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THE tastina panel NE

TOKAJI ASZÚ

Hungary's Elixir is
SWOON-WORTHY
by the Spoon

A close-up portrait of a man with dark hair, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a red tie with a small pattern. He is holding a crystal spoon filled with a golden liquid. The background is blurred, showing warm, bokeh lights.

Daniel Mahdavian
serves Aszú and
Essencia by the
crystal spoon as
Director of Food
and Beverage
at the Trump
International Hotel
in Washington, D.C.

The Whiskey Drinker's Vodka



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UPfront

A woman with reddish-brown hair, wearing a dark quilted jacket and blue jeans, stands on a rocky riverbed. She is smiling and looking off to the side. The background features a river with many rocks and distant mountains under a clear sky.

AT J. LOHR'S NEW
FACILITY IN MONTEREY'S
ARROYO SECO AVA,
KRISTEN BARNHISEL
CRAFTS WHITE WINES WITH
PASSION AND PRECISION

Kristen Barnhisel,
J. Lohr's
Winemaker for
White Wines,
stands in Monterey
County's Arroyo
Seco near the com-
pany's new winery
in Greenfield, CA.

Balancing Act

by David Gadd / photos by Jeremy Ball

It was only after a ten-year search that pioneer vintner Jerry Lohr came to Monterey County's Arroyo Seco back in 1972. With uncanny prescience, Lohr recognized that this beautiful, broad Central Coast valley, spread between the Santa Lucia Range to the west and the Gabilan Range to the east, would be ideal white wine terroir.

Arroyo Seco takes its name from the usually-dry bed of a stream that originates in the Santa Lucias and runs northeastward to join the Salinas River, which eventually empties into Monterey Bay. Captivated by this dramatic location and its attributes, Lohr planted 280 acres of vines in Greenfield. The locale was in the heart of what would eventually—thanks to Lohr's and others' efforts—become the Arroyo Seco AVA in 1983.

The region owes its long growing season to lingering fog and a cooling "wind run" from nearby Monterey Bay; the stony, well-drained soils and lack of rain during the fall season prove ideal for Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, and, especially, Chardonnay. For three decades now, the original Greenfield plantings have provided the fruit for the value-driven J. Lohr Estates tier's Riverstone Chardonnay—named for the jumbled mix of rounded, water-worn rocks in the arroyo and vineyards known locally as "Greenfield potatoes." More recent plantings, including diverse Chardonnay clones, add complexity to Riverstone and contribute to J. Lohr's two proprietary Vineyard Series Chardonnays: Arroyo Vista and October Night.

Things came full circle in 2015 with the opening of a state-of-the-art facility adjacent to the original Greenfield vineyards. A lifelong dream of Jerry Lohr's, the new winery is dedicated to white wines and reaffirms J. Lohr's commitment to both Chardonnay and the Arroyo Seco AVA.

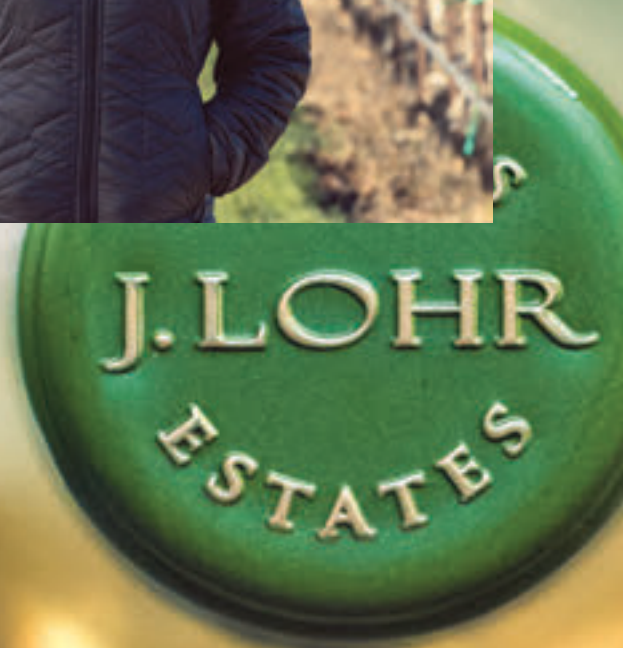
A WINERY TOUR WITH

Kristen Barnhisel,

THE CHARISMATIC
WINEMAKER BEHIND J. LOHR'S
WHITE WINE PORTFOLIO



**"Where it all began":
Winemaker Kristen
Barnhisel stands in the
vineyard block (planted
to the Chardonnay
"musqué" clone 809)
adjacent to J. Lohr's
new Greenfield winery.
The Santa Lucia Range
can be seen in the
background.**



The winemaker in charge at J. Lohr's new Greenfield winery, Kristen Barnhisel, could hardly be more qualified to head up the winery's white wine program. A native of Santa Rosa, she grew up firmly entrenched in Northern California wine country; Barnhisel's mother worked as a biochemist at Simi Winery and her father was a home winemaker.

While traveling in Italy as she pursued a degree in Italian literature, Barnhisel was encouraged by legendary winemaker and family friend Zelma Long to cut her own viticultural teeth. Barnhisel became the first woman to work harvest at Ruffino in Tuscany—an experience that solidified her urge to become a winemaker.

As Barnhisel worked toward completing a master's degree in enology from the University of California, Davis, she also snagged several coveted internships at renowned wineries like Warwick Wine Estate in South Africa, Opus One in Napa Valley, and Long Vineyards in St. Helena, where she gained invaluable knowledge working alongside her mentor Long.

After graduation, Barnhisel spent two years as the enologist at Columbia Crest in Washington State. When she returned to California, she held positions as an assistant winemaker at Jordan Vineyard & Winery and Belvedere Winery before joining Handley Cellars in Anderson Valley, where for eight years she served as Co-Winemaker with Founder Milla Handley. Prior to joining J. Lohr in 2015, Barnhisel was the Quality Control Manager at Francis Ford Coppola's Inglenook, where she was charged with maintaining the stature of the winery's flagship Cabernet Sauvignon, Rubicon, and its top white blend, Blancaneaux.

Today, the outgoing winemaker works alongside J. Lohr's longtime Director of Winemaking Jeff Meier, bringing a vast range of experience, technical know-how, and boundless enthusiasm as she steadily ascends into a role as the "face behind the brand" for J. Lohr's white wines. Between the ever-present twinkle in her eyes and the quality of her wines, evidence abounds of Barnhisel's dedication to this esteemed Arroyo Seco winery.



Kristen Barnhisel holds the Riverstone Chardonnay from the J. Lohr Estates series and the Burgundy-inspired Arroyo Vista Chardonnay from the "single-concept" J. Lohr Vineyard Series.

A Sense of Place

When we visit the small yet bustling town of Greenfield in Monterey County in mid-February, the Arroyo Seco is flowing with the remainder of this winter's rains. The weather is cool but glorious, and Barnhisel is eager to give us the lay of the land.

After visiting a block dedicated to the

Chardonnay "musqué" clone 809, which makes up the backbone of the aromatic J. Lohr October Night Chardonnay, we drive to a low bridge minutes from the winery and hop out for a look at the Arroyo Seco itself. On either side of the river are blocks of the Francioni and Griva Vineyard, which provides fruit to J. Lohr by long-term agreement.



The J. Lohr Estates Flume Crossing Sauvignon Blanc shows zesty citrus balanced by California ripeness.

Down in the arroyo, Barnhisel carefully picks her way across the slow-moving stream and strikes a confident pose among the rocks, the stunning Santa Lucias providing a thrilling backdrop. “Big Sur is just over that range,” she says, giving us a geographic point of reference.

Back at the winery, we don Day-Glo safety vests and enter the hangar-like barrel room, where 40,000 oak and acacia barrels exude the unmistakable wood-tinged aroma of peacefully-aging wine.

The 2017 Flume Crossing Sauvignon Blanc from the J. Lohr Estates tier awaits blending, so the barrel room team patiently stands by while we sneak in for a quick sample tasting. Barnhisel draws samples from both a stainless-steel barrel and an acacia barrel as she explains that the balance between the two fermentation methods is what characterizes this wine: The stainless steel maintains crisp, citrusy grapefruit and lime notes, while the acacia lends texture in the



Made primarily from the aromatic Chardonnay “musqué” clone 809, the J. Lohr October Night Chardonnay exhibits notes of gardenia and orange blossom in its suave texture.

mouthfeel and finish. The current 2016 vintage shows a delicate balance between New Zealand-like zestiness and California ripeness.

“The Many Faces of Chardonnay”

Elsewhere in the winery, Barrel Room Manager Manny Lara has set up two tasting areas with barrels holding components of J. Lohr’s upcoming 2017 vintage Chardonnays. The first showcases the wines that will become the **J. Lohr Estates Riverstone Chardonnay** (SRP \$15), of which the 90-plus individual lots are 100 percent barrel-fermented in American, French, or Hungarian oak for seven to nine months. The lees are stirred weekly and undergo 60–70 percent malolactic fermentation for texture.

At the second tasting station, we discover the **Arroyo Vista Chardonnay** and **October Night Chardonnay** (both SRP \$25) from J. Lohr’s Vineyard Series. These are not single-vineyard wines but “single-

concept” wines, explains Senior Marketing Director Dave Muret, who is along for the visit. Barnhisel draws a sample of the clone 809 Chardonnay, grown in the vineyard block we had visited earlier, and notes its “gardenia and orange blossom” aromas.

This wine, from grapes hand-picked in early morning and crushed in a ten-ton press, will make up 60–70 percent of the finished wine in a process that Barnhisel calls “building complexity.” (She says her question during the crafting and blending of Chardonnay is always, “How much complexity can we build into it?”)

Barnhisel then moves to a component of October Night’s sibling, the Arroyo Vista Chardonnay; she draws a sample of clone 76 Chardonnay, which makes up the backbone of the blend with its brioche flavors (from lees stirring), caramel tones, and well-integrated notes of oak. “This is our ode to Burgundy,” explains the winemaker. The finished wine shows “very floral aromas, flavors of pears, apples, and Meyer lemon—it’s got a lot of layers to it,” says Barnhisel. If October Night is full and voluptuous, Arroyo Vista is poised and finely delineated—or, as Barnhisel puts it, two of “the many faces of Chardonnay.”

While striving to maintain the flavor profiles J. Lohr fans expect from these wines by “blending to a style,” Barnhisel has also managed to put her own stamp on these two icons of Arroyo Seco Chardonnay. “I love Chardonnay,” says the winemaker. “It offers such a wide palette to work with, from austere and mineral to overt and tropical.” Barnhisel has proven herself a master of both aspects of this varietal. “Balance and complexity, with freshness and texture,” she concludes. “That’s my style.”

Meanwhile, experimentation with clonal selection, cooperage, and yeast strains forges ahead at rapid pace under Barnhisel’s supervision at the busy Greenfield winery. With a couple of new blocks coming online next year, the developments will give her even more options to work with as she brings J. Lohr’s white wines into a brilliant future at the place where it all began. ■■

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PHOTO: HARDY WILSON

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PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY

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Spring is the time of plans and projects.”

—Leo Tolstoy

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



Friends from Hungary: Dr. Péter Molnár, General Manager of Patricius Winery; Enikő Magyar, Project Director for Wines of Excellence; Meridith May, Publisher/Editorial Director of *The Tasting Panel* and *The SOMM Journal*; and Attila Balla, President of Vinum Tokaj International.

This month, I'll be a guest speaker at the tenth annual International Wine Tourism Conference in Budapest. It's a fitting city for my speech, which will highlight the success of our three publications' ongoing promotion of Hungary's special wines to buyers in the U.S. Last year, *The Tasting Panel* declared 2017 "The Year of Furmint," and this year, we've shifted focus to our outspoken infatuation with the sweet elixir of Aszú wines from the country's Tokaj region. I'm thrilled to represent the U.S. with our point of view from the trade magazine side of the business, especially as this month's cover story spotlights the modern styles redefining Hungary's historic elixir.

April and May will be busy months for the team here at *The Tasting Panel*. We'll see many of you at the Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA) 75th Annual Convention and Exposition May 1–3 in Las Vegas, where our publications will run the blind wine and spirits competitions and fly in 36 wine buyers, sommeliers, spirits buyers, and mixologists to serve as judges. This event has been an annual tradition for us, but this year—for the first time—we'll also be included in the Battle of the Brands competition, where I will judge alongside some of the top distributor names in the country to place some well-deserving new products on a pedestal for industry-wide exposure (see page 59). The results will all be featured in a future issue.

While our April issue includes our annual report on agave products, we are also diving headfirst into rosé as we spotlight not only the wines we love, but the somms who also adore the category. April ushers in the beginning of our springtime features and rosé, with its meteoric rise in popularity, has proven itself as the season's ambassador.

It's been a fierce winter from coast to coast, with fires, mudslides, Nor'easters, and an awful flu epidemic that have tortured so many of us. We can't fight Mother Nature, but I believe these warmer, calmer months will let us all breathe easier. I wish you all a happy, healthy spring. ■■

Meridith May

*Publisher/Editorial Director
The Tasting Panel*



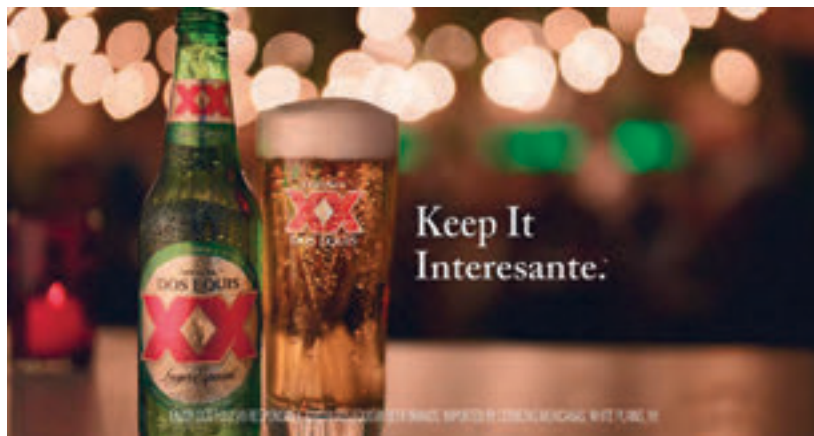
Celebrating 135 Years

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Dos Equis Debuts “Keep It Interessante” Campaign



Dos Equis is out to prove that “interesting” is not limited to just one man. In an exciting evolution of its “Most Interesting Man” campaign, “Keep it Interessante” aims to showcase the creative edge the brand is known for. The campaign helps fans bring their irreverent stories to life in a way that makes them even more entertaining.

After TV commercials debuted in March, the initiative will continue to evolve across social media, digital activations, retail, and out-of-home advertising, as well as at some of the country’s biggest events and cultural moments throughout the summer.

With the objective of driving Dos Equis volume, increasing share of cans during summer outdoor occasions, and recruiting new drinkers, retailers will see an unprecedented level of support for the new campaign to boost sales and profits.

Smith-Madrone Adds Two Distributors

As of February, the estate-vineyard wines of Napa Valley’s Smith-Madrone Vineyards & Winery are now represented by distributors in Nevada and Tennessee. Red Rock Wines, based in Las Vegas, and Best Brands, based in Nashville, will be carrying the winery’s Chardonnay, Riesling, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The Cook’s Flat Reserve will be a special-order item.

“We are glad to be working with Smith-Madrone’s wines, which mean that we can offer our customers great wines from the Spring Mountain District in Napa Valley,” says Allan Nassau of Red Rock Wines.

Simple Life Debuts Its New Rosé

Simple Life, one of the fastest-growing wine brands from Don Sebastiani & Sons, announced the launch of its new rosé in February. The release joins the existing Simple Life portfolio of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

The Simple Life rosé—made from high-quality Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Barbera grapes from Lodi, California—retails for \$13 and boasts a gleaming rose-gold color; aromas of wild strawberry, rose petal, and jasmine; and a well-balanced acidity. “I think our Simple Life wines really speak to the everyday wine consumer who is searching for and enjoying a lot of rosé,” says Donny Sebastiani, CEO and President of Don Sebastiani & Sons. “We think this wine is a perfect fit.”



DISCOVER

THE MOST-AWARDED TEQUILA*



Tequila, 40% Alc/Vol (80 proof) © 2018 Alta Spirits Company, Hayward, CA, USA. All rights reserved. 18-2194073-1 (P&T 7/18/11) *BASED ON GALLO INTERNAL DATA

Wine and Spirit Veterans Launch CompassPoint Imports

As a new national importer of fine wines and spirits, CompassPoint Imports—launched in 2017 by industry veterans Gary Clayton and Tom Tesauro—is dedicated to driving sustainable value and growth.

Clayton brings more than 25 years of marketing and commercial leadership to CompassPoint Imports, having worked for Allied Domecq, Pernod Ricard, Remy, Banfi Vintners, and Pasternak Wine Imports. Tesauro has a similar level of experience with suppliers and retailers, most recently as a Principal of Yankee Spirits, a large-volume Massachusetts retail chain.

“Our focus is on brands with compelling stories that can resonate and connect with consumers and the trade,” Clayton says. CompassPoint Imports’ portfolio currently consists of J.J. Corry Irish Whiskey, Hepple Gin-England, Kingston Wine Estates–Australia, Mooiplaas Wine Estate–South Africa, and Forever Blend–Chile.



Gary Clayton.



Tom Tesauro.

BRAND SPOTLIGHT

Nantou Distillery’s Omar Whisky Brings Taiwan’s Terroir to Traditional Scotch-Making

PHOTO COURTESY OF OMAR WHISKY



OMAR’s Sherry cask-aged Single Malt exudes notes of longan honey, plum preserves, and citrus skin.

Nestled amongst crystal-clear lakes and green mountains, Taiwan’s Nantou Distillery transforms imported Scottish malt into OMAR whisky. In this idyllic location, traditional Scottish whisky-making processes meet exquisite Taiwanese finishing skill and pure water from the ancient forests of this mountainous region.

Basing its name on the Gaelic word for “amber,” OMAR currently offers several releases. Its bright-gold OMAR Single Malt Whisky—with aromas of dried mango and ripe pineapple and a palate of sweet vanilla and delicate flowers—is barreled in bourbon casks, non-chill filtered, and bottled at 46% ABV.

OMAR also offers a Sherry cask-aged single malt; bottled at 46% ABV, the whisky ages in Oloroso Sherry butts from Jerez, Spain, which imparts a brassy hue, a woody smell with hints of honey and apples, and dried fruit and orange cake flavors.

In October 2013, Nantou Distillery launched its cask-strength single malt program and now offers both bourbon-barrel-aged and Sherry butt-aged cask-strength malts. OMAR is also known for showcasing Taiwan’s fruit-filled terroir with three cask-strength, fruit-finished whiskies aged in barrels previously used to mature lychee liqueur, green plum liqueur, and Black Queen—a richly-tannic wine made from local grapes. ■■

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Annual Pork Fest Cochon555 Returns to Los Angeles

Los Angeles may be known for its kale smoothies and ample vegan eateries found all over town, but you'd never guess judging by the massive crowd at Cochon555. Held in March at Santa Monica's Viceroy Hotel, the friendly culinary competition celebrating all things porcine tours the U.S. every year.

At the L.A. event, five local chefs—Brian Redzikowski of Kettner Exchange, Thomas Bille of Otium, Lord Maynard Llera of Mason, Sammy Monsour of Preux & Proper, and Hugo Bolanos of Wolfgang Puck at Hotel Bel-Air—faced off to create multiple dishes that each featured a different breed of heritage pig. Highlights included a Chinese bao-style “Big Mac” made with pork belly from Redzikowski (who won the competition and the title of Prince of Pork), pork belly with strawberry mole from Bille, and a whole pig that was butchered and auctioned before a live audience. Cheers to the gentleman who purchased half of the animal—around 120 pounds of pork!



The five local chefs competing at Los Angeles' Cochon555, from left: Sammy Monsour of Preux & Proper, Brian Redzikowski of Kettner Exchange, Hugo Bolanos of Wolfgang Puck at Hotel Bel-Air, Thomas Bille of Otium, and Lord Maynard Llera of Mason with Cochon555 Founder Brady Lowe.

It goes without saying that a veritable feast of meat dishes needs equally-enticing drinks to wash things down, and several beverage companies heeded the call: Five wineries offered sips of their wide-ranging releases while Breckenridge Distillery, Courvoisier, El Tesoro, Glenfiddich, and more covered the boozier libations.

For those seeking to take the Cochon555 experience home with them, various wine and spirits, along with John Boos & Co. butcher blocks, were available for bidding. The event raised more than \$13,000 for Piggy Bank, a charity that supports the heritage breed farming movement around the world.

If you missed the L.A. edition of Cochon555, it's not too late to attend others around the country, including tour stops in Chicago, Seattle, Miami, and more. For more information, visit cochon555.com. —Jesse Hom-Dawson

A classic fried-chicken bao with pineapple gojuchang glaze was a culinary highlight during a recent event at Upstairs 2 in Los Angeles.



Sampling Upstairs 2's New Seasonal Menu

An informal celebration unfolded on International Women's Day at Los Angeles' Upstairs 2, where an all-female group gathered on March 8 to dine and drink at the cozy restaurant located above one of the city's premier wine stores, The Wine House.

Executive Chef Maiki Le and Sommelier Marilyn Snee joined the lively ensemble, with Snee providing Biodynamic wines from around the world to accompany Le's internationally-influenced cuisine. Dishes like sweet pea and tarragon ravioli with English peas and a Meyer lemon cream sauce could be found alongside a citrus salad with Cara Cara and blood oranges, fennel, and avocado, serving to showcase spring vegetables that had just recently come into season. “You’re the first to try out some of these dishes, so you’re pretty special!” Le joked to the table as she presented us with a trio of baos, including a classic fried-chicken bao with pineapple gojuchang glaze and her new pork belly bao with pickled cucumbers and an apricot-hoisin sauce.

Crème fraîche panna cotta with a mixed berry compote and Turkish coffee ice cream profiteroles rounded out the meal. Snee paired the desserts with a 2015 Quady Essensia sweet dessert wine—giving us an excuse to toast to a delectable meal from two wonderful women! —Jesse Hom-Dawson ■■

Love at first sip.



Experience every luscious, vibrant
taste of Monterey County's
acclaimed Arroyo Seco region,
captured in Arroyo Vista Chardonnay, from
the limited production, artisan wines
of J. Lohr Vineyard Series.

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ForceBrands is the leading recruiting and staffing firm for the beverage, food, and beauty industries. We offer executive recruiting services, board of director assembly, and industry-specific job boards including BevForce—which connects global beverage companies with future leaders.

Ryan Hicks has been named Trade Marketing Director at **WhistlePig Straight Rye Whiskey**. He had been Director of Brand Management at Empire Spirits Project.

William Skelley has been named Division Manager of **Luxco, Inc.** He had been Region Manager-Midwest at Terlato Distell Artisan Spirits.

Blair Finn has been named Northeast Area Manager at **Mahou San Miguel**. She had been Sales Representative at Duvel Moortgat USA.

Jared Mathisen has been named Washington/Alaska Area Manager at **Phusion Projects**. He had been Area Sales Manager-Washington at Columbia Gorge Organic.

Jeffrey Travis has been named Market Manager-Upstate New York at **Stillhouse Spirits Co.** He had been Market Manager-Upstate New York at Western Spirits Beverage Company.

CAREER CORNER

Three Ways to Become a Happier, More Productive Employee

Did you know happy employees are up to 20 percent more productive than their less-satisfied counterparts? And it's not necessarily the employer's responsibility alone to ensure their team members are feeling fulfilled—it often takes an equally committed and dedicated employee. Read on for some pro-tips on how you can maximize your workplace influence and find happiness along the way.

Learn New Things Happy employees are not only more engaged, they're mindful that their work is making an impact and helping drive the success of the business. In order to grow in your role, you need to have a genuine curiosity and interest in learning new skills, as well as a keen awareness of what it takes to get ahead and follow through.

Volunteer Doing good really is good for you: 94 percent of people who volunteer report it improves their mood, according to data from Happify. And you typically don't have to venture too far out of your way to give back, as most organizations offer opportunities for their employees to participate in charity work and other volunteer events.

Practice Mindfulness The average American worker spends an average of 38.6 hours per week performing their job duties, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2015. Be mindful that if you don't love or at least have an interest in what you do, it might be time to rethink where you're investing your time. ■■

Want to connect with beverage industry leaders? Tap into BevForce at www.bevforce.com or email info@bevforce.com for more information.

In Tequila
**THERE'S MORE
TO TEQUILA
THAN TEQUILA.**



Compass Box Whiskymaker
Jill Boyd is the woman
behind the company's new
release, *Hedonism The Muse*.

TWO RECENT
SCOTCH RELEASES
PLACE **WOMEN AT**
THE FOREFRONT



Breaking Up The Boy's Club

by Ian Buxton

International Women's Day is celebrated annually on March 8, and although it may have taken more than 100 years since the inaugural commemoration in 1911, leading Scotch whisky brands both small and large seem to finally be pushing the efforts of women among their ranks to the forefront.

