Vineyard, Santa Rita Hills (\$68)

Fresh, layered, and subtle, with fine acidity; smooth, long, and delicious. **95**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Pisoni Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$81)

From one of California's most renowned vineyards. Lush cherry nose; juicy and exuberant with ripe, tangy fruit; smooth texture and pure, long-lasting flavors. **95**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Soberanes Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$68)

Warm, earthy nose and a silky mouthfeel. Bright, tangy ripe cherry with just a hint of mature sweetness; crisp and long. **95**

Testarossa 2018 Pinot Noir, Graham Family Vineyard, Russian River Valley (\$68)

Silky and elegant, with rich, complex fruit as well as oak and spice flavors. Burgundian style—graceful and long. **95** **LT**

INTRODUCING
THE BEST NEW WHISKEYS OF 2020

94

POINTS
THE TASTING
PANEL
- NOV. 2020

97

POINTS
THE TASTING
PANEL
- AUG. 2019

92

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HITTING THE SOMMELIER

Jackpot

WELCOME TO VINHO VERDE,
THE REGION THAT HAS IT ALL

by Erik Segelbaum



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINHOVERDEWINES

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

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

Allow me to (re)introduce you to Vinho Verde, one of my favorite wine regions on the planet. As a sommelier, I'm driven toward dynamic wines that overdeliver on quality for the price: I'm looking for diversity in the vineyard,



The vineyards of Quinta de Azevedo in Barcelos.



An ancient structure on the Casa de Vila Boa estate in Minho.

passion from those who steward their grapes from ground to glass, and versatility at the table. As a wine nerd, meanwhile, I appreciate the opportunity to dive deep into subregions, microclimates, indigenous varieties, and all of the other wonderfully esoteric elements of terroir that tug at the heartstrings of enophiles everywhere.

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

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

A Taste of Terroir

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

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



Alvarinho is perhaps Vinho Verde's most famous grape.

A Welcome Dinner Guest

With dishes that typically present as challenges for pairing, it's Vinho Verde to the rescue. There's a wine for the spice of Indian and Southeast Asian food, another for the equally intense heat of various Latin American cuisines, and still another for the bold flavors of the Middle East, as well as options for more delicate European and Mediterranean gastronomy. If it lives underwater, there's a perfect expression of Vinho Verde for it, be it sushi, octopus, squid, mussels, tuna, or seaweed. In fact, one of the most amazing pairings I've ever experienced was a red Vinho Verde with charcoal-grilled sardines. For some reason, many sommeliers insist that you cannot easily pair wine with artichokes or asparagus—I beg to disagree! Look no further than premium oaked Vinho Verde Branco.

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



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



BEYOND the BARREL

Joanna Buchanan Metal Straw Set (\$76) Designer Joanna Buchanan's line of barware ranges from reusable straws to cocktail picks to swizzle sticks, all embellished with a variety of trinkets such as polished quartz, chinoiserie orbs, and charms made from food-grade zinc, brass, and glass. The metal straws are sold in sets of four (including the pictured Stripey Bee set) and accompanied by a cleaning brush; they'd be a befitting gift for an eco-conscious loved one with an affinity for bedazzlement.



In **Beyond the Barrel**, we taste and review products that may or may not come from a barrel but land outside the box. From brilliant innovations to zany concepts, we approach everything judiciously, with the cognizance that everything has a market.

Owl's Brew Matcha Boozy Tea (\$3.50/355-mL can)

Owl's Brew Boozy Tea is made from freshly brewed tea and botanicals. The brand's recently launched Matcha, Pineapple, and Chamomile expression is vegan, gluten-free, and not too heady with only 4.8% ABV and 110 calories. Grilled pineapple shows on the palate along with a nuttiness from the matcha and a floral note from the chamomile. And if you're a bubbles aficionado, you're in luck—each variety has just the right amount of effervescence.



Willie's Superbrew (\$11/6-pack of 355-mL cans) No ambiguous artificial flavors in Willie's Superbrew, just alcohol, cane sugar, fruit juice, and spices. Another lightweight contender in the hard seltzer game, the Pomegranate Açai expression weighs in at 4.5% ABV with 110 calories and exhibits juicy yet slightly tannic notes from the pomegranate seeds, which are nicely rounded off by the earthy-berry flavor of the açai juice. And the just-released Pear Cinnamon—which the company calls a "cold-weather hard seltzer"—would likely make for a fine stocking stuffer.



Ah-So (\$17/4-pack of 250-mL cans)

Canned at Ah-So's estate in Navarra, Spain, this organic wine brand makes Sparkling, White, Rosé, and Red expressions from handpicked 100% Garnacha grapes. The red variety shows violet and rose petals on the nose, followed by cassis, candied cherry, and balanced tannins on the palate. It goes without saying that no ah-so opener is needed to enjoy it—just fingers to crack the stay tab on the can. **LZ**

Social Hour (\$20/4-pack of 250-mL cans)

Julie Reiner is one of New York City's best-known bartenders, responsible for opening such celebrated cocktail spots as the *Mad Men*-vibed Clover Club in Brooklyn—where she also co-founded this RTD beverage company. It has come out of the gate with three straightforward and refreshing libations: Gin and Tonic, Pacific Spritz, and Straight Rye Whiskey Mule. The latter has a nice balance of citrus and spice on the palate, with notes of lemon, ginger, cinnamon, and a pinch of cayenne, and there's a jerky-like smokiness on the finish. Perfect for Zoom happy hours.



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WHEN BOOTLEGGERS WERE HEROES

1924 WINES
CAPTURES THE
SPIRIT OF THE
ROARING '20S

by Wanda Mann

Prohibition is a textbook example of best-laid plans gone awry. Ratified in 1920, the 18th Amendment, which outlawed the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquors in an attempt to curtail Americans' taste for fermented fruit (and grains), actually had the opposite effect. It fueled a drinking culture whose proponents creatively outwitted the government at almost every turn. Bootleggers became heroes and speakeasies were the center of social life—and the party-all-the-time ethos of the Roaring '20s was so captivating that it continues to inspire us today, referenced by musicians, authors, filmmakers, and yes, even winemakers. That includes 1924, a fast-growing wine brand that celebrates the fearless and fun-loving spirit of the era with full-bodied and boldly flavored wines reminiscent of those that were all the rage at the time.

Given that Prohibition was the law of the land for more than a decade, why does 1924 hang its fedora on that particular year? Simple: to commemorate when its founders first planted vineyards in California. But while 1924 Wines pays homage to the past, it's crafted to appeal to today's drinkers. That approach has clearly proved successful, with the brand's sales increasing by an astounding 85% over the past year, thanks to releases like the new 1924 Scotch Barrel Aged Chardonnay. Spirit barrel-aged wine is one of the fastest-growing segments of the industry; according to 1924 marketing director Andrew Blok, "Sales have risen by 49% in the past year, dramatically outpacing the 11% growth of wine overall."

At first glance, the union of Chardonnay and Scotch might seem odd, but the 1924 Scotch Barrel Aged Chardonnay—the only such product on the market—aligns perfectly with 1924's connection to the 1920s. Though wine flowed freely behind closed doors during Prohibition, Scotch did not, and the thirst for it reached a fevered pitch. Unlike the ubiquitous moonshine and bathtub gin of the time, the high-quality whisky was liquid gold. The bootleggers it made a fortune for are long gone, but Scotch is more popular than ever. By aging full-bodied Chardonnay in Scotch barrels, 1924 tips a hat to history while bringing together the best of both categories.

The Chardonnay grapes are picked at peak ripeness for rich fruit flavor yet modest alcohol levels; after the wine is made, a portion is aged in the barrels. Along with aromas of rich toffee, sweet tobacco, and baked apple pie, its complex hints of antique leather, caramelized brown sugar, and toasted oak are reminiscent of Scotch. Suggested pairings include subtly sweet and smoky dishes such as pork spareribs or grilled salmon.

Then there's the 1924 Double Black Bourbon Barrel Aged Cabernet Sauvignon, inspired by a loophole in the 18th Amendment that allowed physicians to write prescriptions for booze,



including bourbon. It's crafted with grapes from the well-draining sandy soils of California's Lodi region, where warm summer afternoons combine with cooling nighttime breezes from the Pacific Ocean to yield grapes with the ideal levels of concentration and structure needed for aging in bourbon barrels. The result shows flavors of blackberry, vanilla, and warm spice that intermingle harmoniously with whiskey-influenced notes of caramel, butterscotch, and charred oak—making for a good accompaniment to, say, bacon-wrapped filet mignon with maple-pecan sweet potatoes or grilled, wood-smoked beef tenderloin.

The spirit barrel-aged wines are preceded in the 1924 portfolio by two other wildly popular wines sourced

from Lodi. While the 1924 Double Black Red Wine Blend undergoes a more traditional aging regimen in French and American oak, it's as bold as its brethren, with rich aromas of blackberry, mocha, caramel, and vanilla and core flavors of plum, dark chocolate, toasted marshmallow, and allspice. The 1924 Double Black Cabernet Sauvignon also ages in a mix of French and American oak; its intense aromas of black cherry, violet, black peppercorn, and smoky char are complemented by concentrated flavors of blackberry jam, black currant, and spicy clove.

Time travel may not be possible, but the bold style and energy of the Roaring '20s lives on through 1924 Wines. **L**

Meridith May's Tasting Notes

1924 2018 Scotch Barrel Aged Chardonnay, California

Contributing background flavors of peat and malt, the Scotch influence is not shy in this creamy, dreamy Chardonnay. Notes of apple pie and honeyed lemon add to its intricate nature. **91**



1924 2018 Double Black Bourbon Barrel Aged Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi

Aromas of blackberry and chocolate are the beginning of a journey down a new path for Cabernet lovers. Spiced peach and brown sugar emerge from the undoubtable presence of bourbon's shadow, joining notes of sweet oak and sandalwood. Dates, figs, and cocoa line up to form dense layers on the mid-palate and finish. **92**



1924 2018 Double Black Red Wine Blend, Lodi

Rich, ripe aromas of blackberry preserves, vanilla, and black currants lead to a round and voluptuous mouthfeel with juicy notes of black cherry, tilled soil, and chocolate licorice. A subtle touch of nutmeg and cedar enlivens the finish. **92**



1924 2018 Double Black Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi

Following an elegant perfume of chocolate, leather, and ripe blueberry, white pepper zings amid notes of blackberry pie in this pleasurable experience of a wine. Velvet tannins are swathed in cinnamon and vanilla. **92**



In Down the Aisle, the editors at *The Tasting Panel* rate retail beverages based on a combination of elements that can affect off-premise potential, including packaging, branding/credibility, value, and user friendliness.

“Talkies” are the little cards appended to retail shelves that educate the consumer through tasting notes and, sometimes, ratings. They are an invaluable tool when there isn’t a knowledgeable employee available and/or the customer is too intimidated to ask for help. For this reason, we are **supplementing the traditional rating system with our “Talkie” rating system to assess retail wines/spirits/beers** based on the aforementioned factors—and, of course, taste!

1 TALKIE

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

2 TALKIES

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

3 TALKIES

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

4 TALKIES

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

5 TALKIES

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



Proscotto Semi-Sweet Bubbles, California (\$7)

Family winemakers Anthony, Paul, Natalie, and Michael Scotto, who trace their roots to Italy, were inspired to produce a canned version of their favored style of California-grown, semi-sweet sparkling wine. Aromas of white flowers and juicy pear lead to flavors of tart apple and lemon drop, which ride in on a wave of ticklish bubbles. **88**



SCOTTO CELLARS



Dark Horse 2018 Merlot, California (\$8)

Chocolate and blackberry are neck and neck on the nose, while ripe, vibrant, high-toned fruit exhibits reined-in power on the palate. Silky tannins round out winning flavors of cocoa and cherry. **90**



E. & J. GALLO



Mind & Body 2019 Rosé, California (\$13)

Scents of pink rose petals and pink grapefruit paint a delightful picture for this 90-calorie low-sugar rosé. The palate does not disappoint; in fact, it overdelivers. Strawberry and watermelon are as subtle as a watercolor, while a dry stony quality and great acidity mark a sensational finish. Only 8.5% ABV. **90**



TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



Heavenly Cream 2019 Chardonnay, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14)

From vineyards in Agrelo and the Uco Valley, this wine offers perfumed coconut and lemon meringue that stimulate both nose and palate. Vivid notes of creamy vanilla, melon, and Golden Delicious apple arise before acidity chimes in to brighten up the fruit and white flowers. **91**



DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS



Borghi Ad Est 2018 Pinot Grigio, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy (\$15)

Located in the town of Gorizia near the Adriatic Sea, Borghi Ad Est produces only Pinot Grigio. Grown on marl, this expression is a striking marriage of minerality and acidity. Edgy and focused flavors of Asian pear and lemon verbena light up the palate, where they’re joined by a vibration of white flowers and wet stone. A hint of toffee on the finish lends a sense of roundness. **91**

VINEYARD BRANDS



Miss Anaïs 2019 Rosé, Pays d’Oc, Languedoc, France (\$15)

This lovely custom bottle with a glass top holds a 100% Grenache Noir that’s steely and dry, with notes of bright melon and red tea. Orange zest lingers on the finish. **89**

CHANTOVENT USA



Bernard Magrez Grands Vignobles 2018 Le Prêlat Côtes du Rhone Villages Laudun, France (\$16)

This wine is equal parts brushy, meaty, and earthy, with notes of bacon fat in a light-hearted body. Deep and resonant flavors of plum are seasoned with black pepper and cinnamon. **90**





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Down the AISLE



Sunny with a Chance of Flowers 2019 Positively Sauvignon Blanc,



Monterey County (\$17) For health-conscious and/or weight-watching drinkers, it doesn't get much sunnier than this clean-tasting zero-sugar white at 9% ABV and 85 calories per 5-ounce serving. Sustainably farmed on a family-owned Monterey County estate, it shows off aromas of lime and white flowers, and the palate is light, with grassy notes naturally sweetened by flavors of pineapple and honeyed pear. A tart grapefruit finish sets the palate up for that next sip. The label also produces a Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. **90**



Tree Fort 2019 Pinot Grigio, Paso Robles (\$17)

Expressing flavors that range from honeysuckle to summer pear; this light and refreshing white keeps the palate clean. **89**



THREE BADGE ENOLOGY



Four Vines 2018 The Kinker Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$18)

Featuring just a dollop of Petite Sirah and aged 14 months in French, Hungarian, and American oak barrels, this rich and ripe red hails from a warmer area of Paso Robles, where the grapes enjoy a longer hang time on well-drained soils. Aromas of currants, plum, and vanilla spice lead to sturdy, dusty tannins. Blue and black fruit preserves ripen further on the mid-palate before fennel root, pencil shavings, and fudge linger on the finish. **90**



PURPLE BRANDS



El Coto 2018 875m Finca Carbonera Tempranillo, Tinto de Altura, Rioja, Spain

(\$20) Plum and lilac create a fragrant entry for this red, which overdelivers on both flavor and pleasure. Roasted coffee, plum, and ripe cherry come together in a seamless structure defined by black-tea tannins. Fine acidity lifts the fruit and brings it forward on the palate as the floral aromatics persist. **90**



OPICI IMPORTS



Cascina Castlet 2019 Moscato d'Asti DOCCG, Piedmont, Italy (\$29)

Subtly fizzy bubbles burst into tangerine cream with a hint of pine nut. The result is glorious, tickling the palate and further seducing with honeyed apple and mango. **92**



ROMANO BRANDS



Chateau Routas 2019 Coteaux Varois Estate Rosé, Provence, France (\$15)

A floral beauty, this blend of 46% Cinsault, 30% Grenache, 15% Syrah, and 9% Cabernet Sauvignon exhibits vivid fragrances, flavors, and texture. Melon, peach blossom, white raspberry, and clementine surround a core of minerality. **91**



USA WINE WEST



Bonterra Organic Vineyards 2018 Merlot, California

(\$16) This blend of 85% Merlot, 10% Petite Sirah, 4% Zinfandel, and 1% other red grapes is sourced from vineyards in Mendocino County, Paso Robles, and Lake County. Earthy base notes establish an aromatic profile of dried leaves, sweet beet, and ripe strawberry. Laid on a carpet of fennel and espresso, the red fruit is rich and bright. **89**



FETZER VINEYARDS



Be Human 2018 Merlot, Columbia Valley, Washington

(\$17) This Merlot-based Bordeaux blend shows ripe, dense fruit. Plum preserves, dark chocolate, and creamy fennel root maintain a sense of plushness on the palate. **91**



AQUILINI BRANDS



Babylonstoren 2020 Cande, Simonsberg-Paarl, Western Cape, South Africa

(\$30) This floral-focused blend of 45% Chenin Blanc, 28.5% Viognier, 16.5% Chardonnay, and 10% Sémillon exudes aromas of lemon verbena, white tea, white musk, and lime zest. On the palate, opulent notes of gardenia and honeysuckle are refined by lithe acidity and fine salinity. **92**



Oliviero Toscani 2017 Lumeo Syrah, Costa Toscana IGT, Italy

(\$49) Sumptuous scents of dark fruit and grilled meat speak the language of Syrah. Graphite and dark leather take hold of black-plum skin and black olive on the velvet-lined and juicy palate, which shows a snap of black pepper on the finish. **93**



Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin, Ireland

(\$37) Asian botanicals and gunpowder tea make this superb 86-proof gin unique. Slow-distilled in a medieval copper pot still, it offers up a nose of lavender and spearmint. Flavors abound, starting with cinnamon toast, dried lavender, orange peel, and fennel. Citrus notes linger with spice on the tongue. **94**



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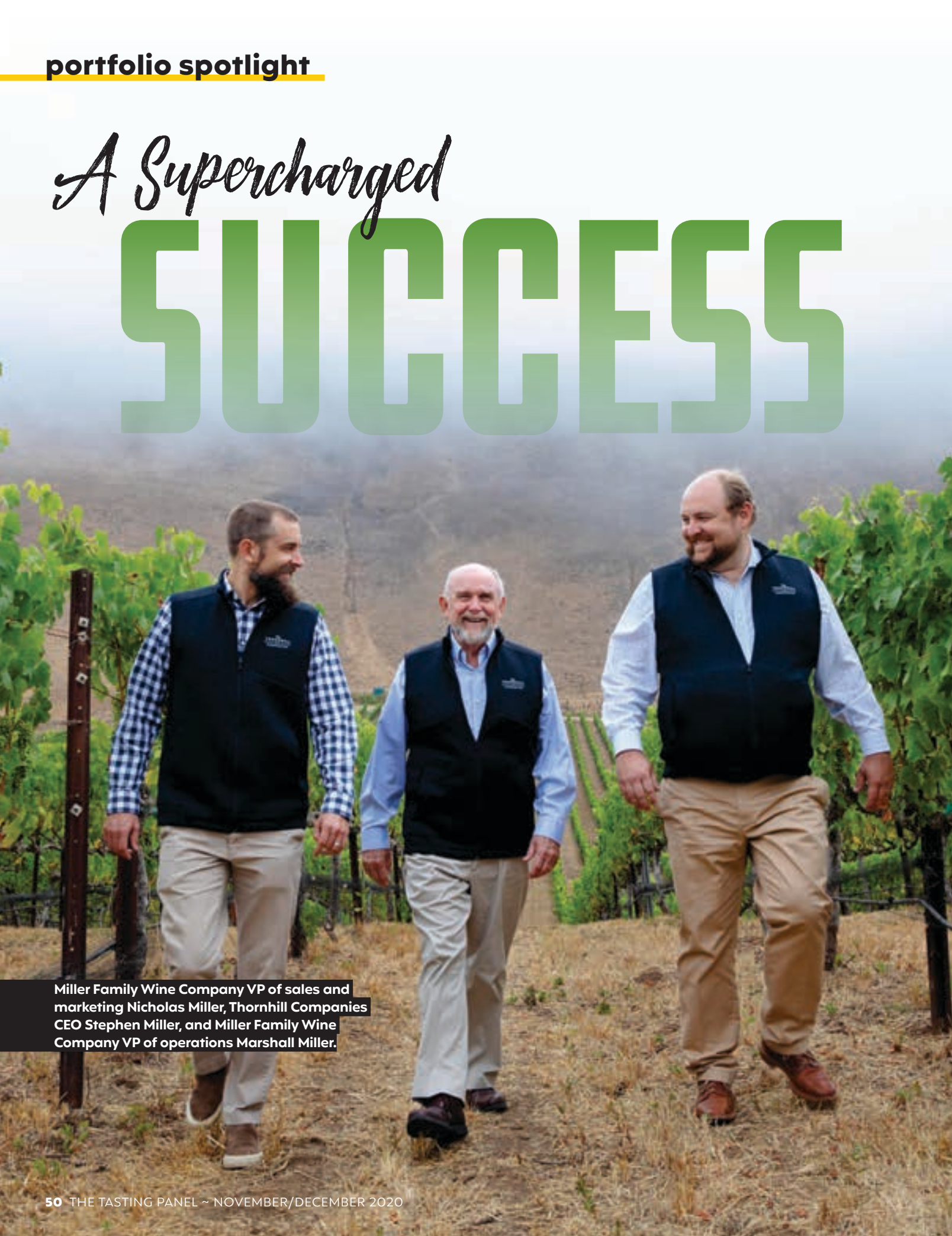


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A Supercharged

SUCCESS

A photograph of three men walking through a vineyard. They are dressed in business-casual attire, including dark vests and light-colored shirts. The background shows rows of grapevines and a hazy, mountainous landscape.

Miller Family Wine Company VP of sales and marketing Nicholas Miller, Thornhill Companies CEO Stephen Miller, and Miller Family Wine Company VP of operations Marshall Miller.



MILLER FAMILY WINE
COMPANY ACQUIRES
THE BNA WINE
GROUP'S PORTFOLIO
OF BRANDS,
INCLUDING ITS
CROWN JEWEL,
BUTTERNUT

by Jessie Birschbach



The Miller Family Wine Company's French Camp Vineyard in Paso Robles.



IT'S

hard to imagine how anyone could improve upon the fortunes of an already über-successful brand like Butternut Chardonnay—until you throw the marketing know-how and resources of the Miller Family Wine Company into the mix. Suddenly, the sky's the limit.

By the time this issue mails in November, the BNA Wine Group portfolio will have been in the care of Thornhill Companies' Central Coast-based division for about a month. Founded in Nashville, Tennessee, the BNA Wine Group developed a number of proven premium labels, including Volunteer, Humble Pie, The Rule, and

most notably Butternut, which has become a sensation for its alignment with market trends—from its big, buttery profile to its recent release in cans. These accessible, consumer-driven brands fit perfectly into the Miller Family Wine Company's multiyear growth plan.

If there is one silver lining to the dark cloud COVID-19 has cast on the U.S. wine industry, it's the boom in off-premise wine sales—which has made BNA's brands, already thriving in the wholesale and retail channels, all the more valuable. But this acquisition, according to Miller Family Wine Company vice president of sales and marketing Nicholas Miller, was in the works prior to March 2020. The Miller family's expansion strategy has been carefully built on three pillars: "[One is] the organic growth of the brands we have; [another is] innovation, like creating new brands and adding SKUs; and third [is] acquisitions," he says.

"We feel these three pillars will help us to become one of the largest wine companies in the Central Coast. That said, we're not trying to become a top-five producer in the wine industry. That's just a whole different company than what we want to be. We want to stay within our lane: family-owned [and] centered within the Central Coast as one of its premier producers."

Given the Miller family history, it seems as though they've been inching their way toward becoming one of the Central Coast's premier producers for nearly 150 years. Miller is a fifth-generation farmer who traces his family's roots in California back to 1871, when his British ancestors settled in Ventura County to grow lemons and avocados. It was the fourth generation who first planted grapes, expanding their land holdings to Santa Barbara County and Paso Robles in 1973; by the late 2000s, the family had begun shifting their focus from growing and bulk produc-

“SOME WILL WONDER HOW WE BALANCE A BOUTIQUE BRAND LIKE BIEN NACIDO WITH BUTTERNUT, BUT THAT’S THE DIVERSIFICATION OUR FAMILY HAS ALWAYS MAINTAINED. WE’VE ALWAYS GROWN MULTIPLE CROPS. WE’VE ALWAYS PLAYED IN DIFFERENT MARKET SEGMENTS. AND THIS ACQUISITION JUST GIVES US ANOTHER POINT OF DIVERSIFICATION.”

—Nicholas Miller



ing for others to making their own wine, releasing their first vintage from their boutique properties, Bien Nacido & Solomon Hills, in 2007.

Miller acknowledges that “some will wonder how we balance a boutique brand like Bien Nacido with Butternut.” But, he adds, “That’s the diversification our family has always maintained. We’ve always grown multiple crops. We’ve always played in different market segments. And this acquisition just gives us another point of diversification.”

Today the Miller Family Wine Company’s winemaking team is run by Jonathan Nagy—formerly of Byron Winery, he’s considered one of the best winemakers in the Central Coast region—and its portfolio consists of Ballard Lane, Smashberry, Barrel Burner, and the beloved J. Wilkes in addition to the new BNA Wine Group brands. As Miller explains, while BNA acted primarily as a négociant in

making Butternut, “What we can do with this successful program is plug in our family’s assets, our vineyards, our production facilities, [and] our winemaking team, and [tack] on to the end of it all hospitality [via their tasting rooms]. We can give these wines now a sense of place, a home, and a connection with the land.”

The newly acquired brands will also become part of the proprietary e-commerce wine club that the company recently launched—yet another tool in its kit for forging a direct connection with the consumer. “Butternut is already a very successful brand,” Miller points out. “We don’t need to improve anything really. We’re just trying to supercharge it, because we truly believe there’s a very long road ahead of it and what it can accomplish.” Luckily for Butternut Chardonnay fans, they can now follow this road through the Central Coast back to the historic Miller Family Wine Company. **V**

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

In addition to the Butternut line—which consists of a rosé, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon as well as a Chardonnay—here are the other brands from the newly acquired BNA Wine Group portfolio:

Volunteer, a value-driven Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$25) and Cabernet Sauvignon (\$25)

Humble Pie, a Cabernet Sauvignon from the Central Coast (\$15)

The Rule, a North Coast Cabernet Sauvignon and Napa Valley red blend (\$20)

Rallying for the Little Guys

BIBO BEVERAGE GROUP USES THE POWER OF THE PORTFOLIO TO CHAMPION SMALL PRODUCERS **by Meredith May**

Because large brands have a clear advantage in today's uncertain (if not downright bizarre) market, smaller wine and spirits producers must continually seek out positioning that helps them be seen, heard, understood, and, ultimately, purchased by gatekeepers both on- and off-premise.

In an effort to appeal to a wide range of clients, many supplier companies aim to build well-rounded portfolios while making costly investments in sales teams with national outreach capabilities. But this approach often costs niche and boutique producers access to the market: How can they survive and make a profit if they can't sufficiently navigate the distribution network?

My empathy is heartfelt for these "little guys" who forge beverage products with their own blood, sweat, and tears. Industry veterans Mark Lester and Terri White not only share my concerns but founded BIBO Beverage Group in order to address them. When I first learned about BIBO and its strategy, I immediately contacted the duo.



With a sales team in key markets and optional marketing plans, BIBO gives its small- to mid-size producer clients the ability to operate with more muscle in a vast and complicated industry. "We believe there's strength in numbers," White points out. "Smaller family brands have a hard time competing with larger companies with the budget to invest in extensive sales and marketing programs. Our

model is simple: With our collective [of specialists], we can open up new doors of distribution to everyone in our tight-knit group of brands," which currently includes Bianchi Winery & Tasting Room, Chatham Imports, pureCru Napa Valley, Soul Premium Cachaça, JACK Wines, Trujillo Wines, and Two Old Dogs Winery.

