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THE tastingpanel MAGAZINE

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UPFRONT

TALES 2.0

GROUNDBREAKING BRAND
ACTIVATIONS BREATHE NEW
LIFE INTO NEW ORLEANS'
TALES OF THE COCKTAIL



Under new management, the updated Tales of the Cocktail enables brands like ABSOLUT Elyx to pull out all the stops to get feet—and fins!—in the door.



Ole Smoky Moonshine recreated its famous distillery, The Holler, for a pop-up tasting room experience at Tales of the Cocktail.

by Rachel Burkons

THE SPIRITS WORLD WAITED with bated breath until mid-July to see what the future would hold for Tales of the Cocktail under the convention's new ownership and management in 2018. As industry professionals from around the globe gathered in hotel lobbies, on street corners, and in iconic bars and restaurants across New Orleans, the answer we'd excitedly awaited finally became clear: Not only has Tales 2.0 arrived, it just might be primed to thrive like never before.

While there were some notable differences and a slightly more subdued feel overall, the new Tales placed even more of an emphasis on education, advocacy, and industry responsibility than its predecessors, with seminars tackling everything from diversity and wellness to life-saving training focused on reversing the effects of an opioid overdose. This understated, serious tone extended all the way to the convention's new logos and branded artwork, breathing professional focus onto an event that's trended more toward bacchanalia than business in recent years.

The William Grant & Sons portfolio party served as one of the most notable hints that things would be a bit different for Tales in 2018. The annual kick-off event has consistently set the tone for experimentation and excellence as far as brand activations go, and this year proved no different, with the supplier paying homage to the 1988 film *Cocktail* by way of music, good vibes, and décor dominated by New Orleans' famed Mardi Gras floats.

"TALES HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT BARTENDERS AND BRAND REPRESENTATIVES CONVENING TO REVEL IN THE MAGICAL MOMENTS THEIR SHARED CRAFT CREATES . . . IT WAS ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THEY FORM THE LIFEBLOOD OF TALES OF THE COCKTAIL."

Considering the occasion, it was surprising to find a particular item missing from this shindig: alcohol. In a somewhat unprecedented move, one of the biggest spirits suppliers in the world decided to throw a gigantic party for bartenders without serving any of its products. Instead, this “spiritfree” soiree melded the talents of WGS’ brand ambassadors roster with those of mocktail expert Julia Momose. Their collaborative menu featured beverages like Sailor Jerry–inspired root beer floats, malted barley and apricot sodas that mimicked the classic Speyside notes in Glenfiddich whiskies, and a virgin take on a Hendrick’s Long Island Iced Tea with cold brew, chicory tonic, and pickled cucumber.



Glenfiddich’s newest release: Fire & Cane.

“Going ‘spiritfree’ in this way allows us to promote responsible consumption by proving that we can come together and have just as much fun without alcohol,”

William Grant Portfolio Ambassador Charlotte Voisey said. “We need to be comfortable with that as an industry.”

According to Voisey, the spiritfree and responsibility-focused elements implemented this year at Tales are part of a larger trend. “In my opinion, the industry will continue to be at its best when it moves forward with balance of all things—for example, the full integration of all types of beverages on cocktail menus rather than segregating ‘mocktails’ off to the side as an afterthought,” she said. “I don’t think people

will stop drinking alcohol; there’s just a need for more good choices across the board for the times when people are not drinking for any one of a myriad of reasons.”

But Tales of the Cocktail is, after all, a celebration of all things spirited, so the festivities returned to business as usual the following morning at the William Grant whisky tasting room. Hidden behind a curtain for VIP palates only was the new release from Glenfiddich’s experimental series: Fire & Cane, a smoky, sweet sipper that marries peated and non-peated whisky aged side by side in ex-bourbon casks. Matured in Latin American rum casks, the resulting spirit exudes Glenfiddich’s signature rich fruitiness with a caramelized undertone of smoked toffee. (*Editor’s note:* Look for more from Glenfiddich and its experimental series in upcoming issues of *The Tasting Panel*.)

While some brands used their tasting rooms to show off new expressions, others transformed their designated areas into immersive experiences, like Ole Smoky Moonshine, which opted to bring a piece of the Great Smoky Mountains to the Crescent City. As guests entered the tasting suite to the sounds of live music, they were greeted with bars proffering cocktails and neat tastes meant to emulate the atmosphere at the brand’s flagship distillery, The Holler—the most-visited facility of its kind in the world. (For more on the activation, turn to page 72.)

Attendees encountered yet another transformative experience just a few blocks away at the Garden of Elyx, where ABSOLUT turned a classic French Quarter courtyard into its own private palace—complete with fancy slushy cocktails, infused popsicles, and abundant copper glassware—in honor of its ABSOLUT Elyx expression.

While these showstopping activations brought a glitz to Tales reminiscent of previous years, some brands took a quieter approach. Pasote Tequila and Bozal Mezcal, for example, hosted a private happy hour with the labels’ distillers, providing an intimate respite from the usual hubbub. “It is important to bring our distillers to this year’s Tales of the Cocktail to bridge the gap



At William Grant & Sons’ annual portfolio party, Portfolio Ambassador Charlotte Voisey and “spiritfree” bartender Julia Momose celebrated the art of mixology sans alcohol.



Bartenders served drinks in copper vessels of various shapes and sizes at the ABSOLUT Elyx House.

between them and the industry’s gatekeepers,” explains August Sebastiani, President of the brands’ parent company, 3 Badge Beverage Corporation. “With an opportunity to drill down on the craft process and production techniques, the educational aspect is a valuable component that bartenders and mixologists can take home and celebrate with their customers.”

In a similar strategy, Writer’s Tears Whiskey—a release from Irish brand Walsh Whiskey in the Disaronno International portfolio—turned the quiet back corner of a sweets shop into a private library bar, where poets tapped out prose on vintage typewriters. Jack Daniel’s also stayed true to its rock ‘n’ roll reputation as it honored brand advocates with two days of featured bartender pop-ups at gritty New Orleans institution The Chart Room.

It’s the sheer diversity of these spirited experiences that allows Tales

to really shine: It encourages brands to embrace their identities and share them with the leading bartenders of the world for a week spent joyously celebrating the industry’s past, present, and future.

One special moment during Tales 2.0, however, managed to bring attendees together more than any swanky party could. As Friday afternoon’s activities concluded, hundreds of industry professionals gathered for a second line parade in memory of Miami barman John Lermayer, who died in early June at the age of 45.

At its best, Tales has always been about bartenders and brand representatives convening to revel in the magical moments their shared craft creates, and as the band played on and more and more people gathered to march, it was abundantly clear they form the lifeblood of Tales of the Cocktail: a collaborative force that should keep its heart beating soundly for years to come. ■■



Pasote Tequila Master Distiller Felipe Camarena and 3 Badge Beverage Corporation President August Sebastiani both attended this year’s Tales of the Cocktail.

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PHOTO: CHRIS GRANGER



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A Cautionary Tale for Absentee Owners

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



Picture this: It was my wife's birthday—a big birthday that seemed to demand a grand gesture. After doing lots of research, we chose an Italian restaurant with a beautiful garden shaded by a huge oak tree. It had a famous chef's name attached to it, so how bad could it be?

We had actually been to this place before—several times, in fact. It had previously been a French restaurant with the same décor and owner, and before that, an Italian place. When the French concept first opened, I brought a well-known and very recognizable cookbook author. The owner, however, spent the evening drinking and eating with his cronies at a table in the corner, never bothering to stop by our table to introduce himself. The second time I visited, the place was half-empty and the owner was nowhere to be seen. The restaurant closed a few months later.

This was not an isolated occurrence, apparently. The same owner opened a Korean restaurant in a neighboring city, which got off to a great start before stumbling, changing its format, and ultimately folding. Another place in a hotel also failed, but in this guy's defense, he does have a very successful restaurant in another part of town. I'm told he spends most of his time there entertaining his pals.

Anyway, I digress: On the birthday night in question, seven of us sat down under the tree and settled in for a celebratory feast. The house specialties we ordered were OK, but not dazzling, and the celebrity chef was not on hand. Neither, unsurprisingly, was the owner.

After I asked for the check, the manager rushed over a few minutes later, apologizing profusely. "The computerized system is down," he told us. "I'm going to have to handwrite the check." That was fine by me, until I realized he would have to handwrite every check in the restaurant.

A half hour later, the poor, harried young manager brought the check and apologized again, telling us that the new line chef had only been working there for two nights. "And where is the owner?" I asked. "Oh, he's at his other restaurant," the man replied. This response left me bewildered: Why hadn't he rushed to the aid of his struggling place?

If I had to make a prediction, it seems this place is doomed to befall the same fate of his other closed restaurants within a matter of months. The evidence amounts to a cautionary tale with a simple admonition: An absentee owner is a surefire formula for failure.

Take it or leave it, my advice is this—if you're hearing the siren song of the restaurant business, it's best to be prepared to show up nearly every night. While your customers expect it, your employees depend on it. ■■

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DAOU Vineyards & Winery Welcomes Master Sommelier Fred Dame

DAOU Vineyards & Winery has announced that Master Sommelier Fred Dame, one of the most renowned and revered sommeliers in the world, is joining the family-owned company as Global Wine Ambassador. Dame will work with founders Georges and Daniel Daou to continue transforming the Adelaida District of Paso Robles into the global wine industry's next frontier for fine Bordeaux varieties while enhancing awareness of DAOU's exceptional wines.