But as the days pass since last month's holiday, I wondered from my own perspective as a veteran in the industry of how things have truly changed for women in whisky, and whether brands "celebrating" women represents tangible progress or is mere virtue signalling.

In particular, two recent releases stand out: the **Jane Walker Edition** of Johnnie Walker Black Label (40% ABV; \$34 SRP) and Compass Box's **Hedonism The Muse** (53.3% ABV; \$275 SRP).



Both are limited editions, though they vary widely in scale—250,000 bottles of Jane Walker, a U.S. exclusive, compared to a worldwide release of just 3,060 bottles of The Muse (some 1,380 will be available stateside). They also both come from companies noted for their commitment to equality of opportunity and the creation of a diverse workforce: Compass Box notes

that more than half its staff are women, and Diageo has strong female leadership in its marketing, blending, and senior executive teams.

The whiskies themselves, however, could hardly be more different. While the Jane Walker Edition merely repackages the standard Black Label blend, Compass Box's effort is a true one-off created by Whiskymaker Jill Boyd. That isn't to say there isn't some heft behind Diageo's

release: The company says it will donate up to \$250,000 in proceeds to charitable organizations championing women's causes.

Now, it would be easy to dismiss this type of thing as mere politically-correct tokenism or to detect a patronising tone. But consider the direction of travel: These are not "whiskies for women" (now *that* would be patronising) but steps on a journey. In the industry I joined three decades ago, the idea that women might actually drink and enjoy whisky—let alone serve as brand ambassadors, distillery managers, or blenders—was rarely considered.

There is much more progress to be made, but that the industry has come a long way cannot—and should not—be denied. As Diageo and Compass Box demonstrate, women have immeasurably enriched this great industry and continue to do so: That accomplishment warrants recognition much more than one day per year. ■■



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Producers from Pauillac on Bordeaux's Left Bank were among the attendees at the Union des Grands Crus de Bordeaux event at Sotheby's in New York City.



In with the New

TASTING THROUGH A PROMISING FLURRY OF **SPRING VINTAGE RELEASES**

by David Ransom



Thomas Hansen is the Winemaker for Weingut Hansen-Lauer, located in the Middle Mosel winegrowing region.

I always look forward to the time of year when new vintages start to appear for tasting: It's an exciting time for both the wine producers showing off their most recent efforts and the buyers who are hopeful that the hype is indeed well-founded.

A series of recent tastings gave me a good handle on what to expect in the coming months, and the news is decidedly positive. At the Union des Grands Crus de Bordeaux event in New York City, I tasted through the 2015 vintage, the most highly-anticipated release since the wonderful 2010s. I found the Right Bank wines quite approachable, and while the Left Bank wines show promise, they'll need more time to develop. Some favorites included the Château Clinet (Pomerol), Château Ferrière (Margaux), and Château Cantemerle (Haut-Médoc), but the 2015 White Bordeaux will definitely be worth purchasing as well.

Next at Mondovino, the annual portfolio tasting by importer Kysela Pere et Fils in Winchester, Virginia, I tried the new vintages from some of Fran Kysela's top represented brands. Along with a deep portfolio of Bourgogne, other wines that resonated were the Rieslings from Middle Mosel producer Weingut Hansen-Lauer and Terrasse, a blend primarily made of Chenin Blanc from South African producer Keermont.

Lastly, back in New York at the Benvenuto Brunello event, I had the opportunity to taste through the 2013 vintage of Brunello di Montalcino. Rated four stars out of five by the Consorzio Brunello di Montalcino consortium, the 2013s were leaner than I expected, with less new oak up front and more austerity. Maybe this is a continuation of the shift back toward the more traditional, less-extracted style of Brunello I first reported on in *The Tasting Panel's* June 2013 issue. Regardless, the wines showed well and should mature nicely. ■■■

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TRENTODOC



Mexico Bound

LAS VEGAS BARTENDERS ANSWER THE CALL OF THE AGAVE AT THE TEQUILA HERRADURA LEGENDS COMPETITION

by Xania V. Woodman

Finalist Tim Weigel, Hakkasan's U.S. Chief Mixologist, featured Tequila Herradura Reposado, pumpkin, spiced ginger syrup, cream, Angostura Bitters, and soda water in his Halloween in Jalisco cocktail.

Curiosity and opportunity lured me to the Mexican state of Jalisco for a collective eight weeks last year, and I wasn't alone: A few other Las Vegasans made their own sojourns southward as they competed in the **Tequila Herradura Legends** bartending competition.

The journey began on the Las Vegas Strip at the Omnia Nightclub rooftop bar, where the competitors presented their interpretation of the brand's signature Horseshoe Margarita. Judging the results were Breakthru Beverage's Brown-Forman Whiskey Specialist **Michael Doyle**, Hakkasan Group Beverage Director **Constantin Alexander**, and yours truly, with **Kevin Vanegas** of the Martin & Vanegas Agency serving as host. When the scores were tallied, Hakkasan's U.S. Chief Mixologist **Tim Weigel** and **Nick Hipwell** from The Dorsey in The Venetian were invited to Guadalajara, Mexico—along with 24 other hopefuls—for the finals.

In Challenge 1, the competitors prepared a Bloody Maria for a panel of judges that included Speed Rack Co-Founder **Ivy Mix**; Levain & Co. Beverage Director **Adrian García-Evans**; and Wynn Resorts Assistant Director of Beverage Development **Andrew Pollard**. Early the following morning, everyone boarded the Tequila Herradura Express train to Casa Herradura in Amatitán, where the contestants worked in pairs to prepare a Margarita, Paloma, Tequila Old Fashioned, and Batanga for Challenge 2.

The finals began just feet from the distillery as each competitor took his or her turn at the "altar" bar. Weigel's Halloween in Jalisco featured Tequila Herradura Reposado, pumpkin, spiced ginger syrup, cream, Angostura Bitters, and soda water, while Hipwell paired Herradura Reposado and pumpkin with Frangelico, soda water, and whole milk in a cocktail he dubbed The Spice Patch. But the day ultimately belonged to Boston's **Naomi Levy**, whose Allied Forces cocktail with Herradura Reposado, pineapple-infused Cynar, rosemary syrup, saline solution, and lime bitters was inspired by her grandfather's courageous subversion of the Nazis during World War II.

Although he didn't place in the top four, Hipwell—among the youngest of the competitors—said the competition "drastically improved [his] confidence in [his] skills behind the bar." "Working at The Dorsey was my first introduction to the craft cocktail world, and after being selected to compete in Mexico against so many other fantastic bartenders, it made me feel like I'm on the right track to advancing my career," he added. ■■



Nick Hipwell, Barback at The Dorsey in The Venetian, was one of the finalists to travel to Mexico for the Tequila Herradura Legends Competition.



FOR THOSE WHO ARE TOO GENTLE TO
live among wolves



PHOTO: WWW.THELABELMAKER.EU

PREMIUM WINES FROM NAPA VALLEY
WOLFSHEADWINES.COM

Chris Mariani

TALENT ACQUISITION, INSPIRA MARKETING GROUP

Chris Mariani manages talent acquisition at Inspira Marketing Group, an experiential marketing agency that works alongside companies like Diageo and Constellation Brands to inspire consumer behavior. Read on to discover how beverage brands are building awareness, what Mariani looks for in key hires, and more.



ForceBrands: Tell us a bit about your background and what brought you to Inspira Marketing Group.

Chris Mariani: I began my career in the staffing industry by working in a number of different industries. To be honest, I didn't have a ton of exposure to the marketing or beverage world, so when I was first contacted about a temporary role here at Inspira Marketing, I jumped at the opportunity to learn something new. Three months later, I knew that I was where I wanted to be for the long term, so I accepted a full-time offer to build and manage a team.

FB: Which qualities do you look for in candidates who are interested in working in the beverage industry in a talent acquisition capacity?

CM: Some traits that you look for in candidates hold true regardless of industry, like eagerness to grow, drive, and an entrepreneurial spirit. But for the beverage industry, in particular? When it comes to working on-premise, it's imperative to be able to think on your feet and build strong relationships in a short period of time. The reality is that each of our employees deals with a diverse array of clients with unique needs on a daily basis, making it all the more important to partner with them to provide custom solutions that help their business.

FB: As experiential marketing becomes an increasingly popular avenue for beverage companies to build brand awareness, have you seen an increased demand for certain roles?

CM: As experiential marketing has grown, its definition has broadened. In the past, experiential marketing for beverage companies meant an event sponsorship or a managed bar night, but the concept has evolved to mean much more. Now, the term encompasses real relationship-building with on- and off-premise counterparts, and that is where we've seen the increased demand for roles. Brands want people who can speak on their behalf to consumers and the trade. Whether at events, bars, restaurants, or liquor stores, the experience people have with the brand is critical to success. ■■

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Dry-aged meat hangs in the walk-in of the butcher shop at Curtis Stone's Gwen in Hollywood, CA.

PHOTO: MONHO FRANK LEE

No Beef with Beef

A NEW WAVE OF **MODERN STEAKHOUSES**
SETS UP SHOP FROM COAST TO COAST

by Merrill Shindler

We are a nation built on beef, and when traveling, tracking down the iconic steakhouses of America can keep you very well fed indeed. I love the old-school steakhouses of America as much as anyone, but there's also a rising tide of modern steakhouses popping up from coast to coast as beef returns from one of its periodic dietary exiles.

What better place to begin this journey than at celebrity chef Curtis Stone's Gwen in Hollywood, California, where you eat your Creekstone Farms 45-ounce ribeye—dry aged for 80 days—in the midst of a butcher shop. Semi-dressed carcasses hang behind glass, welcoming high-rolling customers to take home a tasty Blackmore wagyu 12-ounce New York strip for a paltry \$185. The meat is cooked in an open kitchen over a blazing inferno of a

grill, and along with the thick, richly-marbled cuts of meat, there are platters of charcuterie cured in-house and lighter dishes like scallop crudo and pork cheeks with smoked honey. The wine list, unsurprisingly, is heavy with expensive reds.

In Las Vegas, it can be argued that the Big-Name Chefs of Vegas Cuisine—Joël Robuchon, Guy Savoy, Jean-George Vongerichten, and more—could all be swallowed up by the Nevada desert, but the steakhouses (along with the buffets, of course) would survive. Along with the more classic cuisine at Smith & Wollensky, the Golden Steer, and The Palm, there's fresh beef to be had at Bazaar Meat at the SLS Las Vegas resort, where Chef José Andrés has created a "meat bar." Choose your cut and watch as it hits the flames, then get the foie gras cotton candy treatment . . .

just because you can.

And of course, because New York is New York, the multitude of legacy steakhouses is balanced with a constant crop of new-wave meat shops. The destination of the moment is Nusr-Et Steakhouse, opened in Midtown by Turkish social media superstar Nusret Gökçe—better known as "Salt Bae"—whose shtick is sending a blizzard of coarse grain salt onto your steak after it's been presented and carved as every smartphone at the table captures the moment.

Since Gökçe has restaurants all over the Middle East, including in Istanbul, you should definitely order the barbecued Turkish sausage called a *sucuk* followed by baklava for dessert. The latter escapes Salt Bae's showering of seasoning: His parlor trick doesn't extend to sweets. ■■

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Our Wine Editor, Jessie Birschbach, Certified Sommelier—or JABS, as we call her in the office—uses her experience as a sommelier and her background in marketing to rate retail wines/spirits/beer on both the inside and outside of the bottle. For this reason, we are nixing the traditional rating system and simply employing the “JABS” rating system to assess packaging and brand identity. As for the inside of the bottle, you can be sure that these wines/spirits/beers have met the reasonably high yet unpretentious standard of simply being delicious and drinkable.

1 JAB 🍷

Clear, legible label, solid branding.

2 JABS 🍷 🍷

Eye-catching label and memorable branding.

3 JABS 🍷 🍷 🍷

Creatively inspiring in both packaging and branding.

4 JABS 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

A near work of art and meaningful branding.

5 JABS 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

A masterpiece in packaging and new benchmark in branding.

APRIL

We're raising a glass to the promise of April showers bringing May flowers, because we need rain! (At least here in California.) Please welcome Managing Editor Jesse Hom-Dawson as she reviews the spirit of the month!



Flâneur 2015 Cuvée Constantin Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$40) Purple flowers and bright wild berries dominate in this awesome, medium-

bodied, unfiltered Pinot Noir from the Willamette Valley. Seventy-five percent of the fruit comes from the winery's organic, dry-farmed estate vineyard in Ribbon Ridge, with the remainder sourced from a sustainable vineyard in the Eola-Amity AVA. The black-and-white sketched image on the label represents the Flâneur, a Parisian character who walks at a pace slow enough to be led by a turtle.



The Lost Chapters 2013 Zinfandel, Napa Valley (\$30) Strawberry jam and roasted coffee finish with a nice hand-

ful of gravel, while the label could be a title card in the *Game of Thrones* opening sequence. SCOTTO CELLARS



Shimizu-No-Mai Pure Eclipse Sake (\$159) Only 28 percent rice grain remains in this incredibly silky,

citrus-tinged, and lush Daiginjo sake. This release is made *shizuku* style, meaning gravity is the sole pressing method utilized (this occurs in just 1

percent of all sake production). A lychee-dominate mid-palate gives way to the orange-edged finish, and the bottle is a sexy matte black. Surely the eclipse name was inspired by the fact that sake like this doesn't come around too often. TERLATO WINES



V.E.S. Gin (\$99) Scotch and whisk(e)y tend to dominate the conversation when consumers think of luxury spirits, but Australian-based spirits company V.E.S. aims to bring clear spirits into the ultra-premium category with its new gin. Based on a 1,000-year-old recipe, the 45% ABV spirit includes organic

botanicals like pepperberry, finger limes, coriander, and cranberries; its base spirit, meanwhile, is made from sugarcane grown in enriched, nutrient-dense soil. The small-batch gin is crafted in Hunter Valley, Australia, using traditional copper-pot distillation and a multiple-filtration process. Its crystal bottle is a splurge, but V.E.S.'s claim that the gin won't give you a hangover makes it well worth the price. V.E.S. is currently available in New York, California, and London, with expansion planned for later this year. ■■

—Jesse Hom-Dawson

For information on submitting samples, email jabs@sommjournal.com.

— IT'S —
**OREGON
WINE
MONTH!**



Get into Oregon Wine Month in May!

May celebrates Oregon's official month of wine tasting, wine learning and wine loving. Oregon Wine Month is an opportunity to experience the quality and diversity of Oregon wine.

Oregon's grape growers and winemakers are a community of producers that are committed to sustainability and artisan practices to make some of the world's best wine, where 47% of the vineyards are certified sustainable.

Although Oregon's share of domestic wine production is only 1%, they make up 20% of Wine Spectator's 90+ scores. [source: oregonwine.org]



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Sohol Blosser
Van Duzer
Wines by Joe





THE TOUR DATES

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Napa: July 17
Austin: July 19
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July 22*

Trade
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to cover the
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fee.

Now in its fifth year, the **CRU ARTISAN COLLEGE** will once again partner with the Wine Scholar Guild to host an ambitious three-city academic tour led by Banfi Wines' most outstanding winemakers. Each city will host a full-day learning experience that includes in-depth, razor-focused seminars, culinary pairings, and cash prizes for volunteered competitive blind tastings.

For more information, email **SOMM Journal Events Director Francesca Marciano** at Francesca@TastingPanelMag.com.



Dean Lars Leicht leads a seminar in the Cru Artisan classroom at the San Francisco Wine School in spring 2017.



Andrea Sartori, Family Proprietor of Sartori di Verona, addresses the 2017 Washington, D.C. graduates of Cru Artisan College.



The 2017 Cru Artisan College students in Chicago engaged in a competitive blind tasting for a cash prize.

***There will also be a special 90-minute "encore performance" seminar at SommCon in Washington, D.C. on July 22 at 3 p.m.**

THE TOP-LEVEL SYLLABUS

Milestones: Driving Wineries in Iconic Regions

As Castello Banfi celebrates its 40th anniversary and Satori di Verona celebrates its 120th, the educational cadre of the Cru Artisan College have crafted a particularly reflective syllabus for the 2018 tour. This year will also offer additional seminars in a more condensed format to heighten the scholastic experience. View a sampling of this year's schedule below and visit the Cru Artisan College website at cruartisancollege.com for the most up-to-date curriculum. A full day of back-to-back seminars will run from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Alta Langa Introspective

Italy offers one of the most diverse selections of rosé in the world based on various grape varieties. In the Alta Langa DOC of Piemonte, Pinot Noir is grown on hilltop vineyards in a mix of clay and calcareous soil.

Cuvée Aurora Rosé

Washington State Perspective

Thanks to the Missoula Floods, Washington provides unique soil profiles enabling us to explore key varieties.

Pacific Rim Riesling and more

Verona Retrospective

In its 120 years of business, Sartori di Verona has amassed a vast collection of wines which will serve as the focal point of this seminar.

Sartori di Verona Ferdi, Valpolicella, Regolo, Amarone, Corte Brà, and I Saltari Amarone

Abruzzo Luncheon

Home to Montepulciano, one of the most beloved grapes in Italy, Abruzzo also ranks the variety among its most widely-planted.

Cerulli Spinozzi Cortalto, Cerasuolo, and Torre Migliori

Coyam Super Chilean Component Tasting

The Cochagua Valley offers a patchwork of colluvial-based soils. When these profiles are combined with its climate, the Cochagua Valley enables winegrowers to grow organically, and, in the case of Emiliana, Biodynamically.

Emiliana Coyam

Castello Banfi Brunello Builder Perspective

No producer has advanced the clonal development of Brunello (Sangiovese) more so than Castello Banfi.

Castello Banfi

Marsala Florio Introspective

The development and aging of a serious Marsala is very precise process.

Targa Marsala Superiore Riserva and Florio Fernet

Graduation and Diploma Awards

THE PROFESSORS



Alberto Lazzarino,
*Directing Winemaker,
Banfi Piemonte,
Strevi, Italy*

Professor Lazzarino has served as the Principal Winemaker at Banfi Piemonte since 2002 and is a graduate of the prestigious Agricultural University of Alba, one of the world's leading enology schools.



Andrea Sartori,
*Family Proprietor,
Sartori di Verona,
Negrar, Italy*

Professor Sartori is the great-grandson of Sartori di Verona Founder Pietro Sartori and is now at the helm of the family company, which is one of the Veneto's leading wine producers. The former President of Italy's producer trade group, the Unione Italiana Vini, Sartori will help impart generations of family experience at Cru Artisan College.



Gabriele Pazzaglia,
*Cellarmaster,
Castello Banfi*

Armed with a degree in winemaking with a specialty in viticulture, Montalcino native Gabriele Pazzaglia started at Banfi as a Technical Cellar Assistant in 1999. Professor Pazzaglia has received his doctorate in enology from the University of Florence and manages Banfi's Horizon vinification winery, as well as winemaking for ASKA.



Enrico Cerulli,
*Family Proprietor,
Cerulli Spinozzi,
Teramo, Italy*

With his family roots in Abruzzo dating back generations, Professor Cerulli's passion lies in producing high-quality wines from the Colline Teramane subregion, Abruzzo's only DOCG. Cerulli places a particular focus on the Montepulciano grape, using 100 percent DOCG fruit in his winemaking.



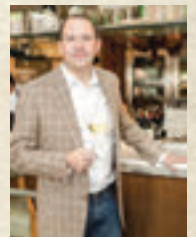
Benedetta Poretti,
*Family Proprietor,
Florio, Italy*

Professor Poretti's family, which built Italy's best-known spirits brand, Disaronno, took stewardship of another iconic Italian name—Florio—in 1998. A student of natural sciences, she loves exploring the relationship between nature and sustainability through the world of wine.



Noelia Orts,
*Winemaker,
Emiliana Organic
Vineyards, Chile*

Professor Orts, along with Álvaro Espinoza, is responsible for Emiliana's world-class Biodynamic wines, Coyam and Gê. Orts graduated from the Polytechnic University of Valencia with a degree in viticulture and enology; in 2009, she pursued a master's degree in enology and viticulture at the University of Chile and subsequently joined the Emiliana team in 2011.



Nicolas Quille,
*Winemaking Director,
Pacific Rim,
Washington State,
U.S.*

Although he's the only U.S.-based wine producer in our faculty, Professor Quille is a native of Lyon, France, where he is a third-generation member of the wine business. After working in Burgundy, Dijon, Reims, and Champagne, Professor Quille came to the United States in 1997 and landed in Washington State to earn his MBA.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOMMCON



**Advanced Sommelier Lisa Redwine
of Regal Wine Company.**

You can cover a lot of ground in five minutes, as Advanced Sommelier Lisa Redwine recently proved when she sat down with us for a Q&A. A Wine Sales Representative for Regal Wine Company in San Diego, Redwine shared her thoughts on striving for the Master Sommelier title, supporting women in the wine business, and more during our speedy yet far-ranging discussion.

NAME: Lisa Redwine

ACCREDITATION: Advanced Sommelier/Court of Master Sommeliers

Advanced Sommelier Lisa Redwine

You made the leap from On-Premise Beverage Director at The Marine Room in La Jolla to working in sales for Regal. What was that adjustment like for you?

For me, the adjustment was to not be working with a team and guest dynamic in a restaurant. But after an amazing two years, there are parallels within the sales position that are equally, if not more, satisfying than being in a restaurant. In working with such a dynamic portfolio, it's akin to having the perfect wine list to present to a buyer.

What's your proudest professional accomplishment?

Taking the Master Sommelier Exam—twice so far. It's my Mount Everest of professional challenges. It takes grit, determination, and humility, and I've always emerged humbler, more inspired, and even more determined.

You're one of the founders of the Women's Wine Alliance. Tell us a bit about that organization.

After sitting the Advanced Exam, I realized there was a need in the San Diego for an organization that offers mentorship, scholarships, and education at a higher level for women in the wine industry. This was an offshoot of a group called Women in Wine and founded by a leading group of women more than ten years ago. We've stayed true to our mission statement since then, and it's an organization I'm proud to still be an active member of.

As part of the SommCon leadership team, you've helped shape education for your peers for the past four years. What are some of the highlights?

I'm inspired every year by the community of volunteers who give their time, expertise, and knowledge to set up all the classes. The Riedel [wine glass company] class was one of the most complicated set-ups to date, and when the door closed and the seminar began, that was a moment of pride in how well we all worked as a team to make it come together. Another key highlight is the coming together of sommeliers and wine professionals of every level who are representative of the sheer passion of our industry. It's an honor to be a part of it. ■

The Tasting Panel and The SOMM Journal are proud to serve as the media sponsors of SommCon D.C. (July 22–24) and SommCon San Diego (November 14–16).





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The Dobos torte, a seven-layer sponge cake filled with chocolate buttercream and topped with caramel, was created in 1883 by Hungarian confectioner Dobos C. József.

History Makers

EXPLORING THE **INGENIOUS INVENTIONS** THAT HAIL FROM HUNGARY

by Izzy Watson



Those traveling to Hungary may often find these seltzer dispensers on their restaurant tables. Since Ányos Jedlik's invention of the beverage in 1826, seltzer water has been long considered a staple in the country.



Hungary's most well-known wine, Tokaji Aszú, is crafted from botrytized grapes—another descriptor for fruit affected by noble rot.

Seltzer water, spritzers, and delicious, layered pastries—they're all fixtures in the food and beverage realm, but they have another thing in common, as well: These items can all trace their origin or part of their lineage to Hungary, the home of many creative minds and inventors through the ages.

One of the country's most popular summer beverages is *fröccs*, a cocktail that blends white or rosé wine with soda water. While the simple drink is replicated in many countries today, the first version surfaced in Budapest, where seltzer water was also invented by Ányos Jedlik in 1826. The story goes that during a wine tasting, Jedlik prepared his favorite beverage with one part seltzer and two parts wine, calling it a "spritzer." However, his friend Mihály Vörösmarty—a great Hungarian novelist and veritable patriot—didn't like the German moniker and renamed the drink *fröccs*, a much more Hungarian-sounding denomination.

Hungarian cuisine is known for sweet desserts like the ubiquitous chimney cake, and one of the country's most famous pastries, the Dobos torte, was created in Budapest by confectioner Dobos C. József in 1884. The country's most vital contribution to the nutritional realm, however, may very well be the discovery of vitamin C—which earned well-known Hungarian scientist Albert Szent-Györgyi a Nobel Prize in 1937.

Besides its culinary contributions, Hungary's most ingenious gastronomic innovations have perhaps been those related to winemaking. This year, we celebrate what would be the 180th birthday of famous grape breeder János Mátiasz, who found the antidote for phylloxera and, as a result, is known as the savior of the vineyards and wineries of the Tokaj wine region.

One of Hungary's most well-known wines, Tokaji Aszú, hails from the region; during harvest, the aszú (the Hungarian word for botrytized grapes, meaning fruit that's been affected by noble rot) berries are collected one by one before they're soaked in fermenting wine for one to two days. After pressing, the wine is fermented and aged for at least three years.