Working off of monthly retainers, commissions, and the occasional well-earned bonus, the BIBO team considers brand equity a key incentive to enhancing their partners' presence in the marketplace. "We are not a broker," Lester insists. "We don't want to be in the position where we open up new avenues for regional sales and chains and then the brands leave. We are breaking away from that mold. We see ourselves as partners for life—that's our investment in creating a model that's a fraction of the cost of the services provided by more traditional agencies."

BIBO's one-stop-shop operation has the potential to shift the focus toward products that deserve attention but have difficulty getting placement. With boots on the ground and creative thinking, its chances for building a luxurious portfolio of esteemed producers is in the cards; for instance, Lester and White plan to dive deep into their producer partners' businesses in ways that may include mentorship programs and even oversight of distributor margins. "We are offering expertise to our clients from our own structured past experience and hunkering down as dedicated employees," says White. "Now more than ever, the power of the portfolio is critical to any brand success. In a time when brands are looking to reduce their expenses, BIBO has a roadmap to reduce costs and increase coverage." **W**

Meet the Founders: **TERRI WHITE AND MARK LESTER**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BIBO BEVERAGE



Terri White has more than 30 years of experience in promotional marketing, distributor management, and sales of luxury wines,

craft spirits, and beer from around the world, with contacts at some of the nation's finest retailers, restaurants, and chains. She possesses a strong entrepreneurial presence, having disrupted the traditional broker mold when she founded Virtus Wines International in 2008, followed by dba Wheelhouse Libations and The SIP Agency. At BIBO, she focuses on supplier-client relations, national account development, and the fine wine division.



Mark Lester came to BIBO as a 20-year industry veteran with experience in multiple channels. He opened Rhode Island restaurant

Sambar in 2005 and sold it in 2014 for a considerable profit; he also created the award-winning brand Soul Premium Cachaça. He concentrates on BIBO's spirits divisions, international distribution, brand programming and strategy, and COGS.

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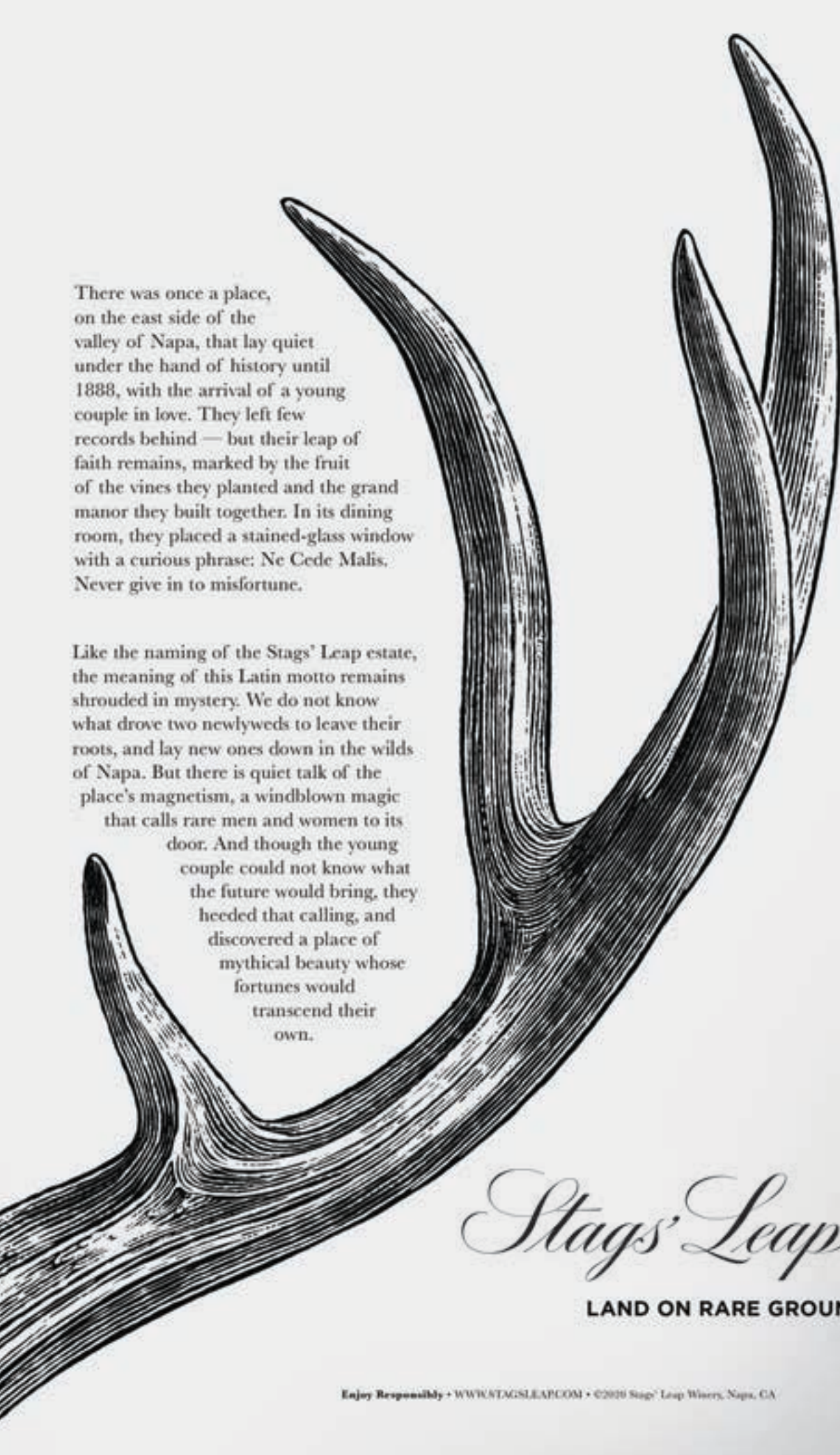
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There was once a place,
on the east side of the
valley of Napa, that lay quiet
under the hand of history until
1888, with the arrival of a young
couple in love. They left few
records behind — but their leap of
faith remains, marked by the fruit
of the vines they planted and the grand
manor they built together. In its dining
room, they placed a stained-glass window
with a curious phrase: *Ne Cede Malis*.
Never give in to misfortune.

Like the naming of the Stags' Leap estate,
the meaning of this Latin motto remains
shrouded in mystery. We do not know
what drove two newlyweds to leave their
roots, and lay new ones down in the wilds
of Napa. But there is quiet talk of the
place's magnetism, a windblown magic
that calls rare men and women to its
door. And though the young
couple could not know what
the future would bring, they
heeded that calling, and
discovered a place of
mythical beauty whose
fortunes would
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Pushing the Limits

SOUTH BAY RESTAURANT **BARAN'S 2239** WEATHERS THE PANDEMIC WITH A PERSONALIZED TO-GO WINE PROGRAM

by Kate Newton

Anniversaries typically symbolize the promise of a new chapter, but in the case of Hermosa Beach, California, restaurant Baran's 2239, the day that should have been a celebration of its fourth year in business marked the end of an era: On March 16, the beloved family-run eatery—whose seasonally driven and internationally inspired dishes have earned it a spot on the *Michelin Guide's* Bib Gourmand list—shuttered as closures prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic swept through the South Bay.

Just two weeks later, it was back, selling dozens of wine selections at retail prices and serving lunch three days a week. Now, with the help of a PPP loan that enabled it to bring back part of its furloughed staff and the volunteer sommelier services of longtime wine sales representative John Lowe, it's been running one of the most well-received takeout operations in the area for the past four months and counting, pairing a handpicked lineup of wines with four- to five-course dinners that change weekly.

With indoor dining disallowed and no outdoor seating at their disposal, brothers Jonathan and Jason Baran and their executive chef-partner, Tyler Gugliotta, were keenly aware that their livelihoods would depend not only on sustaining regulars' loyalty but also on using word of mouth to expand their customer base. To do so, they'd need to continue offering the same intimate fine-dining experience guests had come to expect from the restaurant, and Lowe quickly proved to be a vital part of that equation.



Executive chef Tyler Gugliotta and brothers Jonathan and Jason Baran are partners at Baran's 2239 in Hermosa Beach, CA.

What began as an experiment quickly paid dividends: "We tried it a couple nights, and sales went up at least 200% on the wine front," Jonathan says.

As people come in for pickup, Lowe is on hand to tell the stories behind each selection on offer, helping guests choose what suits their tastes—or satisfies their newfound penchant for exploration. "It started out a little bit conservative; if we did four or five wines, I'd throw in maybe one that would push people's boundaries a little bit," Lowe says. "Now there's some trust [and] the feedback has been positive when they do try something new. I'm ecstatic when that happens, that they're going out of their zone, and it makes them happy [while] framing what's on the plate."

What goes in the center of that frame is mostly up to Gugliotta, though the chef eagerly exchanges ideas with both the Barans and Lowe. He notes that "the more open-minded people are, the better their experience is. It pushes us to be creative."

Standout pairings have included a Caribbean-inspired menu with a dry Riesling from Alexana Winery in Oregon's Dundee Hills AVA (one guest came back the next day and bought all seven bottles in stock) and what Lowe calls the "highly prized" G.B. Burlotto 2016 Barolo, representing "one of the best vintages of the last 25 years," to accompany an Italian menu that included handmade lasagna with eight-hour pomodoro sauce.

Jonathan says the pandemic has only solidified what "a tight-knit community" Hermosa Beach is,



John Lowe, a wine sales representative and longtime patron of Baran's 2239, has been volunteering his services as a sommelier for the restaurant's takeout program.

adding, "We've gotten the most calls we've ever gotten from people saying, 'Oh, my God, you just gave me the best meal of this whole quarantine.' It's been outstanding for people to actually enjoy a to-go meal [so much that they'd] make [that] effort . . . [and] I feel like that's definitely a testament to the food. We're not sending anything out that we don't think will travel well." **T**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BARAN'S 2239

SILVERADO



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POINTS

tastingpanel

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POINTS

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Anthony Dias

BLUE *REVIEWS*

Presented by  **BLUE LIFESTYLE**

In each issue, senior editor 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 bluelifestyle.com.

Prices are for 750-mL bottles unless otherwise noted.

DOMESTIC

92 **7 Cellars 2017 Elway's Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$46)** John Elway's Reserve wines are made by Rob Mondavi Jr. This one is silky, juicy, and tangy as well as fresh, lively, and charming, with good balance, depth, and length.

94 **Cliff Lede 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$28)** Bright citrus nose; smooth and succulent, crisp yet mellow, with multiple layers of flavor and considerable finesse. Deep and rounded, lush and charming.

93 **E18hteen Vines 2018 Craft Wine Pinot Noir, Seppa Vineyard, Petaluma Gap (\$45)** Deeply colored with a fragrant cherry nose. Sleek and juicy, with density and rich notes of black cherry balanced by a core of pure acidity; long and lovely.

92 **Fathers + Daughters Cellars 2016 Ella's Reserve Pinot Noir, Ferrington Vineyard, Anderson Valley (\$52)** Medium ruby hue, with soft yet bright cherry on the nose and palate. Smooth, tangy, vivid, and fresh, with depth and racy acidity.



93 Fog & Wind 2018 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$50) From Sojourn Cellars, this light-ruby wine features soft cherry on a silky palate with notes of earth. Long and rich, with tangy, bright berry flavors.



94 Foxen Vineyard & Winery 2017 Pinot Noir, Block 8, Bien Nacido Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley (\$65) Smooth texture bursting with cherry and raspberry; juicy, lively, and charming, with a fresh, bracing acid structure as well as fine balance and good length.



94 Foxen Vineyard & Winery 2017 Syrah, Tinaquaic Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley (\$50) Another winner from this great producer; with deep color, lavish notes of blackberry, and a velvety texture. Rich and tangy, lush and long.

93 Jon Nathaniel 2018 Lavender Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir, Napa Valley (\$65) Medium ruby color and a ripe berry nose; smooth, dense, and concentrated, with notes of ripe cherry and earth leading into a long finish.



92 La Storia 2018 Cuvée 32 Estate Bottled Red Wine, Alexander Valley (\$36) A silky-smooth and charming blend of three varieties, with Sangiovese playing the dominant role. Juicy, bright, and tangy, with abundant flavors of crisp berry; lively and balanced.

92 Lorenzi Estate 2015 Single Vineyard Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Temecula Valley (\$65) Deep ruby color; bracing, smooth, and lush, with concentrated fruit and lots of spice amid layers of flavor. Intense, long, and balanced.

95 Margerum Wine Company 2017 Barden Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$68) Rich crimson hue, a ripe cherry nose, and polished notes of luscious black cherry with hints of spice and toasty oak. Long and stunning, this wine is indicative of skilled, confident winemaking.

92 McGrail Vineyards and Winery 2017 Shamus Patrick Red Blend, Livermore Valley (\$46) Deep garnet color and a soft blackberry nose; smooth and crisp, with depth and exuberant fruit flavors. All five Bordeaux varieties are represented here—and they're playing nicely together.

92 Miro Cellars 2017 Pine Mountain Vineyard Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Pine Mountain, Cloverdale Peak (\$42) Toasty nose and a silky texture; elegant, with tangy fruit, minerality, and considerable finesse.

94 Peachy Canyon 2018 Bailey Zinfandel, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$46) Deep, dark, dense, and velvety, with a lushly ripe nose, tangy and concentrated berry flavors, and great finesse. Powerful, long, and voluptuous.



95 Jon Nathaniel 2018 Fabulist, Komes Family Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$125) A cellar candidate from the family behind Flora Springs. Very dark color and lush aromas of blackberry; gentle yet luscious on the palate, with toast and vanilla in an intensely generous style as well as a tangy acid structure and good length. 84% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Petit Verdot, 3% Malbec, and 3% Cabernet Franc.

94 Peachy Canyon 2018 Para Siempre, Paso Robles (\$55) Smooth on both the nose and palate; silky and elegant, with juicy plum and good acidity. Balanced and complex, long and deep. 42% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Malbec, 18% Petit Verdot, 12% Cabernet Franc, and 4% Merlot.



BLUE REVIEWS



92 Silver Ghost Cellars 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$40) Rich, ripe plum on the nose and palate. Smooth, graceful, lush, and toasty; balanced, long, and elegant.

92 Peju 2016 Piccolo Red Wine, Napa Valley (\$40) Rich garnet color and aromas of baked plum; juicy and tangy, with notes of bright plum, black raspberry, and spice. Charming and layered with depth, length, and style. 54% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Petit Verdot, 12% Cabernet Franc, 10% Malbec, 7% Merlot, and 1% Sangiovese.

94 Portalupi Wine 2018 Barbera, Shake Ridge Ranch, Amador County (\$45) An incredibly delicious example of one of my favorite Italian varieties. Rich garnet color and aromatic plum nose; smooth and deep, with ripe berry notes and a firm acid structure.

94 Ridge Vineyards 2018 Pagani Ranch Zinfandel, Sonoma Valley (\$40) Deep crimson hue; gorgeous and velvety, with rich flavors of berry, spice, sweet new oak, and vanilla. Tangy, juicy, and long.

97 Ridge Vineyards 2017 Monte Bello, Monte Bello Vineyard, Santa Cruz Mountains (\$230) Smooth, spicy nose and a creamy texture, with fresh and tangy layers of succulent plum and berry flavors. It's elegant, complex, and wonderful now, but it'll be even more spectacular in a few years. 73% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 8% Petit Verdot, and 4% Cabernet Franc.

93 Rusack Vineyards 2018 Estate Sauvignon Blanc, Ballard Canyon (\$26) Fresh, crisp, and bursting with peach, passion fruit, and citrus; silky and juicy, with lovely structure and a long, bright finish.

94 Schramsberg Vineyards 2017 Blanc de Blancs, North Coast (\$40) A refreshing wine with the bright acidity expected of a Blanc de Blancs but also a lovely roundness and richness of fruit. Lively, complete, and elegant; lush and long.

WILSON DANIELS



97 Shafer Vineyards 2016 Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$300) This famous wine lives up to its reputation. Deep, opaque color; silky, generous, and balanced, with tangy and ripe notes of plum and berry as well as toasty oak. Stunning.

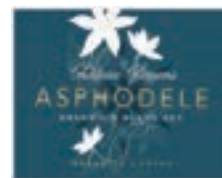
94 Tablas Creek Vineyard 2018 Esprit de Tablas Blanc, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$45) A bright golden blend of five Rhône varieties, with Roussanne in the lead. Lush and deep, it shows fine acidity structured around notes of orange blossom, minerals, honey, and spice.

VINEYARD BRANDS

IMPORTED

95 Champagne Henriot Blanc de Blancs, France (\$60) This crisp and racy Blanc de Blancs shows remarkable depth of flavor: Masterful, elegant, and refined, with a long, rich finish.

MAISONS & DOMAINES HENRIOT AMERICA



94 Château Climens 2018 Asphodèle, Bordeaux, France (\$42) A fine and modern Sémillon from the Lurton family, with luscious citrus and a pure, bright, and tangy style. Smooth and lively, with a charming touch of earthiness; long and lovely.

VINEYARD BRANDS

96 Gianni Gagliardo 2016 Barolo del Comune di La Morra, Italy (\$78) A stunning, deep, and elegant wine with a vivid ruby hue, a floral nose, and amazing finesse. Sleek, lush notes of bright raspberry and roses; racy acidity; and pure, focused style.

ENOTEC IMPORTS

95 Il Poggiolo 2015 Brunello di Montalcino, Italy (\$70) Light-medium crimson color and a smooth, earthy nose. Juicy, precise, and well articulated, with bright acidity and pure fruit. Long, balanced, and lovely.

ENOTEC IMPORTS



95 Mt. Beautiful 2017 Pinot Noir, North Canterbury, New Zealand (\$28) Medium ruby color; silky, long, and elegant, with bright cherry and crisp acidity. Refined, rich, and superb.

MT. BEAUTIFUL USA



94 J. de Villebois 2017 Sancerre Les Monts Damnés, France (\$66) A lush, stylish, and well-rounded wine from a famed vineyard that yields rich expressions with great purity defined by lovely citrus and minerality. Gorgeous, with good depth and complexity.

VINEYARD BRANDS

94 Domaine Jean Fournier 2017 Cuvée Saint-Urbain Marsannay, France (\$40) Fresh, sweet, and juicy, with smooth and tangy cherry; clean, bright, and lifted, with a silky texture, explosive fruit, and a lasting finish.

SHIVERICK IMPORTS

94 Marie-Pierre Manciat 2017 Pouilly-Fuissé Les Petites Bruyères, France (\$29) An elegant, pure, and fragrant expression of Chardonnay with a creamy texture, bright acidity, and a long and smooth finish. Classic.

SHIVERICK IMPORTS

95 Palladino 2013 Riserva San Bernardo Barolo DOCG, Italy (\$89) Lush nose and a velvety texture; pure and precise, with notes of plum and raspberry, racy acidity, and a juicy style. Exquisite, deep, and long.

ENOTEC IMPORTS

93 Regal Rogue Daring Dry Vermouth, Australia (\$27) Smooth and slightly off-dry, with a hint of anise and other exotic spices as well as rich flavors of orange peel. Definitely a keeper.

THE ROGUE GROUP

93 Regal Rogue Bold Red Vermouth, Australia (\$27) Medium cherry-red color and an aromatic nose; smooth, juicy, and richly spicy, with a tangy, crisp style and a well-rounded, off-dry palate. Negroni, anyone?

THE ROGUE GROUP

94 Virna Borgogno 2015 Noi Barolo DOCG, Italy (\$44) Medium ruby color and a tangy nose; elegant, charming, and refined, with bright, tangy flavors. Smooth, lively, and showing finesse, depth, and complexity. Delicious.

SHIVERICK IMPORTS

VALUE

91 7 Cellars 2018 The Farm Collection Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$20) Former football great John Elway is the force behind this lush and smooth wine, whose silky palate features lots of plum and a hint of herbs. Balanced and long. ☺



91 La Playa 2020 Estate Series Sauvignon Blanc, Curico Valley, Chile (\$9) Wow, a 2020 already! This one's an incredible value, with a soft palate of herbs; bright, juicy citrus; and exuberant acidity. ☺

CABERNET CORPORATION

88 Badet Clément & Cie Fleuraison Vin Mousseaux Blanc de Blancs, Côte d'Or, France (\$13) Luscious and round, with clean, ripe fruit; bright acidity; and dense mineral notes. Remarkable style and good length at an amazing price.

MARITIME WINE TRADING COLLECTIVE

91 Comsi Comsa by Sauvage Apple Dry Sparkling Wine, New York (\$15) This fresh and crisp sparkling made from apples is a charming change of pace: A fine accompaniment to food, it's lively and juicy, with a dry and tangy palate of bright apple flavors.

BLUE REVIEWS



93 **Dashe Cellars 2018 Vineyard Select Zinfandel, California** (\$24) Rich garnet color and a spice-tinged nose. Snappy, long, and stunning, this is the complete package, striking a perfect balance between deep, ripe flavors of blackberry and cherry and a lovely acid structure.

91 **Knotty Vines 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, California** (\$15) Bright garnet color and a smooth plum nose; fresh, juicy, and generous, with a nice texture, good depth, and considerable complexity. From Rodney Strong, it's a stunning wine for its price, so stock up. ☺



91 **MyStory Wine Co. 2019 Chardonnay, Paso Robles** (\$17) Golden color and aromas of ripe pear; smooth, rich, and dense, with a hint of toast and a creamy style. Layered and bright, this is a remarkable wine for the price. ☺

89 **La Playa 2020 Estate Series Cabernet Sauvignon Dry Rosé, Colchagua Valley, Chile** (\$9) Pale pink color. Clean, smooth, and balanced, this great value delivers notes of soft herbs on a dry, fresh, and bright palate. ☺

CABERNET CORPORATION

92 **Piper Sonoma Brut Reserve, Sonoma County** (\$25) A lovely and elegant effort with serious bubbles. Refined and flavorful with hints of toast; juicy, ripe fruit; and a persistent mousse.

92 **Warp and Weft 2016 Shweshwe Red Blend, Swartland, South Africa** (\$20) A blend of five mostly Rhône varietals (33% Grenache, 30% Syrah, 22% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Mourvèdre, and 5% Malbec) with a dense garnet color and a lush nose. Velvety, long, and stylish, with spice, depth, and tangy flavors.

90 **MyStory Wine Co. 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles** (\$17) Rich garnet color and a gentle herbal nose. Silky, tangy, and fresh, with notes of succulent plum; racy, crisp, and long. Another great value from this winery. ☺



SPIRITS

94 **Admiral Rodney HMS Formidable Saint Lucia Rum, Saint Lucia** (\$130) Smooth and rich, with notes of molasses, spice, and brown sugar layered within a creamy, lush texture. Aged nine to 12 years.

95 **Basil Hayden's 10 Year Old Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA** (\$70) Medium amber color and a refined, toasty nose; clean, silky, and mellow, with sweet toasted oak and dried flowers defining a lovely and balanced profile.



96 **Bouvery CV Chocolate Liqueur, USA** (\$30) This is amazing: Think thick dark chocolate sauce with 16% alcohol supplied by pure vodka made at Connecticut's historic Westford Hill Distillery. It's so delicious that I've consumed the entire sample bottle; pour it over ice cream or just drink it straight.

95 **Beefeater London Dry Gin, England** (\$24) Complexity comes through on both the botanical nose and the warm and luscious yet dry, citrus-tinged palate. With hundreds of new gins currently flooding the market, this is still the stalwart leader: It's not flashy, just a classic with style, elegance, and balance.

PERNOD-RICARD

94 **Booker's Boston Batch Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA** (\$90) Toasty, aromatic nose; rich with a satiny texture and nuanced flavors of sweet vanilla and new oak. Dense and chewy, with refined style and a long finish.

95 Bozal Mezcal Single Ma-guey Artesanal Madrecuisse, Mexico (\$80) Intense agave nose; silky, earthy, and toasty, with sweet notes preceding a long, rustic finish. Herbaceous and smoky, fleshy and long, it's probably the most authentic mezcal you'll ever try, packaged in a striking ceramic bottle.

3 BADGE BEVERAGE COMPANY

97 Rhum Clément 15 Year Old Rhum Agricole, Martinique (\$200) Smooth, lush, and deep, with good balance; gorgeous, exciting flavors; and a lasting finish. Rich and spicy, toasty and complex.

95 Convite Espadín-Madrecuisse Mezcal, Mexico (\$85) Spicy, smoky nose; silky and lush with rich, ripe agave notes. Toasty, sweet, and dense; layered, round, and lovely.

P & L GLOBAL TRADING INC.



95 Michter's Toasted Barrel Finish Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$85) Sweet and toasted oak is joined by generous, dignified flavors of cereal, caramel, treacle, and honey. Spicy and balanced, with a long, smooth finish.

99 GlenDronach Kingsman Edition 1989 Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$1,299) Rich mahogany color and a spiced nose; concentrated, toasty, and elegant, with a silky texture and lush, layered flavors of treacle, spice, coffee, and molasses. This exquisite spirit takes the single malt category to another level.

94 Lenark Vodka, Poland (\$28) This stunning Polish vodka was first distilled in a garage. Smooth and just slightly sweet, with soft yet rich vanilla on the nose and palate. Off-dry, balanced, and persistent on the finish, it was made for drinking on the rocks.

ABEET, LLC



96 Pristine Vodka, Ukraine (\$27) This remarkable spirit is made from Ukrainian wheat grown in super-rich black soil known as *chernozem*. Creamy, pure, and elegant, with hints of vanilla, it's a vodka for connoisseurs—try it over ice.

TOVTRY IMPORTING

92 Upstate Vodka by Sauvage, USA (\$23) Made from 100% New York State apples, as is apparent on both the soft nose and the smooth, clean, and dense palate. Another excellent candidate for drinking on the rocks.

93 Vavoom Vodka, USA (\$170) Gentle nose and a creamy texture, with rich notes of vanilla and dry, lush style. It's a lovely vodka, but I can't not mention the spectacular and evocative 1-liter bottle, which might end up being the centerpiece of every mancave in America.



92 Nankai Gold Premium Blended Shochu, Japan (\$70) An exceptionally high-proof shochu with a pale amber color and a toasty nose. Smooth, rich, and intense, with elegant spice on a deep, tangy palate.

NANKAI GROUP

94 Rickhouse Bourbon, USA (\$35) This deep and delicious San Francisco spirit with a mash bill of 80% corn and 20% rye is intensely colored and toasty, with a rich, sweet style. Notes of vanilla, spice, and toasted oak are pronounced, and although it adheres to the legal definition of bourbon, it's another animal altogether.

LV



RULING THE Cab Kingdom

HOW SILVERADO VINEYARDS DELIVERS
"THE TRUEST EXPRESSION OF NAPA"

by Nell Jerome



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SILVERADO VINEYARDS

Silverado associate winemaker Elena Franchesci and winemaker Jon Emmerich.

They say that Cab is king for good reason. The famous offspring of Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon is the most valuable variety in the U.S. in terms of sales, according to Nielsen data, and it is the most planted grape in the world as well as in Napa Valley—whose Cabernets have long demanded top dollar. Those of Silverado Vineyards are no exception, but even its least expensive expression, the classic Silverado Vineyards Estate Cabernet (\$57), overdelivers.

The winery is perched on the hills above the Silverado Trail in Napa's Stags Leap District. It was founded in 1981 by Walt Disney's wife, Lillian; his daughter Diane Miller; and Miller's husband, Ron, and it remains family-owned today, with the third generation at the helm and the fourth close behind. The family also owns six vineyards from which they source all of their fruit, making Silverado one of the few 100% estate-grown, -produced, and -bottled wineries in the Valley.