Dame, the first American to serve as President of the Court of Master Sommeliers and complete the Master Sommelier examination in a single year, is one of the wine and restaurant industry's most acclaimed advisors. His decision to join DAOU, an award-winning winery established on DAOU Mountain in 2007, was driven by the opportunity to help blaze a trail in an emerging region with a distinctive terroir and family-focused approach to winemaking. The addition of Dame will further the Daou brothers' commitment to DAOU Mountain and the region itself.

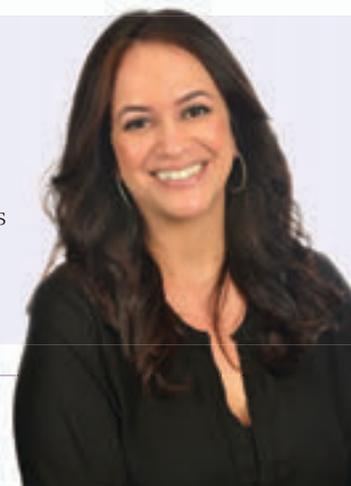
"I couldn't think of a better final chapter of my career than the opportunity to work alongside the Daou brothers," said Dame. "Georges and Daniel have a passionate commitment to excellence that sets them apart, and it has been demonstrated year over year with the purity and ascent of their wines. When you combine their extraordinary vision and culture with the ideal conditions and developing potential of the mountain, you can imagine my delight in becoming part of this extraordinary winery and its quest to produce the ultimate wines in terms of grace, structure, and complexity."



Georges Daou, Fred Dame, MS, and Daniel Daou.

Brianna Pastrana Joins Silverado Vineyards as Event Manager

Silverado Vineyards has appointed Brianna Pastrana as the winery's new Event Manager. Pastrana will oversee the winery's special events program, which hosts gatherings ranging from large group tastings and private events to collaborative affairs with other wine-focused organizations, including The Stags Leap District Winegrowers and Music in the Vineyards.



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Wine By Your Side Brings Convenience Tableside

Wine By Your Side aims to revolutionize table service for both on- and off-premise wine drinkers with its three-piece wine-holder set, helping diners discover newfound convenience in a variety of settings by freeing up table space.

The set touts a chrome-plated steel frame which attaches easily to the side of most tables, creating a freestanding base for a durable stainless-steel ice bucket with a double-walled interior to eliminate condensation. For red wine connoisseurs, a steel adapter shrinks the size of the bucket's opening to securely store wine bottles upright and at room temperature. For more information, visit enjoywinebyside.com.

Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits Appoints Anthony Capparelli as General Manager of South Florida

Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits has appointed Anthony Capparelli to the position of General Manager of South Florida. Capparelli will report directly to Patrick Cassidy, Executive Vice President and General Manager of Florida.

Capparelli has worked for Southern Glazer's for 14 years, transitioning from sales management to his most recent role as Vice President of On Premise for the South Florida division. "Anthony is a results-driven sales leader with a proven history of improving processes, growing revenues, and developing top-performing sales teams," Cassidy said. "[He] is the perfect fit for this role and I am confident that he will take South Florida to even greater heights."



Precept Wine Acquires Truett-Hurst's Wholesale Business Unit

Precept Wine has acquired Truett-Hurst, Inc., an innovative wine sales, marketing, and production company based in Sonoma County that celebrated its tenth anniversary last October. The Truett-Hurst portfolio includes both national brands and exclusives created for retailers, including Albertsons, The Kroger Co., Trader Joe's, Total Wine & More, and several others.

The acquisition gives Precept a foothold in the California wine market and bolsters its Grape & Grain exclusive label business, the fastest-growing portion of its portfolio which accounts for 35 percent of the company's annual sales. Combined, Precept and Truett-Hurst will produce more than 1 million cases of exclusive label wine annually; Truett-Hurst, meanwhile, will retain its Dry Creek Estate and direct-to-consumer brands Truett Hurst and VML.

As part of the acquisition, Phillip L. Hurst, President, Chief Executive Officer, and Director of Truett-Hurst, will join Precept to focus on national and exclusive brands. A veteran winemaker with more than three decades of experience, Hurst is one of the founders of Winery Exchange Inc.; as its Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing from 1999 to 2007, he helped grow the company to more than \$100 million in sales in less than ten years. ■■

Long On Tradition

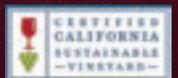
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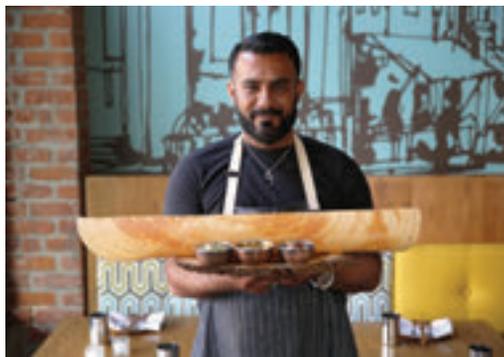
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BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Modern Indian Debuts in Santa Monica at Tumbi

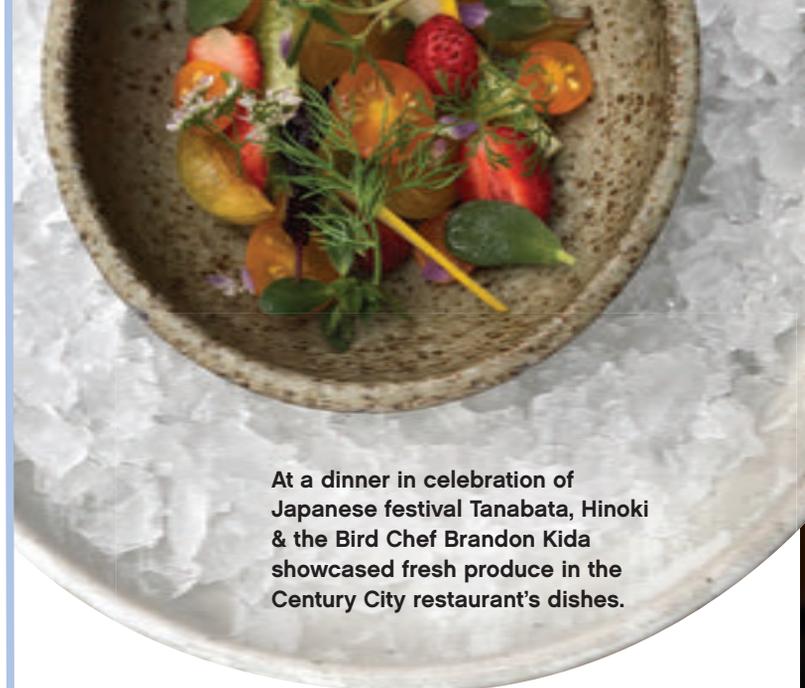
The tourist-packed area of Santa Monica near the pier and the Third Street Promenade might seem an unlikely place to find quality Indian food, but Tumbi, which opened in March, provides a culinary safe haven amongst the chains and more generic destinations.



Chef Imran Mookhi serves up larger-than-life dosas at modern Indian restaurant Tumbi in Santa Monica.

You won't find traditional samosas on the menu, but the substantial dosas can be ordered with various fillings, including lamb, masala potato, or paneer and spiced ricotta with toppings like chili garlic chutney. Chef Imran Mookhi incorporates ingredients from the Santa Monica Farmers Market—basically on the restaurant's doorstep—into dishes like the heirloom and caramelized pineapple salad or kabobs with spinach, soirel, and potatoes.

Familiar Indian dishes also make an appearance on the menu, like the incredibly delicious butter chicken and fluffy, warm garlic naan or the dippable pani puri with tamarind-mint water. The wine and beer list, meanwhile, provides refreshing accompaniments for the flavorful cuisine. Although Indian restaurants are prevalent on L.A.'s west side, Tumbi is perhaps the first to bring well-crafted, modern Indian cuisine to the beach. —*Jesse Hom-Dawson*



At a dinner in celebration of Japanese festival Tanabata, Hinoki & the Bird Chef Brandon Kida showcased fresh produce in the Century City restaurant's dishes.

Celebrating Tanabata at Hinoki & the Bird

For Tanabata, an annual Japanese celebration of love, revelers write wishes on a traditional ribbon known as a *tanzaku* and tie it to a plant. It's thought that when the plants grow, the wishes are brought closer to heaven. L.A. restaurant Hinoki & the Bird celebrates Tanabata, also known as the Star Festival, every year with a special tasting menu by Executive Chef Brandon Kida, and this year's dinner was a standout.

A hand-illustrated menu accompanied five dishes featuring local produce and seafood, including Santa Barbara spot prawns served both raw and fried. Exuding flavors seemingly fresh from the garden, sweet corn agnolotti pasta was served with a tomato dashi and fresh uni, while 30-day dry-aged Flannery Beef arrived alongside mouthwatering bone marrow and scallion crispy rice. —*Jesse Hom-Dawson*

Princess Cruises Unveils Its New Global Cocktail Menu

With 25 years of experience in the industry, master mixologist Rob Floyd of *Bar Rescue* is at the helm of Princess Cruises' new cocktail menu. Known for telling stories through his cocktails, Floyd sources ingredients from around the world that coincide with some of the 380 international destinations the cruise line visits.

At a cocktail unveiling in Los Angeles, the menu's additions were paired with a similarly refreshed menu of bar snacks that can be found onboard at The Salty Dog Gastropub. A new concept for Princess, The Salty Dog features a selection of small plates courtesy of award-winning chef Ernesto Uchimura of Umami Burger and Plan Check Kitchen + Bar in Los Angeles.