While humankind's ingenuity can't be denied, those who sip the nectar for the first time may be inclined to agree that the greatest "inventions" of all are those found in the natural world. ■■



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Citizen Rail's *Catch the Westbound* cocktail features A.D. Laws Rye with Plantation Stiggins Fancy Pineapple Rum, grilled pineapple, housemade falernum, lemon, and cinnamon.



Scotch eggs, artichokes, marrow, and smoked lamb all make appearances on the dinner menu at Citizen Rail in Denver.



Citizen Rail's bar menu features both classic and creative cocktail options.

Meet Me at the Station

CITIZEN RAIL'S DRINKS PROGRAM IS JUST THE TICKET FOR QUIRKY COCKTAIL LOVERS

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

Trains and flames: Those two concepts more or less sum up the beverage program at the new contemporary restaurant Citizen Rail in Denver's vibrant Union Station neighborhood. Located in the Kimpton Hotel Born, which opened last August, Citizen Rail's focal point is its open grill: a constant source of influence for Chef Christian Graves' contemporary cuisine as well as Lead Bartender Chris Burmeister's inventive drinks. "Guests see charred, grilled, and blistered garnishes on their drinks—we even toast housemade marshmallows," Burmeister says of the grill, which uses both native hard and fruit woods. With this asset in mind, the restaurant's menu naturally places a focus on proteins like bison filet, tomahawk steak, and bone-in grilled shortribs; the meat is all butchered and dry-aged in-house.

To pay homage to nearby Union Station, one of the city's oldest landmarks, the bar menu's first page touts a passport-like stamp. Custom cocktails like the Plunder Road are named for either old train or heist films; inspired by a 1957 flick in which five men attempt to rob a gold shipment from a San Francisco-bound U.S. Mint train, the liquid version mixes Del Maguey Vida Mezcal with cantaloupe, clarified milk, Yellow Chartreuse, citrus, and charred grapefruit for a libation that's at once silky-smooth and smoky. (Burmeister cites it as his favorite drink on the menu by far.) Meanwhile, the *Catch the Westbound*—named for the 2013 documentary *Catch the Westbound Train* about vagabonds who arrived in Vancouver by rail during The Great Depression—mingles A.D. Laws Rye with Plantation Stiggins Fancy Pineapple Rum, grilled pineapple, housemade falernum, lemon, and cinnamon.

Other popular sips at the restaurant include the Buckshot, a variation on the Rye Buck that replaces ginger beer with a ginger cordial and a bold, pine-forward West Coast-style IPA, as well as the spirit-forward, Old Fashioned-esque Far from Yokohama. The latter uses sous vide-poached Suntory Toki Japanese Whisky—representing a category Burmeister says is trending in Denver—infused with coconut and mixed with demerara sugar, Bénédictine, and bitters. "It might sound complicated, but it's actually a very straightforward cocktail after all the prep is done," Burmeister adds.

Citizen Rail's shot-and-a-beer happy hour promotion hails from some of Burmeister's personal favorite pairings: saison with amaro, IPA with rye, stout with bourbon, and lager with bonded corn whiskey. The fifth combination—a glass of rosé served with a shot of mezcal that reminds Burmeister of camping trips—is a bit unexpected, but somehow just works. "It's glorious and delicious," he says. "Smoky and bold next to refreshing and delicate is a no-brainer." ■

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

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Triple Threat

MORRIS, CHLOE, AND BARREL
COVER ALL THE COCKTAIL BASES
IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

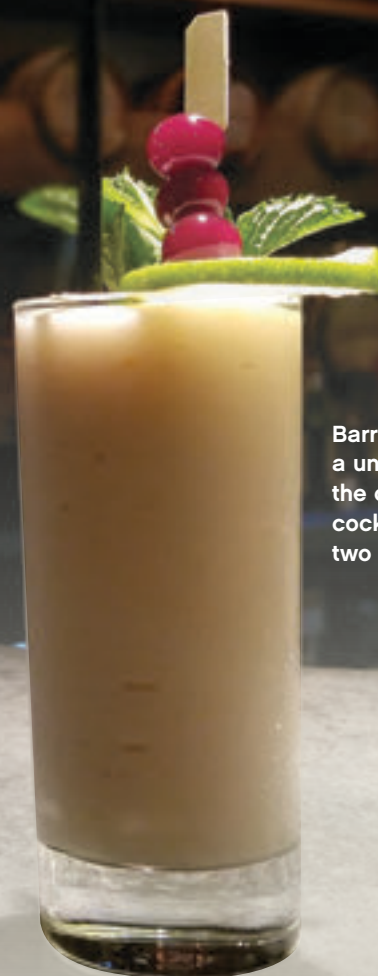
With its pastel blue walls, pale green booths, and wicker furniture, D.C.'s latest mixology den, Morris, defies every convention of the emblematic dimly-lit craft cocktail bar. I popped into the bright 64-seat spot in Shaw for a preview of the first standalone bar from cocktail craftsman David Strauss, who formerly ran the bar programs at The Sheppard, barmini, and Le Diplomate.

In Strauss' opinion, the dark speakeasy concept is on its way out, so he designed this 64-seat space to forge boldly in the other direction. As for the drinks, Morris offers left-of-center variations on classics, like a Gibson riff with absinthe and a French 75/Sidecar mashup with Chartreuse. No matter what you order, the ice is cut by hand from a twice-frozen block made from filtered water.

Proof alum Haidar Karoum recently opened Chloe in the city's Navy Yard, where the 105-seat restaurant incorporates the chef's Lebanese roots and travels in Western Europe and Southeast Asia. The medium-sized plates are meant for sharing, though dishes like local oysters topped with horseradish glaze and brown butter crumble make that easier said than done.

Chloe's General Manager and Beverage Director Tyler Mitchell forgoes an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach in favor of boozy and stirred cocktails with several standout ingredients: The Lt. Mitch Buchannon, for example, combines One Eight Distilling Rock Creek Bourbon (the first bourbon made in D.C.!) with Old Bay Seasoning in a nod to Karoum's mid-Atlantic cuisine.

And I can't believe it's taken me this long to discover Barrel, a Capitol Hill whiskey bar with a killer program overseen by Beverage Director Parker Girard. The drinks can veer toward the unexpected, like the Peatacolada with Monkey Shoulder Blended Scotch and Laphroaig 10 Year Single Malt Scotch. Girard's "Happy Meals" section of the menu, meanwhile, serves up a shot, a beer, and a surprise toy; an even better surprise awaits, though, in letting him select one of the rare, so-called "unicorn" bottles like the 1972 Suntory Airport, bottled to commemorate the opening of a Tokyo airport that year. Priced at \$150 per ounce, it's not exactly on the dollar menu, but it's well worth the splurge. ■■



Barrel's Peatacolada, a unique take on the classic tropical cocktail, features two types of Scotch.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BARREL



David Strauff of Morris uses all handcarved or hand-chiseled ice in his cocktails.

PHOTO: SHAUGHN COOPER



The Lt. Mitch Buchannon cocktail at Chloe includes One Eight Rock Creek Bourbon and Old Bay Seasoning.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHLOE

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Pope Benedict XIV famously said: "Blessed be the soil that hath grown thee, and blessed I am who drink thee".

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For more information and facts about Mad Furmint please visit: winesofexcellence.com





Mara Marski is an Associate Editor at *The Tasting Panel* and serves as the magazine's resident bartender.

PHOTO: JOHN CURLEY



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NOMAD HOTEL

ICE ICE BABY

LUXURY ICE IS THE YEAR'S COLDEST HOTTEST TREND

The establishment of "ice programs" at bars and restaurants is nothing new: For years now, venues with upscale cocktail programs have understood that seemingly-minor aesthetics like quality ice can set them apart from other establishments. Recently, though, the craft ice trend has evolved even further with the onset of branded cubes. At the NoMad Hotel in New York, for example, bar staff use a weighted copper stamp to emblazon the five-star venue's stylish logo on their cocktails' house-produced cubes.

On the West Coast, Southern California-based Ice Bulb is one member of a growing group of luxury producers crafting small-batch ice in a major way. Their facility uses a reverse-osmosis water system to create crystal-clear, machine-cut ice that's shaped, filled with snow, and fused back together. The company's designer cubes even hit the red carpet in March at the 90th annual Academy Awards, where they filled the drinks of the rich and famous with the likeness of the awards' Oscar statuette.



The NoMad Hotel logo is emblazoned on the ice inside the Start Me Up cocktail at the hotel's New York establishment.



Hollywood's favorite statue graced celebrities' glasses at the 90th annual Academy Awards, thanks to Southern California ice décor company Ice Bulb.

BEAUTY IS ONLY *Skin Deep* (BUT IT'S VERY INSTAGRAMMABLE)

My parents were explicit in their warning to never judge a book by its cover, but they didn't grow up in the age of social media. In a nod to Instagram's role as a virtual stage for mixologists, I'm celebrating some of my favorite presentation-focused cocktail trends this month.

PHOTO: RYE SU



Rye Su of Bear and Stone in Los Angeles created The Last Chinese New Year cocktail to honor the memory of his grandfather.

COCKTAIL OR CANVAS?

BARTENDERS CREATE EDIBLE WORKS OF ART BY THE GLASS

Gastronomic trends are becoming increasingly visible on bar tops, with printed beverage garnishes—inspired by a baking technique in which an image printed in edible ink is transferred to a cake—serving as perhaps the most eye-catching examples.

Rye Su of bartending company Bear and Stone recently made a splash in Los Angeles with his Rittenhouse Rye-based cocktail The Last Chinese New Year, a tribute to his late grandfather. The colorful horse garnish is printed with edible ink on wafer paper, which doesn't alter the flavor profile of the drink. ■■

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SANTA BARBARA

THIS BIRD CAN SING: WHY **FINCH & FORK** AT THE **KIMPTON CANARY** IS ONE OF SANTA BARBARA'S LEADING RESTAURANTS AND COCKTAIL STOPS

Thinking Outside the Gilded Cage

by Meridith May

As a fan of Kimpton Hotels for many years now, I find “the Kimpton way” not only offers reliable comfort at choice locations, but a common thread of housing fine—and often trendsetting—dining. With my many travels to

Canary’s dog-friendly reputation (Yappy Hour, anyone?) and bar devoted to craft cocktails, and I’ve found there’s no better place to stay.

Let’s return to the trendsetting dining: The hotel’s restaurant, Finch & Fork, has

never been more creative. He’s always conceiving innovative ways to spotlight ingredients from local fishers, farmers, and ranchers, and the resulting dishes excel in invoking nostalgia and bit of surprise.

“James brings out flavors that are bold, but familiar,” Patrick Bryant, Director of Food and Beverage for the Canary and Finch & Fork, tells *The Tasting Panel*. “I love the simplicity of the dishes.” But after taking a single glance at Siao’s plated salmon with beluga lentils, asparagus, pancetta, green peppercorn hollandaise, capers, and baby turnips, one can’t help but think the chef’s style could perhaps be more accurately described as “elevated simplicity.”

Bryant, a 20-year industry veteran with experience in Las Vegas, understands the nature of high-end, high-volume restaurants and hotels, and his 360-degree view of the space keeps him constantly aware of his guests’ needs. The attention to detail is immediately apparent: Few cities harbor prominent hotels that offer a benchmark for spectacular cuisine, but this corner eatery makes the Canary fly higher than ever. ■■



This salmon dish from Finch & Fork Executive Chef James Siao can be described as “elevated simplicity.” Fresh ricotta cavatelli with housemade sausage ragout, braised Tuscan kale, crème fraiche, fennel pollen, and parmigiana.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KIMPTON HOTELS



Patrick Bryant in the General Manager and Operations Director for the Kimpton Canary Hotel in Santa Barbara, CA.

California’s Central Coast, my stops in Santa Barbara are frequent. More often than not, my nest there is the inviting Kimpton Canary Hotel, which is perched on a high-traffic corner downtown nearby the city’s best shopping and restaurants. Add these benefits to the

maintained its stellar reputation through the years with menus devised by talented chefs. With James Siao currently at the helm as Executive Chef (he also oversees the kitchen at another Kimpton restaurant, The Outpost at the Goodland, in nearby Goleta), the cuisine has



Finch & Fork Lead Bartender George Piperis creates signature cocktails that keep the locals flocking in daily for pre- and post-dinner quaffs. We especially enjoyed Barbie’s Bath Bomb, which combines Hangar One Vodka with rhubarb, tarragon, and grapefruit air.

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MUSIC'S RELATIONSHIP
WITH **JACK DANIEL'S** INSPIRES
DENVER BARTENDERS

by Jesse Hom-Dawson / photos by Jennifer Olson

Rock 'n' roll has always shared a close relationship with whiskey since its meteoric rise in popularity in the 1950s, and no whiskey brand has been more synonymous with the rock music scene than Jack Daniel's.

The company's alignment with music began many years before rock began dominating the charts: Founder Jasper Newton "Jack" Daniel worked with a local band to promote his whiskey and Frank Sinatra frequently extolled his love of the label. Yet rock 'n' roll is arguably the genre the company is most commonly associated with, and some of the greatest rock musicians of the past 50 years have been known for their consumption of Jack Daniel's, including Jimmy Page

of Led Zeppelin, Slash of Guns N' Roses, Lemmy of Motörhead, and Tom Petty. (We could go on, but it's a substantial list.) Rock isn't the only genre to have close ties with the famous whiskey brand, however—legendary country singers from Hank Williams, Jr. to Alan Jackson have mentioned Jack Daniel's in their songs.

One of the most iconic visual examples of music's love affair with Jack Daniel's is a photo of Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards onstage at a 1973 concert in Denver, Colorado; in the image, Richards faces his amp, on top of which rests two cans of Coors, a bottle of Jack, and a can of Coke. In an homage to this photo, Jack Daniel's National

Brand Ambassador Eric "E.T." Tecosky asked a pair of Denver bartenders to create a Jack Daniel's cocktail inspired by their favorite musician. "Music is how I discovered Jack Daniel's—my mother fed me rock 'n' roll in utero and my father is all Sinatra, all the time. Those worlds meet at Jack Daniel's, and I thought it would be fun to see how music inspires other bartenders," Tecosky explains.

Whether it's the song played at the end of a shift or a drink name-dropped in some memorable lyrics, music has long been a creative force in the cocktail industry—and these bartenders prove they're carrying their own talented tune at their respective establishments.

MATTIE COWAN,

Bar Manager and Beverage Curator at La Cour
Denver's Art Bar



Musical Inspiration: “My inspiration is Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, because ‘turn it up’ [the name of Cowan’s cocktail] is what you say anytime a Zeppelin song comes on, and it’s what you do with a bottle of Jack! There’s a photo taken backstage by Neal Preston in Indianapolis in 1975 just before Led Zeppelin takes the stage where Jimmy Page is taking a bottle of Jack Daniel’s and ‘turning it up,’” Cowan says. “My drink is an Old Fashioned that turns up the heat a little bit.”

Favorite Song to Play Behind the Bar: “The best song I could play behind the bar is Zeppelin’s ‘Whole Lotta Love,’ among other tracks of theirs. It’s got a progressive rock beat you can’t not nod your head along to, and it’s got great energy,” Cowan says.

Turn It Up

- ▶ 2 oz. Jack Daniel’s Tennessee Whiskey
- ▶ ½ oz. housemade ancho-cacao liqueur
- ▶ 2 dashes aromatic bitters

Serve in a double Old Fashioned glass smoked with cedar wood for a smoky flavor. Garnish with raw cacao nibs and flamed orange zest.

Aledo Old Fashioned

- ▶ 2 oz. Jack Daniel’s Tennessee Whiskey
- ▶ ¼ oz. banana liqueur
- ▶ ½ oz. black walnut liqueur
- ▶ 1 tbsp. turbinado sugar
- ▶ 2 dashes Angostura Bitters



ALEX KADY,

Bartender at Ste. Ellie

Musical Inspiration:

“Country singer-songwriter Margo Price’s music style is reminiscent of the music my father listened to while I was growing up,” Kady says. “Price’s song ‘Hurtin’ (On the Bottle)’ was my particular inspiration, with the lyrics ‘I put a hurtin’ on the bottle/Baby now I’m blind enough to see/I’ve been drinking whiskey like it’s water/But that don’t touch the pain you put on me.’ I wanted to create a boozy but easy-to-drink cocktail.”

Favorite Song to Play Behind the Bar: “It depends on whatever the crowd is into. Sundays I work solo and normally start my shift with Merle Haggard, then go to Vintage Trouble, followed by Sly and the Family Stone, and close it out with Salt-N-Pepa,” Kady says. ■■





Kristine Serrano, the New York finalist in Tequila Herradura's 2017 Bartender Legends cocktail competition, serves a Horseshoe Holi-daze cocktail featuring Tequila Herradura Añejo at the brand's holiday party in New York City last December.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZACK SHOOTS

A Historic Hacienda

LEGENDARY DISTILLER TEQUILA HERRADURA CELEBRATES ITS LEGACY OF INNOVATION

by David Ransom



Serrano served a trio of her creations—Naughty or Spice, Horseshoe Holi-daze, and Festivus Fashioned—made with three Tequila Herradura expressions.

To cap off a series of industry and consumer events commemorating nearly 150 years of excellence in tequila production, Tequila Herradura celebrated the legacy of its long-established traditions at its holiday party in New York City this past December.

Founded in 1870 at Hacienda San José del Refugio in the town of Amatitán, Tequila Herradura emerged as a leader in Jalisco's tequila industry shortly after its inception. The company can lay claim to some of the category's most influential innovations, including being the first distiller to release Reposado and Extra Añejo expressions in 1974 and 1995, respectively. Tequila Herradura also became the first tequila producer to employ a female master distiller when it appointed María Teresa Lara López to the role in 2009.

The event, held in the Presidential Suite of the Dream Hotel Downtown in the Meatpacking District, also highlighted the Tequila Herradura Legends 2017 cocktail competition. The program saw 32 bartenders compete in eight markets nationwide, with finalists from each market traveling to Jalisco to visit the legendary Tequila Herradura Hacienda.

New York finalist Kristine Serrano, who tends bar at The Astorian, a new establishment in Astoria, Queens, was also on hand to serve cocktails she created with Tequila Herradura: The Horseshoe Holi-daze with Tequila Herradura Añejo, the Naughty or Spice with Tequila Herradura Silver, and the Festivus Fashioned with Tequila Herradura's newest expression, Herradura Ultra. The release blends Tequila Herradura's Añejo with its premium Selección Suprema Extra Añejo, which ages for up to 49 months in American white oak barrels.

"Tequila Herradura is such an historic brand and taking part in the Legends competition was amazing," Serrano told *The Tasting Panel*. "I pushed myself so much further because of it, and it made me think of tequila in so many different ways while getting to know the Herradura brand."

The party also served to launch a new tradition for the company: As part of the "Gift of Giving a Party" sweepstakes, one lucky tequila lover won the chance to "gift" a Herradura party courtesy of the brand to ten friends. An abundance of free tequila? Not a bad way to capture the spirit of the season. ■■



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2. Nielsen FDCM+ Latest 26 w/e 12.23.17

3. Strongbow Brand Health Scorecard Aug '17



SIPPING ON Cloud 9

**NAPA'S ARCHER HOTEL AND
CHARLIE PALMER STEAK OPEN
SKY & VINE ROOFTOP BAR**

by Melissa Marrapese / photos by Alexander Rubin

Peter Triolo, Director of Food and Beverage for Archer Hotel and Charlie Palmer Steak; Jeff Russell, Executive Chef at Charlie Palmer Steak; and Ian Hoshino, General Manager of Charlie Palmer Steak, are pictured in front of Archer's magnificent map of Napa Valley.

Charlie Palmer Steak favorites from left to right: the steak sandwich, lobster corn dogs, charred broccolini, a bone-on tomahawk for two (center), truffle and bacon twice-baked potato, and assorted wild mushrooms.



New to Downtown Napa, Archer Hotel and Charlie Palmer Steak have already established a respected local reputation for their luxurious accommodations, upscale dining, and what's perhaps the most sought-after happy hour in Napa Valley.

Director of Food and Beverage Peter Triolo and Executive Chef Jeff Russell recently shared their vision for Archer's food and beverage program and Charlie Palmer Steak with *The Tasting Panel* while sitting fireside in the lobby of the boutique hotel—five floors below its Sky & Vine Rooftop Bar, a full-service restaurant and bar opening in April.

Sky & Vine will offer the same extensive selection of wine—predominantly from Napa Valley—that Charlie Palmer has downstairs, but the rooftop deck will expand on the restaurant's international offerings. Triolo and Russell say Sky & Vine's wine list will change every quarter to stay fresh and relevant while pairing with Russell's seasonal menus featuring locally-sourced ingredients. Triolo also plans to continue supporting



Director of Food and Beverage Peter Triolo supports local vintners in Napa in his by-the-glass program.

local vintners by offering glasses of select red, white, and sparkling wines for just \$7 during happy hour as patrons take in expansive views of some of the most scenic AVAs in California, from Stag's Leap to Mount Veeder.

Triolo, who originally hails from Modesto, California, began his career in the industry at 18, working for several years at the Four Seasons and serving as the General Manager at The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone. He now wears several hats at Archer, including managing the wine program at Charlie Palmer Steak, the happy hour in the hotel lounge, and now, Sky & Vine.

After working for Charlie Palmer Steak in Washington, D.C. and Denver, Russell spent a year in Napa Valley preparing for the opening of the new restaurant and built relationships with local producers in an effort to incorporate their ingredients into his menus.

For more information on Archer, Charlie Palmer Steak, and Sky & Vine, visit archerhotel.com. ■■

In Pursuit of PURITY

RUSSIAN STANDARD VODKA EPITOMIZES ITS HOME COUNTRY'S PROUD DISTILLING HERITAGE

by Matt Jackson / photos by Timothy Murray

More than just a name, Russian Standard Vodka pays homage to a cultural phenomenon dating back more than 100 years. In the late 1800s, Dimitri Mendeleev, a chemist who formulated one of the first versions of the periodic table, discovered what many considered to be the perfect balance between alcohol and water during his studies on equilibrium. In response, Tsar Alexander III established the "Russian Empire Standard" for vodka in 1894, the benchmark by which all subsequent versions of the spirit would be measured.

Just over a century later, entrepreneur Roustam Tariko founded Russian Standard Vodka, which quickly became Russia's number-one premium vodka brand. The legacy of the tsar's original decree lives on at Russian Standard Vodka's state-of-the-art distillation facility in St. Petersburg; built in 2006, the fully-automated distillery utilizes expertly-engineered equipment from around the world. The distillation units are the tallest of any in Europe, which leads to greater purity through its sophisticated continuous distillation process in which the vodka runs through natural birch charcoal. It then relaxes in tanks for more than 48 hours before bottling.



Russia's natural resources prove equally vital to the finished product's quality: Just 25 miles north of the Russian Standard Vodka distillery lies Lake Ladoga, the largest freshwater lake in Europe. Formed by 10,000-year-old glaciers, Lake Ladoga sits on a granite basin, preserving the water's softness at levels ideal for vodka production.

The Gold Standard

In 2010, Tariko launched Russian Standard Gold, a new expression inspired by an ancient recipe that incorporates extracts of Siberian ginseng. Also known as "the golden root," the plant has inspired belief since the 17th century that it lends increased mental alertness and greater physical endurance to those who consume it.

Grown and matured in the black soils of the Russian Steppes, slowly-matured winter wheat serves as the mash base for Russian Standard Gold Vodka, producing a clean taste with a subtle grain essence. Russian birch charcoal is employed in the filtration process, leaving a powerfully-flavorful yet pure vodka. "While Russian Standard Gold is great in cocktails, it's so pure and packed with character that it's a pleasure to sip neat or on the rocks," says Giulio Bertozzi, Vice President of

Marketing for Russian Standard Vodka. “We want to make a vodka that has character and that’s different from what other vodkas currently deliver.”

Russian Standard Gold was recently reintroduced to the market as “The Whiskey Drinker’s Vodka” not only due to its signature bold, full-bodied flavor, but its unmistakably luscious taste profile as well. “Not all vodkas are the same,” adds Bertozzi. “We want an audience who understands that and who wants to try something out of the mainstream—people who are willing to experiment and can appreciate the sipping experience of a quality spirit.”

Apothéke Raises the Bar

As it seeks to establish itself as a preferred brand for those typically gravitating toward darker spirits, Russian Standard Gold has emerged as a go-to vodka in bars with selective buyers and backbars with limited real estate.

Widely-lauded cocktail bar Apothéke in New York City’s Chinatown is one such establishment. “I like to showcase smaller brands that I feel are in line with our philosophy,” says Seth Bulkin, Apothéke’s Director of Operations. “From my experiences with vodka in Russia, most people prefer to drink it neat. If you’re going



Seth Bulkin is the Director of Operations at Apothéke, which features Russian Standard Gold on its widely-lauded cocktail menu.



Sparkling Vesper

Created by Seth Bulkin of Apothéke

- ▀ 1 oz. Russian Standard Gold Vodka
- ▀ 1 oz. Lillet Blanc
- ▀ ½ oz. lemon juice
- ▀ ½ oz. cucumber and juniper syrup

Muddle cucumber and juniper berries in a shaker, then add ingredients and shake over ice. Strain into a glass, top with Champagne and garnish with cucumber ribbon.

to do that, you should use a quality vodka with outstanding flavor like Russian Standard Gold.”