"We're very lucky to be the custodians of two incredibly historic vineyards in the Napa Valley to source Cabernet from," says winery president Russ Weis. "Our Silverado Vineyard in the Stags Leap District was first planted in the early 1880s, and our Mt. George Vineyard in Coombsville goes all the way back to 1868—and was one of the first

The Silverado Vineyards estate in the Stags Leap District of Napa Valley.



planted in the Napa Valley. We craft our single-vineyard SOLO from Silverado and our single-vineyard GEO from Mt. George, but each year we combine the best fruit from both vineyards into what we think is a classic expression of Napa Valley Cabernet, and that is our Estate Cabernet.”

If the Stags Leap District AVA sounds familiar, it’s probably because the Cabernet from Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars brought worldwide fame to Napa Valley when it won the famous Judgment of Paris tasting against Bordeaux in 1976. If Cab is king, then, many consider the Stags Leap District the kingdom. (And if you haven’t heard of Coombsville, don’t worry—it wasn’t designated as a Napa Valley sub-appellation until 2011.)

So what makes Silverado’s Estate Cabernet exceptional? “Both of our vineyard sites are on the volcanic eastern slopes of the Napa Valley but underneath the fog line, so the fruit stays cool and the evolution of the sugars is slower as the tannins and the other flavors in the skins develop,” Weis explains, adding that technique is as relevant as terroir. “One . . . we use that may be a little bit different from our neighbors is that we do our optical sorting in the vineyards—so we’re literally picking the fruit, having it sorted, and dropping it on the dry ice in bins within a minute of [it] coming off of the vines. That’s our way of keeping that elegant texture of Stags Leap and blending [it] with the more chewy, brawny black-fruit character from Mt.



The cellar of Bern’s Steak House in Tampa, FL.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BERN’S STEAK HOUSE



Gary’s Wine & Marketplace founder Gary Fisch at his store in Napa, CA.

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

George. It is what I consider the truest expression of Napa Cabernet, and it’s a great value.”

But don’t just take his word for it—critics and consumers agree. In addition to scoring 94 points from *The Tasting Panel*, the 2016 vintage earned 94 points from *Decanter*, 93 points from James Suckling, 92 points from *Wine Enthusiast*, 90 points from *Vinous*, and gold medals from both *Texsom International* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Confirming the consistency for which Silverado is known, the 2017 vintage, which was just released, has already earned 95 points from *The Tasting Panel*, 93 points and a gold medal from the *Sunset Wine Competition*, 93 points and a gold medal from the *London Wine Competition*, 92 points from *Wine & Spirits*, 92 points from *Wine.com*, and 90 points from *Wine Enthusiast*.

Eric Renaud, the wine director at the legendary Bern’s Steak House in Tampa, Florida, is a fan of the Estate Cab. “Bern’s relationship with Silverado goes back over three decades, and I’ve been fortunate enough to try many of their wines,” Renaud says. “The Estate Cabernet is one of the most consistent Napa wines year after year. [It] delivers characteristics that we at Bern’s and our customers expect from a Napa Cab. This is the number-one reason we have featured [it] on our by-the-glass list for a decade or so.”

Silverado’s Estate Cab is as popular off-premise as it is on-premise. With four retail stores in New Jersey, Gary’s Wine & Marketplace founder Gary Fisch has also been a longtime customer of Silverado—and now he’s operating a fifth location in Napa, just a few miles away from the winery. Of Silverado’s single-vineyard luxury Cabernets, Fisch says “the Estate Cab is the biggest seller, especially now, which I believe is a result of the quality [and] the trusted name . . . especially for the price.”

Perhaps the most impressive accolade, however, lies in the fact that Silverado Estate Cabernet is the number-one estate-grown, -produced, and -bottled Cabernet nationwide and the number-six domestic Cabernet in overall case volume, per recent Nielsen data. Says Weis, “To be in the company of wineries like Jordan [and] Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars is fantastic, but to be the only estate-grown winery in the top ten is awesome.” **VT**

Amore

FOR AMARONE

**MASI'S BOSCAINI FAMILY
CHAMPIONS TERROIR BY
PERFECTING TECHNIQUE**
by Lars Leicht

Masi's vineyards in Valpolicella.



Representing the seventh generation of family ownership, Raffaele Boscaini is director of marketing at Masi Agricola.

Raffaele Boscaini's "aha" moment came very early in life.

"I was a boy, about 11 years old," he recalls. "I was walking in the vineyard with my grandfather in early September to see if it was time to harvest. He took a grape bunch in his hand and lightly squeezed it, then declared it would need another week to ripen. This quasi-magical relationship between man and nature had me hooked."

That he would go into the wine business, he says, was never a matter of a written agreement, but it was clearly understood just the same. "I grew up surrounded by vines, so it was the most natural thing for me to follow," adds Boscaini. "My father said to me, 'Do what you want to do with your life, but do it in a way that is different from others.' If you know what you want to do, then everything is fine." Today he represents the seventh generation of Masi, his family's enterprise in Valpolicella, as director of marketing.

Masi Through the Generations

After studying architecture, the young Boscaini began constructing his career in the wine trade. To both gain work experience and improve his English language skills, he went to London, where his U.K. importer helped him secure a job with a national chain of fine wine shops. That led to another "aha" moment. "It helped open my eyes to wine beyond Verona," he says. "There was Tuscany, Chile, Hungary—so many places making great wine. In the U.K. I learned the difference between [the] metodo classico and Chardonnay. I was so inspired that I took university courses and obtained my higher certificate."

When he returned to Italy, he worked in many different departments of the winery, from the grape-sorting table to quality control, and spent time in the market as a brand ambassador. He still recalls conversations with farmers during that period that helped him better

explain and present the wines.

"I'm not a great salesman, but I'm a good storyteller," he admits. "I'm not an expert like my father, but I'm a company man, and more romantic—decidedly more romantic."

That comes into play in his additional role as coordinator for Masi's Gruppo Tecnico, a management team composed of professionals in enology, agronomy, quality control, marketing, and sales who oversee production as well as research and development in both the vineyard and winery. "A winery like ours cannot be fully managed by just one person," Boscaini explains. "This is something my father brought together in the 1980s. It is a team approach, because that is always better—you can build a higher tower if you have everybody's help." Though not a technician himself, he adds that what he brings to the table is knowledge "[of] what Masi desires. I grew up in it; I know the style that easily identifies it for my family."

That style was primarily forged by Boscaini's father, Sandro, and grandfather Guido. Since the 18th century, the family has thrived not only as skilled winegrowers but also excellent merchants. Through well into the 20th century, buyers would come to the winemakers rather than the other way around; when Sandro was coming of age, visitors would engage in hours of tasting and negotiation before selecting and marking individual casks. They'd then be treated to a sumptuous lunch in the family dining room. As the market began to evolve in the 1950s, the Boscaini patriarch would make weekly visits to Milan; a rapidly growing international city with a strong on- and off-premise wine trade, it was also a convenient shipping point for the markets of northern Europe.

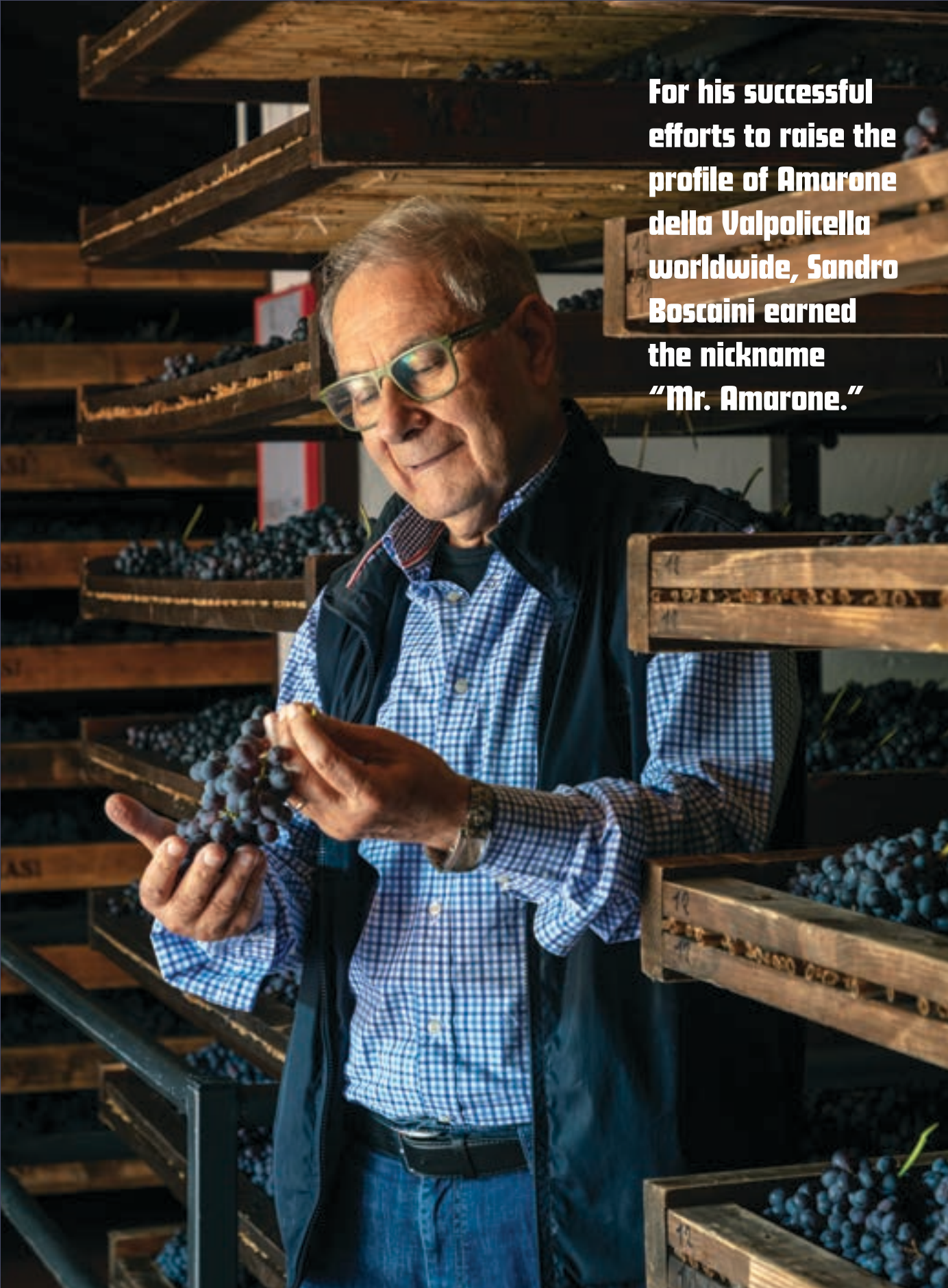
Despite his success, Guido had reservations about Sandro joining him in the wine trade, suggesting a career as a pharmacist or notary

instead. But Sandro studied economics and business before joining his father after all—to the great benefit of not only the family but their home region. As Boscaini points out, though "Valpolicella was one of the first bottled wines sold around the world, in 1964 it was still in straw-covered flasks relegated to the bottom shelf of wine shops and [representing] the lightest choice of house wine in taverns. It was very much a 'people's wine.'" (*Editor's note*: For more on the Valpolicella region, see page 118.)

Sandro earned the nickname "Mr. Amarone" for his efforts to improve the production methods and therefore the marketability of Amarone della Valpolicella, historically made from withered grapes stored in ventilated lofts for as long as four months before vinification. Determined to remove much of its "old-fashioned" oxidized flavor, he began using more indigenous grape varieties that, though lower-yielding, were also mold-resistant; instituted a more rigorous process of selection for the grape bunches to be dried; and introduced humidity control in the lofts. He also isolated yeast strains that would accelerate fermentation and lessen aging time needed before release, thus reducing exposure to oxygen. "We had to identify yeasts that could be active in a sugar-rich must during the cold months of January or February," explains Boscaini. "Few wineries in the world have their own yeasts; Champagne is an example. But control of the yeast is as fundamental for Amarone as it is for Champagne."

If Sandro is "Mr. Amarone," it is a wonder that his father, Guido, was not nicknamed "Mr. Ripasso," since he essentially created—or at least perfected—the process. In the late 1950s, he experimented with pouring young Valpolicella wine over the pressings of dried Amarone grapes to spark a second fermentation and yield a wine lighter than Amarone but more structured than Valpolicella. "We had the dry, simple wine of Valpolicella for every day, and Amarone for special occasions," says Boscaini. "What was missing was something for Sundays." As the first of its kind, the 1967 release of the 1964 vintage Campiofiorin filled the bill.

Two important footnotes to the Campiofiorin story speak volumes about

A photograph of Sandro Boscaini, an older man with glasses, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt and a dark vest. He is standing in a winery, surrounded by wooden crates filled with dark grapes. He is holding a bunch of grapes in his hands, looking at them with a slight smile. The background shows more crates and a wooden structure, suggesting a cellar or storage area for wine.

For his successful efforts to raise the profile of Amarone della Valpolicella worldwide, Sandro Boscaini earned the nickname “Mr. Amarone.”

the Boscaini family philosophy. First, though Masi initially trademarked “Campofiorin Ripasso,” many other wineries soon began using the same technique and calling the wine Ripasso. Rather than challenging their neighbors, the Boscainis donated the trademark to the Verona Chamber of Commerce so the entire region could benefit from it. Second, Masi eventually stopped using its original Ripasso method to make Campofiorin. In the late 1980s, it began relying on uncrushed, semi-dried grapes instead of Amarone pomace, thereby guaranteeing the extraction of finer tannins than would be yielded by already pressed grapes, a shorter refermentation period, and more fresh fruit flavor. With Campofiorin, Masi has been as innovative as it has magnanimous.

Masi in the 21st Century

With vision equal to that of his father and grandfather, Boscaini sees opportunity in our current “age of communication.” Over the past six years, he has been one of the strongest proponents of the company’s hospitality program, Masi Wine Experience, as an effort to embrace the consumer. The historic Cantine Masi in Valpolicella’s Zona Classica, the Serego Alighieri estate in Sant’Ambrogio di Valpolicella, and Tenuta Canova near Lake Garda are all open to visitors with regular tours as well as a variety of tasting experiences; Serego Alighieri even offers cooking lessons.

While this level of hospitality may seem like a no-brainer to anyone familiar with California wine country, it is a new and still rare phenomenon in traditional Italy. Reaching further out, Masi Wine Bars have opened in the neighboring Dolomite mountain town of Cortina d’Ampezzo, site of the 2026 Winter Olympics, and in Zurich, Switzerland; a new location on Munich, Germany’s famed Maximilianstrasse avenue is scheduled to open later this year. Boscaini’s dream is to open an outpost in the U.S. as well.

“We want to speak directly with the consumer,” he says. “It’s a way to show them our version of ‘Italian style,’ which is loved around the world. We like to taste wine but even more to drink it. Sometimes we are too complex in our communication about wine. We need to ask a simple question: Do you like it?”



A fruttaiolo is a loft in which grapes dry prior to vinification.



Harvested grapes begin the appassimento process.



No Compromises

Meanwhile, Masi's dedication to and creativity with Amarone remains solid. The winery team is rigid in upholding the exclusive use of indigenous varieties, with an emphasis on Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara. While using little of the native Corvinone, a cornerstone of many Amarones, they like to spice the mixture with Oseleta, a historic variety that fell out of favor due to its low yields but that adds rich color and concentration. Denomination rules allow for up to 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Sangiovese, and Teroldego in the blend, but Masi eschews them completely. "We want to elevate our autochthonous varieties," Boscaini declares. "We are one of the few who never used international varieties, because my father understood that you have to do something different than others."

To emphasize the family's commitment to the crown jewel of Valpolicella, the Cantina Privata Boscaini collection highlights two single-site Amarones: Mazzano and Campolongo di Torbe. Though they come from the same subzone, their terroirs—and therefore their profiles—are distinct, upholding Boscaini's tenet that Amarone can and indeed should represent the territory. It is Masi's proof that Amarone producers must be stricter about selection and zoning regulations in their quest for quality.

"After all, Amarone is not for every day," he emphasizes. "It must be perfect. No compromises." *LV*



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

MERIDITH MAY'S

Tasting Notes

Masi 2018 Masianco Pinot Grigio delle Venezie DOC (\$15) A blend of Pinot Grigio with Verduzzo offers up aromas of sweet white-tea flowers and peach. With an unctuous texture and notably lively salinity come jasmine spice and honeyed apricot and lime. This is a very special white. **93**

Masi 2018 Bonacosta Valpolicella Classico DOC (\$15) This blend of 70% Corvina, 25% Rondinella, and 5% Molinara is aged four months in Slavonian oak. Aromas of earth, green herbs, coffee, and chocolate begin a complex journey for a wine that certainly overdelivers, as jasmine and lilacs intersect with dark cherry and minerality cuts a path through bold notes of black olive and balsamic. An uprising of acidity makes the youthful profile even fresher. **93**

Masi 2016 Campofiorin Rosso Verona IGT (\$19) Fresh aromas of pomegranate, cranberry, and heather introduce a youthful, juicy, sunshine-kissed red with charismatic stage presence. Coffee and earth tones prime the palate for superbly balanced notes of tar, sour cherry, red currant, and chalky tannins. **92**

Masi 2015 Brolo Campofiorin Oro Rosso Verona IGT (\$27) This Corvina-based red runs the gamut from earthy to floral to savory. Bay leaf, white pepper, and cigar leaf merge on the raisinated finish. **90**

Masi 2015 Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG (\$60) Based on Corvina with percentages of Rondinella and Molinara, this gracious and delicious Amarone Classico is seductive from nose to palate: deep, concentrated, black-fruited, and tarry. The grapes undergo more than 100 days of appassimento before aging 24 months in casks to result in layers of red licorice, espresso, caramel, and oak that run alongside teeth-drying tannins. **95**

Masi 2006 Mazzano Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG (\$150) Black pepper takes center stage in this red defined by tobacco and earth. However intense or austere its flavors, it maintains a light touch on the palate thanks to its acid structure, with a powerful tonality of lavender and sage that comes in midway. **97**

Masi 2007 Campolongo di Torbe Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG (\$150) This wonderful cru Amarone hails from the well-drained volcanic soil of a historic vineyard. Blackberry preserves, tilled soil, and chocolate-covered raisins perfume the glass. Espresso tannins swathe the glorious palate in a silk-lined jacket. Jasmine, cinnamon, black cherry, and coriander are also present in the intense beauty, with mid-palate notes of marzipan threading through stone. An angel with dark wings. **99**



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In each issue, Tasting Panel Publisher Meridith May selects her favorite wines and spirits of the moment. 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: ALEXANDER RUBIN



WINES



Dark Horse 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, California (\$8) The nose features jasmine, green tea, and bright key lime. Grapefruit flavors add zest from the start as unbridled acidity shines a spotlight on pineapple and kiwi. **90**

E. & J. GALLO



Cline Family Cellars 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, North Coast, California (\$13) Lemon verbena fills the air with a citrusy-herbal perfume. It's augmented on the palate by sage, tarragon, and salty lime zest before white grapefruit shows up midway with a bevy of white flowers. Edgy, lean, and crisp. **92**



Ballard Lane 2018 Zinfandel, Central Coast (\$13) A most poignant array of aromas includes briar, sweet tomato leaf, red beets, and bright cherry. Silky, gentle tannins and a generous—if not intense—release of ripe plum, boysenberry, and heather add up to an easy-drinking, food-friendly red into which winemaker John Crandall blends 15% Lagrein and 5% Mourvèdre. **91**

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



Les Celliers Jean d'Alibert Alyssa 2019 White Blend, Pays d'Oc, Languedoc, France (\$10) This blend of 80% Grenache Blanc and 20% Viognier can't help but show a floral, unctuous quality. The palate paves a stony path, with notes of lemongrass and honeydew preceding a dot of salinity on the finish. **89**

CHANTOVENT USA



Bellula 2018 Pinot Noir, Pays d'Oc, France (\$14) Aromas that embody the south of France enliven this stunning, well-priced wine—savory scents of ripe cherry and balsamic that turn earthy on the palate. Red fruit rises to the top and dried roses leave a powdery texture on the finish. **91**

JP BOURGEOIS/IMPORTED BY LEFGROUP LLC



Sterling Vintner's Collection 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$12) Espresso and dark chocolate make for a dynamic duo of perfumes exuding from this concentrated red. Boysenberry preserves, caramel, and well-integrated oak saturate the palate. **90**

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



Worthy of a smooch.



French-style double bizou.



Wildly infatuated.



Seriously smitten.



Head over heels in love.



Baron de Ley Varietales 2018 Garnacha, Rioja, Spain (\$15) Aromas of sweet cherry, rhubarb, and red tea are followed by flavors of red licorice and tart cranberry as well as chalky tannins, which leave behind the taste and texture of dry cherry skin. Spiced oak and salinity spark interest on the palate alongside graceful acidity and a lingering red-fruit character. **90**

OPICI IMPORTS



Tree Fort 2019 Pinot Noir, Arroyo Seco (\$17) Mouth-watering notes of cherry, vanilla, and dried fruit define the palate. Rose petals and a wash of cranberry round out the texture, adding body and structure as they align with balanced acidity. **90**

3 BADGE ENOLOGY



Veema 2016 GSM AOP Languedoc, France (\$20) The freshness that exudes from this blend of 45% Grenache, 35% Syrah, and 20% Mourvèdre, which aged 12 months in French oak, is apparent. (The grapes, grown on sun-drenched sandstone cobbles in vineyards located between Nîmes and Arles, are allowed to ripen optimally.) Aromas of grilled meat, rhubarb, and chocolate establish the platform for the layers of flavor—lavender, espresso, plum, and black cherry—that follow a silky entry. **92**

JP BOURGEOIS



Cline Family Cellars 2018 Cashmere Black, California (\$15) This plush blend of Petite Sirah and Alicante Bouschet offers scents of ripe plum and coffee bean. Creamy black fruit cascades over melted dark chocolate on the palate as black pepper seasons blackberry, boysenberry, and slate. Savory notes of tobacco and black olive appear on the finish. **92**



Paddy Borthwick 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, Wairarapa, New Zealand (\$18) Lemon ice, gingersnap, wet stone, and sandalwood evolve from start to finish in this juicy, bright, and tart wine. Notes of spearmint and grapefruit are refreshing and mouth-cooling. **91**

LEVECKE IMPORTS



St. Francis 2018 Pinot Noir, Sonoma County (\$22) Aged in French oak, this certified-sustainable wine from Sonoma County's coolest vineyard sites is lit from within. Tart cherry pops on the palate, introducing a sassy character that's punctuated by nutmeg and cinnamon. Dried blue flowers combine with orange peel on the unique finish. **93**



KOBRAND



Cline Family Cellars 2019 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$15) A subtle perfume of lime and toffee leads to a creamy body with uplifted acidity and a dot of salinity. Notes of honeyed pear and white flowers charm the palate. **91**



Bernard Magrez Grands Vignobles 2018 Elegancia, Juanico, Uruguay (\$18) Magrez, who owns four Grand Cru Classé Bordeaux estates, including Pape Clément, imports this fascinating, energetic, and pretty blend of Merlot, Tannat, and Marselan from the Southern Hemisphere. Aromas of cherry skin and red tea lead to a juicy, ripe flavor profile in which rhubarb and beetroot meld with raspberry and red tea. **91**



Château des Ferrages 2019 Mon Plaisir Rosé, AOP Côtes de Provence Sainte-Victoire, France (\$25) This seriously streamlined rosé, made with Grenache, Syrah, and Vermentino, offers ethereal flavors and fragrances of strawberry, melon, clementine, and jasmine. The lilting minerality is always present, melodiously finishing with white raspberry and white chocolate. **92**

SERA WINE IMPORTS



Alta Via 2019 Pinot Grigio Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT, Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy (\$15) Sourced from 30- to 60-year-old vines in the southern part of Alto Adige, this stunning white envelops you in aromas of lemongrass and apricot. The silky mouthfeel displays a keen acidity that's rounded out by notes of crème fraîche and honeyed pear. Glassy minerality is ever-present. **92**



PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS



Bonterra Organic Vineyards 2018 Pinot Noir, Mendocino County (\$18) Aged 11 months in new and neutral oak (85% French and 15% American), this Pinot Noir was crafted with certified-organic fruit and features a delectable perfume of exotic red flowers and Rainier cherry. Blessed with an inner sunshine, notes of jasmine and sandalwood complement spiced pomegranate and ripe strawberry. Round and glistening, the palate glides through the finish. **92**



FETZER VINEYARDS



Schug 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, Sonoma Coast (\$25) The fruit for this wine was sourced from vineyards on the southern end of the Sonoma Coast that make their individual personalities known. Opulent honeysuckle and stark white pear capture the nose with a vivid perfume as more juicy pear and guava are encompassed in bright acidity. Exotic floral notes of gardenia and magnolia go creamy while white peach whets the palate and grapefruit peel zings on the finish. **92+**

Publisher's PICKS



Ruffino 2017 Modus Toscana IGT, Italy (\$28) Precise Old World charm emanates from this well-known wine, a blend of 37% Sangiovese, 32% Merlot, and 31% Cabernet Sauvignon. Joining abundant acidity and lean-bodied astringency, notes of sour cherry, balsamic, bay leaf, and allspice impart layered complexity atop base notes of juicy, earth-laden pomegranate and beetroot. **92**



CONSTELLATION BRANDS



pureCru 2017 MC Signature Chardonnay, Oak Knoll District, Napa Valley (\$32) Sourced from top-notch real estate for Napa Chardonnay, this standout white offers scents of baked apple and lemon curd as well as a sensationally creamy mouthfeel highlighted by a fine acid structure. Opulent white floral notes enhance pineapple and Anjou pear with an underlying layer of white pepper, cinnamon, and oak. **92**



Quarter Acre 2018 The Section, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$35) This screw-capped blend of 43% Merlot, 39% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Malbec, and 4% Cab Franc proffers aromas of vanilla, cedar, and plum. Reminiscent of devil's food cake, the grainy yet sumptuous mouthfeel evenly distributes glossy notes of blackberry and boysenberry that culminate in a ripe, juicy finish. **92**



LEVECKE IMPORTS



Château Belugue 2015 Fronsac, Bordeaux, France (\$28) This family-owned estate spans just under 20 acres, with vineyards planted on hillsides along the junction of the Isle and Dordogne rivers. Aged 12 months in French oak, this blend of 90% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon has a regal character that comes through in its texture, flavor, and aromatics. You can smell the soil, deep-rooted brush, slate, and dark chocolate, and the gorgeous entry on the palate speaks of silky tannins. Robust notes of roasted coffee, new leather, and sweet tobacco are shadowy and deep, finishing with dried fruits, black plum, and sandalwood-tinged savoriness. **92+**

JP BOURGEOIS/IMPORTED BY LEFGROUP LLC



The Prisoner Wine Company 2018 Saldo, California (\$32) This is a lushly structured Zinfandel: round and hedonistic. Notes of coffee bean and black pepper come into play with sweet tobacco and ripe dark cherry. **92**



CONSTELLATION BRANDS



Schug 2018 Chardonnay, Carneros, Sonoma County (\$35) Sourced primarily from Schug's Carneros estate, this impressive Chardonnay is simply elegant, remaining decidedly focused, clean, and expressive from its aromatics to its mouthfeel—thanks in part to sur lie aging for eight months, the minimal use of new French oak (25%), and no malolactic fermentation. Aromas of toffee and baked apple lead to rich, creamy, textured flavors of lemon curd, banana, cashew butter, and oatmeal. Decadent as it may sound, acidity is absolutely present. The spiced finish shows a hint of ripe pineapple. **93**



Louis Pommery 2019 Chardonnay, Carneros (\$30) From a house known for sparkling wine, this still single-vineyard Chardonnay is a true departure from the typical California style. In fact, according to the producer, it is vinified in a way that channels Chablis: 97% of the blend is from free-run juices and 3% aged in neutral French oak for three months. Prominent aromas of yellow flowers see a hint of pineapple before judiciously creamy and luscious notes of chamomile and cashew win over the palate with a sweep of great acidity and extraordinary style. Lemon drops linger with a vibrating sense of minerality on the finish. **94**



VRANKEN-POMMERY AMERICA



Emeritus Vineyards 2018 Estate Grown Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$35) The grapes for this stellar wine came from two renowned Sonoma County vineyards: Pinot Hill and Hallberg Ranch, both purchased by Emeritus founder Brice Cutrer Jones. Dry farming causes the grapes on the deep-rooted vines to accumulate sugars slowly, resulting in a most expressive, intense, and concentrated Pinot Noir with delicate minerality. The nose of juicy, bright red fruit and rose petals goes bigger and broader on the palate. White pepper elevates the spark of acidity, bringing out Bing cherry, cranberry, and deep notes of coffee and oak. **94**



Cannonball 2018 Eleven Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$35) Extremely inviting aromas of tangerine and butterscotch give way to lemon, wet stone, and honeyed mango enveloped in a light yet creamy texture. They're enhanced by an oaky toastiness on the finish that tastes like a freshly baked croissant. **92**



SHARE A SPLASH WINE CO.