The updated beverage program ventures beyond cocktails with an international collection of 20 spirits, 39 wines, and 17 craft beers. For more information, visit princess.com. —*Madelyn Gagnon* ■



The Mayan Heat cocktail on Princess Cruises' new menu features Patrón Silver Tequila, triple sec, lime juice, agave syrup, and muddled jalapeño.

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The Dao of Dining

by Jesse Hom-Dawson

In last month's column, I wrote about my frustration with the prejudice leveled against elevated Asian cuisine. I was happy to hear feedback that many people felt the same way, and as promised, I'm now looking toward Texas—and somewhere a lot closer to home—to share the perspectives of more chefs intent on changing the status quo.

Down in the Lone Star State, Dallas chef Angela Hernandez recently helped open Fine China, a Chinese restaurant in the Statler Hotel. While Hernandez

Like mother, like daughter: From a young age, *Tasting Panel* Managing Editor and "Chew on This" columnist Jesse Hom-Dawson (left) has always looked to her mother, Chef Barbara Hom, regarding matters in the kitchen.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FINE CHINA

At the newly opened Fine China in Dallas' Statler Hotel, Chef Angela Hernandez crafts modern and traditional Asian dishes like Cantonese roast duck.

program, great service, quality food, a fun environment—all things that can add up to customers willing to pay more for the experience," Hernandez explains.

acknowledges there's a misconception that Chinese cuisine in the U.S. consists solely of cheap takeout, she says "at Fine China, [the] service and ingredients are able to justify higher prices." "We incorporate types of cuisine from China, South America, and even the Deep South," Hernandez adds.

While the chef, who's Mexican and Korean, built her career on fine French and Japanese food, she gravitated toward Chinese cuisine when tasked with helping develop a new concept for the Statler. The resulting menu features both classic and modern dishes, including black garlic noodles with fermented black beans and Cantonese roast duck served with traditional sides. "We have an excellent cocktail

hallmarks of fine dining is its ability to pair well with wine, but for years the industry dismissed Asian food as "unpairable" for having too much spice, too many flavors, too much . . . everything. While that misguided perception has evolved over the years, many still shy away from pouring a glass to accompany their Thai curry or Cantonese noodles.

To counter this regressive line of thinking, I sought out a trusted expert: my mother, Barbara Hom. A Chinese woman who has worked as a chef her entire professional life, she's spent much of her career crafting wine-pairing dinners for wineries all over Sonoma and Napa County that often feature Chinese ingredients and dishes. "As Asian food

has become more high-end, it's also become more refined with more delicate flavors that make it easier to pair," my mother explains. "Most wine experts will suggest pairing a German wine like Gewürztraminer and Riesling with Chinese food, typically to balance out the sweetness and/or soy-sauce flavor."

However, because "so much depends on what region of food you're cooking," she says it's imperative to know how their defining flavors might affect the dining experience. "Spicy cuisine like Szechuan will blow out your palate, making it hard to taste the nuances of a wine's flavor," she adds. "However, I think Pinot Noir is the absolute perfect match for soy sauce-based dishes, especially those made with Clone 777 grapes, as their earthiness, dark berry fruit, and notes of cumin, cardamom, and coriander go well with soy and Chinese flavors like star anise."

This discussion is far from settled, but as these long-held prejudices against Asian cuisine continuously fail to stand up to scrutiny, here's hoping the food can finally speak for itself. ■■

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Embracing the Unknown at the Aspen Food & Wine Classic

by David Ransom

If you read either of my columns—this one or *The Ransom Report* in our sister publication *The SOMM Journal*—on a regular basis, you know I'm a firm believer in thinking outside the box to explore wines, regions, and producers that are not necessarily in one's wheelhouse. In that vein, this Note is a wine-inspired journey experienced while in Aspen (*light bulb*: East Coast Editor Goes West) this summer for the annual Food & Wine Classic.

My first out-of-the-box experience came courtesy of Bee d'Vine Honey Wine from Sonoma County. Technically mead in its purest form, it's the passion project of winemaker/conservationist Ayele Solomon, who drew inspiration from Ethiopia's rainforests, source of the traditional Ethiopian honey wine known as T'ej, to make his own version of the ancient beverage.

Made solely with honey and water, Bee d'Vine is produced without the addition of flavorants. Two styles are made: demi sec (\$45) and sparkling (\$40). I found both delightfully complex and a nice change from grape-based wine. (For more information, visit beedvine.com.)

The second revelation occurred as I tasted South African wines during lunch with Winemaker Marc Kent of Boekenhoutskloof, located in the Franschoek Valley. Probably best known for The Chocolate Block, the wildly successful Syrah-dominant red blend that's a perennial steakhouse favorite, Kent produces a wide range of wines at different price points. I was particularly attracted to the Cinsault-based Wolftrap Rosé (\$12; 87% ABV for



Geysler Peak Winemaker Randy Meyer with Tasting Panel East Coast Editor David Ransom.

the 2017 release), which shows cherry, plum, and lovely spice. Imported by Vineyard Brands, it's a complex wine built for pairing with food.

The final surprise of the event: Chardonnay from a Sauvignon Blanc

specialist. Wandering the tent, I happened upon new Geysler Peak Winemaker Randy Meyer, a California winemaking veteran who recently took the reins at this historic Sonoma winery probably best known for its Sauvignon Blanc program. One enticing wine we tried from Geysler Peak's Outlot Wines collection was the 2015 Chardonnay (\$22), a small-production, barrel-fermented wine from select Magnolia Peninsula vineyard lots of three different clones: Dijon, Clone 17, and Clone 4. Bright and filled with notes of apple pie and acacia, this wine-with-a-story is perfect for hand-selling. For more on Outlot, visit outlotwines.com. ■■

The label for the Outlot 2015 Chardonnay.



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When Opportunity Knocks

TEXAS BARMAN HOUSTON EAVES CHANNELS HIS LOVE OF HISTORY INTO HIS PASSION FOR SPIRITS story and photo by Lori Moffatt

With a foundation in hospitality and an affinity for history and travel, veteran Texas barman Houston Eaves channeled his passions to secure his current post as Beverage Director at three of San Antonio's most famous drinking and dining establishments.

Ask almost any concierge in town where to experience true San Antonio tradition, and you'll likely hear these names: The Esquire Tavern, which opened in December 1933 to celebrate the end of Prohibition; The Esquire's new wine- and oyster-focused sister bar, Downstairs; and the merry El Mirador, a Mexican eatery known for its soup and Margaritas since its debut in 1968. With Eaves' business sense and service-focused philosophy, the three

spaces further their own legacies by highlighting time-honored producers and methods dating back hundreds of years.

Under Eaves' tutelage, The Esquire—which has earned two James Beard Award nominations since its restoration in 2011—now boasts “upwards of 600 bottles of hand-chosen things that are really special,” he says. “I did a lot of tasting and research,” Eaves adds. “I’m proud to operate a bar on the River Walk that pulls in millions of dollars in annual sales while directly impacting a number of family producers.”

While naming the formative moments of his career, Eaves recalls his teenage years spent working at his dad's deli in St. Louis, Missouri; the foundation in hospitality he built

during his tenure at Hyatt Hotels; and his time spent managing a “tiny, raw-foodist ecolodge” in Costa Rica. He then bounced from Argentina to Austin, Mexico, and San Antonio, all the while diving deeper into the history of alcohol and how “civilization aligned with the discovery of fermentation and distillation.”

Eaves says his heart belongs to agave—tequila and sotol, yes, but especially mezcal, which he credits for opening his eyes to the anthropological side of spirits. In 2014, he spent six months working for small-batch producer Mezcal Vago, splitting his time between The Esquire and the agave-studded mountains of southern Oaxaca. He's currently involved with an organization called the Tequila Interchange Project, which advocates for the preservation of sustainable, traditional production practices, and also frequently hosts Mexican mezcaleros at educational events across Texas.

“It's great to think about the generational knowledge passed down from the great producers, whether they make mezcal, Sherry, Cognac, wine, beer . . . just about every category,” Eaves says. “These are people working with the plants that surround them and figuring out how to make alcohol that tastes delicious.” ■

“I'm proud to be able to look at the bottles we have and put a face to just about every single one,” says Houston Eaves, Beverage Director of The Esquire Tavern, Downstairs, and El Mirador in San Antonio, TX.

Freelance writer and agave lover Lori Moffatt covered Texas travel topics for more than two decades at Texas Highways, the state's award-winning monthly travel magazine. When she's not writing about cocktails, wine, art, and pop culture from her home in Austin, she's traveling, making art, and practicing Spanish.



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Fall Releases to Look Forward To

by Ian Buxton

I sometimes find myself wondering if too much coverage is given to single malts. After all, blended Scotch still outsells its celebrated cousin by nearly four to one in terms of case volume. New single malt releases are newsworthy, but blended Scotch continues to dominate world markets, albeit in a less showy manner.

So, with that thought in mind, I was delighted to hear from Buchanan's with details of its latest blend of pure malt whisky from multiple distilleries: **Buchanan's Select 15 Year Old** (40% ABV; \$50). It's an immensely sippable dram that's as bold and complex as it is well-mannered, smooth, and slightly sweet.



Buchanan's is somewhat coy about the distilleries that have contributed to this "malt perfection," saying only that they're from "the heart of Scotland." That—and the taste itself—suggests Speyside, where brand owner Diageo has a number of operations we don't hear from often, as the output is reserved for its blenders. Well done, then, for this release, as any connoisseur would find this more than acceptable (that's British for "excellent") with considerable value.