The cocktails at Apothéke—which also recently opened a Los Angeles location—are made with the same painstaking attention to detail that Russian Standard employs in its distillation process. “Everything is made in-house and juices are squeezed fresh daily. We also bring in exotic ingredients and Chinatown local produce that is more exclusive to our area,” Bulkin says. Russian Standard Gold’s addition of Siberian ginseng makes it a fitting base spirit for Apothéke’s incredibly popular Sparkling Vesper, a confluence of juniper berries, cucumber, lemon, Lillet Blanc, and Champagne.

With its persistent quality and subtle

market presence, Russian Standard Gold aims to appeal to the craft mixologist seeking authentic spirits to lend their cocktails a distinctive character. This authenticity is reflected not only in the spirit itself, but in the bottle as well: An intentional homage to St. Petersburg’s baroque architecture, the bottle’s antique feel and finely-crafted filigree embossing give the drinker the sense that he or she has been transported to another time. “Russian Standard Gold is not the billboard-blasted spirit with the famed actor or musician attached to it—it’s an elegant spirit housed in an ornate bottle highly reminiscent of old-world Russia,” says Bulkin. “The goal is for our guests to see and taste something extraordinary, leaving the real world at the door.” ■■

Linger at Loquita

A SLICE OF SPAIN THRIVES IN SANTA BARBARA

by Hana-Lee Sedgwick / photos by Rob Stark



In Santa Barbara, CA, Loquita celebrates authentic Spanish cuisine.



Loquita Executive Chef Peter Lee.

Given Santa Barbara's historic roots in Spanish culture, cuisine, and architecture—and a similar Mediterranean climate to boot—it was only a matter of time before a restaurant in the coastal Californian city would center itself around paying tribute to the country's signature flavors. That's the idea behind Loquita, a new restaurant concept that wholeheartedly celebrates Spain while still feeling authentically Santa Barbara-esque in style.

Named after the colloquial Spanish term for a wild, fun-loving young girl, Loquita is located at the gateway to the Funk Zone, the city's formerly-abandoned warehouse district that's been transformed into a mecca of wine, food, and art. As the sixth venture of Acme Hospitality, the team behind popular Funk Zone establishments like The Lark and Lucky Penny, Loquita is a welcome addition to the neighborhood. "It was the right time to dedicate our next restaurant to the incredible culture and food that Spain is known for, but interpreted by a contemporary California sensibility," says Sherry Villanueva, Managing Partner for Acme Hospitality.

Loquita's kitchen is led by Executive Chef Peter Lee, formerly of the Michelin three-star restaurant Joël Robuchon in Las Vegas. Tasked with creating a menu that showcases simple Spanish food with a modern Californian twist, Lee looked to some of the nation's best Spanish restaurants for inspiration and soon discovered the incredible diversity of the country's cuisine.

The resulting menu, which consists of inventive spins on traditional dishes, is designed to evoke a festive, communal dining experience—a playful nod to the tapas bars of Spain. Offerings include traditional pintxos, or one-bite morsels on a skewer; an extensive tapas menu; and Loquita's signature paella offered in vegetarian, seafood, and chicken and chorizo versions. The dish's base of tomatoes, chilies, and garlic cooks for six hours before it's mixed with Spanish bomba rice and a variety of ingredients straight from a nearby farmers market; meant to be shared by the entire table, the meal leaves a lasting impression.

Lee's personal favorite menu item is the wagyu beef carpaccio, which he describes as an inherently Italian dish made with the flavors of Spain and California. "I use pickled mustard seeds, Manzanilla olives, 12-year-aged Sherry vinegar, shallots, Arbequina olive oil, and fried parsley for crunchy texture," he shares. "It's a surprising dish."

Adding to the fun is Loquita's Sunday brunch, where guests can enjoy patatas bravas, smoked salmon Benedict, and the popular Spanish French toast with oranges. Wash it all down with a fresh and salty Green Gazpacho Bloody Mary over a live flamenco dancing performance, and you've got yourself a memorable Sunday afternoon.

The restaurant's contemporary interior, decorated with gilded Baroque-style mirrors, antique brass lights, and an expansive walnut bar, successfully mixes European elements with Santa Barbara's relaxed yet refined ambiance (adding to the classic yet festive vibe is a large outdoor patio complete with fireplaces adorned with sardine cans). The indelible atmosphere makes it a worthy space for paying homage to Spain without leaving the confines of sunny California: You could say it's the perfect spot for a springtime staycation. ■■



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PHOTO COURTESY OF NICO OSTERIA



BRET HEIAR

Wine Director at Publican Anker and Nico Osteria, Chicago, IL

Publican Anker's menu showcases fish and seafood, which can be somewhat limiting in that it's mostly paired with crisp white wines.

What's your personal take on pairing seafood with wine?

There are many red, orange, and pink wines that go great with seafood, as there's a wide variation of texture, fat content, and preparation methods. To simplify things by saying only white wine goes with all seafood is like saying Steve Harvey should only wear boring suits (for the record, his suits are fabulous).

Which wine regions have you seen become more prominent with your guests at both Publican Anker and Nico Osteria, or within the industry as a whole?

Beaujolais, Etna, and the Loire. I've been trying to get people to drink more from these regions for years, but only in the last few years have they blown up. We sell more Gamay Noir than Pinot Noir, and we sell more Cab Franc than Cabernet. People are over extremes: The days of over-the-top hoppy beers and Franken wines have gone the way of JNCO Jeans and Pauly Shore. People want balance and honest wines, and more and more of them are drinking wine as a lifestyle. It's kind of like dessert—when you eat it once a year, you want it to be decadent, but if you start eating it every day, you want your fruits and veggies.

TEDDY PANOS

Beverage Director at Stake Chophouse & Bar, Coronado, CA

What is your current ideal wine, food/snack, music, and atmosphere pairing?

My ideal pairing would be jazz music playing in a French bistro with some pâté and salade lyonnaise, simple steak frites, and some great Burgundy or Beaujolais.

Which wine region warrants special attention right now?

Hungary and Portugal are two great countries to keep an eye on. Hungary has some great dry white wines that are great apéritif wines and dinner pairings. Portugal has some hidden gems, such as red wines from Barriada and Alentejo. All are very reasonably priced and delicious.

Finally, what are some wine trends we should be aware of at the moment?

I think a trend right now is Champagne. The region is producing some fantastic site-specific wines from small producers. At Stake, I'm currently offering Champagne flights—they're a huge success and have been quick to sell out! ■■



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUE BRIDGE HOSPITALITY

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

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LOS ANGELES



As General Manager at Tallula's in Santa Monica, CA, Mary Thompson culls housemade syrups, farmers market produce, and other fresh ingredients to use in her impressive list of Margaritas and Palomas.

A Somm's Eye View for Southwest Food and Drink

SANTA MONICA MEXICAN EATERY **TALLULA'S** IS RUN BY A GROUP WITH A TRACK RECORD OF TALENT AND EXPERIENCE

by Meredith May / photos by Rick Poon



Tallula's Chef/Partner Jeremy Fox uses sustainably-farmed meats and seafood and the freshest local and seasonal produce for his signature "homecooked-style" dishes.

A vibrant cantina offering seaside views just off the Pacific Coast Highway, the hacienda "estate" that is Tallula's offers Mexican comfort food and ingredient-driven cocktails to its sun-kissed patrons in Santa Monica, California.

Those cocktails come courtesy of General Manager Mary Thompson, who worked alongside some of the most cutting-edge chefs in Southern California before joining up with the RC Group, a family-owned restaurant company that includes Rustic Canyon, Milo & Olive, Cassia, Esters Wine Shop & Bar, and Huckleberry Café.

At Tallula's, Thompson has curated a bar program that's both innovative and craft-motivated by taking a sommelier's eye view, choosing vintage-dated or small-production, agave-based spirits for her menu. "I enjoy the hunt," she tells *The Tasting Panel*. "These small brands take a cue from the wine industry, and I'm selecting products that speak to place and the people that make them."

As expected for a Mexican eatery, Tallula's, which opened in May 2017, places a reliable spotlight on the Margarita—but Thompson ensures her bar team finds ways to expand the parameters of the classic cocktail. "I like to push for recipes that are memorable," she explains. "I imagine myself taking our customers on a tour of what's out there with agave spirits."

Wine Director Kathryn Coker oversees a global selection of wines from Spain, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Italy, France, and the U.S., finding labels that pair well with the creative dishes rich in flavor and texture. Coker also co-owns Esters with the same trio behind Tallula's—Josh Loeb, Zoe Nathan, and Chef Jeremy Fox—and it's the addition of these ultra-professionals that makes the Santa Monica cantina a standout in a crowded field of Mexican cuisine. From spending just one meal inside Tallula's southwest-inspired interior, with the inimitable California sunshine pouring through the windows and the ocean just steps away, it's clear it's a special place to work. ■■

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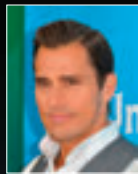
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Rosé REPORT

Refining A New Classic

WINEMAKER MELISSA STACKHOUSE
PREVIEWS THE MEIOMI 2017 ROSÉ

by Diane Denham / photos by John Curley

The Meiomi 2017 Rosé, crafted by Director of Winemaking Melissa Stackhouse, will be the winery's first rosé available for broad distribution.

My friend Kevin is a self-described “recovering” California Cabernet drinker who finally discovered a Pinot Noir he could appreciate in Meiomi’s lush style, and he’s never looked back. When I mentioned I would be interviewing Melissa Stackhouse, Meiomi’s Director of Winemaking, for *The Tasting Panel*, he begged me to ask for her autograph on a bottle of Pinot Noir.

It should come as no surprise, then, that he was equally excited for Meiomi’s new rosé, which launched nationally in March: Stackhouse’s status as a rockstar winemaker is cemented with this new release, and with young consumers clamoring for dry rosés, my friend won’t be the only one eager to get their hands on a bottle.

In regards to Stackhouse herself, the effortlessly-cool winemaker drives a red pickup so old it’s considered “a classic” and is the type to make good on a wager—no matter how embarrassing the pay-up. (One lost bet required cheering on a marathoning colleague. In a bikini. During winter.) And despite her impressive credentials—including a decade at La Crema Winery and stints at Jackson Family Wines, Clos du Bois, and J Vineyards & Winery—Stackhouse is quick to point out that successful winemaking requires the collaborative efforts of “the team.”

Meiomi’s grapes are sourced from vineyards located in the coastal Northern California counties of Santa Barbara, Monterey, and Sonoma (fittingly, Meiomi means “coastal” in the language of the indigenous Wappo tribe). During our interview, Stackhouse elaborated on the critical role the coastal vineyards play in the style and success of Meiomi Rosé.

Melissa Stackhouse: When we were discussing ways to expand the portfolio, a rosé predominantly of Pinot Noir made perfect sense, especially since it was important to continue sourcing from the three coastal counties. It was exciting as well, because it was the first wine our team launched from scratch [after former owner Joe Wagner sold Meiomi to Constellation Brands] and we were able to make the decisions on the style and the fruit-sourcing. I love rosé and I love making it, so it just felt right.



The 2017 Meiomi Rosé, which made its national debut in March, is sourced from vineyards in three Northern California counties. “The tri-county origins allowed us to make a Provençal-style rosé with lovely aromas and watermelon and bright cherry flavors,” says Winemaker Melissa Stackhouse.

“People may have expected us to make a robust, rounded rosé to mirror our Pinot Noir, but while all Meiomi wines reflect their coastal origin, I think each wine should be the best version of its own style.” —Melissa Stackhouse

Rosé REPORT



Melissa Stackhouse embraced the idea of adding a predominantly–Pinot Noir rosé to the Meiomi portfolio. “It just felt right,” she told *The Tasting Panel*.

Diane Denham: I noticed there’s a smaller percentage of Santa Barbara fruit in the rosé than in the other wines.

MS: Santa Barbara fruit can be darker, and we wanted more restraint in the rosé. The Pinot Noir from Santa Barbara is beautiful but brooding, and we wanted more watermelon and bright cherry flavors. We like to maximize the components to pull from as we’re putting the blends together, so the tri-county origins are the most important thing. That gives us a large palette to work with. When you think about the Pinot, it’s really dense and rich, and the idea of making a rosé like that isn’t very appealing. We’re going more toward a Provençal style with bright acidity: a wine that’s mouthwatering and a little coy. With the coastal fruit, you can get that.

DD: The 2016 was the limited first release, and 2017 will be the first vintage that Meiomi Rosé will be in broad distribution. How was the 2017 vintage for you?

MS: The 2017 vintage was challenging but ultimately really rewarding. All the fruit was in before the wildfires, but the intense heat spike that occurred around Labor Day quickened ripening and was followed by rain a few weeks later. We had to make some quick decisions, but we ended up with beautifully ripe fruit and great acidity, which have turned into wines we’re really excited about.

DD: So much for the even vintage variation California is famous for!

MS: *(laughs)* Everyone thinks California vintages are so predictable, and that’s so not true. There’s a lot of vintage variation in California. The 2017 vintage was no exception, but I feel really good about the wines.

DD: What do you like to pair with the rosé at home?

MS: I always think of rosé as a lunch wine. I love it with seafood salads, and when I was in Florida recently, we had it with spicy tuna. We also tried it with a smoky asparagus dish with a chutney on top. With asparagus, pairing can be tricky, but it’s all in how it’s prepared. I always tell people that some food and wine pairings can be surprising. Oftentimes how a food is prepared can either help or hinder the actual pairing.

DD: Any final thoughts?

MS: We had so much fun making the Meiomi Rosé. People may have expected us to make a robust, rounded rosé to mirror our Pinot Noir, but while all Meiomi wines reflect their coastal origin, I think each wine should be the best version of its own style, and rosé just begs to be the light, crisp go-to on a hot day. ■■

Rosé REPORT

PHOTO: CHRISTINA SLATON

Ryan Arnold, Divisional Wine Director at Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, recommends those new to rosé select by hue, as that can signal whether the wine is dry or sweet.

Always in Season

RETAILERS AND
SOMMS ALIKE
LAUD THE **STAYING**
POWER OF ROSÉ

by Vicki Denig

The

experts have spoken: After it emerged as one of the biggest beverage trends of 2017, rosé is officially here to stay. Once referred to as “summer water,” rosé has finally proved itself as a year-round staple, and it’s easy to see why. Once dismissed as a simple thirst quencher meant solely for gulping down on a hot day, today’s well-made rosé hails from various regions all over the world and is one of the most versatile styles of wine on the market, ranging from dry to sweet and light-bodied to full.

Sommeliers and shop owners are increasingly touting their preferred producers and regions to consumers, as background knowledge is especially vital when it comes to selecting quality rosé. According to Ryan Arnold, Divisional Wine Director of Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, a single grape variety can range so much in style that it isn’t always ideal to choose rosé by that criterion. “Location and variety don’t dictate any strict flavor profile; it’s dictated by the winery,” he explains, noting that a few specific Old World regions like Provence, Bandol, and Tavel serve as exceptions due to their more distinct styles. Arnold also recommends that those newer to rosé select by hue, as lighter rosés tend to fall on the crisper, drier side whereas darker-colored rosés are fuller-bodied and often—though not always—sweeter.

Rosé REPORT



PHOTO COURTESY OF VICTORIA JAMES

Victoria James is the Beverage Director of Gracious Hospitality Management in New York City and the author of *Drink Pink: A Celebration of Rosé*.

The Regionality of Rosé

Victoria James, Beverage Director of Gracious Hospitality Management in New York City, told *The Tasting Panel* she gravitates toward rosés “that, like great reds and whites, speak to a region and history.” The *Drink Pink: A Celebration of Rosé* author also harbors an appreciation for both Old World “classic wines from classic producers” and New World rosé from cooler-climate regions like California’s Santa Ynez, New York’s Finger Lakes, and Victoria, Australia. Some of her top picks are Château de Trinquedel Tavel Rosé, Domaine Comte Abbattu, Terrassen Rosé, and Railsback Frères Les Rascasses Rosé, all of which are currently being poured at Gracious Hospitality Management’s Cote Korean Steakhouse in Manhattan’s Flatiron district.

When creating an enviable selection of rosé at Bacchanal Wines in New Orleans, Wine Director Joe Briand also aims to highlight regional variety. Briand says the store currently offers 25 rosé wines—a lineup that will only increase as the weather gets warmer. “Rosé is a huge part of the wine program at Bacchanal,” he explains, adding that Founder Chris Rudge, who died in 2015, was a vocal proponent of the category long before its recent renaissance.

Bacchanal always has a selection of wines from Bandol and Côtes de Provence, the latter of which Briand describes as “some of the best values in rosé.” He reveals that Sancerre and Txakolina wines are huge sellers at the shop, but Briand is currently most excited about Austrian rosé. “The wines are delicious and refreshing—what people expect from rosé—and it’s much easier to get someone to try [popular Austrian grapes] Blaufränkisch and Zweigelt when they’re pink,” he explains.



Size (Sometimes) Matters

Call it a trend within a trend: This year, James reveals she's excited to buy more large-format rosés. "At Cote [steakhouse], we believe bigger is better," she says, adding that magnums keep the wine younger and fresher in addition to being more striking aesthetically. "With less overall exposure to the effects of oxygen through the cork, the aging process of wine in a magnum takes around one and a half times longer than a normal bottle."

James did caution, however, that the focus on size can often become "gimmicky," as less-prestigious producers will bottle cheap wine in big bottles in an attempt to capitalize on magnums' popularity ("Mass-marketed swill that is produced with industrial yeast and made to all taste the same—no thanks," James quips). Like Arnold, James recommends consumers prioritize seeking out producers known for making high-quality wine before they purchase larger bottles.



New Orleans' Bacchanal Wines offers 25-plus rosé wines in its store. Founder Chris Rudge—who died in 2015—"was a serious warrior for rosé before it was cool," according to Bacchanal Wine Director Joe Briand.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BACCHANAL

Low Risk, High Reward

Rosé-themed events provide yet another opportunity for industry members and consumers alike to build excitement around the category. Bacchanal holds an annual backyard party, where, according to Briand, attendees consistently seek out rosés as their drink of choice.

Bacchanal also hosts an annual Rosé Fest, which features 60 different rosés poured by an array of distributors. Guests then vote on their favorite label, with the winner remaining stocked in the store for the full year. "Everyone dresses in pink and we have music going throughout the day as we celebrate rosé," Briand says, describing the event as "one of the busiest days all year."

As rosé climbs in popularity, its well-deserved reputation as a stellar option for food and wine pairing has as well. Briand recommends pairing a darker-hued Tavel with heartier foods, while Arnold suggests a lighter rosé like Domaine de Triennes, which works well with seafood dishes like the *ahi tuna tostada* at Lettuce Entertain

You's restaurant Summer House Santa Monica in Santa Monica, California.

James, meanwhile, outlines an array of classic recipes and rosé pairings from chefs and sommeliers around the world in her book, citing chef/restaurateur Alice Waters' anchovy toasts paired with Domaine Tempier Bandol rosé as one of her favorite match-ups.

Ultimately, Briand believes the true allure of rosé lies in its ability to encourage customers to expand their horizons sans apprehension—especially given the category's affordability. "I think one of the great things about rosé is that people have an open mind about trying new things," he says. "It's always fun to have a table of people trying multiple rosés from all over the place; they might start in Provence, and before you know it, we've got them drinking rosé from Lebanon and a Cilieggiolo rosé from [the Italian region] Liguria." Fashionable, reasonably-priced, and coveted around the world? No wonder this wayfaring wine is always in season. ■■

Bacchanal Wines hosts an annual Rosé Fest featuring 60 rosés poured by an array of distributors. Guests then vote on their favorite label, with the winner remaining stocked in the store for the full year.

Rosé REPORT

A Trailblazer Heads West

RIVAROSE SHINES AS THE FIRST IGP MÉDITERRANÉE SPARKLING ROSÉ WINE TO ENTER THE U.S. MARKET

by Karen Moneymaker

Located in Salon de Provence, Rivarose has been making sparkling rosé since 1909 and is the region's oldest producer within the category.

American novelist Gertrude Stein once famously said that “a rose is a rose is a rose”—a sentiment that rings especially true as rosé’s presence proliferates on bar shelves and wine lists. Yet Rivarose Brut, the first IGP Méditerranée sparkling rosé wine to enter the U.S. market, might pose an exception to that rule, as this “rose” goes by another name: “trailblazer.”

Rivarose’s recent American debut has been decades in the making: The company has produced sparkling wine in Salon de Provence since 1909, making its flagship product the oldest sparkling rosé from IGP Méditerranée. This bolsters Rivarose’s reputation in an increasingly-crowded category, according to Julien Lepont, Marketing Director for Rivarose’s parent company Veuve Ambal. “Rivarose is hitting U.S. shores at a time when the interest in

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IMAGE ET ASSOCIÉS

rosé and sparkling wines has never been higher,” he says. “Both rosé and sparkling wines are now seen as apéritifs suitable year-round—not just seasonally.”

Rosé has indeed reached new heights of popularity in recent years, with sales jumping 53 percent in the U.S. in the year from mid-2016 to mid-2017, according to Nielsen data. Sparkling rosé sales are also skyrocketing, growing 19 percent in 2017 as the broader sparkling wine category grew by just 6 percent.

Even before Rivarose’s stateside debut, wine consumers living in the warmer climes of the U.S. could already attest that the marriage of rosé and sparkling wine from the south of France is a fortuitous coupling. “Rivarose is the perfect embodiment of the Mediterranean *art de vivre*,” says Lepont. “It perfectly captures the sun, air, and feeling of life in the region, inviting wine lovers to step away from the day-to-day and enjoy a virtual vacation and a bit of conviviality.”



Rivarose “perfectly captures the sun, air, and feeling of life” in the south of France, says Julien Lepont, Marketing Director for Rivarose’s parent company Veuve Ambal.

“The Bubbles of France”

Known for its bowling pin-shaped bottle patented by Provence winemakers in the 1920s, Rivarose underwent a subtle packaging update that coincided with its U.S. release. But while the wine may be traversing to new territory, its aesthetic still speaks decidedly to its home region.

“We wanted to show off the evocative wine color, so the label and capsule are simple and elegant as to not distract from the wine’s jewel-toned hue,” explains Lepont. “It was very important to us that this be seen as a Mediterranean-style wine and not a crémant alternative, so the light-blue and gilded front label communicates the atmosphere of our beautiful terrain in the south of France. With our center medallion label, our goal was to clearly indicate the wine’s source and origin, and the label is framed by the region’s famous laurels.”

Rivarose’s simple yet striking bottle is matched by its equally-sophisticated contents. The wine features a blend of Syrah grapes sourced from what Lepont calls the “exceptional terroir” of the southern Rhône Valley. Harvested at night to retain maximum freshness and brightness, the grapes are then vinified in Rivarose’s Salon-de-Provence cellars before aging for six months “to create an effervescent Brut Rosé—or as we refer to it, the ‘Bulles de France,’ meaning ‘the bubbles of France,’” Lepont adds.

While others may follow in its footsteps as this now-ubiquitous category makes way for more members, there’s no doubt that Rivarose is—and will continue to be—the Mediterranean sparkling rosé. ■■



Rivarose Sparkling Brut Rosé:

At a Glance

Designation: IGP
Méditerranée Sparkling
(created in 2015)

Varieties: Syrah grown
in top terroirs of the
Mediterranean

Tasting Notes: Aromas
of peach blossoms and
raspberry-kissed rose pet-
als followed by delicately-
appointed flavors of pink
grapefruit, wet stone,
and Rainier cherry. On
the palate, the bubbles
are elegant and diminish
gracefully on the tongue.

Serving Suggestion: A
perfect apéritif that pairs
wonderfully with cured
meats, crudités, Provençal
dishes, or an afternoon
with friends

Suggested Retail Price: \$18

The Insider Track

VIBE BEVERAGE
CONFERENCE ATTENDEES
TRAVERSE DOWN THE
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
COAST BY TRAIN WITH PR
GURU PATRICK HENRY

by Jesse Hom-Dawson
photos by Todd Westphal

Train rides evoke a bygone era of elegance, when passengers dressed up for travel and settled in for a quiet experience often replete with indulgent amenities. The novelty—and any sense of privacy—is all but absent from modern-day travel hubs like crowded airports and stifling subway cars, but big buyers in the food and beverage industry experienced quite the luxurious change of pace during a recent train trip to the Very Important Beverage Executives (VIBE) Conference in San Diego, California.

The expansive, private three-car train—owned by Texas-based marketing agency Patrick Henry Creative Promotions, which sponsored the trip—traversed southward along the AmTrak Pacific Surfliner track as passengers settled in on leather seats inside a glass-domed area on the second level.

A spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean from the caboose.





All aboard! Anna Orton-Pujol of Mastro's, Patrick Henry of Patrick Henry Creative Promotions, Robbi Jo Oliver of Mastro's, Andrew McGinnis of Beach Whiskey, Sharyn Regan of Ruby Tuesday's, and Billy Bush of Beach Whiskey get ready to hop on the train at Union Station in Los Angeles as they depart for the VIBE Conference in San Diego, CA.