Cascina Castlet 2016 Litina Barbera d'Asti Superiore DOCG, Piedmont, Italy (\$40)

This label depicts its producer's "three C's": *Cascina Castlet Costigliole*. Born from vines that are more than 30 years old, Litina is named for a family member whose dowry paid for its namesake vineyard. The nose is a veritable floral arrangement of lavender and violets with sugared blueberries. Concentrated flavors of blue fruit and wildflowers are surrounded by white chocolate, fennel root, and black olive on a velvety texture that remains from start to finish. **93**



ROMANO BRANDS



Babylonstoren 2018 Nebukadnesar, Simonsberg-Paarl, Western Cape, South Africa (\$40)

This Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend representing all five Bordeaux varieties aged 23 months in French oak. It exudes a rich perfume of boysenberry, earth, and chocolate before giving way to a delightfully juicy and opulent palate with a hint of chalkiness and a spiced-cedar finish. Blue fruit shines and blue flowers bloom within a great acid structure. **93**



Sanctuary 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$40)

This luxurious red truly exemplifies what a classic Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon smells and tastes like, with its exemplary and savory perfume of cedar and dark fruit as well as cocoa-dusted tannins accented by ripe—and clearly fresh—red cherry and sweet blueberry. Back notes of saddle leather, iron, beetroot, and mocha endure on the long finish. **95**



FETZER VINEYARDS



Nectar of the Dogs 2015 CCF MikMurphy Red Blend, Paso Robles (\$43)

This concentrated Cabernet-based blend with 20% Cabernet Franc aged 18–27 months in 100% new French oak. Ripe notes of black cherry, plum preserves, and violets go a long way before crescendoing into a finish of cherry pie, cinnamon, and oak. A portion of the brand's sales goes to dog rescue groups. **90**



Firriato 2013 Harmonium Nero d'Avola, Sicily, Italy (\$43)

Aged 12 months and held in bottle six months before release, this mature and delicious red intertwines plum and sage with chocolate and chewy, tarry tannins. It offers notes of tilled soil, great acidity, and a sumptuous mouthfeel. **93**



Palazzo 2018 Master Blend Series Chardonnay, Napa Valley (\$45)

Sourced primarily from Carneros, this mind-blowing white has a beautiful, attention-grabbing nose of butterscotch that allows a hint of lemon to sidle in, alternating with chamomile and nutmeg. Acidity zeroes in on the palate, with magnolia, jasmine, and gardenia appearing at its edges. Vanilla bean and cinnamon toast go long on the finish. This is Scott Palazzo's signature indeed—it's magnificent. **95**



HAHN FAMILY WINES



Cascina Castlet 2016 Policalpo Monferrato Rosso DOC, Piedmont, Italy (\$48)

This unique blend of 60% Barbera and 40% Cabernet Sauvignon matured for 12 months in barriques and six months in bottle. The bouquet of briar, balsamic-washed cherries, and oregano is breathtaking and the sumptuous palate is lifted by high-wire acidity. Basil leaf and black olive interplay with light notes of cinnamon, cherry, cedar, and white pepper. **94**



ROMANO BRANDS



Utopia 2017 Estate Pinot Noir, The Utopia Vineyard, Ribbon Ridge AVA, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$48)

Twelve clones make up this distinctive small-production Pinot Noir, aged for 11 months in (40% new) Burgundian oak. Cinnamon sugar and pomegranate join forces on the nose, coating dried rose petals. Spiced cranberry and Gala apple are wrapped with a touch of white pepper in a velvety sheath of strawberry and briar. Acidity lights up the wine, which finishes with an echo of coffee bean. **96**



Lucienne 2018 Hook Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County (\$50)

Planted to several Pinot Noir clones, Hook is the southernmost of the Hahn estate vineyards. This expression aged for 16 months in new French oak and reels with spice, earth, and ribbons of black cherry on a silky palate. Violets and mountain brush emerge before the toasty finish of maple and vanilla. **94**

HAHN FAMILY WINES



El Coto 2014 Coto Real, Rioja, Spain (\$50)

This special selection of Tempranillo from what the winemaker deemed to be the best vintages aged 22 months in a combination of French and American oak before spending an additional 24 months in bottle. Smoky cedar and blackberry capture the nose before a dark well of opaque black fruit, slate, leather, and espresso opens up on the palate. With time in the glass, the wine becomes more dynamic, with notes of grilled meat that are tempered by that flow of dark fruit. **93**

OPICI WINES

Publisher's PICKS



St. Francis 2017 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$52) High elevations along the west-facing slopes of the Mayacamas Mountains are home to the fruit that make up this sturdy red. Elegant, high-toned energy emerges from a juicy core, and black-peppered blue fruit, dried lavender, and a slightly chalky mouthfeel are memorable. Chocolate melts over leather and roasted coffee on the finish. **94**



KOBRAND



Smith-Madrone 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$60) The grapes for this Cabernet Sauvignon-dominant blend with small percentages of Cabernet Franc and Merlot grow in steep, dry-farmed vineyards in cool mountain temperatures. Bold aromas of brush, black plum, and espresso precede a round, elegant, borderline-silky mouthfeel with coffee-flavored tannins, sweet earth, and dark chocolate. Aged in 45% new French oak. **93**



Trail 3150 2016 Proprietary Red, Oak Knoll District, Napa Valley (\$60) Equal parts Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Malbec aged 21 months in (50% new) French oak. From its ripe nose of wild strawberry and raspberry liqueur to its juicy flow of dark red fruit, this wine makes a lasting impression. Mocha and fennel side up to high-toned acidity and a note of Red Delicious apple on the mid-palate. Great structure complements a luscious mouthfeel. **93**



Ferraton Père & Fils 2018 Condrieu Les Mandouls, France (\$64) This elegantly expressive Viognier aged mainly in stainless steel; the remaining 15% rested in large oak barrels. Scents of creamy gardenia and honeyed pear give way to balanced notes of star fruit, lychee, honeysuckle, and blanched pears that meld with supportive acidity, keeping the palate fresh. **95**

SERA IMPORTS



pureCru 2015 pureCoz Red Wine, Napa Valley (\$65)

With this cross-cultural blend of 63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Cab Franc, 16% Sangiovese, and 5% Merlot, winemaker Mitch Cosentino brings out the richness of broad-shouldered Bordeaux varieties as well as elements of high-toned vibrancy from their Italian complement. Creamy, delectable dark chocolate and coffee merge with secondary notes of ripe black cherry. The acidity's consistent presence lends itself to the dynamic quality of the wine. **93**



Hawk and Horse Vineyards 2016 Petite Sirah, Lake County (\$65) This distinctively elegant, teeth-gripping expression hails from the rocky, red volcanic soil of an 18-acre mountain estate vineyard that's biodynamically farmed and reaches elevations up to 2,200 feet. Aromas of boysenberry, dark chocolate, and brush lead to a finely grained texture on the palate, with notes of chocolate mint and violets and a sinewy, gliding finish of licorice and purple fruit. **94**



Calla Lily 2015 Audax Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$120) This estate-bottled Cabernet Sauvignon (with small additions of Merlot, Cab Franc, and Malbec) is weighty and powerful. Tobacco, slate, and espresso manage to arouse both the nose and a palate whose earthiness transitions to plum coated in bittersweet dark chocolate. Venturing from tightly wound to lush, the wine coasts to a velvet-lined finish accented by notes of leather. **95**



Angove 2017 Warboys Vineyard Shiraz-Grenache, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$75) The old-vine Shiraz and Grenache that make up this wine are sourced from the organically certified Warboys Vineyard. Aromas of brush and black cherry are tethered to an earthiness that continues on the palate, where black pepper takes hold of juicy plum and black cherry. Their flavors linger thanks to the graceful and extroverted acid structure. Cigar leaf, sage, and red pepper provide just the right ammunition for a savory finish. **94**



TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



Guarachi Family Wines 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$95) Perfumed with night-blooming jasmine, sandalwood, and blackberry, this youthful, elegant red shows exciting potential for aging beautifully. The bouquet of heather, violets, and lilacs is invigorated by the dusty mouthfeel and the minerality imparted by the red-rock volcanic soil. Mountain fruit shows its intensity without being unbearably dense as Old World acidity and "Old Napa" structure come into play. Aged in French oak barrels for up to 22 months. **99**

SPIRITS



White Hjerter Vodka, USA (\$26) This triple- and column-distilled corn-based spirit won a double gold medal at the 2020 San Francisco World Spirits Competition. Clocking in at 80 proof, it shows its noteworthy character through both its soft scents of vanilla and red berries and its lighthearted, creamy palate. White pepper is underscored by crème fraîche and blueberry before the vodka finishes with a zing. **92**



LAUREL CANYON SPIRITS



Salcombe Distilling Co. Start Point London Dry Gin, Devon, England (\$40)

From a company named for trade ships known as the Salcombe Fruit Schooners, Start Point is in turn inspired by the lighthouse that guided those ships on their 19th-century voyages for exotic spices and goods. Packed with 13 botanicals, this extremely expressive spirit is juniper-forward on the nose, which also shows jasmine and vanilla. Flavors stream in on the palate: jasmine, key lime, plumeria, banana, and gingersnap. It's smooth sailing all the way. **95**



Redwood Empire Pipe Dream Bourbon Whiskey, Sonoma County, USA (\$45)

Aromas of caramelized pineapple, biscuit, and caramel serve as the starting point of this energetic 90-proof spirit, which is barrel-aged for at least four years. High-toned stone fruit glides across the palate with white-peppered Granny Smith apples in brown butter. Stony minerality leads a honeyed parade of white and yellow floral notes on the finish. **94**



PURPLE BRANDS



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

Part four of a limited annual release to commemorate Prohibition Repeal Day on December 5, this spirit is a medley of two 12-year-old bourbons with rye profiles of 21% and 36%—not to mention tremendous personality. Scents of clementine, peach nectar, and caramel apple have immediate appeal, and on the entry, sweet notes of dates and figs see the addition of peppered maple. Complementing the luxurious and balanced mouthfeel, notes of cinnamon toast are topped by apricot and oatmeal, which pave the way for a finish of pecan pie and raisins. **98**



El Sativo Tequila Blanco, Jalisco, Mexico (\$40)

This organic and kosher single-estate tequila, made with 100% lowland agave, was awarded Best Tequila of Show as well as a double gold medal at the 2020 San Francisco World Spirits Competition. The nose is opulent with bright lime and base notes of earth, musk, and vanilla. The palate is equal parts round, seductive, creamy, and earthy, with flavors of white pepper, marshmallow, peach, and apple tart. **94**



Doom's American Whiskey, USA (\$50)

This 100-proof rye whiskey blend offers up aromas of peach and wheat with a hint of heat. Powered by a wash of stone fruit, serious notes of tobacco and pepper integrate well with sweeter ones of maple oatmeal and cedar. **92**



Tequila Chamucos Diablo Blanco, Los Altos, Jalisco, Mexico (\$57)

A thread of minerality runs through this fierce yet clean and creamy 110-proof spirit. Vanilla, clay, lime, and fresh agave make a luxe appearance on the nose before lime zest, vanilla, and tobacco leaf join forces to keep the palate intriguing. **92**



PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL



Old Fitzgerald Bottled-in-Bond Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$90)

Produced at a single distillery during a single season and aged for nine years, this whiskey meets the bottled-in-bond requirements. At 100 proof, its strength shows through with tremendous distinction, which is no surprise given that Old Fitzgerald is one of the most renowned names in the business. On the nose, aromas of tobacco leaf are softened by maple and carrot. Dignified flavors of peppered leather and charred oak as well as a walnut-tinged astringency will entertain any bourbon lover's palate. **97**



HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY



Gracias a Dios Artesanal Mezcal Espadín Blanco, Oaxaca, Mexico (\$40)

Handmade by mezcalero Oscar Hernández, this 90-proof spirit is made with eight-year-old agave. Smoke and lavender leave wonderful scents in the air, and on the palate, exotic floral notes ride alongside cocoa and blue fruit. Vanilla and cracked pepper enter mid-palate, where they're enveloped in a silky texture. Mango and dried herbs define the mouth-coating finish. **93**



PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL



Kuleana Rum Works Hawaiian Rum Agricole, USA (\$60)

Fermented in handmade copper pot stills from 40 varieties of sugarcane, this 80-proofer shows aromas of tropical fruit plus earthy notes of clay and white pepper. Vanilla bean and earth take a serious turn on the palate as green apple and key lime cascade into a creamy mouthfeel, finishing with pineapple, coconut, and lime zest. **92**



Kirk and Sweeney XO Limited Edition No. 1 Rum, Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic (\$229)

Notable aromas of rancio, raisin, peach, and maple are easily detected on the nose of this 131-proofer made with blackstrap molasses. On the heels of alert flavors of apricot tart and gingersnap, sweet cream, dried fruits, and nougat accompany maple and succulent peach. A nod to the early 20th century, the luxurious handmade crystal bottle is packaged in a mahogany gift box. **95** **LE**



3 BADGE BEVERAGE

Soaring FLAVORS

**IN SOUTH AMERICA,
HIGH-ALTITUDE
VITICULTURE
MEETS AN ELEVATED
STANDARD OF
WINEMAKING**

The editorial team of *The Tasting Panel* and *The SOMM Journal* tasted through over 100 wines from Argentina and Chile. The following pages are a roundup of some of the most outstanding wines we tried from an array of regions and subregions.

ARGENTINA

SALTA (region)

Colomé 2018 Auténtico Malbec, Calchaquí Valley, Argentina (\$40) From vineyards located at 7,500-foot elevations in the northwestern part of the country, where the sunshine produces thicker-skinned grapes, this red offers va-va-voom on its perfumed floral nose. Violets and plum define a dreamy palate that's creamy yet fresh and focused. Subtle black pepper runs through it, along with notes of fig, clove, and dense blue fruit. **94**



FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

MENDOZA (region)

Alma Negra Brut Nature Rosé NV, Mendoza, Argentina (\$22) Scents of cranberry and lime stay with you throughout this blend of Malbec and Pinot Noir; produced in the traditional method, it spent eight months on the lees to deliver a delicate mouthfeel at a low 12.5% ABV. Soft bubbles vanish quickly to reveal strawberry, dried herbs, tomato leaf, and white chocolate. **91**



VINEYARD BRANDS

Trapiche 2015 Iscay Malbec-Cabernet Franc, Mendoza, Argentina (\$70) "Iscay" translates to the number two in Quechua, the native language of the Incas who lived in the Andes. Here, it symbolizes the merging of vine and terroir through the science and art of viticulture. Lavender on the nose and palate is exquisite, sweetening and enlivening the blueberry and bright vanilla notes that follow. The addition of black pepper and spiced leather enhances the luxe finish. **98**



UCO VALLEY/VALLE DE UCO (subregion)

Vinos de Potrero 2019 Potrero Chardonnay, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$17) Lively and modern, with scents of lime chiffon, oregano, and chamomile. The glassy, gliding mouthfeel offers notes of pineapple and lemon blossom accompanied by bright acidity. Peach comes in midway for a pop of sweetness on the creamy finish. **92**



M IMPORTS

Bodega Norton 2018 Reserva Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20) Iron filings and grilled meat are sweetened by black plum on the nose. Seriously savory notes of balsamic and black olive come through on the first sip, joined by black fruit, slate, and espresso to make for a deep, dark red with a finish of tobacco and cedar. The grapes come from some of the winery's oldest vineyards; aged 12 months in French oak, they see additional time in bottle. **91**



KOBRAND

Proemio 2016 Grand Reserve Winemaker's Selection Red, Mendoza, Argentina (\$27) Aged 18 months in French oak, this blend of 50% Malbec, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Syrah, and 5% Garnacha grown at high elevations is silky and lush. Spicy notes of cassis and ripe black cherry precede a finish of chocolate and cedar. **92**



1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS

Vinos de Potrero 2019 Potrero Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$17) Situated in the high-altitude Gualtallary zone of Tupungato in the northern section of the Uco Valley, this youthful red shows such promise, with aromas of violets and dark chocolate and a juicy freshness on the palate. Plums, dates, and toffee make it bright and user-friendly. **90**



M IMPORTS

Trapiche 2015 Terroir Series Malbec, Finca Coletto Single Vineyard, El Peral, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50) Expressively keen notes of leather and licorice combine with a bright acid structure while vivid boysenberry, sage, and basil ride on a juicy, plush texture. The grapes come from 58-year-old vines grown at an elevation of over 3,500 feet. **95**



~
WHILE SOIL TYPES VARY, SUBSTRATES OF ALLUVIAL LOAM OVER CLAY AND LIMESTONE DOMINATE MUCH OF THE MENDOZA REGION.
~

Vinos de Potrero 2018 Potrero Reserva Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$24) Juicy, meaty, and vivid with plum, dark cherry, and mocha; delicious and plush with dry, chalky tannins and broad shoulders. Fermented in cement vats and aged 12 months in oak, this is a wine to watch! **94**



M IMPORTS

Maal Wines 2018 Biutiful Malbec, Campo de Los Andes, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$22) The stony and sandy soils, high elevation, and abundant sunshine of Campos de los Andes in the prestigious Uco Valley bring out the best in this medium-bodied, unoaked red. Freshness defines the nose and palate, with aromas of blueberry and wild strawberry as well as flavors of blue fruit, persimmon, and apple. Streamlined tannins and a dusting of cocoa appear on the finish. **92**



VINEYARD BRANDS

PARAJE ALTAMIRA (sub-subregion)

Susana Balbo 2019 Signature Rosé, Altamira, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20) Altamira's high elevation; big, stony vineyards; and desert climate with an abundance of sunlight add to the personality of the Malbec grown there. This textural beauty, which blends 60% Malbec and 40% Pinot Noir sourced from over 3,800 feet above sea level, shows both structure and grace.



Its light onion-skin hue may look pale, but a woody perfume with jasmine and rose petals defines a strong character. Clean with an underlying chalky minerality, its fresh notes of watermelon, white flowers, and strawberry strike a chord with crackling acidity. Nervy and delicious. **93**

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

Argento 2017 Single Block Malbec, Paraje Altamira, Valle de Uco, Mendoza, Argentina (\$55) From an organic vineyard, this red is blessed with superior aromatics, a deluxe mouthfeel, and balanced acidity. Violets and blueberry meet with a meaty texture while sweet tobacco, tilled soil, bay leaf, and cumin underscore deep-rooted minerality. **95**



PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS

Tinto Negro 2018 Finca la Escuela Malbec, Paraje Altamira, Mendoza, Argentina (\$45) Vibrant aromas of boysenberry and blue flowers complement mouthwatering notes of blueberry and dark chocolate, plus iron filings and an inherent chalkiness on the mid-palate. Heather, brush, and soy sauce bring this wine to a salty finish. **93**



VINEYARD BRANDS

LOS CHACAYES (sub-subregion)

Tinto Negro 2019 Limestone Block Malbec, Los Chacayes, Tunuyán, Mendoza, Argentina (\$17) Grapes grown on vines at 4,000 feet above sea level on rocky, limestone soils impart distinctive minerality on both the nose and palate. Blackberry and plum create lift, with lavender lilting on the mid-palate. Cocoa, mint, and toasted oak finish things off nicely. **90**



VINEYARD BRANDS

TUPUNGATO (sub-subregion)

Tapiz 2014 Black Tears Malbec, San Pablo, Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50) Tapiz is Spanish for "tapestry," an allusion to the weaving together of high-altitude fruit and oak in wines such as this. Seductive dark chocolate perfumes the dark, opaque liquid that gives the wine its name, with added aromas of blueberry and blue flowers. Juicy from the start, it reveals notes of pomegranate and orange peel along with soft, round tannins and meaty depth. Spicy oak on the finish adds to its intensity. Aged in new French oak for two years. **94**



VINO DEL SOL

LUJÁN DE CUYO (subregion)

Argento 2018 Single Vineyard Finca Agrelo Cabernet Franc, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$40) The Cab Franc aged in concrete eggs for ten months, while an added 5% Malbec aged in concrete eggs (70%) and French oak (30%), also for ten months. The result exudes notes of dark violets and black coffee. Luxurious and well built, with firm tannins, optimum acidity, and a slightly chalky mouthfeel. Black raspberry comes through to lift a palate that finishes with dried heather. **94**



PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS

MAIPÚ (subregion)

Proemio 2017 Terroir Red Blend, Maipú, Mendoza, Argentina (\$13) A great value wine, blending 50% Malbec, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 25% Petit Verdot. Ripeness on the nose is undeniable, coming through thanks to extroverted scents of blackberry preserves, spiced tea, and violets. Rich and seductive notes of roasted coffee, cocoa, and boysenberry pie make for a juicy, easy-drinking palate that's well balanced between oak, tannins, minerality, and acidity. **90**



1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS

Proemio 2017 Reserve Syrah-Garnacha, Maipú, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20) Grown at elevations exceeding 2,600 feet and aged 12 months in French oak, this aromatic red shows notes of plum and spice and silky tannins. On the palate, flavors of tobacco, black pepper, soy sauce, and black cherry run deep. **92**



1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS

Proemio 2018 Single Vineyard Petit Verdot, Maipú, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20) This voluptuous red overdelivers on all accounts. Cassis and dark chocolate are fresh and intense. Plush tannins are surrounded by a surge of earth, beetroot, and blueberry, with violets and plums following on the finish. **94**



1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS



PATAGONIA (region)

Wapisa 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Los Acantilados Estate, San Javier, Río Negro, Atlantic Patagonia, Argentina (\$15)



This exciting and aromatic wine is named for the whales that can be viewed from the vineyards it's sourced from, located just off the Atlantic Ocean. High-wire acidity defines the lean palate of dried herbs, salinity marked with gingersnap, and pink grapefruit. **91**

VINO DEL SOL

Aniello 2018 006 Riverside Estate Pinot Noir, Alto Valle de Río Negro, Patagonia, Argentina (\$17) The southernmost wine region in South America, Río Negro has a cool, dry climate that's superb for Pinot Noir. This rose petal-scented version offers wild strawberry and floral notes that seem to melt on the tongue. Rooibos tea and chalky, earthy minerality make it lithe and lean. Gorgeous. **92**

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS



CHILE

CASABLANCA VALLEY (region)

Albamar 2019 Estate Chardonnay, Casablanca Valley, Chile (\$12) Foggy nights and cool ocean breezes have a wonderful effect on this standout Chardonnay. Scents of lemon verbena, apple tart, and dried herbs lead to a palate with brilliant acidity. It finishes with lemon blossom, vanilla custard, cashew, and brioche. **92**

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS



CENTRAL VALLEY (region)

Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo 2019 Reserva Carménère, Central Valley, Chile (\$12) This blend of 88% Carménère and 12% Cabernet Sauvignon has a longtime reputation for consistency, freshness of fruit, and great value. A hardy and stalwart red at 13.8% ABV, it delivers alluring scents of cocoa, vanilla, pomegranate, and dried herbs as well as notes of sage-kissed Bing cherry that dive into a creamy underscore of licorice, black plum, and toasted marshmallow. **91**

FETZER VINEYARDS



MAIPO VALLEY (subregion)

Santa Rita 2017 Medalla Real Gold Medal Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Maipo Valley, Chile (\$17) The grapes for this blend of 92% Cabernet Sauvignon and 8% Cabernet Franc are sourced from Santa Rita's stony vineyards in the subzone of Alto Jahuel. The semi-arid climate is perfect for Bordeaux varieties, and it shows in this balanced beauty. Scents of chocolate-covered cherry are bright and inviting, and the palate offers bold flavors and dusted-cocoa tannins with grip. Ripe rhubarb, orange zest, and blueberry are noteworthy and offer a tremendous palate feel. Acidity enlivens the fruit while cinnamon, cedar, and licorice provide a creamy finish with extra oomph. **93**

DELICATO FAMILY WINES



COLCHAGUA VALLEY (subregion)

Montes Limited Selection 2017 Carménère, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$17) Meaty aromas join iron, heather, black plum, and vanilla to make the nosing quite an experience in itself—which is always a welcome sign. Paired with good acidity, smoky tones of charred meat add to the depth of black pepper, granite, and smooth notes of lush boysenberry. **90**

KOBRAND



Montes 2018 Alpha Syrah, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$22) Imagine a wine that's big and robust with concentrated flavors, all within a lighter frame—this extroverted red is the result. Showing black olive, balsamic, cigar, and slate, it leads its savory notes into a velvety channel of fennel root and vanilla. **90**

KOBRAND



Viña Maquis 2013 Viola Carménère, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$55) Thanks to the addition of 15% Cabernet Franc, this stunning, spicy Carménère—produced from the best vineyards on the estate—shows a complex base of flavor and aromatics. Scents of red flowers and cherry jam lead to a brilliant entry of vibrant red fruit. The plush, silky texture and tremendously expressive notes of raspberry, rose petal, and orange marmalade won us over. **97**

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS



Calcu 2019 Reserva Especial Sauvignon Blanc-Sémillon, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$13) It didn't take a *calcu* (magician) to create this iconic blend from the foothills of the Andes, but the resulting flavors of dried herbs and lime are remarkable. Lean and edgy, the wine shines. **90** **VB**

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTS



phenol ENVY

RECAPPING SOMMCON'S "PASO ROBLES
CAB COLLECTIVE" WEBINAR

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

J. Lohr's Shotwell Vineyard
in the El Pomar District of
Paso Robles.

BY MICHELLE BALL

Like most events in 2020,

SommCon's annual education summit was a virtual affair. More than 30 webinars took place during the week of September 21, and many of them were livestreamed for free to give everyone the opportunity to participate. One was "Paso Robles CAB Collective," featuring six producers from the namesake association. Moderated by Lars Leicht, VP of education at co-presenter *The SOMM Journal*, it introduced attendees to the variables that make Paso so well suited for Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties.

Though Napa and Bordeaux are often considered points of reference for the region, Leicht was quick to note in his opening remarks that it stands on its own merits. "Paso has the advantage of tremendous phenolics because of the daylight, the exposure, and the slow growing season; I think, if anything, those other regions should have phenol envy," he insisted playfully.