In dramatic contrast, Diageo is more



than keen to emphasise the very special single malts in the new **Johnnie Walker Blue Label Ghost and Rare Port Ellen** (40% ABV; \$350) blend, boasting that it contains "'Ghost' whiskies from Caledonian and Carsebridge . . . [and] rare malts from Mortlach, Dailuaine, Cragganmore, Blair Athol, and Oban."

It's the second in the Ghost and Rare series, but of course the real interest is in the use of the highly valued Port Ellen malt. Considering it's been previously reserved for the annual Special Releases, where it commands super-premium prices, it's therefore a surprise to see the malt featured here. There's little doubt both Johnnie Walker enthusiasts and collectors of this cult Islay whisky will be keen to add this to their shelves.

There's more yet from Diageo, which informed me of three new bottlings



from its renowned Mortlach distillery—**12 Year Old "Wee Witchie," 16 Year Old Distiller's Dram,** and **20 Year Old Cowie's Blue Seal**—which the company claims "are set to bring the dark side of Speyside to life." All are bottled at Mortlach's distinctive 43.4% ABV and will be available in U.S. markets this fall. Expect SRPs around \$50 for the 12 Year Old, with the 16 Year Old at \$100 and the venerable Cowie's Blue Seal touching \$200.



These are robust, full-bodied whiskies from a distillery long hailed for its meaty character and unusual distilling regime, but they represent something of a rethink by Diageo, which withdrew the current range—launched only in 2014—following criticism of the small (50-centiliter) bottle size and lofty prices.

Also from Speyside comes the latest premium single malt from Chivas Brothers: **Aberlour Casg Annamh** (that's "Rare Cask" in Gaelic), a small-batch production with 48% ABV and a \$70 price tag. Lovers of rich, Sherry cask-influenced whiskies won't want to miss this one. ■■

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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.

George Hutchinson has been named Sales Director at **Destilería Serrallés**. He had been Managing Partner/COO/CFO of AnestasiA Vodka/NumBrands Inc.

Jennifer Meacham Bailey has been named EDV–Mid Atlantic Division Manager for **Palm Bay International**. She had been District Manager for Ste. Michelle Wine Estates.

Gabriela da Silva has been named Trade Marketing Manager at **Campari Group**. She had been Global Brand Manager – LEBLON Cachaça.

Jean Manning has been named Marketing Manager at **Gruppo Montenegro**. She had been Brand Manager at Casa Dragones Tequila.

CAREER CORNER

Four Interview Questions You Should Never Ask (And What to Ask Instead)

Job interviews give you the opportunity to showcase who you are, why you're the best fit for a role, and what makes you stand out from other candidates. While some rules of etiquette are universal to the interview process, determining which questions to ask a prospective employer is often trickier to navigate, as no two interviews are the same.

In addition to being thoughtful and well-researched, your questions should be tailored to the employer and role. And as important as it is to know what to ask, it's equally essential to know what *not* to ask during the process.

According to a 2014 survey conducted by CareerBuilder, 32 percent of hiring managers reported that not asking good questions in an interview is one of the most common mistakes job seekers make during the hiring process. Here are some questions you should avoid asking during an interview and alternatives to consider posing instead.

1. "HOW SOON CAN I EXPECT TO BE PROMOTED?" While this question shows your ambition to succeed, it may also prove you're not willing to put in the grunt work of the role you're actually applying for.

Pro tip: Try asking, "What does upward mobility look like for this role?"

2. "WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PERKS AND BENEFITS OF THIS ROLE?" This question can often be misinterpreted, making the hiring manager feel like they need to sell you on the role. Wait until you have a firm offer on the table before inquiring about benefits.

Pro tip: Try asking, "Would you mind describing the company's culture for me?"

3. "WILL THIS ROLE LEAD TO OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS WITHIN THE COMPANY?" This question might express your interest in the business, but it also shows your lack of focus on the role you're currently pursuing. Stay focused and present during your interview.

Pro tip: Try asking, "Are there any internal mentorship or professional development programs that would connect me with leaders within the company?"

4. "WHEN WAS THE COMPANY FOUNDED?" Avoid asking obvious questions. It's important to do your research about the employer, but avoid questions that fail to yield meaningful dialogue.

Pro tip: Try asking, "What do you find to be the most rewarding aspect of working here?" ■■

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Nando's signature dish, its chicken cooked in a spicy peri-peri sauce, comes with a side of peas mashed with parsley, mint, and chili pepper.

Nando's Global Domination is Well-Deserved

by Merrill Shindler

PHOTO COURTESY OF NANDO'S

Eat out at fancy establishments too often and you'll begin to long for the warm embrace of fast-casual. By conjuring that term, I don't mean the dubious cuisine of Mickey D's and Burger King; instead, I'm referencing the sort of restaurant where you order at a counter, get a number, and enjoy a fizzy soft drink (self-poured and bottomless) while waiting for a plate of steaming-hot happiness and joy.

Specifically, I'm talking about my absolute, hand's-down favorite destination for fast-casual dining: the marvelous Nando's Peri-Peri Chicken chain with more than 1,000 branches in 40 countries worldwide. Established in a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1987, Nando's was founded by a Portuguese-born engineer who was so intrigued by the chicken cooked in spicy peri-peri sauce at a local joint called Chickenland that he bought the restaurant, named it for his son, and began expanding the concept.

While its debut in the U.S. came relatively recently, there are now 40 branches distributed throughout Illinois, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. More are in the works, especially near college campuses, for this is great "student food": spicy, reasonably priced, and generously served.

Like tabasco chiles, peri-peri have a cult following and are not for the faint of palate. As they say at Nando's, "it's a pepper, a sauce, and a nod to [its] homeland." As an added bonus, the company grows its own on 500 acres back in South Africa, employing 1,500 area farmers. Bottles of the sauce are available to take home, yet they don't taste as good as they do at the restaurants, where you have options ranging from Lemon & Herb to Extra Hot—which, according to Nando's website, is akin to "tackling a ferociously fiery dragon."

What do I love? The chicken, of

course—served in quarters, halves, breasts, wings, thighs, and livers. This is sublime meat meant for tearing apart with your fingers, emboldening you to search out every shred and bit tucked in the most hidden recesses. Expect a pile of bones worthy of a murder of crows when you finish, and do note the chicken comes with sides—the best of which are the Macho Peas, "a rugged mash of whole peas, parsley, mint, and chili." It may sound goofy, but they taste so good I've taken to making them myself.

There are also sandwiches, wraps, bowls, and salads, including a chicken and kale Caesar. I, however, prefer the peri-peri nuts and the hummus with a peri-peri drizzle—dishes that should be on every bar menu. For dessert, there's a traditional Portuguese custard called Naughty Natas, which is not made with peri-peri . . . unless you sprinkle it on yourself. With Nando's global footprint, I don't think it'd be the first time. ■■

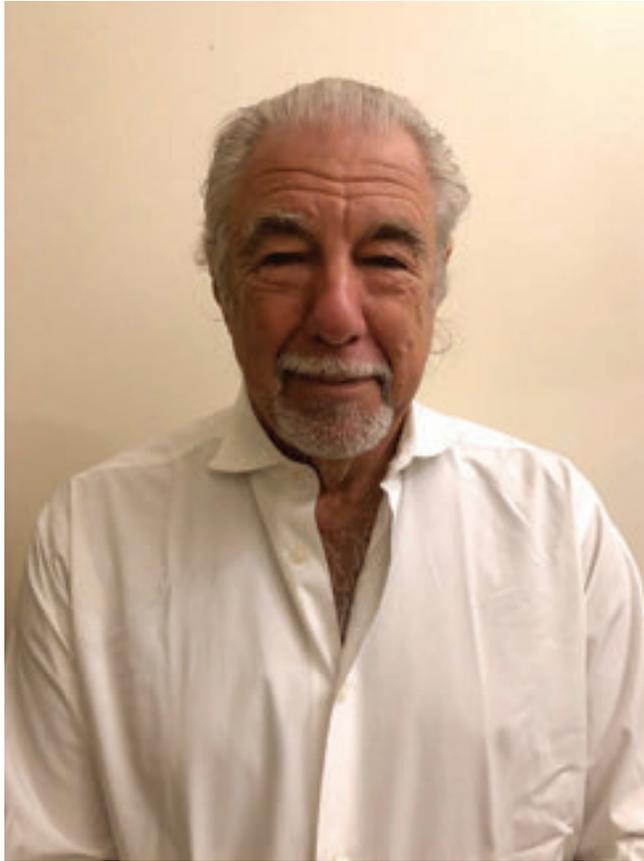
A CUT ABOVE THE REST



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A Q&A with Louis Goldstein,

ACCOUNTS SPECIALIST AT EMPIRE MERCHANTS



ForceBrands: Tell us about the history of your involvement in the industry.

Louis Goldstein: Basically, my grandparents and parents were bootleggers—we were in the grocery business, and, at the time of Prohibition, began selling products other people needed . . . of course, products to make alcohol. As soon as Prohibition was over, my grandfather got one of the first liquor distributor licenses and my grandparents started one of the first wholesale operations in New York City. My father and his brothers ran the business. After my father died at an early age, my mother became the first liquor salesperson there and broke a lot of barriers—she was the first woman allowed in the union. In essence, I was always working with my family’s company at night and at the warehouse. I worked when they were loading trucks by hand, not machines, and was driving a forklift around the warehouse at 6 years old.

FB: Could you describe one of the proudest moments of your career?

LG: I was working at William Grant & Sons at the time when my close friend retired from his liquor store. I bought the store from him and became one of the youngest retailers in the industry at 23. My mother became my salesperson and I had a partner who knew nothing about the industry, although I had some experience. One of my proudest moments was when I entered a Dubonnet contest where stores competed for the best window display: Some stores set up displays with stacks of 30–50 cases, but I won by displaying a single bottle of Dubonnet. I made a cafe in one of my two windows, had brick walls and a table set up, and put my girlfriend in the window with one bottle and a glass on the table—that was it.