A journey to a beverage conference wouldn't be complete without cocktails, and the passengers gathered to order options ranging from Piña Coladas with Beach Whiskey Island Coconut to a Martini riff featuring Absolut Elyx and orange bitters. With a refreshing drink in hand, the guests were greeted by hosts Andrew McGinnis and Billy Bush—both of Beach Whiskey—and Patrick Henry himself.

As lunch was served inside the dining car reminiscent of *Murder on the Orient Express* (minus the titular crime, thankfully), the passengers took in unobstructed views of the Pacific Ocean as the train wound its way down the coast. New acquaintances were made as the likeminded group caught each other up on trends and developments unfolding behind the scenes in the beverage industry, but the ride wasn't all cocktails and work: Author and train enthusiast Eric W. Peterson also handed out copies of his 2016 novel *The Dining Car*, which fittingly takes place on a vintage private railroad car.

After what seemed like too short a time, the train pulled up to the historic Santa Fe Depot in downtown San Diego, where guests disembarked to attend the opening event of the VIBE Conference at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina. Although the main event was still forthcoming, the train trip gave participants an unconventional experience to remember long after the conference concluded. ■■



The train, owned by Texas-based marketing agency Patrick Henry Creative Promotions, featured a surprisingly-large lounge and dining car where guests could mingle and enjoy their drinks.



The viewing dome on the second story of the train inspired a toast from a group of attendees: Andrew McGinnis of Beach Whiskey, Sam Spoehr of Bludso's Bar & Que, Jesse Hom-Dawson of *The Tasting Panel*, and Mary Beth and Tenner Gallagher of Hahn Wine Company.

A SPOONFUL of LUXURY



An event launching the “Year of Aszú” campaign in the U.S. was recently hosted by Dr. László Szabó, Hungarian Ambassador to the United States, at the Embassy of Hungary in Washington, D.C. Organizers included Attila Balla, Vinum Tokaj International President/CEO; Péter Molnár, Ph.D., General Manager at Patricius Winery and Member of the Board of the National Council of the Hungarian Wine Communities; Enikő Magyar, Wines of Excellence Project Director; Dr. László Szabó, Hungarian Ambassador to the United States; Dr. Ákos Horváth, Agricultural Attaché for the Embassy of Hungary; and Cliff Rames, Editor-At-Large of *The SOMM Journal*.



ESSENCIA, THE EXALTED ELIXIR OF HUNGARY'S TOKAJ REGION, PRESENTS A WINE EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER

by Cliff Rames / photos by Nick Klein

For all its glory and romance, it can be easy to forget that great wine ultimately represents an agricultural product—albeit a finely-crafted one. The notion that a farmer could harvest a cluster of grapes affected by noble rot somewhere on a golden, volcanic slope, and that the nectar of these unsightly, shriveled berries could produce an elixir revered by kings and queens, composers, politicians, and master sommeliers alike, is a concept that seems almost fantastical.

I was profoundly reminded of the magical bond between the farmer and the maître d, vineyard, and dining room when I had the distinct privilege of tasting one of the world's most unctuous wines, Essencia, during a formal reception at the Embassy of Hungary in Washington, D.C. Served from a crystal spoon in lieu of traditional glassware, the sweet and complex Hungarian import both electrified my senses and incited

in me a childlike wonder, as though I had just tasted a liquid fairy tale.

The reception served to commemorate the launch of “The Year of Aszú,” a campaign promoting the historical sweet wines of the Tokaj region. Hosted by Dr. László Szabó, Hungarian Ambassador to the United States, and co-hosted by *The Tasting Panel* and Vinum Tokaj International, the event unfurled in grand style with informative presentations, a buffet of Hungarian cuisine, and a distinguished selection of Aszú wines, including the crystal spoonful of Essencia: the crown jewel of the evening. “Essencia is a rare and exquisite treat. Anyone who has ever tasted it realizes that it is unique—a wine unlike anywhere else in the world,” Ambassador Szabó told guests, adding that Essencia is “truly one of the world's finest treasures” with “intense sweetness balanced by wonderful volcanic minerality and acidity.”

Dr. Péter Molnár, Ph.D., who serves as President of the Viticultural Section of the Tokaj Regional Council of Wine Communities, led a discussion of more than 500-year tradition of viticulture and winemaking in Tokaj, the first closed wine region of the world. Molnár, also a Member of the Board of the National Council of Wine Communities, explored the characteristics of Hungary's indigenous varieties and the distinctive, incomparable character of Aszú wines—six of which were available for tasting from different wineries.

The assembled group of 85 sommeliers, restaurant owners, wine professionals, media representatives, and other VIPs sipped Tokaj Dry Furmint selections and the Aszú wines before finally sampling the Royal Tokaji 2008 Essencia in crystal spoons—the recommended method for tasting the wine. “[It’s] like a child taking his medicine,” joked Ambassador Szabó.

“ESSENCIA is a rare and exquisite treat. Anyone who has ever tasted it realizes that it is unique—a wine unlike anywhere else in the world.”

—DR. LÁSZLÓ SZABÓ, Hungarian Ambassador to the United States



A distinguished selection of Aszú wines from Béres, Chateau Dereszla, Gróf Degenfeld, Grand Tokaj, Patricius and Royal Tokaji wineries was presented to a gathering of sommeliers, restaurant owners, and wine professionals to celebrate “The Year of Aszú” campaign. Considered to be the best natural sweet wine and among the greatest wine varieties in the world, Aszú embodies Hungary’s rich winemaking history.



USHERING IN THE “Year of Aszú”

In collaboration with the Hungarian Tourism Agency and some leading Hungarian wineries, Vinum Tokaj International President Attila Balla and Wines of Excellence Project Director Enikő Magyar have been serving as ambassadors for the Tokaj region’s storied and utterly unique wine culture. Read on for more information on the “Year of Aszú” as they help introduce the campaign to the North American market.

What is the message of the “Year of Aszú” initiative?

As part of a three year-long campaign, we’re educating the North American trade and consumers about Hungarian wines, with a special focus on the traditional Tokaji wine specialties. Followed by the successful “Year of Furmint” campaign in 2017, when wine buyers embraced the fine dry Furmint wines considered the new taste of the world, this year’s focus will be on Aszú presented together with other sweet wine specialties.

Our joint aim is to reposition Aszú in the world’s wine market and strip away the limitations of its reputation as a “dessert wine.” We want to see it as the wine of choice for consumers who seek high quality and uniqueness in wines, as well as a favorite wine of Millennial cocktail lovers.

Ultimately, this campaign aims to present and communicate Hungarian wines as dynamic and youthful brands and make as many wine connoisseurs acquainted with them as possible in the U.S. and Canada.

Several prestigious beverage programs serve Essencia in crystal spoons. What benefits does this serving method offer when introducing Aszú to American consumers?

Serving rare Tokaji by the crystal spoon can transmit the story of the wines, and when it’s offered by the crystal spoon in flights, it becomes an affordable way for people to taste wines from different vineyards and vintages side by side. Tasting by the spoon allows guest to decide which one they would like to choose by the glass or bottle, which can help restaurants increase sales.

Each spoon is half an ounce, so when you buy a one-ounce flight, you can share it. It’s a very romantic way to taste wine for couples, too.

How can bars and restaurants interested in serving wine by the crystal spoon implement their own programs?

The first message would be to understand and transmit the message of uniqueness: As the best natural sweet wines in the world, Tokaj wines with their balance and complexity offer a truly outstanding experience for guests that cannot be reproduced elsewhere.

Bars and restaurants also shouldn’t refrain from experimenting to discover the endless possibilities of food and wine pairing with Aszú and other sweet specialty wines. Aszú can be utilized as a fascinating pairing partner and finds its place in almost all nation’s cuisines, being it Asian, Indian, Mediterranean, or, of course, traditional Hungarian.

We are ready to help interested accounts with customized selections to meld seamlessly with their wine program. Aszú is an exciting product and we are looking forward to a great year of celebrating it with new partners.

Natural Treasures:

Tasting Tokaji Aszú Wines and Essencia



Pictured at the Benjamin Bar and Lounge in the Trump International Hotel in D.C., Daniel Mahdavian and Péter Molnár, Ph.D., General Manager at Patricius Winery and Member of the Board of the National Council of Hungarian Wine Communities, discuss the potential for introducing Hungarian museum wines into high-end wine programs across the country.

Essencia is the richest and rarest of all Tokaji wines. At the Benjamin Bar and Lounge, crystal spoons of the Royal Tokaji 2007 Essencia go for \$140 a serving. "Once the guests taste it, it sells itself," says Director of Food and Beverage Daniel Mahdavian.

Daniel Mahdavian first fell in love with Tokaji Essencia in 2000 during his tenure as the Director of Restaurants and Wine at the Ritz-Carlton, Washington, D.C. The price of Sauternes had skyrocketed, and Mahdavian needed an alternative for his wine list. “What attracted me most was the story of Tokaj and the terroir and history of Hungary,” says Mahdavian, who now serves as the Director of Food and Beverage at the Trump International Hotel in D.C. “I remember tasting Tokaji Aszú and Essencia for the first time from a crystal spoon. It was the most delicious and amazing thing!”

When Mahdavian began developing the wine program at the hotel in 2016, he knew the Tokaji Aszú and especially the Essencia would be a perfect match for the venue’s clientele and menu. “We wanted to come up with an original wine program through ideas that were luxurious and different, something truly unique that people had never before seen,” he explains. “The Tokaji Aszú and Essencia offered me the opportunity to provide a taste of nobility—the ‘Wine of Kings and the King of Wines’—for an accessible price. A taste of rare Tokaji from a crystal spoon awakens a sense of luxury unlike anything people have previously experienced, and with 48 wines and 18 Champagnes by the glass, it was only appropriate to offer Royal Tokaji wines from four different vineyards and four different terroirs by the crystal spoon.”

Mahdavian’s guests can currently sample four Aszú wines: the 2009 5 Puttonyos at \$15 a glass; the 2008 6 Puttonyos Betsek Vineyard at \$20 a glass; the 2009 6 Puttonyos Mézes Mály Vineyard at \$29 a glass; and the 2007 Essencia at \$140 a spoon. “When you taste these four Tokaji wines side by side, a light goes on in your head, and you think, ‘Wow! I didn’t know a vineyard, a terroir, or a vintage could change how a wine produced from the same grapes can taste,’” Mahdavian says.

The Process Behind the Pour

Stemming from a painstaking process dating back to 1641, Tokaji Essencia is traditionally produced from Furmint, Hárslevelű, and Yellow Muscat grapes desiccated by Botrytis cinerea, or noble rot. That process can be cumbersome, to say the least: The dried and mold-covered grapes are hand-harvested one berry at a time,

and approximately 20 kilograms of dried berries are required to produce one 375-milliliter bottle.

Once they’re manually selected, the berries are placed into vats without pressing to await fermentation. The pressure from the weight of the mound causes a small amount of free-run nectar to seep out; these drops are collected and set aside to ferment in 50-liter glass vessels, and the resulting must is so sweet that fermentation can take as long as eight years to complete. Alcohol levels linger as low as 1.65 percent and rarely

chalantly the acidity counterbalances the 560 grams of residual sugar and avoids any notion of being cloying.”

A Bright Future for Aszú

Referring to Hungarian Aszú wines as a “national treasure,” Mahdavian says they also tout a dexterous ability to pair with various, diverse types of cuisine—from Asian to Indian to traditional Hungarian and Mediterranean specialties. “When I first discovered the Tokaji Aszú, I realized it was a perfect complement to almost all breakfast foods, but I could drink it with my goat



In addition to celebrating the “Year of Aszú,” Daniel Mahdavian, pictured with Wines of Excellence Project Director Enikő Magyar and Vinum Tokaj International President/CEO Attila Balla, looks forward to further incorporating Tokaji wine specialties into his wine program.

exceed 3 percent, while Essencia’s residual sugar content typically ranges between 450–700 grams per liter (in some vintages, it has even reached an astonishing 900 grams).

Essencia can age for 200 years in exceptional conditions, but the wine can show its full potential even in its early years. Wine critic Neil Martin, who reviews wines for Robert Parker’s newsletter *The Wine Advocate*, awarded Royal Tokaji Essencia’s 2007 vintage a perfect 100-point score. “You cannot help but laugh at the sheer audacity of its syrupy pour . . . Once you have recovered from its texture, the bouquet leaves you giddy with honey, stewed apricots, Japanese plum, and clementine,” he wrote. “Pure and hedonistic, what is magical about this Essencia is how effortlessly, how non-

salad for lunch, I could drink it at night with a foie gras, or I could drink it with dessert as well,” he continues.

In regards to the “Year of Aszú” initiative, Mahdavian thinks it’s exciting to see such abundant proof that “the future is bright for the Hungarian wines.” “I think this is the first time I see such an incredible effort from a country from an agricultural and economical point of view, as well as such a high level of engagement and effort from the wine industry players in this field,” he says.

Royalty are oft described as being born with silver spoons in their mouths—a status few wine enthusiasts can claim no matter how lofty their taste. Yet with a crystal spoon filled with Tokaji Aszú or Essencia, we can all be kings and queens for a day. ■■



The Kapalua Resort is located on one of Hawaii's largest private nature preserves.

A Master Reflects

MICHAEL JORDAN, MS, LOOKS TO THE PAST AND FUTURE OF THE KAPALUA WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

GIVEN HIS LONG-STANDING involvement in the Kapalua Wine & Food Festival, *The Tasting Panel* posed three questions to Michael Jordan, MS, CWE, and Director of Global Key Accounts at Jackson Family Wines, in preparation for the 37th annual event set for June 7–10 in Maui, Hawaii.

The Tasting Panel: What is one of your favorite memories from Kapalua?

Michael Jordan: One night a jam session broke out in the Ritz-Carlton lobby with [chef] Dean Fearing, Jeff Gargiulo [of Gargiulo Vineyards], LA Rams quarterback Vince Ferragamo, Fred Scherrer [of Scherrer Winery], [chef] Mark Tarbell and a few winemakers who are great players, and the “Uncorked, Unplugged, and Unleashed Jam” was born! It created this “living-room vibe hang” with chefs and winemakers who happen to be very good musicians. True *Kanikapila* [Hawaiian slang for ‘jam session’] style!”

Aside from the revolving seminar content, how do you expect Kapalua 2018 to be different from years past?

This year we will continue to elevate the guest’s experience. We’ve expanded the culinary talent with five amazing celebrity chefs: Cat Cora, Hubert Keller, Nancy Oakes, Nancy Silverton and Mark Tarbell will all be here to celebrate with us. We also have some of the highest quality winemakers in the industry, and there will be a winemaker’s panel at Merriman’s Restaurant in addition to the panels held at the Ritz-Carlton. We are very excited about the inaugural *SOMM Journal* International Panel!

What sets Kapalua apart from other wine and food festivals?

It’s the longest running wine and food festival in the U.S., held under the coconut trees on one of the most beautiful islands in the world. The event attracts guests from as far away as China and Japan. There is always an intimate, welcoming feeling and warm vibe due to the high-quality chefs, winemakers, presenters engaging the guests, and, of course, the incredible beauty of Kapalua and genuine Hawaiian hospitality experience.



Chef Cat Cora with Michael Jordan, MS, at the Kapalua Wine & Food Festival.



A seminar at Merriman’s restaurant offered tasting with a view during a previous festival.

Kapalua Wine & Food Festival

*SUBJECT TO CHANGE

FRIDAY, JUNE 8

REGIONAL FOCUS:

"Sand and Fog: Rediscover Santa Maria Valley" Wine Seminar and Tasting

Only the second AVA approved in the U.S., the Santa Maria Valley is one of the most ideal regions for growing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. With old soils, the East – West running valley is open to the Pacific, creating "Refrigerated Sunshine" and "Love from Above" for one of the longest, coolest growing seasons in California.

During the seminar hosted by Master Sommelier Michael Jordan, attendees will sample favorite vintages from the area's finest producers. Panelists will include Wes Hagen of J. Wilkes Wines, James Ontiveros of Alta Maria Vineyards and Native9, Jill DelaRiva Russell of Cambria Estate Winery, and Jonathon Nagy of Byron Winery.

VARIETAL FOCUS:

"Let's Be Franc!" New World Cabernet Franc Wine Seminar and Tasting

One of the major international grape varieties, Cabernet Franc is principally grown for blending with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in the Bordeaux style, but it can also be vinified alone. Once so important to Right Bank Bordeaux and the Loire Valley (then seemingly taken for granted as a blending grape), Cabernet Franc has now found a happy home in the New World while gaining a new generation of loyal fans.

Join us to learn more about this worldwide favorite: a lesser-known varietal cousin of Cabernet Sauvignon. Panelists will include Pam Starr of Crocker & Starr, Manny Pires of Gandona Winery, Raj Patel of Patel Winery, and Luc Morlet of Morlet Family Vineyards.

The Grand Tasting: Kapalua Style

Premium wines will be showcased with fabulous gastronomic indulgences from Kapalua Resort restaurants and friends during this walk-around tasting and evening under the stars—all on the ocean-front grounds of Montage Kapalua Bay. The

tasting will also feature a Petrossian caviar station and a phenomenal cheese display by Kent Torrey of The Cheese Shop in Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA.

SATURDAY, JUNE 9

REGIONAL FOCUS:

"Digging in to Unique Terroir: France, Italy and Hungary" International Wine Seminar and Tasting

Moderator Jessie "JABS" Birschbach, Managing Editor of *The SOMM Journal*, will host a journey through a handful of the Old World's most distinctive examples of terroir: renowned wine regions where the earth and climate can actually be tasted. Travel to Montalcino and Alto Adige in Italy and Burgundy in France before exploration ends in the Tokaj region of Hungary.

The esteemed panelists will include Lars Leicht, Trade Development Director for Banfi Vintners, presenting Castello Banfi's Brunello di Montalcino; Kristina Sazama, DipWSET, Wine Educator for Santa Margherita USA, highlighting the Kettmeir wines of Alto Adige; and Patrick Okubo, MS, CWE, and Wine Educator for Young's Market Company, showcasing the Burgundian wines of Maison Louis Jadot (provided by Kobrand Wine & Spirits); and Enikő Magyar, Project Director for Wines of Excellence, pouring Mád Hungarian wines.

"The Two Nancys" Cooking Demonstration with Celebrity Chefs Nancy Silverton and Nancy Oakes

Hosted by Master Sommelier Michael Jordan, the dinner will feature cuisine from famed chefs (and good friends) Nancy Silverton of Pizzeria Mozza and Osteria Mozza in Los Angeles and Nancy Oakes of Boulevard in San Francisco. The meal will also feature wine pairings from "the two Jeffs": Jeff Stewart of Hartford Court and Jeff Mangahas of Williams Selyem.

HISTORICAL FOCUS:

"Family Tree: Scions of Family Wineries" Seminar

This seminar, also hosted by Master Sommelier Michael Jordan, will bring together second- and third-generation winemakers with their winemaker parents to share their secrets, stories, and wines. Panelists will include David and Laura Long of David Arthur Vineyards and good friends Doug and Ryan Hill of Hill Family Vineyards.

SUNDAY, JUNE 10

REGIONAL FOCUS:

"Champagne and Caviar" Wine Seminar and Tasting

Sample the finest caviars alongside paired Champagnes at this seminar hosted by Master Sommelier Rob Bigelow and Christopher Klapp of Petrossian in West Hollywood, CA.

Cooking Demonstration with Celebrity Chef Hubert Keller

Celebrity chef Hubert Keller of the TV show *Secrets of a Chef* will present his French-inspired healthy cuisine paired with wines from Luc Morlet of Morlet Family Vineyards and James Hall of Patz & Hall. The demonstration will be hosted by Master Sommelier Michael Jordan.

VARIETAL FOCUS:

"World Famous" Pinot Noir Wine Seminar and Tasting

Top Pinot Noir producers will gather to showcase their premium vintages and share their passion for this illustrious varietal. Panelists include James Hall of Patz & Hall, Jeff Mangahas of Williams Selyem, Michael Browne of Cirq and Jeff Stewart of Hartford Court.

SEAFOOD FESTIVAL

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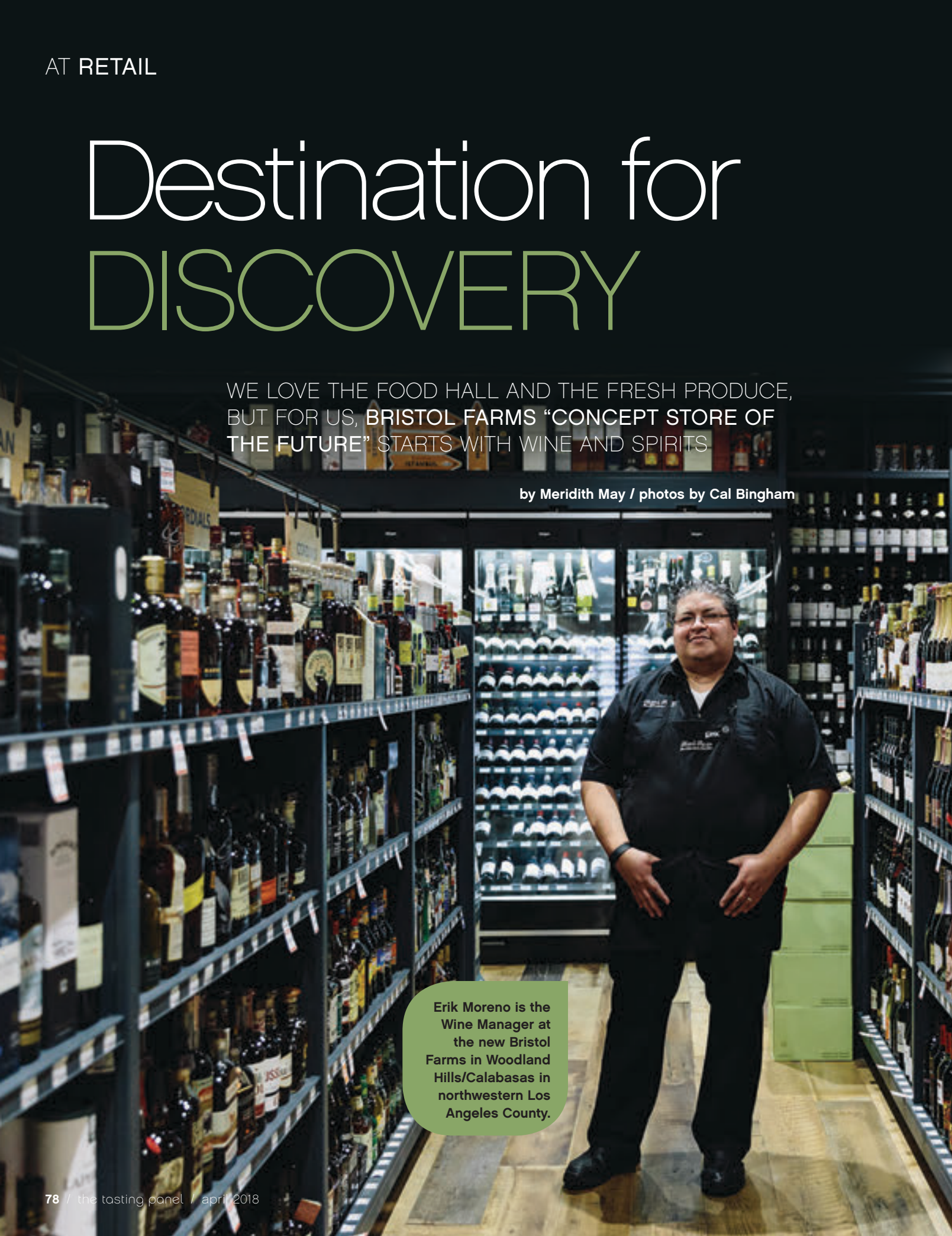
Fourteen of Maui's top restaurants will showcase their seafood-focused culinary creations while competing for Maui Nō Ka 'O'i Magazine's "Best of the Fest" award. Maui-based band Nuff Sedd will provide the entertainment.

AT RETAIL

Destination for DISCOVERY

WE LOVE THE FOOD HALL AND THE FRESH PRODUCE, BUT FOR US, **BRISTOL FARMS** “CONCEPT STORE OF THE FUTURE” STARTS WITH WINE AND SPIRITS

by Meredith May / photos by Cal Bingham

A photograph of Erik Moreno, the Wine Manager at Bristol Farms, standing in a wine aisle. He is wearing a black short-sleeved button-down shirt and black trousers. He is standing with his hands on his hips, smiling at the camera. The aisle is filled with shelves of various wine bottles. In the background, there are refrigerated display cases filled with more wine. The floor is made of light-colored wood.

Erik Moreno is the
Wine Manager at
the new Bristol
Farms in Woodland
Hills/Calabasas in
northwestern Los
Angeles County.

Moreno wants to be sure he can answer any of his customer's questions regarding the retailer's wine, spirits, and beer selection. "Bristol Farms invests in their employees; education is a vital aspect of our training," he says. "From the stock clerks to the floor staff, everyone should know what's in their department."