Indeed, Paso Robles' large diurnal temperature swings and calcareous soils have led to an influx of premium winemakers who are further contributing to its growing reputation, taking advantage of the differences in temperature, rainfall, and soil structure found in its 11 sub-AVAs to craft a wide range of styles.



PHOTO: JOHN CURLEY

Paso Robles pioneer Gary Eberle.

Eberle Winery

Gary Eberle, Founder

A Paso Robles pioneer who co-founded the AVA, Gary Eberle first came to the area in the early 1970s. His professors from the University of California, Davis—including the notable Dr. Harold Olmo—were in search of the next great winegrowing region, and Eberle tagged along on their forays as a self-described "sherpa," collecting data and transporting equipment. "This is where you want to be—Paso Robles will be the next great Cabernet-producing region in the state of California," he recalled Olmo saying, prompting him to exclaim to himself, "Eureka! I'm home."

The Penn State football player and geneticist turned Bordeaux enthusiast started his winemaking career in what would become the Estrella District before establishing his own namesake winery in what is now the Geneseo District in 1979. Since he was among the first to plant Cabernet Sauvignon in Paso Robles, he's responsible for much of the budwood that spread throughout. Identifying the celebrated BV Ranch No. 2 vineyard in Napa Valley as the source of the clonal material, he described it as a "shy producer" due to its smaller clusters and lower yields: "Essentially, [each berry is] a piece of skin wrapped around four seeds, giving you a tremendous skin-to-juice ratio."

Promoting Paso Robles was initially a challenge; many people, confusing it with El Paso, assumed it was in Texas, and restaurant buyers were hesitant to give his wines a chance. So Eberle launched his Vineyard Select Cabernet Sauvignon to introduce consumers to the region at a reasonable by-the-glass price. In the beginning, he'd contract with growers that had new vineyards in the area, sourcing fruit from their first three crops—the expectation being that those young vines would "behave like teenagers," in Eberle's words, producing fruitier wines. "I called [the Vineyard Select] a 'cocktail Cab,' and we marketed it as a wine for the backbar," he explained, adding that it was meant to be enjoyed with or without food. To his surprise, it's now his biggest seller.

Eberle Winery 2017 Vineyard Selection Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$25) The Old World acidity that we know and love from Eberle shows beautifully in this true-to-its roots red, the grapes for which are sourced from vineyards throughout the Paso Robles AVA; after blending, it remains in barrel for 18 months. Sour cherry, earth, and red plum keep the texturally clean palate alert as frisky notes of white pepper, briar, black cherry, and mocha come into play. **92** —*Meridith May*

JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery

Master Sommelier Joe Spellman,
Spokesman and Educator

Master Sommelier Joe Spellman first met JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery founder Justin Baldwin in the early 1990s while working as a sommelier at The Pump Room in Chicago. Now serving as a spokesman and educator for the estate, he joked that he's often asked, "What part of Napa is Paso Robles in?"

JUSTIN was established in 1981—before the official Paso Robles AVA even existed—on a 160-acre property in the Adelaida District, a western sub-appellation. Setting out to emulate his

favorite wines from Bordeaux's Left Bank, Baldwin planted it primarily to Cabernet Sauvignon, with Merlot and Cabernet Franc in select blocks. The result was critically acclaimed blend JUSTIN ISOSCELES, which helped bring name recognition to the region.

ISOSCELES is just one of many Bordeaux-inspired blends the winery makes, while its Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon is among its few 100% varietal wines. Spellman described it as having "a fantastic indigo robe with a beautiful ruby edge," adding that he thinks "straight Cabernet from Paso . . . succeeds a little more than straight Cabernet from other places." For that he credited the local terroir, which varies dramatically in elevation, soil structure, rainfall, and temperature, ensuring that the Cabernet grown in multiple sites will show very different characteristics—from plummy with soft tannins to firm and angular with black fruit (plus everything in between).

JUSTIN sources from eight of the 11 sub-AVAs in Paso Robles, giving the team great flexibility when it comes to blending; Spellman called winemaker Scott Shirley's craft a "mosaic" assembled in the service of pinpointing the right weight, flavor profile, phenolics, and alcohol level for each wine. The results are approachable even in their youth: "Those softer phenolics that we get in Paso make [our Cabernet] really drinkable young," he observed.

JUSTIN 2018 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$58) Aromas of slate-lined blackberry and meat lean into the wine's highly developed architecture. Fruit and minerality are balanced with dusty tannins and a race car-sleek mouthfeel. Just-tilled soil, blackberry underbrush, and dark-chocolate espresso follow through to the finish. **93** —*M.M.*



Master Sommelier Joe Spellman is a spokesman and educator for JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN VINEYARDS & WINERY

Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery

Matt Merrill, Managing Partner

Matt Merrill's family has been farming on the Central Coast of California for eight generations. In the 1980s, his father, Dana Merrill, started cultivating grapevines and soon established Mesa Vineyard Management. It became an industry leader, overseeing vineyards throughout Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey counties.

In 2002, the Merrills purchased a vineyard near Templeton in the El Pomar District and

worked to get it SIP (Sustainability in Practice) Certified. They also established a winery there, working exclusively with fruit that they farm from multiple sites including the estate, which is cooled by the afternoon breezes that flow through the Templeton Gap. "We like to think we're in a sweet spot," said Merrill. "[We're] in between some cooler zones as you head toward the coast, and [we] get the cooler influence. As you move north and east, it gets warmer."

Merrill presented a calcareous rock from the vineyard's Linne Calodo soils, to which he attributes much of the quality, structure, and acidity that ultimately appears in the wines. "[They] really express the terroir of the area," he said, adding that the sub-AVA also benefits in other ways from its unique geographic positioning. "The cooling breezes come from the Templeton Gap and what you're left with is a really nice, dark, opulent wine."

Because Merrill's great-grandfather was an engineer for the Southern Pacific Railroad, Pomar Junction displays a genuine boxcar with a caboose to pay homage to him and the history of Templeton, which was situated along the historic railroad tracks. In 2014, the winery released Cab Forward, a wine that likewise pays tribute to Merrill's great-grandfather (as well as its lead varietal). Currently on display in the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, the locomotive he operated was used to push trains through the Sierra Nevadas and carried the identity number 4294, which is etched into the glass of each bottle of Cab Forward.

Pomar Junction 2014 Cab Forward Red Bordeaux Blend, Paso Robles (\$65) This reserve blend of 43% Cabernet Sauvignon, 28.5% Petit Verdot, and 28.5% Merlot offers scents of ripe blue and black fruit enhanced by cassis and spiced earth. Ripe and rich on the palate, it features floral notes of lilac with white pepper, spearmint, and Italian herbs. Silky tannins make for a superb mouthfeel. **94** —*M.M.*



Matt Merrill is managing partner at Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery.

PHOTO COURTESY OF POMAR JUNCTION VINEYARD & WINERY

Hearst Ranch Winery

Soren Christensen, Winemaker

Hearst Ranch Winery is a partnership between longtime grape grower Jim Saunders and Steve Hearst, great-grandson of William Randolph Hearst. Their winemaker, Soren Christensen, echoed the idea that one of Paso Robles' great assets is its diversity; because they're currently replanting their Estrella District vineyard, he has had the chance to seek out fruit from many different sites, which "has been this great exploration," he said. "I've come to fall in love with El Pomar



PHOTO COURTESY OF PASO ROBLES CAB COLLECTIVE

Hearst Ranch Winery winemaker Soren Christensen.

Cab—I find it incredibly complete. Adelaida's strength really lies in that calcareous soil and the great chalkiness it brings" compared to the estate fruit he works with, which he described as exhibiting soft, round fruit flavors. In short, the opportunity to work with various properties is something he truly enjoys as a winemaker. "We can achieve a harmonious blend by working with the different sub-AVAs in Paso," he explained.

Meanwhile, the work of premium grape growers who've moved to the region in recent years has elevated quality overall, Christensen believes. He recalled that, when he first started in the 2000s, many of the vineyards were overcropped, and the wines reflected the problem. "That's long gone now, which is awesome, as more and more wineries are producing really high-end wines and growers are falling in line with that goal," said Christensen.

He presented the winery's luxury-tier Cabernet Sauvignon, Proprietor's Reserve, which is a blend of grapes from the Adelaida and Estrella districts, to illustrate their complementary aspects—the former providing structure and texture while the latter brings soft, voluptuous fruit character and length to the finish. Aged 22 months in predominantly new French oak, only a couple hundred cases are produced.

Hearst Ranch Winery 2017 Proprietor's Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$100) Melting dark chocolate starts the elegant journey. Acidity and fruit are well balanced with distinguished notes of cedar, boysenberry, beetroot, soy sauce, and slate. The chalky mouthfeel from limestone-rich soils adds intensity, but the overall picture here is downright sleekness. **95** —*M.M.*

Opolo Vineyards

Robert Nadeau, Grower Relations Director

Opolo Vineyards is owned by Rick Quinn and Dave Nichols, who not only live side by side in Camarillo but also established vineyards next door to one another in Paso Robles. They joined forces in 1997, and today they farm nearly 300 acres on both the east and west sides of the AVA. "We can leverage the differences between the plummy Cabernets that are on the east side and the firmer, tannic wines that are on the west side—that gives us a lot of blend-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT NADEAU

Opolo Vineyards grower relations director Robert Nadeau.

ing power," said grower relations director Robert Nadeau.

In addition to its estate holdings, the winery also partners with vineyards in the El Pomar District, which experiences radical diurnal swings of up to 50 degrees due to the aforementioned cooling breezes that flow through the Templeton Gap. Nadeau, who started at Opolo as a consulting winemaker 20 years ago, echoed his fellow webinar panelists in noting that, by sourcing from across the AVA, the team has a spice rack of flavors and textures to play with as they dial in their desired style of Cabernet Sauvignon.

Although Opolo is best-known as a Zinfandel house, Nadeau is really proud of its Cabernets, which he feels have been elevated by a close monitoring of phenolics during fermentation. This is a practice many area producers undertake, as naturally high phenolics—due in part to Paso Robles' low rainfall and high-pH soils—contribute to thick, dark skins that in turn provide intense color. "That's really helped us make our Bordeaux programs go from good to something really special," said Nadeau.

Opolo 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$36) Earthy with dusty tannins, dark fruit, and cigar leaf. Black fruit and slate lend depth to the mouthfeel. Cocoa and toasty oak leave a satisfying finish. **92** —*M.M.*

"Paso has the advantage of tremendous phenolics because of the daylight, the exposure, and the slow growing season; I think, if anything, those other regions should have phenol envy."

—SOMM Journal VP of Education Lars Leicht



J. Lohr Vineyards & Winery

Brenden Wood, Red Winemaker

When J. Lohr founder Jerry Lohr established his Paso Robles vineyards in the 1980s, his main goal was to control every step of the winemaking process, from ground to glass. Over the decades, the family's holdings have spread throughout most of the region, giving their winemaking team the wide range of options for blending that's one of J. Lohr's greatest strengths.

For example, J. Lohr's famous flagship, Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon, started as a single-vineyard wine grown near the winery in the Estrella District. However, as high-quality estate acreage has expanded, so has the range of sources. J. Lohr Hilltop Cabernet is now composed of fruit from the best elevated sites at the team's disposal. Red winemaker Brenden Wood shared details on each of them as he presented soil samples, literally spilling the dirt on the wine's components.

In the Adelaida District, Gean Vineyard sits on a mix of calcareous sandstone and calcareous marl beneath richer topsoil. Wood described the rocks as "sponges" that hold in moisture without giving the roots wet feet: "They can kind of nurse these little sponges and tap [into] that water as they need it." The resulting flavor profile centers on red fruit that's fresh and energetic on the palate, he said, almost like "raspberry Pez."

Shotwell Vineyard, meanwhile, is located in the rolling hills of the El Pomar District. The soils are composed of gravel with alluvial clay loam and cobbles that allow for good drainage. "I think of it as that classic, old-school Cabernet," said Wood, noting the emphasis on cassis, plum, black tea, and hints of mint found in the wines from there.

The third site is quite unusual. Beck Vineyard sits at 1,700 feet above sea level on the east side of Paso Robles in the Creston District. Wood compared it to "the Cliffs of Dover," with stark-white, high-pH soils beneath a topsoil like crumbled chalk. These produce high-acid wines with dense concentration. "Everything struggles to grow out there—the berries are extremely small [and] extremely concentrated," he explained, portraying the wines as opaque, with dark flavors of blackberry and cassis.

This mix of characteristics allows Wood to blend for consistency year after year while overdelivering on quality for the price, a primary goal for Hilltop. "I just feel really fortunate to work with all these different vineyards and have a big-picture perspective of the AVA," he said. **EW**

J. Lohr's Beck Vineyard in Paso Robles' Creston District.

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



J. Lohr red
winemaker
Brenden Wood.

J. Lohr 2018 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$35) The majority of grapes for this blend, which includes some Petit Verdot and Malbec, were sourced from the cooler El Pomar District, with an additional selection off a 1,700-foot-high site in the warmer Creston District. Scents of blackberry preserves, pepper, and tobacco are at the forefront. Polished tannins and a juicy mouthfeel meld with notes of tilled soil, black olive, and black currant. One of the deeper and darker vintages, it shows a maturity and more finesse than we have ever experienced from this wine, revealed in balanced acidity and fruit that's bright and poignant—intense but not overbearing. **94** —*M.M.*

J. Lohr 2018 Pure Paso™ Proprietary Red Wine, Paso Robles (\$27) Composed primarily of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah, the second vintage of this tremendous blend delivers a rich, bright perfume of boysenberry preserves, cashew, and milk chocolate. Licorice, leather, and slate are indulgent flavors that add to the round body, with a distinctly satiny mouthfeel that's balanced by the sleekness of black-tea tannins. Power meets poise. **93** —*M.M.*

“I just feel really fortunate to work with all these different vineyards and have a big-picture perspective of the AVA.”

—BRENDEN WOOD



Masters *of their* OWN DOMAIN

**OUR “SPIRITS SPEED
TASTING” WEBINAR
TOASTED TO THE
SUCCESS OF SIX
STANDARD-BEARING
PRODUCERS**

by Rachel Burkons



AS

As we settle into the era of virtual tastings, we're discovering that a remarkable amount of storytelling can be done via Zoom. On a mission to discover what makes six spirits brands so special, *The Tasting Panel* partnered with ECRM for a virtual speed tasting in early August that brought together buyers from across the country—all in the comfort of their own homes. Moderated by our editor-at-large Jonathan Cristaldi, the webinar challenged the representatives of each company to tell their brand's stories in ten minutes or less. Although they spanned a variety of categories, they elicited a common theme from our participants: Maintaining strict control over production from sourcing to packaging is the key to ensuring standards of excellence.



Eric "ET" Tecosky is U.S. brand ambassador for Jack Daniel's.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JACK DANIEL'S

An American Legend: **JACK DANIEL'S**

"It is very easy for people to assume they know all there is to know about Jack Daniel's, but in reality, there's a lot of missing information," began Eric "ET" Tecosky, U.S. brand ambassador for the world-famous whiskey. "Over the years, we've been able to introduce new whiskeys and flavor profiles based on consumer needs, and that evolution comes from the passion of our distillers and really everyone that touches the process in the tiny town that produces all the Jack Daniel's enjoyed in the world. Jack was famous for saying, 'Every day we make it, we'll make it the best we can.' That mantra is as true today as [it was then]."

Tecosky recalled the lore of the company's eponymous founder, who discovered a limestone cave with iron-free water that is "optimal for making whiskey." The company considers this ingredient so important that it has bought up all of the surrounding land to protect it, according to Tecosky, who explained that "since Jack's days in the 1800s until now, we make all of our whiskey with water from that source."

Also essential is the charcoal mellowing process that results in a smooth, pure spirit. "Tennessee whiskey by definition touches charcoal," said Tecosky, "and at Jack Daniel's, new-make whiskey hits the charcoal drop by drop." This step is important not for what it lends to the spirit but for what it takes away: "Charcoal adds no flavor or color, but it gets rid of the heavy corn aromas, flavors, and oils that Jack wasn't looking for in the finished product. It allows the other flavors to shine."

But the most important aspect of whiskey production is barrel-aging, and here, Jack Daniel's has a unique advantage: "We have two cooperages and five stave mills. We control every bit of the barrel-making process, from the trees coming in to the barrel going out." (And despite their massive output to keep up with global demand, the cooperage and stave mills manage to be zero-waste operations; for more on sustainability at Jack Daniel's, see page 136.) In short, said Tecosky, "We make our own yeast, we make our own charcoal, we make our barrels: We do all of that to make sure everything in the bottle is the best we can make it." No wonder the brand has such an enduring legacy while continually garnering new fans, he added: "Because Jack Daniel's is such a great, iconic whiskey, it's always fun to help others discover or rediscover it."

Master of the Mountains:

OLE SMOKY DISTILLERY

Positioned at the entrance to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Gatlinburg is one of the most-visited cities in Tennessee. So in 2010, when three men whose families had a history of making moonshine—Joe Barker, Cory Cottongim, and Tony Breeden—decided to open a little distillery downtown, they expected to bring in some tourists. Little did they know that demand would far outpace supply: “They thought they had enough product for six months and sold out in a week,” said Mason Engstrom, VP of on-premise accounts for Ole Smoky. Receiving more than 4.5 million visitors in 2019 alone, Ole Smoky’s flagship distillery has become the most-visited facility of its kind in the world. But it’s so much more than a tourist destination. With three other locations in its home state, Ole Smoky is now churning out moonshine, whiskey, and much more for consumers nationwide. The key to the brand’s success is simple, according to Engstrom: In keeping with its ethos of authenticity, “We still handcraft everything ourselves in small batches.”

Take the Apple Pie expression, which has developed an incredibly loyal following. “Using apple pie flavors is a historical way to make moonshine, and one of the reasons we still package our products in a Mason jar is that it’s historically how moonshine was packaged,” explained Engstrom. “These mountain moonshiners were not making a super-high-quality product. . . . So to make it more palatable, people mixed it with apple cider and juices and drank it straight from the jar.”

But as much as the Ole Smoky team reveres the traditions of the past, innovation drives the brand. Its Salty Caramel Whiskey, for instance, “is technically the number-one product for Ole Smoky right now. . . . We thought at first it would be a seasonal thing, but it just continues to grow,” Engstrom divulged. Another recent example is Ole Smoky Moonshine Pickles—dill pickle spears brined in 40-proof moonshine. “[They] took off like a rocket ship both on-premise and off-premise,” said Engstrom, noting that the company has also rolled out 1-liter bottles of Pickle Juice Moonshine for the convenience of its on-premise customers. Along with its Moonshine Cherries, such cult favorites are Ole Smoky’s stock in trade: As Engstrom put it, “When we started, everyone assumed we were an old brand, but we trend younger than people might think [by bringing] new, exciting, and unexpected flavors to today’s consumers.”



PHOTO: JASON MYERS



PHOTO COURTESY OF 3 BADGE BEVERAGE CORP.

Keeping It in the Family:

UNCLE VAL'S BOTANICAL GIN

With his Zoom backdrop set to a lovely garden scene bursting with ripe lemons, Eric Timmerman, national sales manager for Uncle Val’s Botanical Gin, began by answering an obvious question: “Who is Uncle Val? He was a real person, and his legacy is translated to what’s in the bottle. This gin was inspired by a life well lived.”



Valerio Cecchetti—great-uncle to August Sebastiani, the president of wine-and-spirits négociant 3 Badge Beverage Corporation—was a physician whose true passion was growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs that he would use to cook for his family. Sebastiani recalled that zeal for gardening when he set out to craft a new style of botanical gins that he eventually named for Cecchetti.

Made with corn and water sourced from the Sonoran Desert, the gluten-free base spirit is distilled five times for purity prior to the infusion of botanicals. “It’s a gin first and foremost, so it has juniper, but it also has cucumber, lemon, lavender, and sage,” explained Timmerman. That makes it “interesting for those who don’t drink gin, because . . . it’s more floral and citrusy. Most people won’t drink gin neat, but this is unique to the gin category in that you can just drop in an ice cube and enjoy it.” From a mixology standpoint, he added, “It lends itself beautifully to a simple Gin & Tonic, but it [also] works in more complex cocktails like a Negroni or a Last Word. It’s not one-dimensional.”

With three expressions that include Uncle Val’s Restorative and Peppered gins as well as the original, the brand had seen its unusual approach to the category pay off in the form of 57% growth over the 24 weeks leading up to the speed tasting. While Timmerman noted that its attractive price point (\$27–\$30) is a driving factor in off-premise sales and its stylish packaging grabs attention on-premise, he added that “the product in the bottle speaks for itself—the liquid is phenomenal.”

Everything Aged Is New Again:

LA ADELITA TEQUILA

“Distillation was always something intriguing to me,” mused wine-maker turned bourbon and tequila producer Chris Radomski, who cited a biochemistry background as key to his lifelong pursuit of all things liquid. “I’ve always loved tequila, and for a number of years I was traveling to Mexico looking for the right relationship. After six years . . . I ended up meeting someone in Miami Beach,” he said with a laugh.

That someone was the right fit for a few reasons: “He had a generational distillery in Jalisco founded in 1885,” explained Radomski, “and he’s been planting agave there for 20 years, back when it was trading at nothing. He has knowledge of terroir and began to treat what they were doing with planting the agaves like [growing] a fine Cab. . . . [And] like we did in Napa, every single plant that goes into the fermentation process

is hand-selected” for its expressiveness and hand-harvested by seasoned jimadors. “These days, so many things are manipulated,” Radomski pointed out. “To be able to do something the old-fashioned way fell out of favor a while back, but I think our consumers today are much more educated. Tequila is no longer ‘salt-lime-shot’; it’s about caring where it comes from. That’s intensely important, no matter what you’re making.”

The core portfolio includes a classic unaged Blanco, a Reposado aged three months, an 18 month–aged Añejo, and an Extra Añejo aged 48 months. “The Extra Añejo is my favorite,” admitted Radomski. “I’m a big bourbon drinker, so I love the nuances from the oak. It’s an incredible sipping tequila.” He’s similarly excited about the La Adelita Black, a cristalino tequila that’s aged 18 months in retooled second-use American oak whiskey barrels and filtered via a proprietary system to remove color but maintain character. “It has great depth of flavor,” he said. “It’s great in a premium cocktail.” But perhaps even more exciting is what’s yet to come. “We do have some very old aged product,” Radomski acknowledged a bit coyly. “We’re still discovering different ways to release it.”



PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO



PHOTO: SARAHIPPITY PHOTOS

Cuban Inspiration, American Production:

BIG 5 RUM

When Blue Ridge Spirits & Wine Marketing CEO Carlos Carreras and VP of sales Rene Armas set out to make a rum, they kept their heritage as first-generation Cuban Americans in mind. “We were thinking back to the days of pre-Castro, where the parties were going and the rum was flowing,” Carreras recalled. “[At the time] there were five big social clubs in Cuba, and as members of these different clubs came over to the U.S. in the ‘50s and ‘60s, they formed one big club called the Big Five. That’s where we got the idea.”

Though Blue Ridge supports a wide variety of brand partners, the co-founders’ personal connection to both Cuba and Florida, where they started out, motivated them “to do something a little different and make our own rum,” Carreras said. Based on blackstrap molasses sourced from South Florida sugarcane growers, Big 5 is distilled in copper at The Point Distillery in New Port Richey. “On the back of the bottle, there’s a subtle map of Florida and Cuba that reinforces the brand story,” noted Carreras. “They’re only 90 miles apart.”

While Big 5 Silver Rum, made in the traditional Caribbean style, is in his view the perfect base for a classic Cuba Libre, Carreras believes that the brand’s entire lineup lends itself well to modern mixology, including its bestselling Coconut Rum. “It’s not your typical coconut rum,” said Carreras. “Made from all-natural ingredients, it’s 70 proof, not 40 proof like some other flavored rums. The higher proof makes it great on the rocks but also very mixable.” Big 5 Spiced Rum is another example, according to Carreras, who called it “top-notch,” with a flavor profile of allspice, cloves, nutmeg, vanilla, and orange that “really stands up in a cocktail.”

Meanwhile, the brand’s newest release, Cafecito Rum, is as Cuban as they come. “If you’ve ever had Cuban coffee, you know that it’s served in a little shot glass; after Cuba nationalized their food supply in 1962, people were allotted only 4 ounces per month, so they preserved coffee by taking tiny little shots,” Carreras explained. “Drinking [them with] rum at the same time is very Cuban!”

Family-Owned and Community-Oriented:

MAGUEY SPIRITS

Maguey Spirits CEO Alejandro Rossbach, who founded the company with his brother Christian in 2013, credits his family with “allow[ing] us to take our own path [to do] the most exciting things”—and what was exciting to Rossbach was doing something different. “Mezcal is usually made from Espadín agave, [but] after exploring the whole [production zone], we ended up in the north of Mexico, working with wild agave,” he explained. Growing uncultivated on diverse terroir, these plants have depth of flavor and a sense of place. Wild agave from Durango, for instance, grows in volcanic soil, giving it a smoother, less smoky flavor profile. “Mezcal is like Mexican wine,” asserted Rossbach. “The older the agave, the more complex it gets.”

Because sourcing wild agave can take a toll on the environment (and on people), Maguey Spirits is committed to both social and environmental sustainability. For every bottle of spirit sold, it ethically cultivates one agave in greenhouses before reintroducing it into the wild—essentially growing four times the number of plants consumed.

Meanwhile, at the Maguey Spirits distillery, where Burrito Fiestero Mezcal is made, the Conde family combines traditional production techniques with state-of-the-art green technology. In addition to relying on solar energy, they use agave byproducts to make bricks, fabrics, compost, and even the labels on their products, which are packaged in recycled boxes and bottles.

Finally, as a key employer in the state of Durango, the Maguey team takes its responsibility to the local community seriously, said Rossbach, who has some building projects in the works there. [LZ](#)

Maguey Spirits CEO Alejandro Rossbach (second from left) with his team in Durango, Mexico.

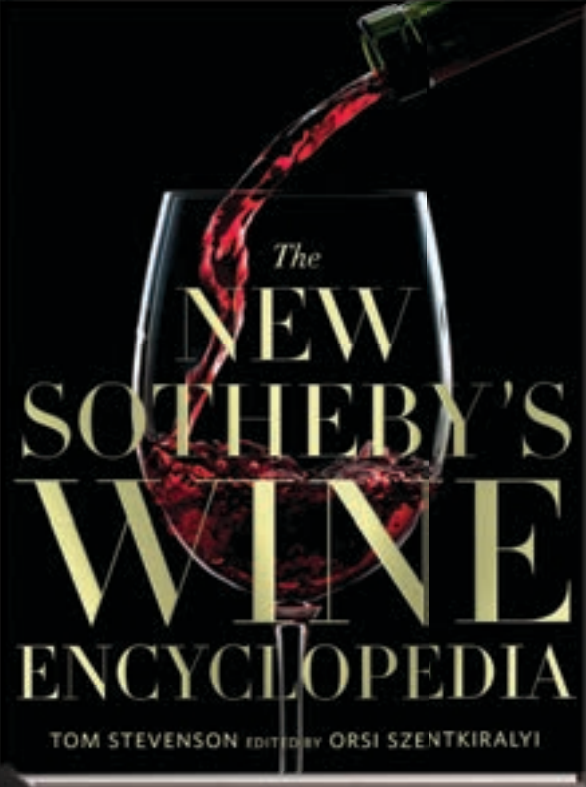


PHOTO COURTESY OF MAGUEY SPIRITS



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a taste of the
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OUR "BIG NAMES ON CAMPUS"
WINE WEBINAR WITH ECRM
DELIVERS ON ITS PROMISE

by *jessie birschbach*

One has to wonder if the higher-ups at ECRM realized, when the company was established in 1994, just how crucial it would be in 2020. According to the website, ECRM's mission is "helping buyers and sellers around the world." That may sound like an oversimplification, but in the time of COVID-19, the wine industry is desperately searching for alternative ways to connect its buyers to its sellers. In response, *The Tasting Panel* partnered with ECRM for a wine-tasting webinar titled "Big Names on Campus."