FB: What has been some of the best professional advice you’ve received?

LG: I remember Artie Cutler, Barry Corwin, and Howie Levine [who started many iconic New York City restaurants, including Carmine’s and Docks] had a restaurant opening party for friends and family. They asked me what I thought and I said the food was terrific. They replied, “Don’t tell me what’s good; tell me what’s bad.” From that day on, I learned that you’re not doing your customer any favors by telling them only what they want to hear—they’ll never grow if you do that. I learned to open up my mouth.

FB: If you could be working in the industry in any other capacity, what would your role be?

LG: I’d like to finish my life in this business in marketing or anything that involves being a little more creative. ■■

You’re not doing your customer any favors by telling them only what they want to hear—they’ll never grow if you do that.”



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We've partnered with Chef's Roll & Somm's List, the global culinary and wine professional networks, to learn more about beverage experts from across the country.

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ERICK CASTRO AND CHRIS PATINO,

Partners at Raised by Wolves in San Diego, CA

How long have you both been involved in the bartending community?

Erick Castro: I've been in the hospitality industry since I was 14, when I started washing dishes at a restaurant in my hometown. I quickly started bartending once I was old enough to make drinks on my own; however, for the first five years or so, all I was doing was shaking Lemon Drops and pouring pints. It was only once I started working at a tequila bar in Sacramento that I discovered the beauty of fresh juice and craft spirits. After that, there was no turning back.

Chris Patino: Between Erick, [co-founder] Arsalun Tafazoli, [Beverage Director] Anthony Schmidt, and myself, it's almost too many years to count! We are all veterans of the bar community with varying backgrounds and levels of experience.

Tell us a bit more about Raised by Wolves.

CP: The concept for Raised by Wolves was inspired by Roman mythology. The brothers Romulus and Remus were raised by a she-wolf before going on to found Rome, which was essentially the cradle of Western civilization. Wolves are loyal, nurturing, socially connected animals, and those are exactly the values we strive to promote at Raised by Wolves. We also had an opportunity to bring a more urban-minded focus and mentality—which [parent company] Consortium Holdings has successfully fostered throughout the downtown San Diego area—to a more suburban crowd. Just because you leave the city behind

shouldn't mean that you should be deprived of a well-made craft cocktail in a well-thought-out and intimate setting.

EC: With Raised by Wolves, we wanted to provide folks with something truly special in a place they least expected. Not only that, we wanted them to be blown away by the variety of options.

What makes the cocktails at Raised by Wolves different from other establishments?

CP: Because we are located in an outdoor shopping mall, we encounter a wide array of palates, from the well-informed cocktail aficionado to the novice or occasional drinker. We knew we wanted to put together a serious cocktail program, but we needed to ensure there was also a sense of familiarity so that we didn't alienate anyone.

EC: So often nowadays menus have become pedestrian and expected, so we deliberately did our best to smash those expectations and come up with something new.

What has the response been so far to the concept?

CP: So far, outstanding. Both the bar and retail shop are doing well, and the amount of support we've received from the community has been overwhelmingly positive.

EC: The local community has greeted us with open arms, and we are honored to be part of what makes La Jolla/San Diego so special. At the end of the day, fancy drinks and glassware only get you so far. Without hospitality and a sense of community, we wouldn't even bother—and all of that begins with an amazing staff. ■■



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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Aridus Winemaker Lisa Strid recently led a tasting of the Arizona-based company's portfolio in Napa, CA.

Beating the Heat

ARIDUS PROVES ARIZONA'S DESERT TERROIR CAN PRODUCE GREAT WINE

story by Amber Burke

Based in Willcox, a small city in southeast Arizona, Aridus Wine Company chose its name as a direct homage to the state's extreme conditions: Meaning parched, dry, or lacking water in Latin, Aridus and its desert vineyards survive in an environment where water is at a premium.

Owners Scott and Joan Dahmer were first drawn to wine while living in Sonoma, and after moving to Arizona, Scott was convinced great bottlings could also be made there. While the wine industry is newly established in the southwestern state, its climate and conditions are similar to winegrowing areas in Argentina, where high-quality Malbec and Tempranillo are produced on a large scale.

The Dahmers launched their winery in 2009 after purchasing 40 acres along Turkey Creek in nearby Pearce; nestled at an elevation of 5,200 feet above sea level, the site now serves as the winery's estate vineyard. In 2012, they transformed an old apple-processing

plant into a state-of-the-art custom crush facility, which has won awards from organizations like the International Interior Design Association's Southwest Chapter for both its design and usage of reclaimed materials.

During a recent tasting of the company's portfolio at the Napa Valley Wine Academy in Napa, California, Aridus Winemaker Lisa Strid emphasized the company's commitment to remaining on the cutting edge of winemaking practices and techniques.

To make Aridus' wines, Strid ventures beyond Arizona to source additional grapes from other mountain-

desert vineyards in the Southwest, including sites in neighboring New Mexico. Strid also detailed the challenges she faces in desert winemaking, including canopy management, water conservation, balancing pH and acid levels, and managing the various critters that roam the vineyards. ■■

Aridus has tasting rooms in Willcox and Old Town Scottsdale. For more information, visit ariduswineco.com.

We tasted ten current releases from the winery's lineup of 22 bottlings. Among the standouts were the tropical and fresh 2017 Sauvignon Blanc (\$34) with notes of papaya and citrus and a vegetal tinge; the spicy and rich 2016 Syrah (\$37), which, with its dark, ripe fruit, would pair well with barbeque or Mexican food; and, for those who enjoy lightly sweet and floral white wines, the 2016 Malvasia Bianca (\$37).



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Bob Bath, MS, and Julie Bath, Partner at Sake Tengoku

by Michelle Metter



Master Sommelier Bob Bath serves as an educator at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, while his wife, Julie Bath, is a partner at California-based importer Sake Tengoku. Both will appear at SommCon San Diego, set for November 14–16.

I sat down with this wine industry power couple for a quick Q&A on the importance of mentorship, their role in educating young professionals, and their predictions for the future.

You're both embedded in the education of wine professionals at all levels. What advice do you give when there are so many options available?

Bob Bath: Our graduate wine and beverage program at CIA Greystone provides incredibly

broad yet in-depth exposure to the industry and helps you find that part of the business you're really passionate about. Finding that passion and constant networking are my best pieces of advice.

Julie Bath: Sake is inherently complicated in regards to language, terminology, and culture. Online sources are beginning to expand, but a good sake foundation can be obtained through many organizations. I recommend the WSET Level 1 and Level 3 classes for sake and classes offered by John Gauntner.

We're seeing a growing interest in sake—what do you think is in store for the category?

JB: Over the last few years, the availability and quality of sake has vastly improved. The open-mindedness and creativity of chefs and sommeliers has made a huge difference. They are discovering that sake has a tremendous range in terms of flavor and style and works well with all types of Eastern and Western cuisine, in some cases better than wine. We are slowly breaking down the misconceptions about sake with consumers, and I see the category becoming a necessary part of any quality beverage program in the U.S.

Bob, your session on the Garnacha grape at SommCon D.C. in July got amazing reviews. Why do you think this topic resonated?

BB: It's all about quality, style, and value. Garnacha is finally getting the recognition it deserves as a truly exciting, versatile grape that's just as good at being a supporting actor in a blend as it is being the star of the show.

You have worked in almost every facet of the industry. Do you feel like there's still uncharted territory for you to cover?

BB: We have to continue to inspire and prepare the next generation of wine professionals and educators. Our industry focuses a lot on examinations and certifications, but we also have to focus on how to teach consumers and young professionals about wine in an engaging, fun, memorable way. I really want to get more into video presentations that will expose the wonderful world of wine to the largest audience possible. ■■

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South Africa's Storied Grape

MULDERBOSCH GOES BACK TO ITS ROOTS WITH ITS NEW CHENIN SINGLE-VINEYARD SERIES

by Albert Letizia

A lot of people in the wine business are still waiting for South Africa to finally become the “next big thing,” but the country always seems to get leapfrogged by other emerging wine-producing regions that perhaps haven’t quite paid their dues the way South Africa has.

That hasn’t discouraged brands like Mulderbosch, which has always been considered one of the country’s foremost wine producers. Now, after a quick reshuffle in ownership, it’s added top South African winemaker Adam Mason of Klein Constantia; the winery’s focus remains, however, on Chenin Blanc (or “Steen op Hout”), which was first planted 300-plus years ago in South Africa.

The variety has since morphed into a distinct expression of Chenin unlike that of France’s Loire Valley or any other winegrowing region, according to Mason, who recently brought some new bottles to Los Angeles for lunch at Kali Restaurant in Hollywood. “Chenin Blanc, with its history, is simply available to tell the South African tale better than any other variety,” Mason said.

While Mulderbosch has always offered a rock-solid and somewhat iconic bottling of Chenin sourced predominantly from Stellenbosch, Mason has developed an additional single-vineyard series of Chenin from three separate vineyard blocks to express the wide breadth and scope of the variety in the area. Each block is vinified simply with whole-bunch pressing and neutral-oak maturation.

The Vineyard Block A bottling reveals the fruity aspect of Chenin with quince, dried apricot, and citrus, while Vineyard Block S2 is characterized by a lanolin-like texture, touches of hazelnut, and bracing minerality. Vineyard Block W, with its close proximity to the ocean, has a saline, briny quality and bright, sharp acidity.