With supermarket concepts expanding to place a more artisanal focus on food and beverage, California-based **Bristol Farms** continues to be a trendsetter in the category.

The grocery retailer's new 25,000-square-foot concept store recently opened in the northwestern 'burbs of Los Angeles on the border of Woodland Hills and Calabasas. With private-label foods, specialty deli items, wagyu meats, a global array of cheese, and a smoothie/coffee/gelato bar, this Bristol Farms location is a gourmet haven with an architectural aesthetic that emulates an intimate library: It's all wide-aisled, well-lit, low-ceilinged comfort here.

As a frequent shopper at this location, I find myself planning for special "me" time each time I visit. After venturing past the health-food items, handmade desserts, and the best dark chocolate-covered raisins I've ever munched, my long-awaited last stop is the wine and spirits section.

I take my time as I peruse each shelf and aisle: A store within a store, this is no average grocery wine department. Small-production labels expand a customer's grasp of the worldwide arena, but the larger name brands are there in force as well—as they should be—though they're still hand-picked for the upscale customer who shops here.

Wine Manager Erik Moreno lovingly runs this shop inside Bristol Farms; armed with 20 years of experience, he started out at Beverly Hills-based Long's Drugs when it was family-owned and -operated. "The founder's grandson taught me about customer service," Moreno offers. "I learned the ins and outs of creating relationships before I learned how to sell wine."

Moreno's career in wine and spirits retail progressed at many of the prestigious markets, both regionally- and nationally-based. He has been studying under the Cicerone program for beer service, but also adores mezcal, tequila, and sake. "We're working on bringing edgier products here, with an emphasis on local and craft beverages," he tells *The Tasting Panel*. "We want our customers to be able to make their own discoveries." ■■

THE ART OF THE Beverage List

A PICTURE'S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS AT TRICK
DOG, THREE DOTS AND A DASH, AND EMMERSON

by Ruth Tobias

Based on a *Heavy Metal* comic cover depicting a winged goddess atop a heap of broken skeletons, this cocktail at Emmerson in Boulder, CO, features bourbon, Sfumato Rabarbaro, vermouth, and Bénédictine.

PHOTO COURTESY OF EMMERSON

The cocktails on Trick Dog's TD Airways menu are inspired by international flight hubs, including the SEA cocktail with rum, gin, Ancho Reyes, Kahlúa Midnight, and hints of chocolate and grapefruit.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRICK DOG



The visually-engaging menus at Chicago's Three Dots and a Dash uphold a long-held tradition: "Tiki bars were doing big, elaborate menus as early as the 1950s," Beverage Director Kevin Beary says.

IMAGE COURTESY OF LETTUCE ENTERTAINYOU ENTERPRISES

When it comes to menu presentation, most bars choose to print their selection on a sheet of paper and call it a day. Within some facets of the industry, however, it's becoming increasingly clear that an artful drink list can be as integral to a guest's experience as the drinks themselves.

From pop-up and puzzle books to original graphic novels (as seen at New York's The Dead Rabbit) and collectible sticker albums (London's Callooh Callay), an innovative design can be well worth the investment when it comes to engaging your guests and expressing your brand—provided you take a page, literally, from some success stories.

In San Francisco, craft cocktail bar Trick Dog ventured onto the unconventional menu scene with its now-legendary Pantone fan deck, which showcased each cocktail on a matching color swatch. Since then, partners Josh Harris and Morgan Schick have gone on to, in Harris' words, "three-dimensionalize" the themes of their lists by taking an elaborate yet holistic approach to their development. More recently, a menu in the form of a trifold tourist map was accompanied by rectangular coasters doubling as postcards ("You could write on the back, and we'd pay for the postage and mail them," Harris says).

Granted, Schick says, "each idea presents its own set of problems." Theft of the Pantone menus was so rampant that Trick Dog ensured its next release—a collection of old 45s—would be difficult to steal. It turns out it was also hard to read: The drink descriptions on the records' labels replicated the original text so closely that "people couldn't find them," Schick says with a laugh, adding that the situation ultimately served to remind them that "form cannot trump function."

Long-term viability has emerged as another concern as they launch new concepts. "We've done menus that cost a buck and menus that cost \$25–\$30 a unit," notes Harris. "You need to think about how easily you can redo them. A map you can run off in a day" at little cost; a coffee table-worthy tome, not so much.

Kevin Beary faces a similar dilemma in his role as Beverage Director of Chicago tiki bar Three Dots and a Dash. As part of the Lettuce Entertain You restaurant group, he concedes they're "lucky to have the resources at our disposal"—including an in-house design department—to create vintage-inspired lists replete with sumptuous photographs and charming illustrations. But even so, he says, "you've really got to be ahead of the game. Changing two cocktails might cost you \$500 [in reprints], so sometimes we use Photoshop, or I'll try to make a new cocktail that looks just like the old one." The visuals impact the ordering process regardless: "Guests are basing their decisions not just on the description but the presentation—I really like the ingredients in this one, but I like the way that one looks," Beary says.

Meanwhile, at Emmerson in Boulder, Colorado, every cocktail in Bar Manager Nancy Kwon's booklet occupies its own glossy page with eye-popping cover art from old issues of sci-fi comic *Heavy Metal*. A QR code leads guests to "the song that got me in the mood" for the recipe, Kwon says, which aims to enhance their visit and encourage repeat business. "People sitting alone at the bar really love it; it gives



Trick Dog's children's book-themed menu—titled "What Rhymes With Trick Dog?"—required some finesse when it came to brainstorming ideas: "We couldn't have all these drinks named Brick Fog," Partner Morgan Schick says with a laugh.

IMAGE COURTESY OF TRICK DOG

them something to do," she adds. "They'll ask to take a copy home, then come back and say, 'OK, I love this song. Now I have to try the drink.'" For her next menu creation, Kwon is tinkering with the idea of a tarot card deck.

The bottom line of menu innovation, Beary says, is that while "you can't underestimate the commitment" involved in an attention-grabbing design, he "wouldn't discourage anybody" from trying out the trend. "At the end of the day, I think you should put as much effort into your drink presentation on paper as you do in the glass," he adds. ■

The background of the entire image features two champagne bottles and two champagne flutes. The bottles are positioned on the left and right sides, partially visible. The two flutes are in the center, one filled with champagne and the other empty. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the glass and the bubbles in the champagne.

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Tasting Inclusion

OUR NEW COLUMN EXPLORES INITIATIVES FURTHERING WOMEN AND PEOPLE OF COLOR IN THE WINE AND SPIRITS INDUSTRY

by Julia Coney

The *Tasting Panel* has always aimed to reflect open and inclusive perspectives on the pages of our magazine, but we can always do better. Tasting Inclusion, our newest column, hopes to help fill a void in our industry by highlighting the diverse individuals and companies changing the face of wine and spirits.

The world is connected now more than ever, and at the same time, it feels equally as divided. While wine and cocktail lists reflect global diversity, representation of the people in our industry largely does not. Many people of color don't feel welcome or accepted—professionally or personally—and this needs to change.

I'm Julia Coney, a wine and lifestyle writer based in the Washington, D.C. area. When I entered the industry, I expected the same communal feeling I experience while drinking wine with others would also exist on the other side of the glass. It didn't.



PHOTO: NICOLE MCCONVILLE

Amy Bess Cook is the creator of Women-Owned Wineries, an initiative promoting the work of female winemakers.

Chicago-based *Causing a Stir*, the brainchild of Ariel E. Neal and Alexis Brown (pictured), hosts a wide-ranging lineup of events that aim to create a space for women and people of color to discuss issues surrounding representation in the industry.



PHOTO: JUAN ANTHONY



Bacardi's inaugural Spirit Forward Women in Leadership initiative celebrated women and their work in the hospitality sector during a five-city tour.

So how do we move the needle forward? This can only happen if we're open to listening and understanding what women and marginalized people have gone through—and continue to go through—as they seek to further their careers. If we want to be the change, we must understand it won't happen overnight, but using the tools and resources at our disposal will make all the difference in the world.

Over the past few months, I've spoken with individuals across a wide spectrum of professional roles to hold an open dialogue on problems impacting so many of us: racism, sexual harassment, marginalization, and a lack of understanding surrounding the concept of intersectionality.

The conversations were honest, and I felt safe enough to speak my truth on what representation in this industry looks and feels like. The more people I spoke to, the more I realized I was not alone.

As a writer, my job is to tell stories, and through this column I hope to introduce you to people and companies who desire to see our industry thrive at a level that's more welcoming of diverse talent than ever before. Welcome to Tasting Inclusion: Grab a drink, take a seat at the table, and let's get started.

At Bacardi, the **Spirit Forward Women**

in Leadership initiative was created to showcase, encourage, and empower women of diverse backgrounds who work in the hospitality sector. Seen as a celebration of these women and their contributions to the industry, the five-city tour explored subjects ranging from feminism, sexual harassment, public speaking, finance, self-defense techniques, and work/life balance with the help of engaging speakers who are leaders in their field. The response to the inaugural tour's mission of inspiring future leaders in hospitality has been overwhelmingly positive.

In another initiative centering women, **Amy Bess Cook** created **Women-Owned Wineries (WOW)** to promote the work of female winemakers. Of the 4,000-plus wineries in California, only 10 percent have a lead female winemaker: "Women have been graduating from enology and viticulture programs in equal or greater numbers as men for years and go on to secure cellar and vineyard positions," Cook says. "The issue is that they are not promoted properly to lead positions, and/or they drop out due to issues they face in those settings."

In an effort to break through this glass ceiling, WOW will launch its all-female wine club later this year through iFundWomen, a crowdfunding

platform centered around supporting female-owned small businesses and startups. This campaign will also help WOW expand its database nationwide.

Last but certainly not least, Chicago-based **Causing a Stir** is the brainchild of Alexis Brown and Ariel E. Neal. In an effort to serve as a "voice of change," they created a place for women and people of color to feel safe discussing issues from race to workplace disparity to inequality. What started as a luncheon has since evolved into a global movement: Causing a Stir hosts a wide-ranging lineup of events and promotes other initiatives led by fellow people of color.

Causing a Stir has started the process of becoming a nonprofit organization in order to expand its programming, and it also offers scholarships to under-represented individuals seeking work in the hospitality industry. The apropos title of the organization tells you all you need to know: Causing a Stir plans to break down walls and barriers confining diversity within our industry, one expertly-crafted libation at a time. ■■

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Anthony Dias

BLUE *REVIEWS*

Presented by  **BLUE LIFESTYLE**


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

85-89: VERY GOOD

90-94: OUTSTANDING

95-100: CLASSIC

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

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

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

Prices are for 750 ml. bottles unless otherwise noted.

DOMESTIC

97 **Cardinale 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$275)** Bright ruby color with a soft plum nose; bright cherry and boysenberry with notes of vanilla, toast, and spice; deep, intense, and ageworthy. Another Chris Carpenter masterpiece that's incredibly elegant, precise, and generous.

94 **Cordon 2016 White Hawk Vineyard Syrah, Santa Barbara (\$32)** Smooth and spicy with clean, rich blackberry and toast; long and balanced; a lovely wine from star winemaker Etienne Terlingen.

HOLLYWOOD AND WINE



92 **FEL Wines 2016 Chardonnay, Anderson Valley (\$32)** Made by the Mendocino subsidiary of Napa's Cliff Lede Vineyards; a tangy nose preceding bright acidity and lively citrus fruit; a crisp, modern, stylish wine with plenty of depth and finesse.



93 **Merry Edwards 2014 Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley (\$48)** Rich, creamy, and ripe; sweet and balanced with dense flavors and Sauvignon spice; lush and balanced with Sauternes-like finesse.

93 **Flora Springs 2015 Trilogy, Napa Valley (\$85)** Lush and sumptuous with dense plum and berry fruit and a smooth texture; deep and showing promise for long aging. An unctuous addition to a series dating back to 1984.



94 **Niner Wine Estates 2014 Fog Catcher Estate-Grown Premium Bordeaux Blend, Paso Robles (\$100)** Silky and lush with tangy plum and berry fruit that delve deep; elegant, complex, and refined; bright and long. 37% Cabernet Franc, 29% Petit Verdot, 28% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 6% Malbec.



90 **Steele Wines 2016 Cuvée Chardonnay, Santa Barbara, Sonoma, and Mendocino Counties (\$22)** Smooth, juicy, and rich with racy acidity and lush texture; long and balanced. Jed Steele continues to make quality wines with a minimalistic approach.

89 **Perfusion Vineyard 2014 Pinot Noir, San Francisco Bay (\$40)** Tangy and earthy with green cherry fruit; edgy and dry; vibrant acidity and long-lasting flavors.

92 **Piña Cahoots 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$49)** Lush and rich with depth and finesse; notes of plum with generous flavors of berries and chocolate; an exquisite wine from one of Napa's true cult producers.

90 **SAVED 2016 Red Blend, California (\$25)** Deep and spicy with rich, balanced Rhône style; a stylish blend of Malbec, Grenache, Syrah, and Zinfandel with a lasting finish; smooth and lush from a winery unconventionally named after a Brooklyn tattoo studio.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



91 **Trefethen 2015 Merlot, Oak Knoll District, Napa Valley (\$40)** Gentle plum nose; luscious and softly tannic with bright fruit and tangy style; dense and racy; a solid effort from this Napa leader.

93 **Siduri 2015 Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$55)** Medium ruby color from winery specializing in cool-climate Pinot Noir; polished and rich with ripe cherry and earthy notes; generous and long with a crisp, tangy finish. ☺

IMPORTS

91 **Luce della Vite 2015 Lucente, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$30)** Smooth, ripe, and tangy with spice and rich texture; dense, earthy, and long; deep and lush from the estate of Lamberto Frescobaldi.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

93 **Masi 2012 Costasera Riserva, Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOC, Italy (\$80)** Sleek and flavorful with spiciness and toasty black fruit; intense, charming, and long from one of the giants of the region.

KOBRAND WINE & SPIRITS

92 **Yangarra Estate 2014 Old Vine Grenache, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$30)** Velvety and succulent with minerality, depth, and spice; pure and tangy with racy energy from an Aussie producer specializing in Mediterranean varieties.

JACKSON FAMILY WINES



VALUE

91 **Bodegas Godelia 2012 Mencía, Bierzo, Spain (\$19)** Dark ruby color; lush, rich, and fresh with some puckery tannins; juicy with bright plum and blackberry; creamy with good balance.

EUROPVIN USA



88 **Line 39 Wines 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$11)** Juicy, herbal, and fruity with simple and clean flavors; smooth and balanced; a good option for a weeknight dinner at home.

91 **Kim Crawford 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$18)** Smooth, lush citrus; riper and a bit sweeter since Kim and Erica have left the building, but still as fresh, bright, and complex as the older renditions. ☺

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



88 **Giò 2016 Pinot Grigio, Delle Venezie IGT, Italy (\$13)** Smooth, juicy, and minerally; clean and tangy with depth and balance. Giò is the shortened version of giovane, the Italian word for "young."

WINE TREES USA

BLUE REVIEWS

91 Angels & Cowboys 2017 Rosé, Sonoma County (\$15)
Dry, refreshing, and lively with bright, crisp acidity; predominantly Grenache, the ideal variety for this category; a first-class rosé at an excellent price.

SHARE A SPLASH WINE CO.

90 Luca Bosio Vineyards 2016 Moscato, Moscato d'Asti DOCG, Italy (\$18) Sweet and delicate with spice and floral notes; bright with citrus and soft spritz; delightful with a lengthy finish. ☺

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

89 Lunar Harvest 2016 Merlot, Columbia Valley (\$9) Bright raspberry nose with a juicy palate showing plum and berry fruit; lush with some herbal nuances; an amazing value.

88 Nebel 2016 Riesling, Rheinhessen, Germany (\$14)
Aromatic with sweet, off-dry style; nicely balanced with distinct minerality. 10.5% ABV. ☺

88 Paringa 2016 Sparkling Shiraz, South Australia (\$18)
Dark ruby color with a rich blackberry nose; sparkling and dry; intense and ripe with deep berry notes from a family involved in the Australian wine industry for eight decades.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

90 Pighin 2017 Pinot Grigio, Grave del Friuli DOC, Italy (\$18) Bright, crisp, and lavish; fresh, racy, and long with plenty of flavor; this represents precisely what Pinot Grigio is all about. ☺

KOBRAND WINE & SPIRITS

92 Susana Balbo 2015 Signature Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$20) Deep crimson color with a rich and dense mouthfeel; a lovely, luscious, and expressive wine made by one of Argentina's premier producers run by the prolific Susana Balbo.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

91 Tangent 2016 Sauvignon Blanc, Paragon Vineyard, Edna Valley (\$17) Juicy, bright, and fresh; crisp and bracing yet still elegant and balanced; made from estate fruit sourced from the coolest AVA in California. ☺



88 Tercos 2017 Tercos Bonarda, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14) Smooth, spicy, and juicy with bright berry fruit and good balance; fresh and clean; a good example of the variety known here as Charbono. ☺

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTERS

96 Germain-Robin Augustine's Blend Brandy, USA (\$700)
Creamy, complex, and rich with great depth and elegant style; pure and balanced with refined flavors and toasted oak; lush and polished.

E.&J. GALLO

95 Glenmorangie Spìos Private Edition No. 9, Scotland (\$99)
Crisp, elegant, and sweet with lovely spice, fine texture, and amazing balance. This annual release is the first of the series to mature in American ex-rye whiskey casks.

92 Lvov Vodka, Poland (\$20)
Earthy nose with a creamy texture; lush with sweetened notes of vanilla; long, refreshing, and balanced; distilled from beets.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

SPIRITS

93 Bowmore The Vintner's Trilogy Manzanilla Cask Single Malt Scotch Whisky Aged 18 Years, Scotland (\$127) Smoky, toasty nose; intense and spicy with a typical Islay funk imparted through its aging in both bourbon and Manzanilla Sherry barrels; long and smooth with considerable finesse.



BEAM SUNTORY

93 Pomp & Whimsy Gin Liqueur, USA (\$40) Light amber color with a floral nose; nectarous and rich with lovely flavors that hint at honeysuckle, lavender, and roses; this unique sipper truly comes together in the glass.

92 Soto Super Premium Junmai Daiginjo Sake, Japan (\$45)
Soft and silky with lovely finesse and balance; elegant and refined; not really a spirit, this is more of a brewed product like beer, but it's lovely nonetheless. Gluten-free with no additives, preservatives, or sulfites.

95 Guillotine Heritage Edition Vodka Révolutionnaire, France (\$69) Stunning amber hue with a nose of rich caramel and orange rind; elegant and long finish with spiced cinnamon and tea. Distilled from Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, and Chardonnay from Aÿ vineyards in the Champagne region, the spirit rests in Limousin oak barrels and finds its way into French-made barrels. ■■



From Champagne to the Southwest

GILBERT GRUET'S LEGACY CONTINUES AT HIS FAMILY'S NEW MEXICO WINERY

In 1952, 21-year-old Gilbert Gruet started producing Champagne in the small village of Bethon, France. With help from his wife, Danielle, he planted his vines on a property given to him by his father.

When he visited the American Southwest some years later, Gilbert found a group of European vintners producing wine near Truth or Consequences, New Mexico—a town named after a famous '50s radio game show. He purchased some high-elevation land and planted the traditional Champagne varieties of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Meunier; at more than 4,000 feet above sea level, the dry, warm days and cool, crisp nights offer a perfect climate for grape-growing.

Gruet Winery remains a family business, with Gilbert's descendants overseeing operations. The sparkling wines (Gruet also produces small quantities of still wines) are made with the traditional *méthode champenoise*, where the secondary fermentation takes place in each individual bottle. Located not far from Albuquerque, the winery attracts a steady flock of tourists and houses a tasting room and a restaurant. **Read on for Anthony Dias Blue's tasting notes of Gruet Winery's sparkling wines:**



91 Gruet Winery NV Brut (\$18) Smooth with generous fruit and fine bubbles; fresh, juicy, and clean with tangy style; a delightful wine and an amazing value.



90 Gruet Winery NV Brut Rosé (\$18) Bright pink color with a juicy strawberry nose; dense and fresh with good balance and style. 100% Pinot Noir at 12% ABV.



90 Gruet Winery NV Blanc de Blancs (\$18) Dry and crisp with a rich texture; bright and luscious with ripe flavor and excellent balance; polished and dense.



90 Gruet Winery NV Sauvage (\$20) Clean, rich, and fruity with minerality and depth; an invigorating and tangy wine that is very reasonably priced.



88 Gruet Winery NV Demi Sec (\$18) Round, lush, and off-dry; silky, clean, and satisfying; simple and refreshing with a long finish.



91 Gruet Winery 2012 Gilbert Grande Reserve (\$35) Crisp and precise with earthy notes and mineral elements; refined and complex with a long and lively finish.



90 Gruet Winery NV Blanc de Noirs (\$18) Continuous and rich with a ripe elegance; dry, balanced, and deep; a carefully-made wine at a very reasonable price.



91 Gruet Winery 2012 Cuvée Danielle Grand Rosé (\$35) Dry, snappy, and ripe with hints of strawberries; smooth, lush, and balanced with long-lasting flavor. ■■

92 Gruet Winery 2012 Blanc de Blancs (\$35) Charming and elegant with bright, juicy style; tangy, sleek, and racy with finesse and fine balance; an impressive achievement.

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

Publisher's PICKS

PHOTO: DAVID GADD



As a sponsor of this year's World of Pinot Noir event in Santa Barbara, we were able to taste an abundance of the variety and noticed an incredible diversity in flavor and character profiles. Here are some of the standouts:



Talbott 2016 Kali Hart Pinot Noir, Monterey County (\$26)

On the heels of the earthy, ripe, and savory plum nose, the flavors lead to an inner core of Old World acidity and color. Strawberry rhubarb is mouth-filling with spiced accents of cinnamon amid soft tannins. Dark chocolate emerges slowly, with red fruit streamlining the finish. **92**

E. & J. GALLO



Rusack 2014 Pinot Noir, Solomon Hills Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley (\$48) Aged 11 months in French oak (63% new) with a 20-day extended maceration, this juicy, fruity Pinot Noir reinforces the stellar reputation of this prestigious vineyard site. Earthiness gives way into dense cherry plum as the rich texture transforms the palate and olfactory senses into a garden of heather and roses. **92**



Goldeneye 2015 Pinot Noir, The Narrows Vineyard, Anderson Valley (\$85) In the marine-influenced Anderson Valley, the Narrows Vineyard—a historic mountain ranch—sits on a ridgetop at the region's northernmost, cool "deep end." Surrounded by California's giant redwoods, the mature vines thrive in this rustic site. The plum-cherry nose is fresh and bright, and brown-sugared cherries melt across the palate. Mocha seeps in midway with a subtle graphite edge as wild mushrooms dance with cranberry on the long finish. **95**



Sea Smoke 2015 Southing Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$64)

Delivering wines from its organic- and Biodynamic-certified estate in the Sta. Rita Hills, Sea Smoke has earned its reputation for outstanding quality. Low yields from the 2015 vintage, which winemaker Don Schroeder (who has presided over the wines since 2003) deems phenomenal, makes this red "exceptionally concentrated." The wine offers up scents of chocolate earthiness, and on the palate, roses bloom alongside structure that goes on for miles. The cherry is oak-influenced, but only a subtle hint. This wine melts in the mouth with a luscious *whoosh*. **96**



Worthy of a smooch.



French-style double bizou.



Wildly infatuated.



Seriously smitten.



Head over heels in love.