The theme was tried-and-true wine brands: "When you're talking to national buyers, the wines have to be priced right, and they have to be available to the national audience—but [also], the national audience will have to *want to buy them*," asserted Lars Leicht, VP of education for *The Tasting Panel*. Leicht, who served as the webinar's seasoned moderator, did a bit of reflecting following the event. "I firmly

PHOTO: MEGAN CLINE

Cline's Catapult Ranch Vineyard
in the Petaluma Gap AVA.

believe that once we come out of this crisis mode and go into a new normal, people are going to be seeking reliability—wines they can trust, wines with unique character,” he said, noting that many of the participants represented family-run wineries: “It was wonderful to watch this great lineup of history . . . passion, reliability, and sustainability. These brands are everything that the market deserves and needs to bring us forward into this brave new world that we’re all about to face together.”

Of the opportunity to connect them to a live audience, he added, “I’ve been in this business for 33 years, and what I love about it is that it’s all about people. It’s about networking and building long-term relationships.” Sarah Davidson, SVP of food & beverage at ECRM, shared a similar sentiment: “In today’s environment, it is more important than ever to stay connected and continue to push business forward; the first step is bringing the right people together.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLINE CELLARS

Cline Cellars 2019 Pinot Noir (\$15)

Presented by North Coast Winemaker Tom Gendall

Fred and Nancy Cline started growing grapes in the Contra Costa area in 1982. Today they also farm 800 acres in Sonoma (150 of which are in Carneros) and 650 acres in the Petaluma Gap, according to Cline’s North Coast winemaker, Tom Gendall. However, the New Zealand native focused mostly on the latter as the origin of the just-released 2019 Pinot Noir that our webinar participants were among the first to try.

“We had a great growing season—[it] was very mild,” said Gendall, who added that most of the fruit for the wine was picked in October. After Leicht commented on its “European” character, Gendall thanked the cooler climate of the Petaluma Gap for that: “It’s a gorgeous place to grow Pinot. . . . You get those bright fruit notes, similar to what comes out of the Russian River, but also a lot of earthy tones, so it does become more of a Burgundian style.”

He showed the audience pictures of not only the Petaluma Gap growing sites but also a historic adobe mission centered in one of Cline’s Sonoma vineyards; old, gnarled Zinfandel vines in Contra Costa; and a series of images of sheep, owls, dogs, goats, and more sheep that made the estate look like a fancy petting zoo. The lush scenery foretold another key element of Cline Cellars’ story: an extreme commitment to sustainability.

“It’s definitely organic—beyond organic, actually, so we’re looking into that sort of certification now,” said Gendall, who explained that the vineyard team avoids pesticides and herbicides, using only sulfur as a fungicide; maintains owl boxes for pest management; plants cover crops; and nourishes the vines with housemade compost teas as well as using the aforementioned sheep for pruning purposes.

Cline’s motto, according to Gendall, is “A wine for every table”—but considering the efforts the company puts into winegrowing, the claim seems to sell Cline a bit short: “A sustainable, well-made, delicious wine for every table” is more like it.



The golden Chardonnay of Wente Vineyards.



Wente 2017 Morning Fog Chardonnay, Livermore Valley (\$18)

Presented by Viticultural Manager Niki Wente

It's safe to say that there wasn't a national buyer in virtual attendance who wasn't familiar with Wente. Heck, even most consumers have heard of it—its wines are ubiquitous in the marketplace, after all. But perhaps what gives the producer the most street cred is the Wente clone, from which 80% of the Chardonnay grown in California today descends. The highly revered golden grape was bred into greatness starting in 1912, when C.H. Wente—who founded the winery in 1883—worked with his son Ernest to retrieve Chardonnay cuttings from F. Richter Nursery in Montpellier, France. Ernest and C.H. planted these cuttings alongside their original 2 acres of Chardonnay, planted four years prior in 1908.

Fifth-generation winegrower and viticultural manager Niki Wente was there to represent her family. "My great-great-grandfather Ernest would taste the berries and continue to replant based on the vines that tasted best to him—that's how easy it is to farm," she admitted, adding, "Don't tell anyone, though. I don't want to lose my job." The humble joke was underscored by her modesty in crediting much of her family's success to the Livermore Valley AVA they call home.

Her presentation settled for a bit on a picture of one of Wente's estate vineyards, over which loomed a layer of fog like the front of a steamroller. "We're 30 miles from the [San Francisco] Bay," Wente explained. "We have an east-west-oriented valley that allows for nice wind flow and keeps us really cool at night. . . . All of the fog from the city blows in and settles into our valley, and you can really taste that cool fog temperature in our wine."

The slide illustrated what we were sampling for the webinar: the Wente 2017 Morning Fog Chardonnay. "It's about 50% oak and 50% stainless steel, so only about half goes through malo, which is a great intro for people to Chardonnay," said Wente. "We want to give you that perfect balance between acid and rich mouthfeel to make it that true California style"—a world-renowned style that her family has helped shape.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WENTE

Ancient Peaks 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$22)

Presented by Executive Vice President Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANCIENT PEAKS WINERY

Ancient Peaks executive vice president Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins was on her A-game with respect to visual aids. As we sipped on the rich, graphite-laden Ancient Peaks Cabernet Sauvignon, she dangled a freshly picked bunch of Cabernet grapes before the camera while describing her SIP Certified property. "Our 14,000-acre Santa Margarita Ranch property takes up much of the [namesake] AVA," she said, explaining that the lush southernmost sub-appellation of Paso Robles is quite unlike the

PHOTO: CAMERON INGALLS



rest of the region. “In our vineyard, we see up to 50-degree temperature swings pretty darn regularly. [The shift] lengthens the ripening period, slows the process, and [offers] more richness and ripeness from a phenolic perspective.”

But if those Cabernet grapes (one of 17 varieties Ancient Peaks cultivates) helped to tell the story of the AVA’s capabilities, the giant oyster shell Wittstrom-Higgins brought for show-and-tell signified its legacy. “What’s most interesting about our Margarita Vineyard is the diversity in soil types—in fact, the different types of strata are depicted on our label,” said the kindhearted second-generation winegrower and fourth-generation resident of San Luis Obispo County (Google her nonprofit organization, Dream Big Darling, and you’ll see what I mean). Holding up the foot-long shell, she went on, “This is about 10 million years old and almost 100% calcium, which is an incredible profile for growing grapes. The vines really struggle, and as a result, we get smaller berries with a higher intensity of fruit. This stuff stretches throughout several sections of the vineyard. It’s the reason we’re called Ancient Peaks.”

Ancient Peaks’ Margarita Vineyard sits in the heart of the Santa Margarita Ranch sub-AVA of Paso Robles.

PHOTO: CAMERON INGALLS



7 Deadly Zins 2017 Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi (\$20)

Presented by Head Winemaker Scot Dahlstrom

“The idea is balance,” said 7 Deadly Zins head winemaker Scot Dahlstrom, swirling his dark-ruby 2017 Zinfandel by the stem of his glass. “We have access to a lot of different vineyards and small lots. Almost everything is head trained. So what we try to do is pick across the board and put together a lot of combinations. [We] bring in some red fruit, some

big jammy fruit, [and] some dark fruit and then tie it all together with French oak and a little American oak.”

The inaugural vintage of the wine we tasted came from seven certified-sustainable old-vine Zinfandel vineyards in 2002 (thus the name). Although there are a few more sources today, the wine is still certified sustainable by LODI RULES, one of the most comprehensive programs of its kind in the country. Lodi sits in proximity to the San Francisco Bay, “so it’s right at the Delta,” said Dahlstrom, noting the coastal influence to counter the misperception that the Central Valley is strictly a hot growing area. The California native, who grew up in in Turlock not far from Lodi, added that the Mediterranean climate is complemented by mineral-rich sandy clay soils, making for conditions in which Zinfandel tends to thrive. No wonder the area is regarded for its old-vine expressions, with 7 Deadly Zins leading the way: It’s the bestselling Zinfandel in the U.S. and has remained so for nearly six years.

Luna Nuda 2019 Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige (\$13)

Presented by VP of Marketing John Dunn

Located in Cortina in the southern part of Italy's Alto Adige region, Castelfeder has been family-owned and -operated for over 50 years. The winery's founder, Alfons Giovanett, was fascinated by the lunar phases and believed that wines taste their best when the moon is full—hence the name of its Luna Nuda label (which translates as Naked Moon). To this day, the team celebrates each lunar cycle by toasting to new beginnings with a glass of Luna Nuda.

But there are other reasons to celebrate Luna Nuda Pinot Grigio too, according to its VP of marketing, John Dunn—starting naturally with where the wine is made: Alto Adige is considered by many to be one of the best growing regions for Pinot Grigio, thanks to its cool Alpine climate (94% of its vineyards sit at more than 1,000 meters in elevation), which enables it to produce fresh, crisp, structured, and mineral-driven wines.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASTELFEDER



Director of sales Ines Giovanett with Ivan Giovanett, winemaker for Luna Nuda.

The handpicked, hand-sorted estate fruit, grown on 120 acres close to the Alto Adige/Trentino border, is managed via the Guyot trellis system to ensure smaller yields and therefore higher quality. Dunn called the 2019 release “our best vintage to date,” adding that between Castelfeder’s family history, the caliber of the vineyard, the quality of the grapes, and the \$13 SRP, “we’re almost alone” in terms of value.

Chalk Hill 2017 Estate Chardonnay, Chalk Hill, Sonoma County (\$42)

Presented by Foley Family Wines VP of Luxury Brands Alan Crawford

Proprietor Bill Foley considers Chalk Hill Estate to be the flagship of his portfolio and spares no expense in maintaining its legacy, according to Alan Crawford, VP of luxury brands for Foley Family Wines. Founded in 1972 by Fred Furth and in the care of the Foley family since 2010, the estate takes

its name from the white volcanic ash and rocks common in the soil of the AVA it inspired. Chalk Hill sustainably farms 382 of the appellation's 1,400 acres under vine. Each plot has been thoughtfully mapped out and planted on the appropriate rootstock to the right varieties and clones, which are then handpicked and vinified separately.

But as Crawford said, “Chalk Hill is rooted in our love for Chardonnay.” He pointed out the aging potential in the Estate Chardonnay in our glass. “I was fortunate enough to taste four decades’ worth of this wine dating back to 1983 last month,” he noted, “and it’s amazing how long that these wines age. Yet right here out of the bottle, it’s soft and malleable with great acidity.” The unfiltered Chalk Hill Estate Chardonnay is aged sur lie for 11 months in 100% French oak (44% new) after going through both 100% native yeast fermentation and 100% malolactic fermentation. “It is a quintessential California Chardonnay: big and rich, with a really intense sense of citrus yet softness on the nose and bright, fresh fruit on the palate,” Crawford said. [L](#)



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHALK HILL

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

Chalk Hill Estate sits within the small Chalk Hill sub-AVA of Sonoma County.

WINE ENTHUSIAST **94** POINTS



RUM CHATA
LIMÓN

Caribbean Rum With Real Dairy Cream, Natural & Artificial Flavors.

14% Alc/Vol 750ml



Jordan Wente, fifth-generation winegrower and project manager—winegrowing operations; Aly Wente, fifth-generation winegrower and director of marketing; Carolyn Wente, fourth-generation winegrower and CEO; Niki Wente, fifth-generation winegrower and viticulture manager; and Karl Wente, fifth-generation winegrower, COO, and chief winemaker.

ACCOLADES FROM

Afar

LIKE MOST CEREMONIES IN 2020, WENTE FAMILY ESTATES' LEGACY AND RISE AWARDS WERE CELEBRATED VIRTUALLY

by *Eric Marsh*

The 2020 Emmy Awards were hosted before an audience of cardboard cutouts; the winners received their trophies at home from presenters in hazmat tuxedos. So too did Wente Family Estates have to improvise for its 12th annual Legacy Awards: Usually held at Wente Vineyards in Livermore, California, the ceremony had to be called off this year, but that didn't stop the Wentes and their team from honoring their top distributors and importers, whom they refer to as "partners"—though they sometimes seem more like extended family.

"The Wente family has enjoyed a long and productive relationship with their family-owned, often multigenerational, distributor associates," says vice president and national sales manager Chris Giudice,

PHOTO: HARDY WILSON

Legacy Awards, USA

who leads the company's sales efforts in legacy markets. "Since the 1980s, Carolyn Wente has cultivated strong bonds of mutual respect with our wholesale partners. It's clear that her leadership and passion have been integral to our success."

Past Legacy Award winners have journeyed to Livermore from across the United States, Canada, and even Europe to partake in the festivities, held at The Tasting Lounge at Wente Vineyards or, as last year, in the winery's 137-year-old sandstone cave before dinner on the events lawn. This year, Giudice explains, he, Carolyn Wente, president Amy Hoopes, and chief sales and marketing officer Tyson Overton instead jumped on video calls to personally congratulate each winning team, whose trophies—6-liter bottles of Charles Wetmore Cabernet Sauvignon with the wholesalers' names etched into the glass—were delivered to them along with luxury care packages containing merchandise from Wente Family Estates. Since they "couldn't come to Livermore," says Giudice, "Livermore was sent to them" (no hazmat suits necessary).

The company also recently sent out its third annual RISE Awards (the acronym stands for Respect, Integrity, Sustainability, and Excellence in allusion to four of Wente's chief values). This special class of accolades is given strictly to distributors under the umbrella of Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits (SGWS), the largest distributor of wine and spirits in the nation. According to vice president and national sales manager SGWS division Crystal McIntyre, Wente is "aligned with SGWS nationally in 25 markets, including California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois."

The Tasting Panel's prior coverage of both the Legacy and RISE awards has included photographs of the winning teams holding high their trophies with beaming smiles; this year, as we interviewed them about their partnerships with Wente Family Estates, we asked that they snap pictures of themselves with their prizes at their homes or offices for a candid, intimate touch. Though they kindly obliged, it was clear that many fingers are crossed in hopes that the 2021 awards will once again be held at the Wente estate in honor of one big, happy family.

Tier 1 Awards

PHOTO COURTESY OF OPICI FAMILY DISTRIBUTING



Opici Family Distributing president Dina Opici and executive vice president Steven Hutchinson.

OPICI FAMILY DISTRIBUTING NEW YORK

Founded nearly 100 years ago, Opici is a long-standing family-owned company, just like Wente—which is, however, new to the distributor's portfolio. "We've carried Wente wines for coming on two years," noted executive vice president Steven Hutchinson, "[and] I would say that we've had tremendous success out of the gate, especially in the latter part of 2019."

Asked what he admires most about the winery, he cited "the quality-to-value proposition and the fact that the family completely owns [it]," adding that the Wentes' commitment to "keeping the quality level extremely high is very serious . . . and that comes through in sales execution and in the trading area." Hutchinson, like many other Legacy Award winners, said he enjoys the chance to communicate Wente's impressive history, including the development of the Wente Chardonnay clone, to buyers. But if the brand's white wines were "our lead-in," in his words, "it's something we are leveraging to expose the consumer to the quality of the red portfolio. We see it as an opportunity for us as we close 2020—and certainly as we grow and flesh out our business in 2021."

PHOTO COURTESY OF TRYON DISTRIBUTING



Tryon Distributing vice president of sales Max Perkins.

TRYON DISTRIBUTING

Founded 36 years ago, family-owned Tryon Distributing services all of North Carolina. Vice president of sales Max Perkins told *The Tasting Panel* that selling Wente Family Estates wines is a pleasure because "they have something in their portfolio for each palate, for different buyers, and for different channels of business, so all the eggs aren't in one basket."

Tryon is a repeat Legacy awardee, and the Wentes have welcomed Perkins and his team at the Livermore estate several times; on one occasion, he recalled, one of his managers attended a costume function there dressed as Zorro. The festivities included horseback riding—but rather than demonstrate his skills as the adroit horseman he resembled, the manager "proceeded to get bucked off one of the Wente horses"—and will likely never live the irony down, Perkins joked. But laughs aside, he added, the Wentes have always made time for his team on their trips to California, which makes the partnership that much more personal.

Tier 2 Awards

CAPITOL-HUSTING COMPANY

As eight-time Legacy Award winners, Capitol-Husting has clearly earned some bragging rights for its loyalty. “In Wisconsin, we are stewards of the [Wente] brand,” said general manager—vintage division Kyle Luebke. “Our team cherishes that [it] will never be sold [to a larger corporation].” And it doesn’t hurt, he added, that Wente “wines overdeliver for the price and give [us] the confidence to put a bottle in the bag for virtually all buyers.” That includes Capitol-Husting’s Wente portfolio manager Lauren Haas as well as “everyone in the field,” he asserted. “We feel this is a team approach and everyone is holding the rope.”

**Capitol-Husting general manager—
vintage division Kyle Luebke.**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPITOLHUSTING COMPANY

HEIDELBERG DISTRIBUTING COMPANY KENTUCKY

Founded in Ohio in 1938, Heidelberg Distributing is now led by third- and fourth-generation family members and has expanded to Kentucky. Heidelberg Kentucky vice president/sales manager Jimmy Carpenter credited the fact that “both are multigeneration companies—essentially two families working in an industry together, selling really great wine” as “contribut[ing] to our success.” He added that it’s rare to find family-produced wines of such quality at a price that doesn’t break the bank: “Most of the wines you’re competing with at this price point are owned by multinational corporations.” As for working with Wente in the future, he enthused, “It’s exciting to see the next generation—Karl, Niki, Jordan, and Aly—stepping into leadership . . . and I can’t wait to see where they take it.”

**Heidelberg Kentucky vice president/sales manager
Jimmy Carpenter.**



PHOTO COURTESY OF HEIDELBERG DISTRIBUTING COMPANY

SELECT WINES

Family-owned Select Wines was established in 1987 in Chantilly, Virginia. Wente has been in its portfolio for 23 years and remains one of its top-selling brands. Vice president/general manager Nathan Roberts’ appreciation for it is personal: “I served Wente wines at my wedding, and I have them on my dinner table every time we have a get-together,” he noted. So is his appreciation for the people that Select’s key players—including Nancy Sharp, Paul Hill, Gabe Pica, Sam Komelasky, and Larry Miller—get to work with: “We’re lucky [they’re] such a nice family. . . . Everyone we’ve encountered from the Wente team has just been outstanding.”

**Select Wines vice president/general manager
Sam Komelasky.**



PHOTO COURTESY OF SELECT WINES

Tier 3 Awards

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUE RIDGE BEVERAGE COMPANY



Blue Ridge vice president Barry Custer and wine sales manager Charles Gilroy.

BLUE RIDGE BEVERAGE COMPANY

Blue Ridge Beverage Company has been operated by Archer Family Management since 1959. The wholesalers started out in Salem, Virginia, and now have “four divisions covering 60% of the [state],” wine sales manager Charles Gilroy informed us. He and vice president Barry Custer agree that what they enjoy most about selling Wenté is telling the company’s backstory: that it was founded in 1883 by C.H. Wenté, who in 1912 introduced what is now known as the Wenté clone to California soil, where it remains the most-grown Chardonnay grape. Custer also expressed his gratitude for the fact that, in addition to putting “great wine in the bottle for our team to sell, the Wenté team makes us feel that our contributions are valued.” Asked about the wines he enjoys most, Gilroy said he admires them all, but acknowledged that “if I’m going to drink Chardonnay, it’s going to be Wenté—it’s the foundation and backbone of California Chardonnay.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF EMPIRE DISTRIBUTORS OF TENNESSEE



Empire Distributors director of sales Darren Rothenberg and president David Henry.

EMPIRE DISTRIBUTORS OF TENNESSEE

Director of sales Darren Rothenberg has been working at Empire Distributors of Tennessee for eight years now; by the time he came on board, Wenté had already been in the company’s portfolio for 15. Rothenberg extolled the entire Wenté team, in particular CEO Carolyn Wenté, for providing tremendous support in a warm, congenial manner that makes him and his colleagues “really feel like part of their family.” He went on to say that the president of Empire Distributors of Tennessee, David Henry, is so fond of the Wentés, their wines, and their property “that two years ago he held his daughter’s wedding at the Wenté Family Estate—that’s how much their winery means to us.”

In addition to putting “great wine in the bottle for our team to sell, the Wenté team makes us feel that our contributions are valued.” —BLUE RIDGE VICE PRESIDENT BARRY CUSTER

Legacy Awards, Export

AMBROS INC., GUAM

Ambros Inc. was founded in 1949 and has been partners with Wente for nearly 40 years—and according to Ambros team member Joey Salas, “During that time, we have seen the brand grow not only on Guam but also in Saipan [and] Palau and throughout Micronesia. It remains our flagship winery, and we look forward to its continued success for years to come.”

Ambros Inc. team members John Myers, Joey Salas, and Tom Shimizu.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMBROS INC.

IMPORTATION ÉPICURIENNE, CANADA

Importation Épicurienne has been representing Wente in the Canadian province of Quebec for more than 20 years. President and CEO Julie Fortin said that she and her team “strongly believe that the constant quality of [these] wines from one vintage to the other is the main reason for our success. The consumers are never disappointed when they buy Wente.”

Wente president Amy Hoopes (third from right) with Importation Épicurienne team members Alexandre Hamel-Lamoureux, Martin Paquette, Genevieve Boisvert, Benoit Maurer, and Julie Fortin. (Not pictured: Philippe Barbasch, Anne-Marie Langlois, and Julie Flamand.)



PHOTO COURTESY OF IMPORTATION EPICURIENNE

GLOBAL WINERIES, BELGIUM

Global Wineries was founded in 2004 in Kapellen, Belgium, to import and distribute wines from across the globe. CEO Paul Dielen said that “the quality of wine in the bottle, along with Wente’s sustainability program [and] its marketing support,” are largely responsible for Global Wineries’ success in distributing the brand and, in turn, for its Legacy Export Award.

Global Wineries team members Peter Goussens, Paul Dielen, and Filip VanDenBosch.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GLOBAL WINERIES

“The Wente family has enjoyed a long and productive relationship with their family-owned, often multigenerational, distributor associates. Since the 1980s, Carolyn Wente has cultivated strong bonds of mutual respect with our wholesale partners. It’s clear that her leadership and passion have been integral to our success.”

—WENTE FAMILY ESTATES VICE PRESIDENT AND NATIONAL MANAGER CHRIS GIUDICE

RISE Awards

EAST REGION

PHOTO COURTESY OF SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE AND SPIRITS OF DELAWARE



SGWS of Delaware vice president and general manager Jim Miller and director—commercial on-premise Michelle Souza.

SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE & SPIRITS OF DELAWARE

“Trust, understanding, and respect continue to be the pillars of our partnership,” said Jim Miller, vice president and general manager of Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits of Delaware, about working with Wente. He added that the heritage of the winery and the fact that a large percentage of its team consists of women make him “excited about the future of Wente Family Estates in our market.”

CENTRAL REGION

PHOTO COURTESY OF SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE AND SPIRITS OF ARKANSAS



SGWS of Arkansas team members Drew Vanderlinden, director of sales grocery division; Cory Jennings, trade development manager; Ashley Lessenberry, director of sales on-premise; Michael Laureano, dedicated division manager; John Myers, director of sales universal; Derek Teter, senior vice president of sales; and Dick Meeks, state director of sales dedicated division.

SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE & SPIRITS OF ARKANSAS

Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits of Arkansas’ relationship with Wente has spanned some 30 years. General manager Dick Meeks observed that “the common bond that binds [us] is that we are all family businesses, and we depend on each other for continued growth.” Their success was evident in 2019, as “our off-premise team, led by Drew Vanderlinden and Bryce Dittrich, delivered +25% growth and our on-premise team, led by Ashley Lessenberry, delivered +19% growth,” said Meeks, adding that consumer interest in Wente’s single-vineyard wines in particular increased in 2019, a sign that “the future is bright for Wente Estates in Arkansas.”

WEST REGION

PHOTO COURTESY OF SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE & SPIRITS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA



SGWS of California senior vice president and general manager Steve Harden with SGWS of Northern California senior vice president and general manager Jim Andrus.

SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE & SPIRITS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

As senior vice president and general manager of Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits of Northern California, Jim Andrus asserted that his team’s 30-year partnership with Wente Family Estates is “built [not only] on trust and collaboration but, more importantly, personal and profound friendship”; what’s more, since its inception, Wente has been run by “true pioneers” who “invest in the future and continue to innovate.” The winery’s forward-looking approach imbues Andrus and his team with confidence in their role as Wente’s “distributor . . . through the next decade” and, surely, beyond. **W**

Dichotomous Question,
**COUNTLESS
ANSWERS**

**THE SOMMCON VIRTUAL
SUMMIT'S "TECHNIQUE
OR TERROIR?" WEBINAR
FOUND A LIGHT AT THE
END OF A LONG AND
WINDING TUNNEL**

BY JESSIE BIRSCHBACH

Broadcasting live from Napa

in late September as part of the SommCon Virtual Summit, sommelier and media personality Amanda McCrossin promised that the webinar she was moderating, "Technique or Terroir?", would do its best to answer an age-old query: Is what's being perceived in the glass a result of nature or nurture? "This is one of those questions that those of us in the wine community are always asking ourselves," said McCrossin.

By the end of the webinar, I wondered if the virtual attendees had arrived at the same conclusion I had: Any winemaker who claims their wine is purely a result of terroir is all too humbly downplaying their own craft. Consider, for instance, the DNA analysis that the winemakers behind Scheid Family Wines' Metz Road label conduct on their native-fermented Chardonnay to ensure that their commercial yeasts haven't somehow infiltrated the wild fermentation process. Isn't that using technology—aka technique—to showcase the terroir?

More on that later, but whatever the conclusion ascertained by each of the savvy audience members, I'm quite sure we can all agree that the answer will never resolve the inherent tension of the dichotomy in question. Still, perhaps we were at least able to determine how the featured wines (as well as a pair of spirits) tipped the scales in favor of either technique or terroir.

WINE: J. Lohr Estates 2019 Flume Crossing Sauvignon Blanc (\$14)

PRESENTER: J. Lohr winemaker, white wine, Kristen Barnhisel

VERDICT: Mostly terroir, though farming and winemaking techniques play an undeniable role

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



J. Lohr winemaker, white wine, Kristen Barnhisel believes that the Arroyo Seco AVA is the ideal environment for the Musqué clone of Sauvignon Blanc. She's not the only winemaker who feels this way. Most of the Sauvignon Blanc grown in the region is the Musqué clone, which tends to be slightly less grassy than other Sauvignon Blanc strains. "We're just 20 miles south of Monterey Bay, so our climate is quite cool. During the summer, we get quite a bit of wind coming off of the bay, so it really extends our growing season and helps those grapes to retain flavor and acidity too," said Barnhisel.

J. Lohr sources the grapes for its 100% Musqué wine, Flume Crossing, from three different blocks with three distinct soil profiles: "ancient alluvial soils, floodplain-esque with rocky soils underneath, and gravelly sandy loam," according to Barnhisel, who added that cobblestones deep in the soil in many of the vineyards "help to balance the vigor and yield of the vines." This allows the fruit to ripen more gradually and imparts more tropical fruit flavor as well as more texture in the finished wine, she explained.