While the resulting wines emerge as stunning and distinctive expressions of site-specific terroir, they also fill a niche as high-end, South African white wines that are both sophisticated and cool. “We have some of the oldest vineyard soils in the world, and culturally we have strong ties to Europe,” Mason says. “I always say South African wine is truly unique: We display elements of classic Old World structure and restraint whilst celebrating the virtues of New World generosity and approachability.” ■■



Mulderbosch
Winemaker Adam
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JCB
by Jean-Charles Bobbet

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When it comes to “making time” for what matters, Wente Family Estates President Amy Hoopes says game night with her family tops the list. (Pizza night is a close second.)



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**WENTE'S NEW
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ENCOURAGES
EMPLOYEES TO
SEEK HAPPINESS
“INSIDE AND
OUTSIDE OF
WORK”**

by Mara Marski
photos by Hardy Wilson

For many people in the workforce, achieving work-life balance is more of an aspiration than a tangible goal. It doesn't help that in today's increasingly digital world, ease of access and the tempting glow of a smartphone screen often allow work to creep into our lives until it's all-consuming.

As the owners and operators of Livermore Valley's Wente Vineyards, the Wente family knows the importance of work-life balance all too well, as their familial relationships and livelihood have been inextricably linked for the past 135 years. For this reason, the company has emerged as a champion within the wine industry for promoting this concept of balance amongst its staff. “Wine inherently brings people together and allows for deeper connections, and we want to foster that same feeling among our employees,” Wente Family

Estates President Amy Hoopes says.

This principle serves as the driving force behind Wente's new company initiative, the Make Time program, which incentivizes employees to maintain strong interpersonal relationships and engage in activities of their choosing during what's known as Make Time Off (MTO) hours. The company actively encourages employees to use these paid hours at their discretion, whether they're scheduling a long lunch with their parents, meeting up with an old friend for a coffee date, spending extra moments with their kids, or simply reading and relaxing—all without having to sacrifice precious vacation days. “The program helps integrate the things that matter inside and outside of work,” says Hoopes, “and that's at the core of family business.”

“AN INCREDIBLE GIFT”

For Make Time Off, the company drew inspiration from its Volunteer Time Off hours (VTO), which enable employees to spend time volunteering in their community without sacrificing any compensation. And while the Make Time program grew fluidly out of the VTO initiative, volunteering isn't the only out-of-office pastime Wenté has promoted



amongst its ranks: As a natural extension of fifth-generation winemaker Karl Wenté's own personal passion for music, the company developed its Make Time for Music program, which, among other initiatives, features concerts hosted on the Wenté Vineyards property.

Hoopes says the program was so popular that they realized it wasn't so much about music as it was about the desire to “make time” for employees' personal fulfillment. “We want to really engage the public and help people understand the bigger picture of what we're doing as a company while motivating others to find and pursue the things that inspire them,” says Hoopes.

Though the Make Time program is still new, Hoopes says it's been met with overwhelmingly positive responses from

employees. “We've gotten so many emails from people who have used or even just requested their Make Time Hours,” she adds. “They're telling us how much they appreciate the program and that the time is an incredible gift.”

And while the company isn't tracking any official metrics for the program, Hoopes says she's seen firsthand how employees have become more thoughtful and present in their interactions since it launched, citing a recent Make

As a family-run business for the past 135 years, Wenté Vineyards aims to prioritize the happiness and well-being of its employees through initiatives like the Make Time program.



As a married mother of two, Wenté Family Estates President Amy Hoopes says the #MakeTime program helps her utilize her own time more effectively.

Time barbecue organized by the finance department that was intended to keep spirits high during a particularly work-heavy period. “We spend so much time at work, and when you feel valued, engaged, and involved, you work harder,” Hoopes adds. “In family businesses there's a different culture already, but the Wenté family puts people at the forefront of their cultural fabric, and that just reinforces why we work as hard as we do.” ■■

MAKING TIME WITH AMY HOOPES



Wenté Family Estates President Amy Hoopes with her family.

As the President of a high-profile company and the married mother of two daughters, Amy Hoopes says people often confront her with the same familiar question: How does she balance it all?

Fortunately, she always has a thought-provoking response ready for advice-seeking inquirers. “It's not about balance—it's about choice,” Hoopes says. “I choose to make time for the things that fulfill me and make me feel whole: first and foremost, my family.”

In the Hoopes household, family dinner is a must—so valuable, in fact, that all devices go in a basket so everyone can engage free from distraction. “It's important to prevent the churn of daily life and the glow of electronics from taking over and to put the focus on our face-to-face relationships,” Hoopes says. “It's a daily practice and requires constant reminding, but we need to have intention with our time.”

CABERNET

with a Twist

CALIFORNIA-BASED **STAVE & STEEL** SOARS WITH BOURBON BARREL-AGED CABERNET SAUVIGNON

by Deborah Parker Wong / photos by Hardy Wilson

The practice of finishing whisky in wine barrels has been around since the 1860s, when Scotch producers first utilized Sherry butts as a means of transporting their spirits. It seems the tables have turned in the 21st century, however, as winemakers like James Foster of California-based Stave & Steel currently seek out whiskey barrels—Kentucky bourbon barrels, specifically—as an alternative oak-aging regime for its wines.

This technique is hardly new: By the 1970s, Scotch producers had switched almost entirely from Sherry butts to bourbon barrels. They had also started experimenting with still-wine barrel finishes, although the practice didn't become an established part of the single-malt market until 2004. A short decade later, the first whiskey barrel-finished wines—primarily Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, and Shiraz—hit shelves.



James Foster is the Winemaker for California-based Stave & Steel.

While wine barrels can add fruitiness, body, and even sweetness to whiskey, it's the characteristics bourbon casks add to wine that intrigued Foster, who serves as Winemaker for Stave & Steel. A native of Eufaula, Alabama, Foster spent his summers in California working in a winery and oversees production at a historic Livermore winery in his other role as Head Winemaker at Concannon Vineyard.

With these credentials, Foster has proven he knows his way around a Cabernet Sauvignon vine: With an estimated 80 percent of California's 90,000 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon planted to the Concannon Cabernet clones 7, 8, and 11, they form the backbone of the Cabernet industry in California.

To craft wine for the Stave & Steel label, Foster says he selected "freshly dumped" Kentucky bourbon barrels and ran trials with various grape varieties before settling on 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. The release bears a California appellation, with Foster sourcing from sites in Paso Robles, Lodi, and Clarksburg for the 2016 vintage.

With the awareness that "even just a few drops of bourbon will kill a glass of wine," Foster knew selecting the right barrels would be key to achieving his desired style: "There's a tremendous amount of flavor left in these once-used oak barrels," he says.

Early entries in the whiskey barrel-aged wine category were met with some resistance, largely because their resulting flavors were essentially the same as wines spending longer periods in standard oak barrels. Foster sought to avoid that pitfall by optimizing the duration of the aging process through his trials, eventually landing on four months in barrel—"a recipe that produces a wine with drinkability," he says.

To further perfect the wines, Foster spent time blind-tasting a wide range of styles in the bourbon barrel-aged category, from weak to overpowering. Because striking the right balance in alcohol content can be challenging, Foster says he starts "with a lower-alcohol red wine because we'll see a .5 to 1 percent increase in alcohol from even a very brief time in barrel," resulting in a wine with rich, round, and bold yet refined flavors.

Room to Experiment

As for why modern consumers find bourbon barrel-aged wine so appealing, the spirit itself provides some answers. American enthusiasm for bourbon has grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade, with growth largely attributed to the renaissance of cocktail culture and the enthusiastic support of millennials, particularly those interested in home entertaining and amateur mixology.

Considering whiskey is making more gains with women than men as it expands its consumer base, the industry is increasingly appealing to the former with flavored whiskey and other innovative products. With many labels featuring only a small percent of barrel-aged wine in their finished blends, Foster says Stave & Steel sets itself apart as a 100 percent bourbon barrel-aged brand with aromas of vanilla, caramel, smoke, and some wood tannins adding more structure to the wine.

Because Stave & Steel Cabernet spends a relatively short amount of time in barrel, notes of macerated cherries, dark plums, and ripe blackberries emerge prominently in the wine alongside hints of umami and brown spices. The boost the wine receives from the aging process also seems to amplify and extend the finish.

Considering Foster's upbringing, it's hardly surprising he feels at home aging a Cabernet Sauvignon in bourbon barrels. "I've made wine all over the world and I think there's plenty of room for experimentation," he says. "Bourbon-barrel aging is a twist that can reinvent premium Cabernet Sauvignon." ■■



Stave & Steel ages its Cabernet Sauvignon in Kentucky bourbon barrels.

“I’ve made wine all over the world and I think there’s plenty of room for experimentation. Bourbon-barrel aging is a twist that can reinvent premium Cabernet Sauvignon.”

Tempranillo Takeover

SPANISH PRODUCER FÉLIX SOLÍS AVANTIS IS AT THE TOP OF ITS GAME

by Anthony Dias Blue

Encompassing six key wine regions throughout Spain and selling 27 million cases annually in 116 countries, Félix Solís Avantis is the seventh-largest producer of still wine in the world. Despite this tremendous international influence, the company has remained true to its deep familial roots while offering quality, affordable wines and exceptional service to its global consumers.

Founded in 1952 by Félix Solís Fernández and his wife, Leonor Yáñez, Félix Solís Avantis now operates under the leadership of third-generation family employees as it blends Old World styles with New World modernity. The company's extensive portfolio has received a multitude of praise from internationally recognized media outlets and organizations, including recognition as the "Best Spanish Winery" nine times at the Berliner Wein Trophy competition.