Gehricke 2014 Los Carneros Pinot Noir, Sonoma (\$39)

Exotically-spiced aromas of cinnamon-rhubarb, desiccated rose petals, and anise motivates that first sip. Black-tea tannins and tobacco show the serious side of this wine, while vibrant black cherry integrates well with toasty oak. **93**

3 BADGE BEVERAGE



Sokol Blosser 2014 Thistle Vineyard Pinot Noir, Dundee Hills AVA, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$38)

Thistle Vineyard is a 27-acre, Certified Organic site on 100% volcanic Jory soils, with the fruit sourced from vines grown at elevations up to 550 feet. Scents of earth and Bing cherry manifest as the palate dives into a savory thread of plum spice, animale, and minerality. Aged 16 months in French oak (35% new), this wine is extremely well made with complexity and balance. **92**



Panther Creek 2015 Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$30) This 100% stainless steel-fermented white has a nose of lemon and buttercup. The mouthfeel, while generous, is laden with flinty notes that coat apricot and tarragon. **89**



Dutton Estate 2016 Kylie's Cuvée Sauvignon Blanc, Dutton Ranch, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$25)

From the cooler Green Valley sub-appellation of Russian River Valley, this Musqué-clone Sauv Blanc offers up aromas of lime, mango, and fresh herbs. Precise and clean on the palate, the crisp grapefruit notes are tempered with tropical fruit while the white floral tones of lily and jasmine are rounded out by a hint of cinnamon. **92**



Apothic Crush 2016 Red Blend, California (\$14)

Created as a seasonal release, this "smooth red blend" ups the ante for a "sweet-but-not-too-sweet" category. With the majority of its grapes sourced from the Lodi region, the blend predominantly consists of Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, and Pinot Noir. Notes of perfumed jasmine show complexity, melding with a delicious fudge cake aroma that translates right to the palate. At 14.5% ABV, this wine is balanced and food friendly: Its acid structure is just right for its richness factor. A wash of caramel along with ripe, dense cherries and plums stretches the fun to a plush finish. **90**



Ancient Peaks 2014 Oyster Ridge, Santa Margarita Ranch, Paso Robles (\$60)

Large white oyster fossils are ubiquitous along the Santa Margarita Vineyard, located in the southernmost area of Paso Robles in its own AVA—Santa Margarita Ranch. This cool growing region 14 miles from the Pacific offers a mineral-rich, big-boned red comprised of 51% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Merlot, 5% Syrah, 5% Petite Sirah, and 3% Malbec. While the tannins are developed, the liquid is plush with layers of flavors from lavender to mulled plum and blackberry to dusted cocoa cedar. **94**



The Winery 2014 Tempranillo, North Coast (\$27)

The Winery has its urban location in San Francisco, but it works with viticulturists throughout California's wine regions. Winemaker Bryan Kane has a commitment to sustainable farming practices and natural winemaking. What we liked about this wine was how it teetered on a profile of Old and New World to profess this variety. It's structurally sound with round tannins, and its nose of cherry cocoa and briar is inviting. This is a terrifically food-friendly red with good acidity. Fresh, tart cranberry, rhubarb, and a touch of new leather hit mid-palate before it finishes nicely with mocha oak. **90**



Pamplin Family Winery 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Washington (\$50)

With appellations covering Walla Walla (51%) and Red Mountain (49%), this not-yet-released red is due out this fall. Aged 21 months in new, single-use, and neutral French oak barrels and sourced from three vineyards, this small-production Cab shows off the ripeness of juicy cherries while maintaining its serious graphite-licorice core and dense texture. **93**



WINES



Ladera 2015 Chardonnay, Pillow Road Vineyard, Russian River Valley (\$50)

From the Sebastopol Hills just ten miles from the Pacific, this striking white grown on Goldridge sandy loam soils exudes arresting aromas of vetiver, lemon curd, and summer pears. Chamomile, baked apple, and tarragon are enmeshed in the wine's creamy nature, and keenly-linear citrus notes bring in high-toned acidity. The finish is surprisingly salty. **94**



J. McClelland Cellars 2013 Malbec, Oak Knoll District, Napa Valley (\$45)

Rich, pronounced fruit with stature. This wine is aged in French oak for 40 months, and its meaty, earthy, just-right spice makes for a stellar example of this grape from top real estate in Napa Valley. **94**



SCOTTO CELLARS



Cellardoor Winery 2015 Aurora Artist Series, USA (\$30)

Labeled as an "American Red Wine," the grapes for this sturdy blend are sourced from the Yakima Valley, Red Mountain, and Horse Heaven Hills AVAs. With 52% Syrah, 29% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 19% Cabernet Franc aging 18 months in new American and new French oak—plus the warmest-to-date growing season in Washington State—this wine was jammy with chocolate-cherry notes. The acidity was pronounced, making it a perfect food-pairing option. **91**



E. & J. GALLO

Publisher's PICKS



Tenuta di Biserno 2015 Il Pino di Biserno, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$75)

This blend of 20% Petit Verdot, 20% Cab Franc, 30% Merlot, and 30% Cabernet Sauvignon showcases the hilly, stony terroir of Bibbona, a coastal municipality in Alta Maremma.

Owner Lodovico Antinori describes the Biserno winemaking project, produced in partnership with his brother Piero, as his last.

Aged for 12 months in new and used French oak, the wine exhibits soft tannins that guide the liquid on a lush stream of cherry-oak, violets, and a hint of graphite. Royal elegance from start to finish. **95**

KOBRAND WINE & SPIRITS



Kim Crawford 2017 Rosé, New Zealand (\$18) Composed of 99% Merlot and 1% Syrah, this Hawkes Bay–appellated wine shows off a vibrant prom-dress-pink hue, even though it spends little time on the skins. Crisp, clean, and bright with starfruit, raspberries, and a charming mineral finish. **90**

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



Simple Life 2017 Rosé, California (\$13) An understated yet international style and taste profile makes this an “overdeliverer” in our book. A blend of 77% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre, 7% Zinfandel, and 6% Barbera presents a dusted rose and high-toned floral nose and palate. The undercore of minerality and delicate pear adds texture to a wine with fine acidity. What a find. **90**

DON SEBASTIANI & SONS



Edna Valley Vineyard Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$15)

Savory notes of chamomile and lemon verbena spark an interest on the nose. The palate offers a plethora of flavors, including ripe pineapple, a rare appearance of apricot nectar, and toasty-creamy oak on the finish. Texture plays an important role in showcasing a wine that significantly overdelivers with finesse and quality for the price. **93**



E. & J. GALLO



Day Owl 2017 Rosé, California (\$15) This pretty rosé is made from Barbera grapes sourced from Madera County, the Central Coast, and Paso Robles. Orange rind and crème fraîche meld with strawberry to create a bright and citrus-driven pink. Melon and dried apricot splash in mid-palate and lively acidity makes this wine quite food-friendly. **90**

O'NEILL VINTNERS & DISTILLERS



Bass Note Peach Tarragon Artisanal Sangria, California (\$15)

This ready-to-serve fruit-and-herb blend is imaginative and adventurous. At just 11% ABV, this light-hearted, cocktail-inspired concoction offers authentic peach flavors with that just-right touch of tarragon, which works wonders as an accompaniment to grilled shrimp (I tried it!) or with a seafood or chicken salad.

Retailers take note—additional flavors include Blackberry Sage and Cherry Lime Almond. **90**

ELEVATE BEVERAGE INC.



SPIRITS



New Amsterdam Grapefruit-Flavored Vodka, USA (\$15)

Distinctive aromas of pink grapefruit would charm anyone who's as infatuated with this citrus as I am. As a stalwart fan of the fruit, however, I'm a stern critic of its variations when applied to spirits. This new entry in the flavored vodka lineup for New Amsterdam gets a strong nod: It tastes just-squeezed, has a marvelously fresh palate feel, and marks the mouth with quality through to the crisp finish. **93**



E. & J. GALLO



Old Elk Blended Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$50)

The oatmeal and maple nose is sincerely fragrant with bright accents of sweet peach. On the palate, this blend of malted barley (with four times more of this ingredient than conventional bourbon recipes), rye and corn is evenly peppered and fruity in this balanced, 88-proof sipper. Charred oak, vanilla bean, and walnut linger on the finish. **93**

OLD ELK DISTILLERY



Dancing Goat Distillery Limousin Rye, USA (\$45)

Dancing Goat Distillery officially opened in Cambridge, Wisconsin with the debut of this 92-proof rye. The spirit's base distillate ages over time in vintage oak before new wood is added with a proprietary process (it finishes aging in a Solera system featuring Limousin oak barrels). The nose is particularly fragrant with honeyed white floral notes, deep caramel-cocoa, and green tea. The flavors bring out some lovely stone fruit, including peach and apricot, while honeysuckle shapes up and almost sweetens the fruit even more. A dash of oatmeal and a hint of caraway linger on the finish. Exquisite! **94**

Guest Reviewer: Mara Marski, Spirits Editor, The Tasting Panel



Skip Rock Distillers Nocino Walnut Liqueur, USA (\$45)

This liqueur is the poster-child spirit for a Pacific Northwest distillery that evolved out of the local food movement and a passion for great drinks. The nose is basically a camping trip in Snohomish, Washington: a savory combination of burnt sugar, pinewood, and cola. The juice is made from fresh, local walnuts harvested while still green and soaked with a spice infusion to impart flavors of marzipan, roasted marshmallow, honeycomb, blackstrap molasses, and orange peel to the liqueur's signature toasted-walnut base. Bartender tip: Try it in a fall-themed Gold Rush or a Nocino-washed Old Fashioned. **91**





AN OASIS OF FLAVOR

AGAVE EXPRESSIONS MAKE
THEIR MARK ON THE MODERN
SPIRITS INDUSTRY

BY EMILY COLEMAN

As tequila continues to thrive in the United States, the success of the category also brings uncertainty: Agave farmers are increasingly concerned about their ability to keep up with the growing demand, meaning many spirits producers could soon find it more challenging to secure the most crucial ingredient in their tequila and mezcal.

While these obstacles will surely shape the future of this category, they also create opportunities for innovation and exciting new expressions. Judging by the following tequila and mezcal releases, we're already seeing and tasting the fruits of this labor in the midst of the ongoing agave boom.

As Nature Intended: **4 COPAS TEQUILA**

After consulting with experts in different fields when creating his tequila, 4 Copas Founder Hector Galindo Miranda decided to slow roast organic Blue Weber agave from Jalisco in traditional brick ovens—utilizing only the hearts while recycling the heads and tails as fertilizer. He ferments with organic yeast and has also created a proprietary purification process.

The clean palate of 4 Copas Blanco (SRP \$42) allows the taste of the pure organic agave to dominate the tasting experience; the 4 Copas Reposado (SRP \$52), meanwhile, ages for nine months and has earned a Gold Medal at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. Finally, the 4 Copas Añejo (SRP \$62) ages in American white oak barrels and took Master Distiller Sebastian Melendrez and his team seven years to produce; the moment you taste this exquisite spirit, you can tell their patience and hard work paid off.



TEQUILA LAS AMERICAS

Worth the Wait: **CASA NOBLE TEQUILA**

Well known for making remarkable tequilas since 1996, Casa Noble launched when Founder and Maestro Tequilero Jose “Pepe” Hermosillo decided to introduce his family’s traditions—developed from seven generations of tequila production—to the modern drinking experience.

Casa Noble’s portfolio of outstanding tequila aged in French white oak includes Crystal, made from 100 percent Blue Weber agave; Reposado, which ages for 364 days; Añejo (SRP \$60), which rests for two years; and Joven (SRP \$45), a smooth tequila aged for six weeks. The brand also boasts two limited-edition single barrel expressions: Single Barrel Reposado (SRP \$60) and Extra Añejo (SRP \$150), which show off the pure beauty of agave.

In late 2017, Casa Noble launched Selección del Fundador Volume II; the Certified Organic and kosher expression is produced from 100 percent Blue Weber agave planted in 1997 to commemorate the opening of the distillery. Also aged in French white oak barrels, the spirit’s elegance and warmth pave the way for complex layers of dried fruit and sweet flowers. Twenty years in the making with only 300 bottles available, this spirit gives your guests a truly coveted experience.



TASTING NOTES

Casa Noble Crystal (\$40) This tequila is a smooth operator. The aromas are crisp and clear with scents of just-squeezed lime, pineapple, and a hint of clay. On the palate, orange rind and lemon-grass are seasoned by white pepper. The maturity of the plants shows through the sweetness of the tropical fruit notes, while cashews play around a salty mineral finish. **95** —*Meridith May*

Casa Noble Reposado (\$50) Aged 364 days in new French oak, this tequila is perfumed with maple-cocoa and oak. Peppered mango works with cinnamon, which is a common thread throughout the tequila’s many marques. If passion itself was a flavor, this spirit is its liquid expression. **96** —*M.M.*

Casa Noble Tequila Selección Del Fundador Volume II (\$1,500) Named for the brand’s founder, this Extra Añejo is aged eight years in new French white oak barrels. Only 300 bottles were made, so let me share these notes: Peaches, orange liqueur, and cinnamon waft from the glass. The mouthfeel is slightly spiced, but ultimately silky. Flavors of cooked agave, hazelnut, cedar, dark chocolate, butter, and sandalwood are just some of the savory and floral tones that emanate from this luxurious spirit. **98** —*M.M.*

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

Turning Up the Sweet Heat: **AGAVE LOCO**

A product of Jalisco, Agave Loco begins with a 100 percent agave reposado spirit that becomes the base for an infusion of sweet heat. To build this flavor profile, several types of peppers steep in the spirit before the oils are extracted to produce a cured tequila (the hot peppers, specifically jalapeño, habanero, and serrano, are blended with three varieties of sweet peppers).

Too often when a spicy pepper is introduced to a drink, the heat overpowers all other components. Agave Loco deftly avoids this pervasive problem and instead creates the perfect base for a wide variety of cocktails, including a Jalapeño Bloody Maria, a Jalapeño Sunrise, or a Paloma. It also shines as a secret ingredient in guacamole with a unique kick.

TASTING NOTES

Agave Loco (\$35) The sweet red pepper nose is alluring and clean, offering up a perfume of lime, basil, and maize. The palate gets tickled and teased by the zingy pepper, but is also intrigued by the refined notes of cocoa and baked agave. **93** —*M.M.*

AGAVE LOCO LLC

Jalapeño Sunrise

- 1½ oz. Agave Loco Pepper Cured Tequila
- ½ lime, juiced
- ½ cup frozen strawberries
- ¼ tsp. sugar
- 3 oz. orange juice



An Expanding Family:

CONTIGO, EL FUMADOR, AND EL MACHO

Widely recognized as a premier Californian winemaking family since the early 1900s, the Sebastianis have embarked on a new endeavor: luxury tequila. Led by Donny Sebastiani, Don Sebastiani & Sons partnered with a family-owned distillery in Jalisco to develop a small-batch, expressive, and terroir-driven line of tequilas that launched in 2016.

The three expressions—Contigo, El Fumador, and El Macho—are sourced from an estate-grown blend of highland and lowland agaves. Don Sr. and Donny Sebastiani

have long shared affinities for fine tequilas, appreciating the parallels between crafting the spirit and winemaking. In each art form, they meticulously prepare each detail, all the way down to the proprietary yeast strain used in production.

The Contigo Tequila Plata is made from the small and large hearts of 100 percent Blue Weber agave (the Master Distiller takes the juice and distills it twice in stainless steel tanks). Also produced from the hearts of 100 percent Blue Weber agave, El Fumador, a reposado expression, is distilled twice and

rests for eight months in American white oak barrels previously used to age whiskey.

Finally, El Macho, an añejo tequila, blends 50 percent Blue Weber agave from the volcanic-rich soil of lowlands of Jalisco with 50 percent Blue Weber from the iron-rich soil highlands. Grown in elevations ranging from 4,200–6,700 feet and picked when they mature to 10–12 years old, the agave adds complexity to the flavor profile, which is already enhanced and emboldened by two years of aging in American oak whiskey barrels.

TASTING NOTES



Contigo Tequila Plata (\$35)

Contigo exudes sensuous lavender-lime on the nose with a hint of earth. Deep notes of tobacco, black pepper, black olive, and coffee bean are savory with a rich, spicy mouthfeel. It finishes with a vanilla muskiness that lasts for a long time. **92** —M.M.



El Fumador Reposado (\$40)

This tequila perfumes the air with cooked agave, toffee apple, and pink grapefruit. The delightful aromas are a start to a flavor profile that is enhanced with a slick, edgy mouthfeel. With a high-toned leanness, the salty pear and apple notes are intensified. Black tea, honeyed pineapple, and a surge of slightly-smoky minerality complete this handsome spirit. **94** —M.M.



El Macho Añejo Tequila (\$60)

El Macho is a garden of orange blossom, caramel-cocoa coffee, and a hint of cedar. Those are just the aromas: The palate dazzles with peppered mocha latte, deep-cooked agave, and cinnamon-spiced mandarin orange. **95** —M.M.

DON SEBASTIANI & SONS

A Master Somm Takes on the Tequila Industry:

ASTRAL TEQUILA

Richard Betts, MS, is the ninth person in the world to pass the Court of Master Sommeliers' Masters exam on the very first try. Now he's soaring to new heights with the appropriately-named Astral, a meticulously-crafted artisanal blanco tequila that won a Double Gold Medal at the 2016 San Francisco World Spirits Competition.

"I wanted to return to tequila because I was so sorely disappointed in the way the spirit had evolved to something so devoid of character," Betts says. "I then wanted to explore how to make something reflective of the way it was produced in a time gone by. It's really a throwback to heritage tequila, the likes of which have not been made in decades."

After maturation, the single-estate organic agaves harvested for Astral are slow roasted in traditional stone ovens, or *hornos*. The spirit is produced using native yeast fermentation, which takes eight times longer than conventional fermentation. The *bagazos*—the solid pulp from the crushed roasted agaves—is retained during the fermentation process to capture maximum agave character. Copper pot-distilled and bottled at a higher-than-normal 92 proof, Astral fills the mouth with a rich floral spice that can be served neat or used in any number of cocktails.

TASTING NOTES

Astral Tequila Blanco (\$40) The nose engages with sweet lime and brown sugar while floral flavors of lilac and creamy magnolia paint the palate. A distinct salinity forms a path through vanilla bean and grapefruit. The finish is luxe: You can taste the terroir. **94** —M.M.

DAVOS BRANDS



A Terroir Treasure: CHINACO TEQUILA

A lesser-known region of the five Mexican states permitted by law to produce agave, Tamaulipas sits close to the Gulf of Mexico. With its coastal breezes and soil rich in minerals, the region offers plentiful benefits to producers like Chinaco; named after the landowners in Mexico who became known as fierce fighters in the 1800s, the company sources most of its agave from this underrated region.

Chinaco Tequila Blanco—which won a Double Gold at the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America spirits competition in 2017—joins Chinaco Reposado and Chinaco Tequila Añejo in featuring this agave, which slowly roasts for 12 hours. Utilizing a signature yeast strain, fermentation occurs in steel tanks before the spirit undergoes distillation in copper-lined alembic stills. The Blanco is bottled within 30 days of distillation, while the Reposado ages for eight to 11 months and the Añejo rests for two and a half to three years in a mix of casks. As one of the first premium tequilas to enter the U.S. market in the 1980s, Chinaco proves that a high-quality product has staying power.

TASTING NOTES

Chinaco Blanco Tequila (\$35) The distinctive nose includes vanilla bean and sweet agave. On the palate, the sweetness blooms, caressing the palate while a thread of spice weaves through. Expressive notes of sugar beets, lime blossom, salted caramel, and clay interplay through to the finish. **94** —M.M.

Chinaco Reposado Tequila (\$55) Perfumed with exotic spice and floral notes: sandalwood and jasmine mingle with lanolin, lime, and brown sugar. On the palate, these aromas, flavors, and spices merge for an exquisite mouthfeel. It simultaneously melts and sparks. **96** —M.M.

Chinaco Añejo Tequila (\$65) Chinaco Añejo's unique aromas include apple, toffee, orange rind, and cedar. Cinnamon and clove spice the tongue, while cherry oak is profoundly dramatic mid-palate. The finely aged tequila offers a hint of tobacco and mineral-driven agave notes on the finish. **93** —M.M.

HOTALING & CO.





The Culture Club:

CLASE AZUL

Distributed in more than ten countries with nearly 250 employees, Clase Azul is the world's first luxury tequila brand. Its beginnings, however, were rooted in humble authenticity. First distributed from the trunk of Founder and Master Distiller Arturo Lomeli's car, Clase Azul debuted with a goal to bring the beauty and history of Mexican culture to the drinker in a way no other tequila had before.

Founded in 1997, Clase Azul was at first criticized for its unmistakably tall, hand-painted bottle. Now, it's one of the most recognized tequilas in the world not only because of its incomparable flavor, but for the expert handiwork of the Mazahuan artisans who individually craft each bottle by hand—creating vessels as distinct as the spirit inside them.

Despite Clase Azul's rapid growth over the past two decades, Lomeli insists on handmade craftsmanship and small-batch production over mega-factories and cheap glass. The company also operates a charitable arm, Fundación con Causa Azul, which serves as a philanthropic project dedicated to the preservation of Mexican artisan culture and its traditional techniques.

Clase Azul further sets itself apart as the perfect pairing to elegant foods. The Reposado is a delectable companion to soft brie cheese and robust charcuterie, while the Añejo is a faultless match to semisweet chocolate in mole or after dinner with coffee and a Connecticut cigar.

In addition to its noteworthy tequilas, Clase Azul also produces a mezcal expression. Made from Cenizo Agave grown in the Mexican state of Durango, Mezcal Clase Azul draws its complexity from the region's extreme climate and rich soil. Another member of the brand's portfolio is La Pinta, a blend of Clase Azul Plata tequila and bright, crisp pomegranate. This ultra-premium liqueur, inspired by a traditional pomegranate punch made in Nahuatl, defies categorization while paying homage to its Mexican roots and inherited Spanish tradition. The liqueur perfectly balances tart and sweet and can be enjoyed neat or as the base of any number of cocktails.

With plans to produce more special-edition offerings and expand into exclusive appellations, there's no doubt Clase Azul will continue to serve as the preferred tequila for the connoisseur who dares to be different.

CLASE AZUL SPIRITS



Inspired by Divine Love: **LOS AMANTES MEZCAL**

Mezcal company Los Amantes harbors dual meaning in its name: Translating to “the lovers,” the moniker also honors the goddess Mayahuel, who ancient Mexican cultures—predominantly the Aztecs—associated with the maguey plant. As the folklore goes, Mayahuel infamously sacrificed herself after falling in love with the supreme god Quetzalcoatl against the wishes of her grandmother.

Los Amantes uses espadín, a variety of the maguey plant grown in the state of Oaxaca, in its mezcal production. In accordance with tradition, the distillery cooks the espadín in stone and wood ovens before grinding it in a stone mill powered by a horse; natural fermentation, meanwhile, occurs in wooden tubs.

Los Amantes Mezcal Joven is distilled three times, enabling more nuanced layers of flavors to shine through on the palate. Round and full of character, Los Amantes Mezcal Reposado ages in French oak barrels for six to eight months, while Los Amantes Mezcal Añejo rests for two years in French oak barrels and small American oak casks—adding a touch of smoke and deep complexity to the spirit. Your customers will quickly fall head over heels for this portfolio—no sacrifice necessary.

TASTING NOTES

Los Amantes Joven Mezcal (\$53) This spirit offers up a sturdy nose of lime, smoked spearmint, and brine. The palate is frisky with dots of white pepper, clean agave, and slate. Warm notes of mocha, oregano, and licorice lead to the creamy finish. **94** —M.M.

Los Amantes Reposado Mezcal (\$65) This has an inviting perfume of agave, blueberry, and smoked lime. The delicate, gentle flavors and creamy texture earmark an elegant spirit. Sandalwood and buttercream meld with an echo of minerality. **96** —M.M.

Los Amantes Añejo Mezcal (\$80) Integrates the wood aging gracefully and the aromas of cedar plank, lightly-smoked caramel-lime, and sweet agave are ethereal. Despite an opening curtain of black pepper and singed orange peel, the delicate nature of this spirit is immediately apparent. **95** —M.M.



PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL

Sophisticated Spirits: **TEQUILA BRIBÓN AND TEQUILA CHAMUCOS**

With three generations of experience behind its tequilas, Casa Don Roberto has distinguished itself as one of the top producers in Mexico. Developed in partnership with Palm Bay International, the company's Tequila Bribón expression was developed using a proprietary yeast strain and seven- to ten-year-old fully-matured agave.

The spirit undergoes double distillation in a process that combines pot-still distillation with column distillation. Bribón shines as a Margarita base, especially when combined with Bauchant Orange Liqueur (SRP \$23), made from a base of VS and VSOP Cognac infused with bitter and sweet orange varieties.

Another high-quality tequila available from Palm Bay, Tequila Chamucos, launched in 1994 and sources organic Los Altos agave from the highlands for use in its production. After it's slow cooked in brick ovens, the agave naturally ferments in open vats with its signature yeast strain. Distilled in stainless steel, the Tequila Chamucos portfolio consists of Blanco (SRP \$45), Reposado, and Añejo (SRP \$60) expressions, with the latter two releases aging in virgin American and French white oak.



TASTING NOTES

Bribón Blanco Tequila (\$20) Indulges the senses, first with its charming aromas of bright, clean, fresh lime-kissed agave, then with another high note of blueberries and wild flowers. The stark purity on the palate is dotted with salted grapefruit peel, vanilla, and summer melon. **94** —M.M.

Tequila Chamucos Reposado (\$50) This salts the olfactory senses while edging out fragrances of wild flowers and apricot. Fruit, flower, and earth combine on the palate for a complex layered effect, brushed by white pepper and a creaminess that works with the mineral-acidity on the finish. **95** —M.M.

PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL

A Passion for Community: **SOMBRA MEZCAL**

On a trip south of the border to learn about the world of tequila, Master Sommelier and winemaker Richard Betts instead discovered a passion for mezcal and its terroir. Growing up in Tucson, Arizona, Betts spent his weekends in Sonora drinking agave-derived *bacanora*. From there, he was hooked: Betts traveled all over Mexico before falling in love with Oaxacan mezcal and its strong ties to the people, geography, history, and cuisine of the region. “Sombra is produced in the same way that mezcal has been made in Mexico for several hundred years,” he says. “It’s about organically farmed, mountain-grown agave that is hand-harvested, stone tahona-ground, roasted in the ground, wild-yeast fermented, and distilled in copper pot stills.”