One of the more fascinating points made by Barnhisel—aside from her note that Flume Crossing is aged partially in acacia wood (in addition to French oak and stainless steel) to further add texture—is that it's a blend of ten different picks. "The fruit gets a little riper every one to two days," she said, "and this really affects the flavor profile, going from lime to key lime to grapefruit to kiwi to passion fruit and so on."

From there, the winemaker feels that her job is to "retain those fresh fruit flavors and try not to manipulate too much" by relying on methods like picking both at night and in the morning, minimizing oxygen contact during fermentation, and fermenting in 75% stainless steel. This helps to produce a Sauvignon Blanc that contributes a silky mouthfeel and an elongated finish to the aforementioned spectrum of fruit flavors.

PHOTO: CHRIS LOPEZ

J. Lohr Estates 2019 Flume Crossing Sauvignon Blanc, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$14) This fresh wine gets off to a good start with glorious aromas of sage and lime, followed by a wondrous texture and notes of grapefruit zest plus a unique combination of peppermint and passion fruit. It's an aromatic dream that persists on the palate. **94** —*Meridith May*



The Franscioni & Griva Vineyard Block 14 in the Arroyo Seco AVA provides the Sauvignon Musqué featured in J. Lohr's Flume Crossing release.

WINE: Metz Road Chardonnay, Riverview Vineyard (\$30)

PRESENTERS: Scheid Family Wines VP of winemaking Dave Nagengast and assistant winemaker/enologist Casey Di Cesare

VERDICT: Terroir, honored by advanced technology and age-old techniques alike

If you've ever been to Scheid Family Wines' state-of-the-art wine-making facility in Greenfield, California, it's possible that you may have mistaken it for a sparkling silver city—its size a testament to the output from 4,000 acres of certified-sustainable estate vineyards it's required to handle. Yet the technology integrated within allows for a gentler approach that's described by VP of winemaking Dave Nagengast as "very small, high-end production on a large scale."

But not too far from these shimmering headquarters, among unassuming blocks of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the Riverview Vineyard in Soledad, stands a humble shipping container that yields just 16 barrels: It's home to Scheid's Metz Road label. "We're tiny, but we're getting that sense of place, and that's what we're going for," said assistant winemaker Casey Di Cesare.

Di Cesare revealed that his own definition of terroir includes the site's microbiota: "Not only are we talking about climate and soil but also about the specific organisms that are living in the vineyard—in other words, what is going to be doing the fermentation." This is why the shipping container is separated from the main winemaking facility—to mitigate the high risk of commercial yeasts taking over the fermentation process. "Commercial yeasts are fantastic fermenters; they're reliable and predictable. But that's not what we want for this wine. With Metz Road, we want to highlight the unique saccharomyces [and] non-saccharomyces that are living in the vineyard and feature what they will do to the wine," Di Cesare explained, adding that he and Nagengast did so via "an old, simple technique": simply pressing the grapes and letting the juice ferment. He went on to credit certain non-saccharomyces yeasts for creating an abundance of mannoproteins, which can in turn increase body and mouthfeel; others help establish different aroma profiles.

Which naturally occurring non-saccharomyces yeast strains end up making it into the wine is dependent on the climatic conditions of each vintage and vineyard treatments, according to Di Cesare. The strains, like all yeast, are also quite sensitive to sulfur. "We want to use just enough to protect the wine but not so much that these non-saccharomyces yeasts will die off," he added. The winemakers then have the wine's DNA analyzed to ensure that no cultured yeast has somehow bullied its way into the mix.

These non-interventionist yet high-tech applications perhaps help to produce what Nagengast calls his favorite of all Scheid expressions, hailing from a wholly unique slice of Monterey.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCHEID FAMILY WINES



Riverview Vineyard is located in the cool eastern benchlands of the Salinas Valley.



Metz Road 2018 Chardonnay, Riverview Vineyard, Monterey (\$30)

This estate-grown Chardonnay comes from a sustainably farmed 340-acre vineyard in the cool eastern benchlands of the Salinas Valley. Morning fog and strong winds off Monterey Bay add to its personality, as

do the decomposed granite soils and on-site fermentations with wild yeast. Aging in 100% French oak for 12 months and regular lees stirring impart a creamy brioche effect on the nose and palate. Golden Delicious apple, honey, and chamomile pave the path to an inherent richness. A fine acid structure and a seashell minerality break through, delivering a sensation of freshness and notes of mango and orange marmalade on the finish. **93** —*M.M.*

SCHEID FAMILY WINES



Metz Road 2018 Pinot Noir, Riverview Vineyard, Monterey (\$35)

Aged for 12 months in (37% new) French oak, this blend represents a selection from a different vineyard block each year. An undeniably sweet earthiness exudes from the glass, along with fragrances of cranberry, currant, and rhubarb. Flavors

of bright red cherry, saddle leather, and incense are punctuated by high-toned acidity. White pepper gives way to red pepper and the vibrant reappearance of cranberry. Vanilla-cedar spice on the finish brings it all together. **93** —*M.M.*

SCHEID FAMILY WINES

WINE: Penfolds 2017 Bin 389 Cabernet Shiraz (\$40)

PRESENTER: Treasury Wine Estates senior wine educator Gillian Ballance, MS

VERDICT: Although surely Australian, mostly technique

Considering that

Penfolds has made its name on its progressive winemaking methods, it probably won't come as a huge surprise that Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance attributed much of the Penfolds Bin 389 profile to technique. "Though it does reflect the terroir of South Australia, this is a very technique-driven wine, and I think that kind of comes from [Penfolds'] origins of developing a technique for making fortified wines in Australia," said Ballance.

Whether they're varietal expressions or multiregional blends, Penfolds uses the same naming system for its wines: The acronym

BIN (Batch Identification Number) followed by a series of numbers indicates the location of the physical bin in the storage area. That said, Ballance acknowledged that the Penfolds team knows Bin 389, a roughly 50/50 blend of Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon, by another name: "We call [Bin 389] 'Baby Grange' because it sees the same oak from [the winery's flagship Grange wine] the year before, so you're already incorporating some technique." Grange is famously made from grapes sourced throughout South Australia, and the fruit for Bin 389 is likewise "sourced [from] all over [the region], but where we source Shiraz versus Cabernet Sauvignon is very different. Shiraz comes from some of the warmer climates," she explained, while the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TREASURY WINE ESTATES



latter grape is sourced from cooler Geographical Indications (GIs) like Coonawarra and the Limestone Coast. Bin 389's character and ageability is then determined by such methods as the use of traditional basket presses; multiple rack and returns, which help to temper the big tannins and structure typical of the warm Southern Hemisphere; the use of large boards to submerge the cap during fermentation, helping to increase tannin, color, and flavor; and aging 12 months in American oak hogsheads (37% new) formerly used for tobacco. Ballance believes that employing these techniques to blend Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon "gives us a balanced yet undeniably lush Australian wine."

WINES: William Hill Estate Winery 2017 Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$27) and 2019 Winemaker's Series Coombsville Chardonnay (\$50)

PRESENTER: William Hill Estate Winery winemaker Mark Williams

VERDICT: Both, but weighted to one or the other depending on the wine



William Hill Estate Winery in Napa, CA.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILLIAM HILL ESTATE

"If I were to say that this wine represents all of Napa," I'd be lying," said William Hill Estate Winery winemaker Mark Williams of the 2017 Napa Valley Chardonnay he chose for discussion, "only because there are so many different styles of Chardonnay being made in Napa right now. But I do think this is a good representation of the valley as a whole. The combination of different sites coupled with winemaking techniques and vintage gives you the end product."

The fruit for the blend comes from five different vineyards in the Napa Valley sub-AVAs of Oak Knoll, St. Helena, and Carneros, with Oak Knoll representing roughly half. Williams detailed what the distinct soils and climate of each contributed to the wine, yet he presented it as an example of one more influenced by technique. Employing traditional Burgundian methods, he puts the blend through 100% barrel fermentation (30% in American oak), 100% malolactic fermentation, and bâtonnage twice weekly before aging it nine months in barrel. This treatment imparts "the showiness that people tend to look for in Napa Chardonnay," in his words: "They want oak and they want butter."

Williams then offered William Hill's 2019 Coombsville Chardonnay as an example of a wine largely defined by its terroir, asserting that "there's just something so unique" about its source, Haynes Vineyard, which was planted in the 1960s and sits on volcanic alluvial soils dispersed by the eruption of Mt. George 8 million years ago, forming the caldera that Coombsville sits within. "There's still some old Wente Clone Chard—the super-small, chicks-and-hens clusters that give you those nice floral aromatics—on [its original] St. George rootstalk that is still in production today. There's also Clone 4 in there. And then you've got that influence from the San Pablo Bay and that big [caldera] anchored by Mt. George, plus tons of volcanic alluvial fans and gravel deposits," Williams explained.

After he waxed poetic about the site and climate, he also made sure to credit his thoughtful methods in producing the wine, which fermented in concrete eggs, did not undergo malolactic fermentation, and aged on its lees for five months while being stirred weekly. The result, according to Williams, is a "juicy and vibrant but still super-complex" Chardonnay.



William Hill Estate Winery 2017 Napa Valley Chardonnay, Napa Valley (\$27) Decidedly sensuous aromas of vanilla wafer, toasted pineapple, and coconut are followed by a leesy and opulent entry of toasted oak, orange marmalade, and tropical fruit. The powdery mouthfeel of dried white-flower petals, white chocolate, and lemon meringue is memorable. 100% barrel fermented. **93** —*M.M.*

E. & J. GALLO



William Hill Estate Winery 2019 Winemaker's Series Coombsville Chardonnay, Coombsville, Napa Valley (\$50) Citrus aromas are edgy and lean with a touch of bay leaf and lanolin. We love that this wine comes from Coombsville just east of downtown Napa, where morning fog and cool temperatures are moderated by the influence of the nearby San Pablo Bay. The liquid glides on the palate with pear nectar, white flowers, fig, and kiwi. Balanced acidity and a fine line of minerality are seasoned by oregano and dill. **95** —*M.M.*

E. & J. GALLO

SPIRITS: Rye Whiskey and Ron Izalco Rum

PRESENTER: Phenomenal Spirits owner/master blender Karthik Sudhir

VERDICT: Thanks to distillation and blending, technique, but each spirit exhibits sense of place



PHOTO COURTESY OF PHENOMENAL SPIRITS

“Unlike with wine, where the impact of terroir on grapes is prominent,” said Phenomenal Spirits owner/master blender Karthik Sudhir, “distilled spirits undergo further separation and concentration of alcohols after fermentation, which usually removes nuances related to terroir. What is true is that climate and soil conditions have a lot to do with the health of the sugarcane and the quality of crops like rye, corn, and wheat, which are critical for making fine brown spirits.” The outgoing former software engineer then spent the next seven minutes talking about the geographical origins of his Rye Whiskey and Ron Izalco Rum.

It was about five years ago, while Sudhir was doing product research and development, that Central America emerged as the obvious home base for his future brands. “The entire region is filled with volcanic black soil, which produces some of finest sugarcane in the world,” said Sudhir. To make a full-bodied, complex spirit with a long finish, he sources rums from various Central American countries that have been aged in ex-bourbon barrels.

Sudhir pointed out that temperatures “of about 100 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the year produce the best aging results for us” by accelerating the process. “Although the first two years of the angel’s share is extremely high, as the years pass, the angel’s share drops and the rum stabilizes,” he added. “This creates a rum that can age very well.”

For his newly released Rye Whiskey, meanwhile, Sudhir chose to blend Canadian and American ryes. He feels strongly that Canada “produces the finest rye grain” in the world and leveraged his long-term relationships with a handful of distilleries there to create the expression, which sees additional aging in Ron Izalco rum casks.

WINES: Zolo Malbec Reserve, Tapiz Alta Collection Malbec, and Wapisa Malbec

PRESENTER: Fincas Patagónicas owner Patricia Ortiz

VERDICT: Terroir, mainly in the form of altitude



PHOTO COURTESY OF FINCAS PATAGONICAS

“When it comes to terroir, everybody talks about the soil and the climate, but in Argentina the altitude is very important,” said Patricia Ortiz, who runs three wineries in the country. Before diving into each of the three featured wines and their respective regions, Ortiz detailed altitude-driven factors like a drop in respiration for the vines, which creates more malic acid and in turn means less oxidation; an increase in UV rays, which thicken the grape skins, resulting in more polyphenols and anthocyanins; and the impact of temperature on the perception of fruit flavors (warmer temperatures typically impart notes of stone fruit, while cooler temperatures create floral and red-fruit aromas, she explained).

Still, Ortiz acknowledged that different soil profiles also play a role, imparting varying levels of structure to the finished wines. Interestingly enough, all three went through a similar winemaking process: a cold soak of 46 degrees Fahrenheit for five days, a 15-day initial fermentation followed by 100% malolactic fermentation, and up to 14 months of aging in oak (80% French and 20% American).

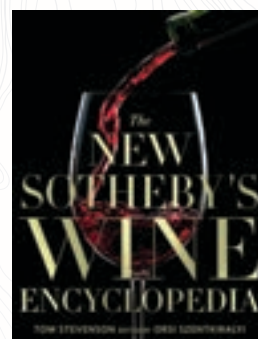
Defined by red fruit and smooth tannins, the Zolo Malbec Reserve is grown at 3,440 feet above sea level on a combination of clay and sandy loam in the Mendoza region. Also from Mendoza, the Tapiz Alta Collection Malbec is sourced from vines grown at 4,400 feet on fine sand over calcareous, rocky soil. This area, made up of several dried riverbeds that once held snowmelt from the Andes, creates a more intense Malbec with a complex yet balanced *mélange* of “flowers, figs, blackberries, and orange peel with secondary graphite and chocolate notes,” according to Ortiz.

Finally, the Wapisa Malbec is made from grapes grown on sandy, silty clay in the Patagonia region in close proximity to the ocean. “In Argentina, we don’t [typically] have wineries with ocean influence, and here the soil is totally different. What we find in this Malbec is . . . the spiciness, which is totally different from the other Malbecs you’ll find in Argentina,” said Ortiz. This unusual wine is set to potentially become even more special, as the Wapisa team is currently exploring the possibilities of aging in the ocean without any oxygen. One can’t help but wonder: Would a concept like this fall under technique or terroir? [V](#)

THE SOMM JOURNAL

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In Association With National Geographic



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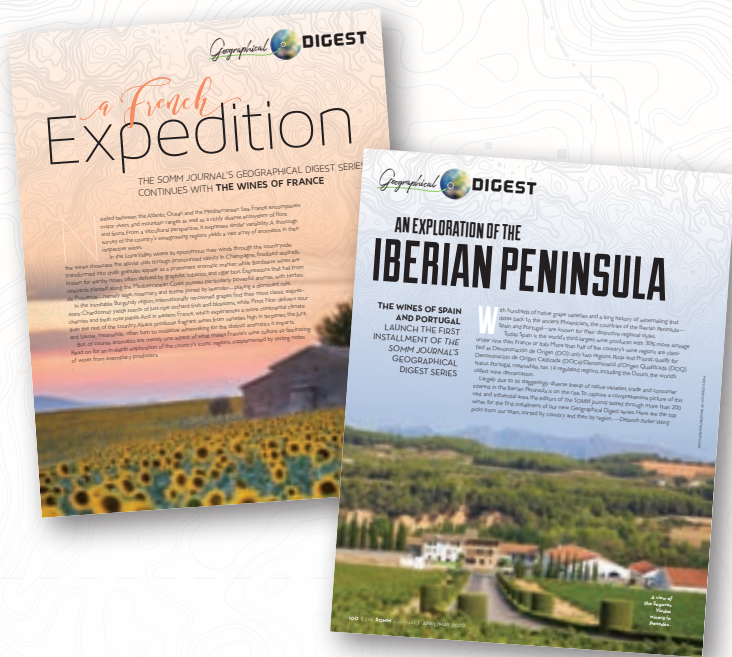
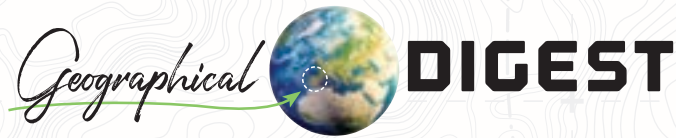
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December 16, 9 a.m. PST: The Southern Hemisphere: From Down Under to the Top of the Andes (recap in March/April issue)

2021

January 21: An Exploration of Renowned Single Vineyards (recap in April/May issue)

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

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

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

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



Vibrant VALPOLICELLA

IN A RECENT WEBINAR, WE SHOWCASED THE
ITALIAN REGION'S RICH LEGACY OF ANCIENT
METHODS AND MODERN STYLES

by Deborah Parker Wong



Grapes undergoing the appassimento process.

We know very little about the Arusnates, an ancient people who inhabited the eastern shores of Lake Garda when the Romans arrived in the Veneto between the third and first centuries BCE—but we do know something about their winemaking practices.

Roughly corresponding to the modern region of Valpolicella, the territory they occupied was named Pagus Arusnatium by the Romans, who found that a style of wine production using partially dried grapes was already well underway there. Historically, there were two main growing regions: one centered near the towns of Negrar, Prun, and Torbe in the northern reaches of the Valpolicella Classica zone and the other in the center of what is now Valpantena.

Historical references to the wines of Valpolicella are compelling. Cassiodorus, a historian and minister of King Theodoric the Great, wrote about a wine called Acinaticum that was favored in the courts of the German Ostrogoths, who ruled what is now Italy during his lifetime. Made with dried grapes, Acinaticum is believed to have been similar in style to Amarone's sweet counterpart, Recioto della Valpolicella. Merchant records show that by the eighth century CE, local wines produced in the hills west of Venice were being regularly traded through the city's port.

Hills cover 75% of the Valpolicella region.



Dry-stack stone walls known as *marogne* line hillside vineyards.

Although its precise origin remains in dispute, the name Valpolicella was made official in 1177 by Holy Roman emperor Federico Barbarossa. Over the following centuries, the region went through periods of expansion and decline, but upon receiving official recognition as a DOC in 1968, winemakers here began their quest for enduring quality. In the 1980s, the popularity of Amarone spurred an increase in both production and regulations; today, Amarone is ranked side by side with Barolo and Brunello as one of Italy's greatest red wines.

In September, our sister publica-

tion, *The SOMM Journal*, partnered with SommCon to host a webinar titled "Valpolicella: Terroirs, Styles, and Stories" to explore the region in depth. VP of education Lars Leicht and I served as presenters; here's what we discussed.

Reflections on Terroir

It's not difficult to imagine the pleasure the ancients must have taken in the mild temperatures afforded by the moderating effects of Lake Garda on Valpolicella's continental climate. Hills cover 75% of the region and the ridges



of the Lessini Mountains fan out like fingers, creating 11 valleys from west to east that terminate on the Adige River plain. Vines here are planted to the predominately limestone soils that were deposited in layers by the Adriatic Sea; younger volcanic soils and marls are common in the north and east, where both the Adriatic Sea and the Lessini Mountains exert a greater influence on the vineyards than they do in the Zona Classica to the west, where the oldest soils can be found.

The majority of vineyards are planted at elevations between 100–500 meters (roughly 328–1,640 feet), making terracing a necessity. Revealing the parent material of the hillsides, dry-stack stone walls known as *marogne* confine vineyards trained to modern Guyot trellising or the traditional pergola Veronese, which the majority of producers favor for yielding more complex aromatics and greater balance, particularly at higher elevations.

In Valpolicella's cast of indigenous grape varieties, Corvina has long been the star, representing 45–95% of the blend—but it's since been joined by Corvinone, which can now replace it in all of the region's wine styles. More drought- and disease-resistant than Corvina (to which it's unrelated), Corvinone is known for its peppery characteristics—so the fact that it can now play a larger role, combined



Along with Barolo, Barbaresco, and Brunello, Amarone is considered one of Italy's greatest red wines.

with a recent change that lowers the maximum amount of residual sugar in Amarone from 12 grams per liter to 9, may signal a shift in the expression of future vintages.

Meanwhile, Oseleta, an old Veronese variety with tiny bunches and ample tannins and anthocyanins, has begun to replace Molinara—a lighter-skinned variety that contributes acidity and drinkability to the blend—and the less desirable international varieties Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. But it's Corvina's unique ability to concentrate desirable phenolics and resveratrol during the *appassimento*, or drying, process that makes it so ideally suited to the leading role in Amarone.

Producer Spotlight

The moderating influence of Lake Garda is especially felt in Sant'Ambrogio, the westernmost valley of the Classica zone, where the wines are often voluptuous with ripe, round flavors. It's here that Carlo and Mario Boscaini of **Boscaini Carlo** work their 14-hectare family estate. Their Valpolicella Ripasso DOC Superiore Zane is a blend of Corvina, Corvinone, and Rondinella grown on sandy clay soils; refermented on Amarone or Recioto skins, it spends up to 24 months in traditional botti. Compared to 2015, the 2016 vintage is more deeply colored and fuller-bodied.

Seen in the distance, Lake Garda has a moderating influence on the DOC, especially to the west where the Classica zone lies.





Vineyards on the eastern side of the Valpolicella DOC, which includes Valpantena.

Since its introduction in the early 1980s, the ripasso style has been so commercially successful that new production regulations have been put in place to ensure its integrity. Ripasso wines must now contain 10–15% of wine intended for Amarone or Recioto della Valpolicella, and both the base wine and the pomace must come from the same producer; moreover, the ripasso technique requires at least three days.

Moving east, **Pietro Zardini** produces its Pietro Junior Amarone della Valpolicella DOCG on marl and basalt soils at lower elevations in the adjacent valley of San Pietro in Cariano. A blend of 70% Corvina with Rondinella and Molinara, it ages in raw terra cotta amphorae and barriques. The fruitier character derived from the lower elevations of San Pietro in Cariano is evident in the wine, which speaks volumes in terms of charm.

Sartori di Verona is located in Negrar, the Classica zone's easternmost valley, which is noted for producing elegant wines. Originally a family of hoteliers, the Sartoris sold some of their vineyards and partnered with the Colognola

di Colli cooperative in 2002 to ensure adequate grape sourcing. Current owner Andrea Sartori, the great-grandson of founder Pietro, is an influential voice in the industry, having served as president of the Valpolicella growers' consortium. The Valpolicella DOC Classico Superiore is a classic blend of Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella, and the lesser-known Croatina, grown midslope in limestone soils.

A historic area of production in the region, the Valpantena is where Giorgio Pasqua crafts **Le Vigne di Giorgio** Vent Valpolicella Ripasso DOC from the calcareous clay soils of the high-elevation Costa d'Oro vineyard in Grezzana. The cooling influence of the Lessini creates a more continental influence in the vineyards, where Pasqua blends 60% Corvina with Rondinella and a small percentage of Corvinone before refermenting on Amarone skins to produce this wine, called Vent for the wind that blows across Lake Garda.

Corte Adami is located in Val Squaranto in the eastern region of the Valpolicella DOC. Initially growers in Soave, the Adami family began bottling their own wine in 2004. Their 10 hect-

ares are located in Ferrazze, where they grow Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella, and Molinara for both Valpolicella and Amarone. The 2017 vintage was challenging: Yields for their Valpolicella Ripasso DOC Superiore were limited by spring frost and hailstorms, which were followed by an unusually dry, hot summer. Yet the wine, which spent one year in a combination of French oak and stainless steel, is well balanced despite the conditions.

Val Mezzane di Sotto is notable for its high-elevation vineyards—including those of the 13-hectare **Villa Erbice** estate at a maximum of 450 meters (about 1,476 feet) in altitude, where the limestone soils are shallow and stony. A blend of Corvinone, Corvina, and Rondinella spent two years in small French barriques to become the 2012 Tremenele Amarone della Valpolicella DOCG. The region's hottest vintage on record, 2012 was similar to 2003, when a brutal heatwave reduced yields across the EU; though irrigation was allowed, yields went down by 30%. Rich and voluptuous, the wine's style is reflective of the vintage's suitability for oak aging. **LV**



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Justin Moran | Limestone Coast Wine (LCW)



in season

HOLIDAY BONUS

FOUR SIPPERS TO SEE YOU
THROUGH THE SEASON

After the year we've had, we all deserve a few extra gifts. So we're stuffing our stockings with a quartet of new-to-us products to push us across the 2020 finish line: a hearty red for holiday feasts, a rum tailor-made for nursing fireside over a great American novel, a line of canned cocktails to toast to winning touchdowns, and—what else?—bubbly to ring in the New Year. Spread the cheer by recommending them to harried customers on last-minute shopping sprees.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY COLLECTION, JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM, BOSTON

HOLIDAYS WITH HEMINGWAY:

PAPA'S PILAR RUM

Ernest Hemingway's love of rum is well documented, so it's a fair guess that when the holidays rolled around, the legendary author had the spirit in his glass—and probably under his tree too. Named after the man himself and his beloved boat, *Pilar*, Papa's Pilar Rum offers a line of ultra-premium rums hand-selected by master blender Ron Call; inspired by Hemingway's bold, intrepid spirit, they're perfect for a wide variety of seasonal cocktails.

Papa's Pilar Dark Rum is made from a blend of nine different pot- and column-distilled rums that are aged in a variety of casks, including bourbon, Port, and Sherry. Served neat, this smooth, nuanced blend is robust yet highly mixable with fall and winter ingredients ranging from apples and citrus to baking spices and cream.

After such a challenging year, giving will be more important than ever this holiday season, and the Hemingway family remains committed to philanthropic efforts; in fact, they donate the majority of the proceeds they earn as Papa's Pilar Rum brand partners to charities like the International Game Fish Association, the Ocean Foundation, and PEN International. —*Rachel Burkons*

FALLIN' FOR PAPA

Recipe courtesy of Inga Tantisalidchai, @cocktailsbyings

- ❖ 2 oz. Papa's Pilar Dark Rum
- ❖ ½ oz. Licor 43
- ❖ 2 oz. fresh cranberry juice
- ❖ ½ oz. fresh orange juice

Garnish with charred cinnamon sticks and fresh clementine slices.

Papa's Pilar Dark Rum Aged in bourbon, Port, and Sherry casks, the rums in this 86-proof blend are sourced from the Dominican Republic, Florida, Venezuela, Barbados, and Panama, the latter being the oldest at 24 years. It opens up with scents of rancio, maple, sandalwood, Luxardo cherry, and new leather. Following a silky entry, espresso, maple, and charred cedar meld with apricot nectar and salted peanut brittle. The mouthfeel is exquisite: streamlined and even-keeled to a finish of dark chocolate and ripe peach. **95** —*Meridith May*

ONE PERFECT HOLIDAY PAIRING:

VDR BY SCHEID FAMILY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCHEID FAMILY WINES



Dave Nagengast is VP of winemaking at Scheid Family Wines.

The choice to bring two powerhouse grapes like Petit Verdot and Petite Sirah—both known for providing intense color and structure—together in a single blend is an unusual one that could potentially yield over-the-top results. But in the hands of Scheid Family Wines VP of winemaking Dave Nagengast, who tempers them with a splash of silky Merlot, it's the right move. Still, he humbly gives all the credit for VDR (Very Dark Red)—which he calls “an all-purpose wine, big, bold, and impactful yet smooth”—to the exceptional sites producing the fruit, particularly Hames Valley Vineyard.