With a mission to celebrate all things Tempranillo, Félix Solís Avantis' new website, accessible at getyourtempon.com, encourages consumers and wine-buying professionals to expand their knowledge of this widely grown Spanish grape variety. Here are some recent releases I tasted and reviewed from the company's vast portfolio:

Viña Albali 2011 Gran Reserva Selección Privada, Valdepeñas, Spain (\$15) A crisp and bright Tempranillo that's worth adding to by-the-glass programs; creamy texture and vibrant fruit with a tangy finish. **88**



Viña Albali 2015 Gran Selección, Valdepeñas, Spain (\$10) Generous and juicy at a crazy price; fresh and aromatic with a long, lively finish; racy and modern. **88**



FYI 2017 Red Blend, Spain (\$13) A sleek, opulent blend of Garnacha, Tempranillo, and Cabernet Sauvignon; satisfying, concentrated, and deep, it's a remarkable value. **90**



Prospero Brut NV, Spain (\$11) An unexpected sparkler that's refined and refreshing with a burst of apple and pear; lively with a ridiculously low price; dry and flavorful. **90**



Viña Albali Verdejo Rueda 2016, Spain (\$12) Clean, smooth, and fresh with juicy, crisp style; a good value from a region with a growing reputation; bright, balanced, and long, this is a delightful everyday wine. **88**



Viña San Juan 2016 Red Blend, La Mancha, Spain (\$12) Smooth and full-bodied with dense, meaty flavors; a well-balanced, generous blend of Merlot, Tempranillo, and Syrah with a lengthy finish. **90**



Frissé Sparkling Sangria, Spain (\$10) This carbonated, bright-pink, rosé-based drink is polished and off-dry with succulent raspberry and apple notes; the clean, vibrant flavors have been amplified by authentic and natural additives. **88**



Sentoro 2016 Tinta de Toro Red, Toro, Spain (\$10) Luscious, ripe, and generous fruit results in a lovely wine with astonishing value; velvety and balanced with an enduring finish. **90**



Pulpo 2016 Albariño, Rías Baixas, Spain (\$14) Fragrant and refreshing; spicy and crisp with pleasing mineral notes; silky with balance and good length; a classic Albariño with depth and style at an amazing price point. **91**



Viña San Juan 2017 White Blend, La Mancha, Spain (\$12) A lush, piquant, and balanced blend of Chardonnay, Verdejo, and Viura with bright, generous flavors; more complex and rich than you would expect from a wine at this price. **88** ■■



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Watching the Green

THE ALCOHOL
INDUSTRY KEEPS
ITS EYES ON
CANNABUSINESS
AS SUPPORT FOR
LEGALIZATION
GROWS

by Rachel Burkons



It's no surprise that alcohol industry giants are keeping close tabs on a topic as newsworthy as legal cannabis, especially as it continues to gain ground across the United States. Considering there's a lot of money to be made in this emerging marketplace, news of established beverage companies publicly eyeing cannabis continues to grab headlines.

Such was the case in mid-July, when newsfeeds lit up after the Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA)—among the industry's most influential voices—announced its support for the legalized regulation of cannabis in the U.S. It's big news, for sure, but don't expect WSWA to make its own foray into the cannabis world just yet. "Our position is that if your state is going to legalize cannabis, Congress and the federal government should give them a path to do so," says Dawson Hobbs, the organization's acting Vice President of External Affairs.

Instead, as Hobbs explains, WSWA aims to send a message that "legalization is here to stay, and following a regulatory model similar to alcohol will help resolve the conflict between state and federal laws." "What's *not* good for communities is an unregulated marketplace," he adds. "The best thing would be to have the market regulated in a safe manner. Take alcohol, for example—counterfeit product is almost unheard of, thanks to these regulations. Don't we also want to offer the safest cannabis marketplace in the world?"

Of course, the alcohol industry's eyes are also on its own bottom line, as fears of legalization potentially cannibalizing consumers and revenue have churned around for several years now. "The data is inconclusive," admits Hobbs. "Some studies show it competes, some say there's no effect, and some say it's complementary and can even help alcohol sales."

One supplier seems to be taking anxiety out of the equation by jumping in feet first: In early August, Constellation Brands made a \$4-billion (yes, that's *billion* with a "b") investment in Canadian cannabis company Canopy Growth. If that's not taking the cannabis bull by the horns, we don't know what is.

We'll continue to keep tabs on this alcohol-cannabis crossover trend in future issues of *The Tasting Panel*, *The SOMM Journal*, and *The Clever Root*, so if you and your business are making moves in this space, we want to hear about it. Email rachel@TheCleverRoot.com for your chance to be featured! ■

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Spirits Editor Mara Marski is *The Tasting Panel's* resident bartender.

Required Reading

SOME OF THE INDUSTRY'S MOST REVERED AUTHORS SHARE THEIR BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

It's back-to-school season, and while most of us are no longer trekking to the classroom, that doesn't mean learning is entirely off the table. To celebrate our craft's unwavering focus on lifelong education, I picked the brains of some of the bar world's most respected authors to compile a list of their favorite page-turning reads.

PHOTO: DORON GILD



One of the world's most formidable cocktail historians, David Wondrich also authored the award-winning book *Imbibe!* and its follow-up, *Punch*.

Wondrich's Picks



"I like Jeff Berry's *Sippin' Safari* because he not only unearths the history of tiki drinks, he shows you how he did it."

"Constantino Ribalaigua's *Bar Florida Cocktails* is the bar book of the famous Floridita in Havana from the 1930s. The best mixologist of the 20th century, Ribalaigua provides recipes that are consistently delicious."



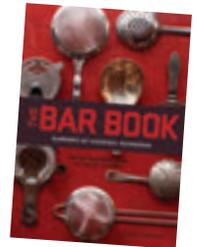
PHOTO: JIMI FERRARA



Gary Regan, in addition to being one of the industry's leading educators and authors (his column, *The Cocktailian*, ran in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for 13 years), serves as Bartender Emeritus at New York's Dead Rabbit.

Gary's Greatest Hits

"Nobody does it better than Jeff Morgenthaler, and in *The Bar Book: Elements of Cocktail Technique*, he patiently guides you through the nitty gritty of how to do things right. No bartender should be without a copy of this gem."



"Julie Reiner is one of the world's top bartenders, and in *The Craft Cocktail Party: Delicious Drinks for Every Occasion*, she takes everything down to basics, making it easy for newcomers to the craft. The book is also valuable to seasoned bartenders."

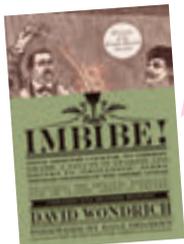
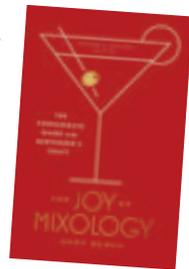
PHOTO: OLIVIER KONIG



Tiki expert Jeff "Beachbum" Berry has authored six books on the category, including *Sippin' Safari* and *Potions of the Caribbean*.

Berry's Beach Reads

"[Gary Regan's *The Joy of Mixology: The Consummate Guide to the Bartender's Craft*] not only teaches you how to be a better bartender, it teaches how you to be a better person."



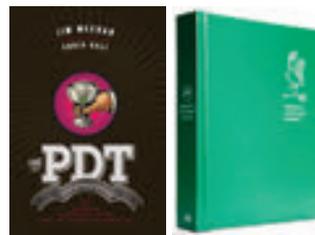
"There is no recipe book more monumental than [David Wondrich's] *Imbibe!* Wondrich decoded Thomas's inscrutable 1862 specs and found modern equivalents for archaic ingredients, then he field-tested every recipe and printed the best of them with fascinating historical notes."

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFFREY MORGENTHALER



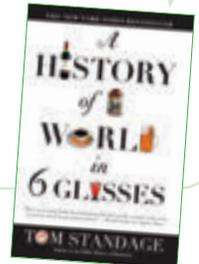
An awarded bartender and author, Jeffrey Morgenthaler manages the bars at Clyde Common and Pepe Le Moko in Portland, Oregon.

Morgenthaler's Must-Haves



"I always turn to either the *PDT Cocktail Book* by Jim Meehan and Chris Gall or *Meehan's Bartender Manual*. Jim's got one of the best grasps on classic cocktail proportions and ingredients out there."

"I'd recommend *A History of the World in Six Glasses* by Tom Standage. It's an interesting take on world history through the lens of both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages." ■■



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Spa Girl Cocktails CEO Karen Haines and Susan Anton Palm Springs, CA

The European Grape You Never Knew You Knew

GARNACHA/
GRENACHE
EXCELS AS A
STANDALONE
VARIETY

by David Gadd

Nobody knows exactly who coined the phrase “Everything old is new again,” but it couldn’t be more apropos when talking about a classic grape from Europe’s Mediterranean region. Known as Garnacha in Spain and Grenache in France, this ancient variety is becoming a new star once again.

Ampelographers (scientists who identify and classify grape vines) have traced the origin of Garnacha/Grenache to northern Spain’s Aragon region, but the grape’s suitability to the warm, dry Mediterranean climate saw it spread to other Spanish regions. It then ventured across the Pyrenees Mountains into Roussillon (which was once under the Crown of Aragon) and further to southern France and Sardinia, as well as other worldwide locales. In addition to serving as the “G” in familiar GSM blends alongside Syrah and Mourvèdre, Grenache is now back in the spotlight as a stand-alone varietal wine. Just call it “the grape you never knew you knew.”