Sombra is also 90 proof—a rarity in the world of mezcal—but it’s a deviation Betts believes is very important as the alcohol carries greater flavor and texture. For Betts, Sombra is just as much about the impact it has on the area than what’s inside the bottle. The Sombra distillery is committed to environmentally-friendly practices, including sustainable forestry, water conservation, composting, solar energy, and upcycling (the company creates adobe bricks from agave byproducts for local housing). In addition to finding ways to give back to the land, Sombra has partnered with 1% For the Planet and donates 1 percent of sales to charities and educational initiatives in the community.

Betts has built Sombra on the Oaxacan ideals of “*te divierte*,” (have fun), “*sigue aprendiendo*” (keep learning), and “*ama la tierra*” (love the earth), at once honoring local traditions while applying them to a more contemporary approach to local and environmental responsibility.

TASTING NOTES

Sombra Joven Mezcal (\$39) Smooth and smoky with roasted piñon, lots of spice, and some rich sweetness; earthy and showing wildflower and earthy, peppery notes. This is the real thing! **93** —M.M.



DAVOS BRANDS

Giving Back to Mexico: **MEZCAL VERDE MOMENTO**

Mezcal Verde Momento has decided to take the challenge of the looming agave shortage head-on: The company is reinvesting 10 percent of its net profits into the planting of more organic espadín agave, citing agave sustainability as one of its main priorities.

Maestro Mezcalero Doroteo Garcia takes these eight-year-old espadín agave and crafts Mezcal Verde Momento using a mix of ocote, holm oak, and pepper tree wood to cook the plants. Natural fermentation, meanwhile, builds the distinctly-smoky flavor profile. The brand packages the mezcal in bottles with six different modern label designs by contemporary Mexican artists, reinforcing that Mezcal Verde Momento’s efforts to engage with the community make it a company growing roots in Mexico in more ways than one.



TASTING NOTES

Mezcal Verde Momento (\$32) This mezcal is supercharged on the nose with a sensual smoke that carries notes of vanilla musk and earth. The satin effect on the mouth is interrupted by a peppered nectar of stone fruit, beet root, and sassafras. The finish smooths out calmly, becoming silkier by the second. **94** —M.M.

HOTALING & CO.

The Highest Honor: **TEQUILA HONOR REFLEXIÓN**

By partnering with fourth-generation agave growers and tequila producers Familia Vivanco, Tequila Honor aims to honor the very traditions that make the spirit remarkable. The producer’s blanco expression, Tequila Honor Reflexión (SRP \$45), starts with 100 percent blue agave cooked in clay ovens. It ferments slowly using a proprietary yeast strain before being distilled in small copper pot stills.

The final spirit does not overwhelm the palate, instead creating a balanced and inviting tequila tailored for guests of honor seeking new and authentic experiences.

TASTING NOTES

Tequila Honor Del Castillo Reflexión Blanco (\$45) This spirit has an assertive bouquet of salty lime: tart and piquant. Exotic, spicy fruit and blue flowers take over on the palate before the black-pepper twist and fresh agave aftertaste. Cayenne-spiced raspberries finish dramatically. **93** —M.M.

GLOBAL QUALITY IMPORTS INC.



PUSHING THE LIMIT

PHOTO COURTESY OF JILL ANDERSON

BARTENDERS GO BEYOND COCKTAILS FOR GLENFIDDICH'S MOST EXPERIMENTAL BARTENDER COMPETITION

Glenfiddich's World's Most Experimental Bartender Competition—formerly known as the Kindred Spirit Competition—has always set itself apart from other cocktail contests by the sheer inventiveness and artistry it demands from its participants.

Rather than require bartenders to simply create a cocktail using Glenfiddich expressions as the primary ingredients, the acclaimed Scotch whisky producer encourages contestants to come up with unique “serves” for their entries. In the past, finalists have paired Glenfiddich with tea and oaties, crafted edible cigars, and constructed whisky cocktails using sous-vide methods.

Now in its fourth year, the competition has set the stakes even higher as Glenfiddich brand ambassadors and *Tasting Panel* editors travel all over the country to see the serves in person. The results are in: Eleven finalists will embark on a trip to Scotland this spring to compete in the U.S. finals, with one winner continuing on to compete for the coveted title of Most Experimental Bartender in the global final this November. We've profiled the serves of this accomplished group of bartenders and hope these serves will inspire your own creations behind the bar!

JILL ANDERSON THE DRIFTER IN CHICAGO, IL “HEATHER & HEARTH”



THE SERVE: For the impressive presentation of her cocktail serve, Anderson burned Glenfiddich's stag emblem and indentations for four Glencairn glasses into two unfinished wood rounds, then attached a carved ox horn and stand onto each round. Each horn contains rosemary and lemon thyme, which “adds a three-dimensional element and fragrance to the serve,” Anderson says. The cocktail served in the glasses features Glenfiddich 14 Year Old, Drambuie, V.E.P. Green Chartreuse, housemade cardamom, coffee bitters, and a lemon-twist garnish.



THE INSPIRATION: Anderson says her serve is intended as a large-format cocktail for between two to eight people (there's four glasses per wooden round). “The look and feel of the serve was meant to evoke a rustic Scottish landscape while presenting an elegant cocktail with opulent ingredients,” she explains, adding that she chose the Glencairn glass to concentrate and intensify the drink's flavors.

JERAMY CAMPBELL

SEVEN GRAND IN AUSTIN, TX

"VALLEY OF THE DEER"



THE SERVE: The elaborate, interactive story behind Campbell's serve starts with a wooden box containing three bottles labeled 1, 2, and 3, which contain Glenfiddich 12 Year Old, 15 Year Old, and 18 Year Old, respectively. Each is paired with an unlikely snack—a Slim Jim, Nutter Butters, and a Lindt LINDOR Truffle—which serve as part of the story Campbell conceived; the box also contains materials necessary for participants to complete that narrative's central mission.



In the story, as Campbell explains, "the participant has found their way into the safe haven that is Seven Grand, aka the Valley of the Deer. In order for the participant to become a member of this elite group of humans fighting back against their oppressors (the DEER), they must go through a series of tests to prove they are not an enemy spy." The low-brow snacks represent rare delicacies in this imagined dystopian future, but Campbell says they also show whisky drinkers "don't always have to be fancy when pairing flavors together."

The serve doesn't end there: Participants open an envelope at the bottom of the box at the end of the test, revealing the flavor notes of the pairing along with everything else they've just tasted. A dart also included in the box, meanwhile, must be thrown at one of Seven Grand's dart boards. The participant then hands the bartender their Seven Grand token marked with an X, and depending on which number they hit on the dartboard, the bartender will make them one of 21 Glenfiddich whisky cocktails.



THE INSPIRATION: While its name comes from the English translation of "Glenfiddich" from Scottish Gaelic, Campbell's serve drew its inspiration from Seven Grand itself. "Seven Grand, above all else, is a whisk(e)y bar," Campbell says. "Our success comes from our knowledge, customer service, and ability to make a great classic cocktail." In an effort to remain true to this identity, Campbell devised a serve with simple components that would be easy to recreate during service while also providing a distinct and unforgettable tasting experience. Needless to say, we think he achieved it.



PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY

JOSEPH BENNETT

FINE & RARE IN NEW YORK, NY

"LIGHT AS A FEATHER"



PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY



THE SERVE: Bennett's serve features a soup with chicken stock, warm water, egg drop, and Glenfiddich 12 Year Old with a garnish of celery salt, roasted lemon, and three quail eggs. Each egg is pickled differently: sweet, curried, and beet.



THE INSPIRATION: "Growing up in Seattle, I was used to cold, damp weather in winter, and I thought the weather in Scotland must be quite similar," Bennett says. "I set out to make a soothing cocktail—something to warm one up on a raw day—and aimed to create something filling, satisfying, and somewhat savory, like a cock-a-leekie soup from Scotland. Then I took out the food elements and replaced the barley element with Glenfiddich."



PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY

HEMANT KUMAR PATHAK

JUNOON IN NEW YORK, NY

"GLENFIDDICH GOES POP!"



THE SERVE:

In collaboration with Junoon's pastry kitchen, Pathak prepares three pastries modeled after Pop-Tarts and pairs them with a pour of Glenfiddich 15 Year Old. He also mixes the expression with a paste of almond flour and confectioner's sugar for the pastry dough, which is filled with a fig and ginger reduction jam, more Glenfiddich, and mascarpone with a hint of black pepper.



PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY



THE INSPIRATION: "For this serve I went back to my roots—I loved Pop-Tarts as a kid!" Pathak says. "Combining a cherished childhood memory with what I do now to create something special is what this pairing was all about."

SEAMUS BANNING

ASHTON CIGAR BAR IN PHILADELPHIA, PA

"THE EYE OF BALOR"



PHOTO: FELICIA PERRETTI



THE SERVE:

Banning's serve celebrates the layers of flavor hidden within Glenfiddich 12 Year Old Single Malt Scotch, which are revealed and accentuated by allowing the whisky to drip at a rate of just 300 drips per hour through a mixture of herbs, peels, and spices (including Szechuan peppercorns, citrus peels, bay leaf, rosemary, thyme, and coriander) housed in a

Kyoto cold-brew coffee-drip tower.

After the drip is complete, Banning pours the brewed whisky over ice and a demerara sugar cube infused with Angostura Bitters into a hand-carved limestone mug created by Red Celt Stone Sculpture. The drink is then placed in a wooden cigar box under a glass dome, into which the smoke of dried jasmine flowers is piped to "smoke" the surface of the cocktail. Banning lifts the dome as he serves the cocktail alongside a plate of olives and an Ashton Symmetry Belicoso cigar; the Nicaraguan/Dominican tobacco blend's "creamy and peppery smoke flawlessly syncs with the layers of aromatics" in the cocktail, Banning explains.



THE INSPIRATION:

Banning named his serve after Balor, an ancient Celtic god of destruction also known as the "Irish Cyclops." Legend has it that Balor used seven cloaks to subdue the powerful forces within his eye, and with the removal of each cloak, the depths of this awesome power were revealed: Heat began to build and intensify, causing smoke and sparks to emit from the ferns and trees until, with the shedding of the last cloak, the entire landscape burst into flames. "For my serve, Balor's seven cloaks represent the seven layers of flavor revealed as the cocktail develops over ice: Classic Glenfiddich apple and pear notes accentuated by citrus peel, followed by jasmine smoke, Szechuan peppercorns, bay leaf, herbs (rosemary and thyme), and spice (coriander)," Banning says.



PHOTO: FELICIA PERRETTI

YOUNG KIM

FLATIRON ROOM IN NEW YORK, NY
"THE FROZEN STORM"



THE SERVE: Kim's serve is a deconstructed and frozen version of a Whiskey Sour featuring Glenfiddich 12 Year Old. The whisky, infused with ginger, pink peppercorns, pear, lemon, and honey, is topped with Champagne and showcased in a bowl. A deconstructed array of the Glenfiddich 12 Year Old's flavor components—spiced poached pear, apple, and seasoned nuts—are served on a tray alongside the whisky and aim to show the spirit's journey from malted barley to bottle. The serve is currently on the menu at Flatiron Room, which sells about two bottles worth of Glenfiddich per week strictly for use in her cocktail.



THE INSPIRATION: Kim says the idea for her serve came from her mother, who would give her an old Korean remedy for coughs as a child. "It was a traditional concoction of pear that had been poached in pink peppercorn, ginger, and honey," she adds.



PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY



PHOTO: TIMOTHY MURRAY

PHOTO: GREG POWERS



SHAUN STEWART

ELK ROOM IN BALTIMORE, MD
"AVADA KEDAVRA, OLD SPORT"



THE SERVE:

Stewart's serve first combines Glenfiddich 12 Year Old and a vanilla orgeat in a mixing glass before the mixture is slowly poured into the bottom of a tea siphon. In the top vessel

of the siphon, Stewart adds orange peel, double bergamot Earl Grey tea, cardamom, clove, star anise, and cassia bark to create a handcrafted version of Boker's Bitters.

After a flame is lit under the bottom vessel, the heated liquid ventures upward into the top vessel, where it infuses with the other ingredients before slowly returning to the bottom. Vintage tea cups are placed in front of each guest with a finger sandwich of cucumber, tomato, lemon, dill, and a little bit of oil to serve as a cleansing bite between sips.

Stewart then pours the cocktail into a teapot for serving when it's finished steeping, and it's at this stage that the wizardry comes in: "In a second teapot, I add dry ice to already brewed Earl Grey tea, which will produce a fog that will go onto the surface of each cocktail and bring more of the wizarding world into it. I finish with a flash of green light and there you have it! Avada Kedavra, old sport!"



THE INSPIRATION:

According to Stewart, the main inspiration for his serve came from his girlfriend, Elisa Hutter: "I wanted to bring a part of her world into mine by creating a cocktail influenced by her favorite book series, *Harry Potter*," he says. Fans of the books and movies will undoubtedly recognize the famous death spell in the serve's name, but the second half of its title relates to what Stewart calls a "little-known fact": "In *The Great Gatsby* when Jay Gatsby looks out over the water and sees a green light, it's actually the spell Avada Kedavra being used by American wizards to defeat Death Eaters," he quips. Some may call it revisionist literature . . . we call it creativity.



PHOTO: GREG POWERS



PHOTO: BENJAMIN RUSNAK

BEN GOLDEN

BELLWETHER IN JACKSONVILLE, FL

"BLACK CHYPRE"

THE SERVE: Golden dubbed his serve Black Chypre, a play on "black sheep" (Bellwether is owned by the Black Sheep Group) and a term used by the perfume industry to describe an array of aromatics (typically citrus top notes, bergamot heart notes, and oak moss base notes) coexisting in harmony.

For his cocktail, Golden first created a Whisky Smash utilizing Glenfiddich Bourbon Barrel Reserve 14 Year Old Single Malt, grapefruit, mulled wine syrup (red wine, mulling spices, and brandy), and rosemary. The serve was then strained into a glass smoked with vetiver root and topped with a cocktail foam aromatized with bergamot, black pepper, Luxardo maraschino, and a spritz of lime with a rosemary sprig garnish. The fusion of the whisky and vetiver root's woody and spicy base notes, the bergamot heart notes, and the jasmine top notes, meanwhile, form the "chypre" of the cocktail.



PHOTO: BENJAMIN RUSNAK

THE INSPIRATION: Golden says his love of classic French perfume "in all of its timeless elegance" inspired him to demonstrate through his serve how aroma influences taste: "I set out to create a perfumed cocktail that will transform a simple drink into an artistic, sensual experience. Golden believes the Black Chypre proves "aromatics can take a simple cocktail to the next level" while still celebrating the inherent character of the Glenfiddich Bourbon Barrel Reserve 14 Year Old Single Malt.

OSCAR SINISTERRA

COLD DRINKS IN SAN FRANCISCO, CA

"A MOMENT OF MY LOVE"

THE SERVE: Sinisterra's thoughtful, multi-step tea serve requires audience participation: Inside a wooden whiskey box, he uses a small candle stove to heat a mixture of Fernet-Branca, coffee beans, anise, and cinnamon, which, once boiling, is immediately cooled in a glass over ice. Sinisterra then presents his audience with three crystal glasses—each containing an ice block, Glenfiddich 14 Year Old Single Malt Scotch, and the Fernet mixture—before providing them with three brightly-colored syrups: hibiscus/raspberry, saffron, and mint. Participants can then use a paintbrush to paint the inside of their glass with the syrups, reserving the other ingredients to create their own Old Fashioneds as Sinisterra plays music from a small wooden music box.



PHOTO: HARDY WILSON

THE INSPIRATION: "I wanted to capture all of the senses with my serve," Sinisterra explained. "The wooden whisky box in which the central elements are contained are literally 'captured.' The boiling mixture with coffee beans uses your sense of smell, while the painting of the syrups provides the tactile element, the music box provides the sounds, the presentation itself is the visual aspect, and of course, there's the taste of the cocktail you create!"



PHOTO: HARDY WILSON



PHOTO: FELICIA PERRETTI

KYLE DARROW

RED OWL TAVERN IN PHILADELPHIA, PA

"THE SCOTCH EXPERIMENT"

THE SERVE: Darrow presents his series of three distinct serves in a striking set of connected wood boxes rustically "stained" with aromatic bitters and engraved with wood-burned Celtic symbols. Each box houses a small glass containing each component of a cocktail divided in three parts: Nature, The Barrel, and The Craftsman.

Nature acts as a tribute to Robbie Dhu, the celebrated spring that supplies the Glenfiddich distillery with its water. This first serve highlights Glenfiddich 12 Year Old Single Malt enhanced with a spiced pear reduction and an ice cube infused with edible dandelion and lemongrass. The glass is artfully set within the first box on a bed of green moss.

The second serve, The Barrel, commemorates the Glenfiddich cooperage and the charring of the oak casks that nurture the distillery's whisky for decades. Darrow harnesses the rich vanilla, baking spice, and smoky notes of the Glenfiddich 15 Year Solera Reserve Single Malt Scotch and emboldens them with a splash of El Maestro Sierra Pedro Ximénez Sherry. The serve is set in the second box next to a small mound of smoldering oak chips.

The final serve in the trilogy—dubbed The Craftsman—is a nod to the blending expertise of Glenfiddich Malt Master Brian Kinsman. The two glass dram vials in this last box each contain one of the previous liquid serves and are accompanied by empty glass, which encourages the guest to experiment with the serves and create different blends just as a malt master would.

THE INSPIRATION: Darrow says the "Trinity Knot" design of the iconic, triangular Glenfiddich bottle was the guiding influence behind his serve. "I wanted to highlight the three elements at the heart of great Glenfiddich whisky—the natural raw materials, the wood maturation, and



PHOTO: FELICIA PERRETTI

STEPHEN KURPINSKY

GEORGE'S AT THE COVE IN SAN DIEGO, CA

"DUFFTOWN BY CANDLELIGHT"



PHOTO: HARDY WILSON

THE SERVE: Kurpinsky's serve features a cocktail made with Glenfiddich 15 Year Old Solera Scotch Whisky mixed with a flambéed syrup of coffee beans, orange peel, cinnamon, sugar, 151-proof rum, and water, as well as Sherry and housemade aromatic bitters. After Kurpinsky stirs the cocktail with ice to dilute it, he serves it on the rocks with a side of Walkers classic shortbread and dehydrated lemon slices set on fire for theatrical effect.

THE INSPIRATION: The Scottish hometown of Glenfiddich's distillery, Dufftown, gave Kurpinsky's serve its name. "It's a play on an Old Fashioned, and the chewy, citrus feel of the Pedro Ximénez Sherry cask-aged whisky pairs well with the raisin-esque quality of the Sherry. I imagined this cocktail as something you would have as a nightcap in Dufftown," Kurpinsky says, adding pointedly, "although I haven't been to Scotland . . . yet." Thanks to his winning serve, that won't hold true for long. ■■



PHOTO: HARDY WILSON



Johan Hagstrom, Bartender at The Living Room at the Park Hyatt New York, with his Park Hyatt GT cocktail.

JOHAN HAGSTROM

BARTENDER, **THE LIVING ROOM AT THE PARK HYATT**
NEW YORK

by David Ransom

As a young bartender in his hometown of Helsingborg, Sweden, Johan Hagstrom would dream of one day joining the New York bar scene. A leap of faith has since landed him in the Big Apple for good: After completing stints at Marcus Samuelsson's Red Rooster, Charlie Palmer's Aureole, and Marc Forgione's Khe-Yo, Hagstrom is now a bartender at The Living Room, the sleekly-modern bar in the soaring Park Hyatt hotel on Manhattan's West 57th Street.

Hagstrom fell into the industry by accident at 19 when a friend asked him to cover a barback shift at local nightclub. After spending three years honing his skills at "the Swedish equivalent of an Irish pub" and several nightclubs, Hagstrom shifted his focus to making craft cocktails before finally making the jump to New York in 2012.

At the Living Room, where he's worked since 2015, the menu is split between progressive cocktails and the classics. "I love creating new drinks, but I've always been intrigued by cocktails with a history, so our list has a bit of both," Hagstrom says. A big fan of brown spirits, Hagstrom also aims to increase The Living Room's allocated whiskies collection in the coming months.

Rather than trying to please everyone, Hagstrom instead likes to target those with specific tastes. "I create most of my cocktails with the intention of hitting just that certain audience who will appreciate it," he explains. "I find it more interesting and challenging than making just a good cocktail with broad appeal." ■■

THE "5" LIST

JOHAN HAGSTROM'S TOP FIVE FAVES:

When I can introduce a guest to a spirit or a cocktail they think they won't like, and then make them love it.

When I'm judgmental toward a guest for whatever reason (yes, I'm a jaded bartender), but then they prove me wrong and are the sweetest people ever.

When guests are fully understanding that we're slammed and are still nice and patient—much appreciated.

Meeting new people who become new bar regulars!

Making connections and meeting likeminded members of the industry.

JOHAN HAGSTROM'S TOP FIVE PET PEEVES:

When guests ask for a glass of water or a menu before sitting down or even saying hello.

Guests blowing their nose in a linen napkin (or paper, for that matter) and leaving it on the bar or table. Disgusting.

Splitting checks five ways. Venmo, people!

When a guest orders a wine, gets a taste, agrees to a whole glass, and *then* sends it back.

When guests ask you to make something they found online without even looking at the menu.

Ole Smoky
Tennessee
Moonshine

C'MON
WIN A LITTLE

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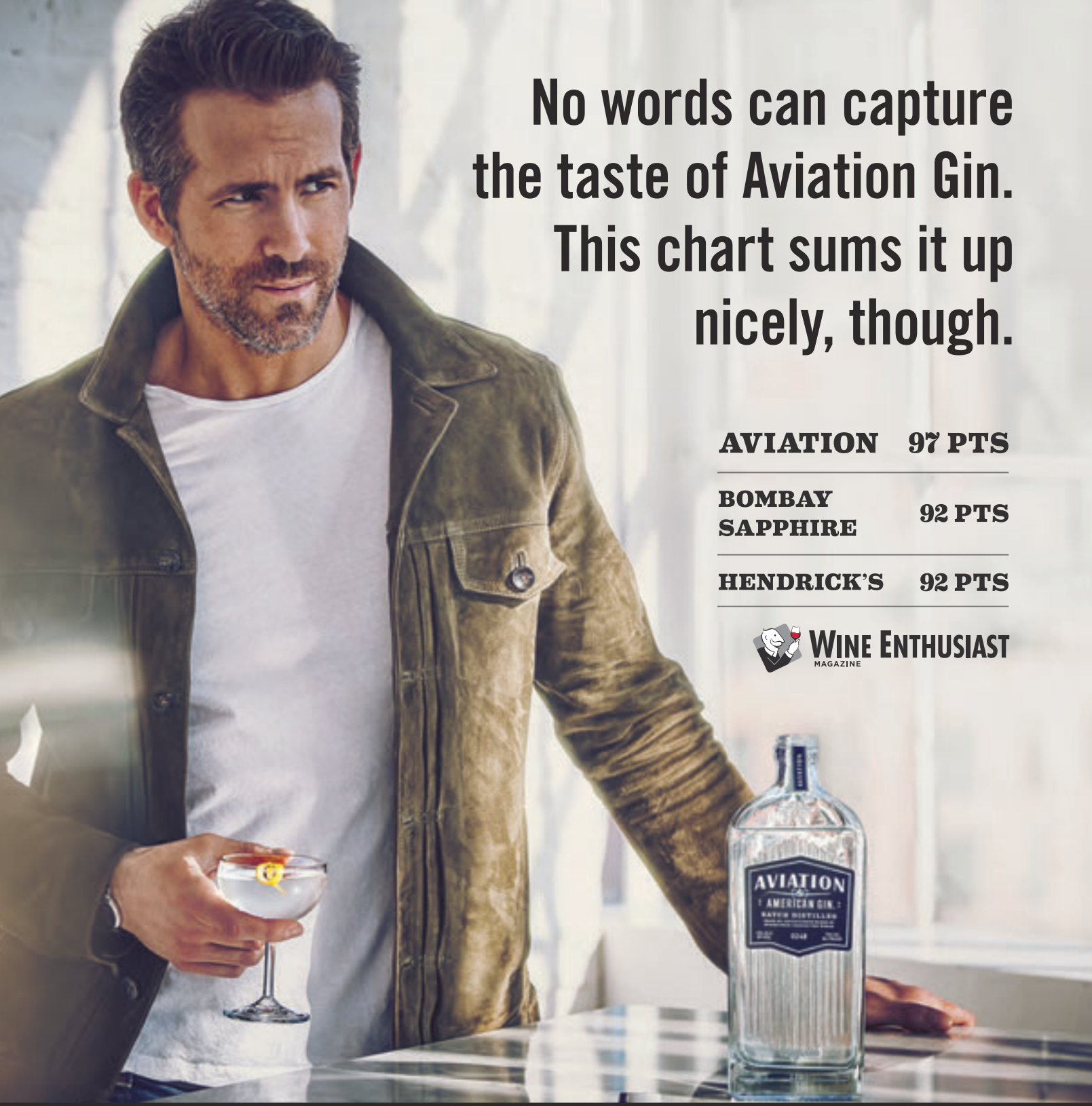
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No words can capture
the taste of Aviation Gin.
This chart sums it up
nicely, though.

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