Lying just north of San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles in the southernmost reaches of the Monterey AVA, Hames Valley is one of 12 estate vineyards in Scheid Family Wines' holdings, which span 4,000 acres in the Salinas Valley. All of the vineyards are CCSW Certified, and the family “plans to convert their entire growing operation to organic within the next few years,” according to Nagengast—who adds that in a sea of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Hames Valley “provides a unique microclimate well suited to the varietals” that appear in VDR. Hot, sunny days and cool nights allow for fully developed phenolics and ripe tannins along with bright acidity.

In the company's 100% wind-powered Greenfield winery, Nagengast vinifies using the traditional pumpover method in large tanks and finishes the wine in a mix of American, Hungarian, and French oak barrels and barriques, only 20% new to ensure freshness and fruit-forwardness. The blend changes each year, he says, with the 2018 vintage “highlighting the spice and fruit of the Petite Sirah,” which in turn “accentuate food by wrapping [themselves] around the dish.”

Indeed, with top notes of sage and cypress wafting in a sea breeze; tangy blackberry bramble and violets rounding out the mid-palate; and additional flavors of fleshy black plums, blueberries, cocoa, and green and black peppercorns, VDR has an aromatic warmth and gravitas that make it perfect for a winter's evening. Nagengast recommends serving it at holiday meals or paired with cold-weather fare like pungent blue cheeses, prime rib, stroganoff, or mushroom risotto. —*Simone FM Spinner*

Scheid Family Wines' 12 vineyards span 4,000 acres in the Monterey AVA.



VDR 2018 Red Blend, Monterey (\$25) The initials VDR stand for Very Dark Red, a reference to the opaque black-carmine hue of this blend of Petite Sirah and Petit Verdot. The grapes are sourced from some of Monterey's warmer, more southerly vineyard sites, which are shielded by the Santa Lucia Mountains and the Gabilan Range. Aging for 12 months in French, American, and Hungarian oak adds a “seasoned” character to the wine, resulting in a complete sensory experience that offers a glimpse into the personality of its powerful, fruity, and dense varieties. Ripe aromas of black cherry and milk chocolate lead to teeth-grabbing black-tea tannins. With further exploration come juicy notes of roses, sweet beets, cherry, and vanilla. Balanced acidity and the persistence of red-berry aromatics ensure that VDR strikes a fine deal with hearty dishes such as grilled lamb or meat stew. **92** —*M.M.*



AND NOW FOR SOMETHING
COMPLETELY DIFFERENT:

BEAGANS 1806

Stop us if you've heard this one before: There's a new RTD line on the market. But Beagans 1806's canned cocktails offer something that most of the products crowding shelves right now can't. For one, they're stronger: At 12.5–20% ABV, they pack a genuine punch. For another, they run the gamut of flavors: With the winter launch of a **Mai Tai**, **Whiskey Cola**, **Vodka Soda**, and **Cosmo**, Beagans will boast a whopping 14 expressions.

"The RTD craze has only just begun," says Mike West, director of beverage development for LeVecke Wine, Beer, & Spirits, which produces Beagans. "We've seen hundreds of new products enter the market in just the last six months. I felt it was really important we stand apart." As a hospitality vet himself, West makes sure of it with a spectrum of cocktails that give consumers both the strength and quality of one they'd get in a bar. From a **Bloody Mary** that makes brunchtime anytime to a tried-and-true **Gin & Tonic**, the brand rises to every occasion. No wonder it has experienced an astounding 600% growth in sales since launching last summer—a figure that's likely "to be closer to 700–800% by the end of the year," by West's estimate.

In short, at the dawn of a golden age in RTDs, Beagans is just getting started. As West points out, "We're in a time right now where convenience is expected"; unfortunately, from the wine coolers of the '80s onward, "RTDs loaded with high-fructose corn syrup and unnatural ingredients" gave the category a bad rap. But he feels that "right now there's the technology—delivery of fresh produce and methods of utilizing these components—to provide an exceptional experience. If you can get a canned cocktail that tastes great, who wouldn't be enticed by that?" And if you can get 14 of them, even better. —*Allyson Reedy*



PHOTO: THE BEVERAGE CURATOR

Beagans 1806 Manhattan This lighthearted, whiskey-based cocktail with a nose of maple and peach is on the border between hedonism and gravitas. The true flavor of the whiskey comes through with a hint of fresh stone-fruit nectar. 40 proof. **90** —M.M.

Beagans 1806 Margarita This 25-proof quaff of tequila and triple sec shows scents of lime and quinine. While the flavor profile shines through clean notes of lemon blossom and vanilla cream, the tequila is not just a side note: It shows a typicity of agave that adds depth and a certain weight. **90** —M.M.

Beagans 1806 Old Fashioned Subtle and graceful flavors of oak and caramel are enhanced by additional notes of walnut and maple. An overall approachable, balanced drink at 40 proof. **89** —M.M.

Beagans 1806 Bloody Mary The perfume of tomato juice—with a hint of cayenne—is pure poetry for us Bloody Mary fans. The pepper packs a punch on the palate, taking this 30-proof vodka-based RTD to another level. Sure, you can drink it chilled right out of the can, but I imagine pouring it over ice and adding grilled shrimp, a black olive, and a celery stick. It's one red-hot mama. **91** —M.M.

Beagans 1806 Coffee and Cream If you swear by your sweet tooth, the nose alone will tell you this one's a keeper: Imagine a dollop of crème fraîche on your favorite dark roast with a swirl of dark chocolate. It's not a bit cloying—the cream lingers, but the sugar dissipates quickly. As in all of the Beagans expressions we've tasted, it shows balance above all. 30 proof. **91** —M.M.

A SPARKLING MOSAIC:

LE GRAND COURTÂGE

Back in 2010, Tawnya Falkner was working in architecture and real estate development when, inspired by many trips to France, she had a vision that was equal parts romantic and savvy. After the accomplished businesswoman took the leap and moved to the country, she became the proprietor and CEO of French sparkling wine brand Le Grand Courtâge, which recently surpassed the 50,000-case mark—a milestone Falkner called a “huge accomplishment” for her small team.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LE GRAND COURTÂGE



Le Grand Courtâge proprietor and CEO Tawnya Falkner.


Tell us about giving up a prestigious career to start a wine brand.

My decision no doubt seemed rather sudden to many, but it was an idea that had been ruminating and something I thought I'd explore when I retired. A few “aha” moments accelerated my decision. I am multipassionate and take risks, but each of my decisions is grounded in practicality—an understanding of the marketplace and data. I put together a business plan before taking the leap after noticing trends in the sparkling-wine category happening domestically.

Was there a moment during your time in France that encapsulates the concept of joie de vivre for you?

One day at a friend's home, we ate, drank, and danced until the wee hours amongst the vineyards. The owner of the property owned an antique store and had numerous mismatched plates and cups that hadn't sold over the years. Late that night, she had us throw them against the barn wall (which I cringed doing), and then we all used the pieces to create a beautiful mosaic tabletop over the next few weeks. I think that amid the pandemic, this story has resonated because even when something appears broken, the end result represents a strength and beauty emanating from the whole of the parts. Wine too is like this, as it is a marriage of numerous parts, though the process of winemaking isn't always sexy or pretty.

Please describe the style of Le Grand Courtâge.

Le Grand Courtâge is a little unconventional, as it involves the blending of grapes from different terroirs and of French and American winemaking styles—it's the Old and New Worlds coming together. Rather than [relying on] the standard three Champagne grapes, my objective was [to make] something crisp, light, and refreshing that's cuisine- and cocktail-friendly, from breakfast to dessert. I wanted to offer the traditional attributes of dryness, yeast, and acidity, but with hints of fruit on the finish to soften the profile. 

Visit tastingpanelmag.com for the unabridged version of this Q&A.

Le Grand Courtâge NV Blanc de Blancs Brut, France (\$20) Sourced from vineyards in Burgundy, Languedoc, and the Loire Valley, this blend of 45% Chardonnay, 10% Chenin Blanc, 15% Colombard, and 30% Ugni Blanc offers up the most delicate bubbles. Aromas of Bosc pear and croissant lead to notes of candied pineapple, lemon meringue, and white flowers followed by a long, mineral-driven finish. The feel of the baby bubbles on the palate and the great price point put this French sparkler in an elevated category of charm and elegance. **93** —*M.M.*

Le Grand Courtâge NV Brut Rosé, France (\$20) This sparkling rosé—a blend of 45% Chardonnay, 40% Ugni Blanc, and 15% Gamay—opens up with perfumed lilac and red berries. Bubbles burst with raspberry and wild strawberry before the palate gets into gear with racy acidity and an inherent freshness. **93** —*M.M.*

Très Chic 2019 Rosé, Sud de France, Pays d'Oc (\$17) From the Languedoc-Roussillon, this rosé is a blend of 70% Grenache and 30% Cinsault. Aromas of melon and raspberry with a touch of basil are lovely. White-peppered pomegranate and watermelon are fresh and alert on the dry, mineraly palate with pitch-perfect acidity. **92** —*M.M.*

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS

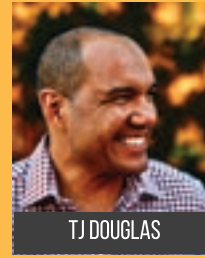
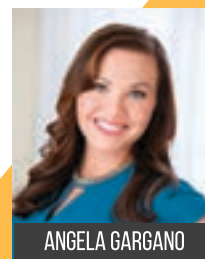
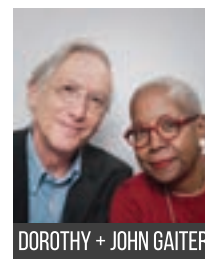
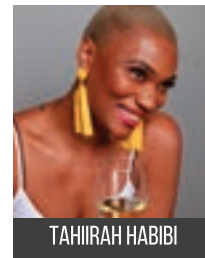
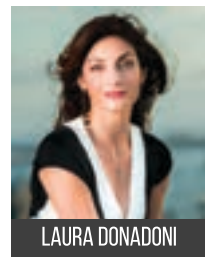


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LOOK AT THE

Bright Side

DARK SPIRITS TO LIGHT
UP WINTER NIGHTS

The Tasting Panel publishes reports on brown spirits a few times a year, but a deep dive into the warm glow of a glass filled with amber liquid feels especially welcome these days. Be they regional up-and-comers or international legends, all the brands spotlighted here have got the goods to keep your backbar shining despite the short sunlight hours.

A Grand Slam: COOPERSTOWN SELECT WHISKEYS

Founded in 2013, Cooperstown Distillery is situated in its namesake town in New York just a few blocks away from the National Baseball Hall of Fame and about 40 miles from the farm in Canajoharie where it sources all of its grain. Since the brand's inception, says founder, owner, and master blender Gene Marra, he and his team "have dedicated a tremendous amount of time, skill, and effort into cultivating a world-class whiskey portfolio." The result is a just-released line of Cooperstown Select Whiskeys.

Meanwhile, the recent completion of a 7,000-square-foot rickhouse, with enough space to age 1,200 barrels, will allow for increased production and expansion into other markets—including California, where Cooperstown became available last year. —*Eric Marsh*

Cooperstown Select Straight Rye

Whiskey, New York This blend of two- to three-year-old small-batch whiskeys is finished in ex-Cabernet Sauvignon oak barrels from Long Island. At 102 proof, it's a gentle giant, with aromas of peanut brittle, peach, and apricot in maple syrup. The warmth on entry overshadows the high ABV. A zing of black pepper seasons rich, unctuous notes of buttered plantains and stone fruit on the finish. **96** —*Meridith May*



PHOTO COURTESY OF COOPERSTOWN DISTILLERY

Cooperstown Select Straight Bourbon Whiskey Four Grain Mash, New

York This intense 100-proof whiskey contains a blend of three- to four-year-old small-batch bourbons made from New York-grown grains. Aromas of spiced apricot, chocolate, and cedar give way to dark chocolate, new leather, nutmeg, orange rind, pekoe tea, and walnut, which add a textural dryness to the palate while keeping it slightly sweet. The finish lasts forever. **96** —*M.M.*

Cooperstown Select American Blended Whiskey, New York

Matured in American oak, then blended before aging six months in French oak. Aromas of maple, cherry, and cedar warm the nose before exotic spices, sandalwood, leather, and black pepper converge in the sleek, nectar-like mouthfeel of this 90-proofer. **96** —*M.M.*

*Transforming the
Winter Warmer:*

DON Q



DON Q OLD FASHIONED

- ▶ 2 oz. Don Q Gran Reserva XO rum
- ▶ 1 sugar cube or ½ teaspoon sugar
- ▶ 3 dashes Angostura bitters
- ▶ Splash of club soda

Place the sugar in a rocks glass. Add Angostura bitters and club soda. Muddle the mixture, then add ice. Pour Don Q Gran Reserva XO and stir until well chilled. Garnish with an orange peel and maraschino cherry.

As the days get shorter, our drinks get darker. But while many of us might first turn to bourbon or Scotch for a winter nightcap, Don Q is making a move to change our minds with two releases that stand up to the best of the more traditional brown spirits. Its **Reserva 7** is an amber-hued, super-premium rum that's aged at least seven years in American white oak barrels to earn its rich notes of dark caramel, toasted almond, and chocolate; the **Gran Reserva XO**, meanwhile, is a rebranding of Gran Añejo, a popular blend of rums aged between nine and 12 years.

"Several years back, with the explosion of all the whiskeys on the market, and because of our house style, we thought we had the taste profile to create a rum that talks to that bourbon and Scotch audience," explains John Meisler, vice president of sales for Serralles USA, Don Q's parent company. "With our strict adherence to not adding any sugar and the time spent in the oak, we created a rum that the whiskey audience can fall in love with." That's not to discount category connoisseurs, he promises: "Make no mistake—this is still a world-class rum. It just happens to appeal to that whiskey lover."

Like whiskey, Don Q rums are distilled in a column still and aged in oak barrels, which lend them the tannins for that strong, stick-to-your-bones mouthfeel as well as vanilla flavors that morph into dried fruits, leather, and tobacco over time. "We allow the wood to do [its] work," Meisler says. And thanks to the tropical Puerto Rican climate in which they're made—very different from that of, say, Scotland or Kentucky—the aging process goes faster and deeper.

In fact, many decade-old rums can hold their own against the 18- to 30-year-old Scotches of the world (at a fraction of the price). "Old rums are truly scarce," Meisler says. "These seven- or nine- to 12-year-old rums [are] filled with tannins and flavors and richness and viscosity that nothing but time and the magic of the barrel can provide." Instead of settling for the same old dark spirits when the temperature drops, then, Don Q could have you reaching for rum to keep warm all winter long. (Not convinced? Try the Gran Reserva XO Old Fashioned recipe at left and you'll be a convert.) —Allyson Reedy



The Numbers Don't Lie:

BARDSTOWN BOURBON COMPANY

While whiskey fans have long had access to an ever-expanding selection of innovative blends, few distilleries have proved as transparent about the production process behind their creations as Kentucky-based Bardstown Bourbon Company. Its core bourbons, Fusion and Discovery, display their respective mash bills so that consumers aren't left to guess what they're tasting.

Now on their third editions, the series share a common thread. Fusion begins with a three-year-old bourbon that's "masterfully blend[ed] with an older bourbon," according to Sarah Diehm, division manager for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits' Artisanal Group, and Discovery is "a blend of three bourbons aged ten years or more that are brilliantly [melded] to provide a layered experience that unfolds more and more with each sip."

At 98.9 proof, **Fusion Series #3 (\$60)** blends 60% of Bardstown Bourbon Company's three-year-old wheated and high-rye Kentucky bourbons with 40% 13-year-old Kentucky bourbon; the mash bill comprises 74% corn, 18% rye, and 8% malted barley. Unifying these disparate elements results in a well-balanced spirit with abundant complexity on the nose and palate, and each sip features notes of green apple,

honey, roasted nuts, and caramel.

The 110-proof **Discovery Series #3 (\$130)**, meanwhile, blends a 13-year-old bourbon (45%) from Indiana with a mash bill of 75% corn, 21% rye, and 4% barley; a 13-year-old Kentucky bourbon (32%) with a mash bill of 74% corn, 18% rye, and 8% malted barley; and a ten-year-old Kentucky bourbon (23%) with a mash bill of 75% corn, 13% rye, and 12% malted barley. If that description seems like information overload—which, for the Bardstown team, is a welcome consequence of the transparency it prides itself on—the final product makes a vivid impression, with layers of maple, cinnamon, ripe pear, and aged leather on the nose and rich, warming flavors that culminate in a memorably enduring finish.

The Bardstown portfolio will expand yet again in January with the second release of the **Phifer Pavitt Reserve Collaboration**, a straight bourbon whiskey finished in the Napa Valley winery's Cabernet Sauvignon barrels. The first release of this bourbon claimed a double gold medal and Best in Class award at the 2020 San Francisco World Spirits Competition, where the Fusion Series #2 and Discovery Series #2 also claimed gold and double gold medals, respectively.

Lara McGowan, Bardstown's state sales manager for California, says she's

"extremely excited" to see how the brand's footprint in Southern California grows in 2021 with a designated market representative working directly with the Artisanal Group team. She credits them for "getting our bourbons into the right accounts," including off-premise retail partners, during the soft launch over the past year, noting that Diehm and her colleagues drove 96% growth in volume and 34% growth in accounts sold from 2019 to 2020.

Diehm says that "with the on-premise coming back online, we are excited to work closely with our partners to curate programs that reach their customers and enhance their whiskey exploration experience."



A historical portrait of Heaven Hill's founders, the Shapira brothers.

A Hallowed HALLMARK

HEAVEN HILL
DISTILLERY
CELEBRATES
85 YEARS OF
TRADITION AND
INNOVATION

by Kelly Magyarics



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEAVEN HILL BRANDS

Production manager Bob Murray with late master distiller emeritus Parker Beam and president Max Shapira on the line at Heaven Hill.

When Susan Wahl started her career at Heaven Hill right after college, the U.S. whiskey landscape looked decidedly different. “We were just getting into the premiumization of whiskey and single-barrel [expressions were] becoming popular, but master distillers were still pretty much unknown,” she says. Fast-forward two decades, and Americans’ “appreciation for transparency and authenticity” has transformed the industry—a development that Wahl, who now serves as the product director for the company’s entire whiskey portfolio, views as due in part to Heaven Hill itself, which was founded by the Shapira family in 1935 with no whiskey stocks but lots of ambitious plans.

December 13, 2020, marks the 85th anniversary of barrel-filling at Heaven Hill, which has become the country’s largest independent, family-owned and -operated distilled spirits supplier. With an inventory of 1.8 million barrels across 61 warehouses, it boasts the second-largest holding of American whiskey and a collection of storied brands that includes Elijah Craig, Larceny Bourbon, and Pikesville Rye. Heaven Hill’s Bernheim Distillery in Louisville, Kentucky—purchased in 1999 after the original facility burned to



Jodie Filiatreau is the artisanal distiller at the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience.



One of Heaven Hill's 61 warehouses.

the ground in 1996—is the nation’s largest single-site bourbon distillery, producing 1,300 barrels daily. And its flagship label, Evan Williams, is the second-best-selling bourbon worldwide.

Jodie Filiatreau is the artisanal distiller at the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience, the brand’s educational and experiential visitor’s center on Louisville’s historic Whiskey Row. Starting with the company in 1981 at age 20, he worked as a bottling house laborer, label machine operator, order filler, distillery utility operator, and warehouse supervisor before assuming his current role. “It’s amazing how much the industry has evolved since I started,” he notes. “Consumers are educated on what they want to drink, [and] they want an experience—to go out to a distillery and get into the thick of it.” He and his team produce one barrel of bourbon per day in a pot still, completing each step—from measuring the mash bill to turning the steam valves to filling the barrels—by hand to show visitors exactly how the namesake distiller would have done it in 1783.

Wahl agrees with Filiatreau that today’s whiskey drinkers are savvy, as familiar with the concept of age statements as of mash bills. “It’s staggering how much information the consumer has now,” she notes, “which means we have to be as consistent today and tomorrow as we have been the last 85 years in order to maintain that quality and transparency.” She cites the movement toward slow food and farm-to-table cuisine as factors in people’s evolving views of whiskey as an all-natural product, made with grain, water, and wood and without

flavorings or additives. The craft-cocktail revival and the trend toward lighter and flavored expressions have all served to bring in a larger audience, Wahl believes, marking a welcome shift toward inclusivity that can be seen in the increase in female whiskey drinkers—from a mere 10% to around 37%—and in the rise of organizations like the Black Bourbon Society. And many heritage distillers were early adopters of such innovative approaches.

The **Parker’s Heritage Collection** has been especially noteworthy in that regard, according to Wahl. One of Heaven Hill’s premier lines, it’s built on ingenuity, with consideration for what might be trending ten or even 20 years down the road. Take, for example, its **Heavy Char Rye Whiskey** labeled with an eight-year-old age statement—which “means we were predicting [the rye boom] when the category was still relatively small,” says Wahl—or an experimental barrel regimen that has resulted in the likes of **Cognac Finished Bourbon** and **Orange Curaçao Finished Bourbon**. Parker’s Heritage Collection is also progressive as a force for social good; the company donates a portion of every bottle sold to research for ALS, a disease that afflicted its legendary late distiller, Parker Beam. “We work in a fun industry, but it’s one that can also touch a lot of consumers,” Wahl notes. “To have a brand that has social impact, that’s huge.”

Meanwhile, to commemorate the upcoming anniversary, Heaven Hill is releasing a limited-edition **13-Year-Old Single Barrel Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey**, which hails from a barrel filled on its 71st anniversary

in 2006. From Parker Beam onward, the distilling team watched it closely as it matured on the second floor of Rickhouse G for 13 years in honor of the founding date of the distillery. “December 13, 1935, was Friday the 13th, but we consider it a lucky day as it was when we filled our first barrel,” Wahl explains. “It was the start of what was really to become the whiskey portfolio we have today.” It was dumped on December 13, 2019, cut to 107 proof in keeping with the original formula, and bottled non-chill-filtered. Wahl describes it as a bold expression with a big, rich mouthfeel; signature oak and vanilla as well as spice notes; and a smoky finish, adding that “it’s exactly what you would expect from one of Heaven Hill’s hallmark whiskeys.”

But for all the exciting projects going on amid the company’s growth—including a multimillion-dollar expansion of its Bardstown visitor’s center, to be completed in spring 2021—Filiatreau believes it’s important to maintain the hands-on attentiveness to detail that his own favorite expressions embody, whether he’s enjoying Evan Williams Barrel Proof with a cigar or sipping a flask of Henry McKenna Single Barrel during a ballgame. As for Wahl (who favors Elijah Craig on the rocks and “unsung hero” Bernheim Wheat Whiskey), she thinks Heaven Hill’s family history is its past, present, and future strength. “Everyone in this company is impacted by the family, and every day is not about the bottom line,” she muses. “While that is important, our long-term outlook lets us make decisions others wouldn’t be able to necessarily make. That familial environment permeates throughout the company.” **LT**



Ahead of THE CURVE

**FOR JACK DANIEL'S,
SUSTAINABILITY
IS A TRADITION,
NOT A TREND**

by Eric Marsh

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JACK DANIEL'S



**A chair made from repurposed
Jack Daniel's barrel staves.**

In the past decade, more and more spirits producers have worked to make their operations sustainable. The hope is that this is not just a passing trend but rather a new direction that all companies will be taking to ensure a more promising future for our planet; for evidence, we can turn to those that have been striving for sustainability far before the concept entered the mainstream. Such is the case with Jack Daniel's, which has been implementing eco-friendly practices for over 50 years.

"Sustainability is something that Jack Daniel's has always had in our DNA," says Larry Combs, the distillery's senior vice president and general manager. "It's something we've continued to focus on and, over time, incremental changes continue to be made."

CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION

The Cave Spring Hollow has remained the only water source for Jack Daniel's for more than a century; the limestone-filtered water that flows from it has been vital to the company's success as one of the most historic whiskey brands in the U.S. In order to protect it, says Combs, "We mapped the cave spring so we could understand the drainage basin for it, and over time we've purchased all the land above it." As a result, farming activity there has ceased, and the team can now monitor the tract to make sure that there are no noxious chemicals present that might seep into the water table.

They're also involved in forest protection. The company makes its own aging barrels from white oak and its own mellowing charcoal from sugar maple; to ascertain that its demand for wood doesn't deplete the environment, it partners with the University of Tennessee in its Tree Improvement Program and also participates in DendriFund's White Oak Initiative, which assesses the health of the woodlands from which the logs are sourced.

After use, Jack's mellowing charcoal is recycled into smoking pellets.

A SECOND LIFE FOR WOOD

Beyond protecting natural resources, Jack Daniel's upcycles, reuses, and recycles materials in several different ways. One element that sets it apart from other Tennessee whiskey brands is that it drips its spirit through 10 feet of the aforementioned charcoal. The lifespan of charcoal used for this purpose is generally six to eight months; rather than discarding it once spent, Jack sells it to manufacturers of pellets for barbecue grills and smokers.

Meanwhile, Jack's used barrels have a variety of secondary purposes. Some are broken down into staves and likewise turned into smoking chips, many are sent abroad for use by other distilleries, and still others end up in the hands of woodworkers. As Combs explains, a portion of the distillery's barrels are shipped to "50-60 local and regional craftsmen in roughly five different types of facilities, who build

everything from rocking chairs to couches . . . to bookshelves and picture frames." These furnishings are often marketed as being constructed from Jack Daniel's barrels.


FARM TO FARM

The Jack Daniel's distillery is located in Moore County, Tennessee. With a population of fewer than 7,000 people, it remains a pastoral place. "We often joke that there are more cattle than people here," Combs says with a laugh before adding that, with 10,000 cows in the county, it's actually true. This human-to-cow ratio is largely the impetus for a program that's been in place at Jack Daniel's for more than 50 years, which involves repurposing spent grain for cattle feed.

"I like to call it our farm-to-farm" initiative, says Eric "ET" Tecosky, Jack Daniel's U.S. ambassador and the author of annual publication *Jack's*

Black Book, which features bartenders from across the country, some of whom have visited the distillery. "They're often most impressed with how sustainable Jack is," he asserts, especially when learning about the distillery's grain-reuse program. After the fermentation process, spent corn, rye, malted barley, and residual yeast are cooled and sold as "wet slop" to local farmers; Combs says that after the distilling team converts the grains' starch and sugar to make alcohol, their protein and fiber remain, ensuring the slop is still a nutrient-rich food.

Finally, Jack Daniel's has partnered with its glass supplier to recycle waste from its bottling operation while selling the plastic shrink wrap left over from packaging operations to a decking manufacturer that makes composite boards. It also uses the water that's rejected from its reverse osmosis system to fill its fire sprinkler system.

Not only do these practices diminish the company's carbon footprint, they actually manage to turn a small profit; Jack can therefore be seen as a model for distilleries looking to make a little green while going green. 



Spent grains from the Jack Daniel's mash bill go on to become cattle feed.



MEET CHRIS FLETCHER, NEW MASTER DISTILLER FOR JACK DANIEL'S

Chris Fletcher, who served as assistant master distiller at Jack Daniel's for six years, recently took the reins as master distiller. Fletcher's tenure at the company stretches back to 2001, when he began working as a part-time tour guide while attending college. He graduated from Tennessee Technological University with a bachelor's degree in chemistry in 2003 and began a career soon after as a chemist in research and development at Brown-Forman, where he stayed for eight years before returning to Jack Daniel's.

"For the past six years, Chris has been right there and involved in every major distillery innovation, product, and enhanced production process while ensuring our Tennessee whiskey is of the highest character and quality," says Combs. "Chris has whiskey making in his blood, but he also has this incredible and unique combination of knowledge, expertise, and creativity that will position us well into the future."



United Sommeliers Foundation

Many Sommeliers, One Community

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