Europe: Where Garnacha/Grenache Is King

France and Spain are by far the world leaders in plantings of Grenache and Garnacha. With great attention to terroir, modern winemaking techniques, local know-how, and century-old vineyards, the dry Mediterranean regions on both sides of the Pyrenees represent the purest expression of Garnacha/Grenache as a varietal wine. It’s in these terroirs that this grape can unleash its most intense and captivating expressions.

The European Union’s Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) certifications confirm quality and authenticity.



Garnacha/Grenache grows best in warm, windy, and dry climates like that of Europe’s Mediterranean region.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF GARNACHA/GRENACHE





Gnarled old-vine Garnacha/Grenache is cherished by European winemakers.

With the European Union's Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) certifications in place to insure quality, monovarietal Garnacha/Grenache is flourishing. Notably, it's being produced in five Spanish DOs (Denominaciones de Origen)—representing roughly 5,500 winegrowers and 144 wineries—and in France's Roussillon by an estimated 2,200 winemaker families, 25 co-ops, and 350 private cellars.

In Spain's DO Calatayud, where traditional harvesting at high altitudes (up to 1,100 meters, or 3,600 feet, above sea level) meets modern technology, the Garnacha/Grenache-based wines show prominent fruit and minerality prized by connoisseurs. In DO Campo de Borja, known as the "Empire of Garnacha," 40 percent of the vines are between 30 and 50 years old. Created in 1932, DO Cariñena is one of the oldest protected growing areas in Europe and is sixth in export volume among Spain's wine regions.

In the progressive DO Somontano, meanwhile, low-fertility soils yield rich wines with modern flavor profiles. DO Terra Alta is noted for both red and white versions of Garnacha, producing 70 percent of the Garnacha Blanca made by Spanish PDOs. Exports represent 65 percent of sales from these five Spanish PDOs, much higher than the 43 percent from all Spanish DOs combined.

Across the border in France's Roussillon, a new generation of winemakers is exploring the potential of Garnacha/Grenache to create vibrant contemporary wines backed by tradition, making Roussillon a Grenache powerhouse. "Roussillon is one of the cradles of Grenache," says Eric Aracil, Export Director for Wines of Roussillon. "This variety is found in its black, white, and gray forms as well as a 'hairy' version called Lledoner Pelut. That this is a family of grape varieties is key for us, because as such it occupies nearly 41 percent of the total cultivated area and is found as a single varietal wine and in blends. It is therefore a 'must' variety, a Roussillon pureblood." American consumers are clearly keen on wines from Roussillon's 15 PDOs and three PGIs: Exports to the U.S. increased 166 percent between 2010 and 2016.

Why European Garnacha/Grenache?

"Given that the variety originated here, we benefit from the expertise of cultivating the grape for more than 1,000 years as well as having the optimal conditions," says Sofía Gonzalez, who oversees the European Garnacha/Grenache Quality Wines program. European winemakers engage in optimal site selection and viticultural techniques as they seek out well-drained, low-vigor soils for plantings, paying close attention to water stress and sun exposures.

Garnacha/Grenache can grow in many soil types, but it thrives in the limestone, slate, schist, and clay abundantly available in both northeastern Spain and Roussillon; there, it develops wines with intense minerality sought out by enophiles. Strong winds in these Mediterranean regions also serve to promote vine health.

Keen on protecting heritage old-vine Garnacha/Grenache, these European vintners maintain natural low yields for enhanced quality and concentration. The vines' deep roots also auto-regulate berry production while giving a tangible sense of place to the finished wines. Today's Garnacha/Grenache winegrowers also opt to wait for full ripeness to increase the wines' fleshiness, balance, and drinkability.

Garnacha/Grenache can serve as a base for a wide range of styles: whites, rosés, reds, and sparkling wines, as well as specialties such as natural and fortified sweet wines (the grape's ability to withstand oxidation results in some unique *rancio* styles as well). In short, there's virtually no limit to the versatility of the Garnacha/Grenache grape family when grown in compatible terroirs like those found in northeastern Spain and Roussillon.

European Garnacha/Grenache appeals to wine lovers of all generations, from adventurous millennials to older, experienced explorers. With International Garnacha/Grenache Day approaching (see below), there's no better time to get to know this captivating variety once again. ■■

International Garnacha/Grenache Day

For International Garnacha/Grenache Day on Friday, September 21, we suggest you celebrate—and educate your guests at the same time—by featuring Spanish European Garnacha and Grenache on your wine list during the month of September.

In New York City, for example, various activations around Garnacha/Grenache will take place at Pierre Loti, a Mediterranean restaurant and wine bar in Manhattan's Chelsea district. The lineup will include four all-night happy hours (September 5, 12, 19, and 26 from 4 p.m. until 1 a.m.) featuring Garnacha/Grenache wines, as well as a special event on Garnacha/Grenache Day.



garnachagrenache.com
#GarnachaDay #GrenacheDay



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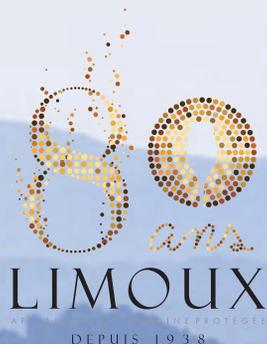
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FRESHNESS AND VALUE ABOUND IN WINES FROM **LIMOUX**,
THE LANGUEDOC'S ONLY SPARKLING APPELLATION

by Jessie Birschbach / photos by Nick Klein



*W*hile Blanquette de Limoux—an appellation sparkling wine from the Limoux AOP in France’s Languedoc region—may be celebrating the 80th anniversary of its official designation in 1938, many historians credit the Limoux AOP as the birthplace of sparkling wine, tracing its creation to the monks of the Abbey of Saint-Hilaire in 1531.

Whether one’s familiar with the self-proclaimed “OG” of bubbles or not, there’s no denying the rising quality and ever-present value of the Languedoc’s only sparkling appellation. One of the region’s smaller AOPs, Limoux is situated between the Pyrenees mountains to the south and the Cévennes mountains to the north on the western edge of the Languedoc.

A vineyard in the Languedoc’s
Limoux appellation.



Todd Salvatore, General Manager at Siren by RW in Washington, D.C., pairs the restaurant's striped bass and ceviche melon gazpacho with the Antech Blanquette de Limoux Grande Reserve Brut.

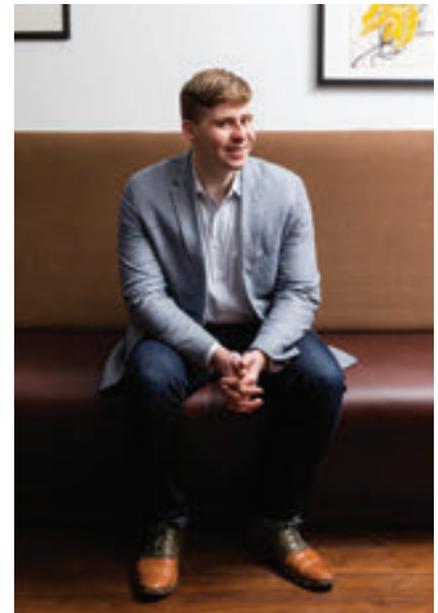
According to Master Sommelier Jack Mason, who serves Limoux AOP in his role as Wine Director at Pappas Bros. Steakhouse in Houston, Texas, the appellation benefits from “a natural tunnel [that allows] coastal influences to make their way not only from the Mediterranean, but even more importantly from the cool Atlantic.” “These influences keep the area cool and allow things like bright, refreshing sparkling wine and balanced Chardonnays to be made in what would otherwise be an area only suitable for rich, full-bodied red wine,” Mason adds.

Mason, who runs an award-winning wine program at Pappa Bros. with nearly 4,000 offerings, says Limoux provides “great value for someone wanting to offer a traditional-method sparkling wine by the glass at a very approachable price point.” He names Domaine Collin, a family-owned company with “roots in Champagne [that’s] migrated south to make traditional-method wines,” as one of the area’s most distinguished producers, adding that the family’s decision to embrace the style “is a testament to the potential of the area and the terroir of Limoux.”

Highlighting Limoux at D.C.’s Siren by RW

Todd Salvatore has practically grown up in the hospitality business. After stints at the historic Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, several Michelin-starred restaurants in Las Vegas, and Charlie Palmer Steak in Washington, D.C., Salvatore now serves as the General Manager at Siren by RW in D.C.’s The Darcy hotel. The position has also put him in charge of the restaurant’s wine and spirits program, which set him up for his most fulfilling challenge: “creating the perfect wine list for [Siren’s] seafood-based menu,” Salvatore says.

The seasonal menu requires Siren’s kitchen staff to source most of



Jack Mason, MS, serves as the Wine Director at Pappas Bros. Steakhouse in Houston, TX.



Todd Salvatore, pictured at left, is the General Manager at Siren by RW in Washington, D.C. Pictured at right, the restaurant's pan-roasted halibut with masago, white asparagus, fava beans, and smoke morels pairs with the Michele Capdepon Crémant de Limoux.

their ingredients locally. "I am lucky enough to have the opportunity to maintain a wine list that especially complements our menu—crisp whites, white Burgundies, domestic Chardonnays, and most importantly, sparkling wines from around the world."

Like Mason, Salvatore relies on Limoux AOP sparkling to provide both quality and value to his guests. "The Crémant de Limoux AOP wines we offer are two of the more whimsical wines on Siren's wine list, and they pair exquisitely with our cuisine," Salvatore says. "It is very rewarding to expose guests to new winemaking regions, and sparkling wines from Limoux certainly give us that opportunity, especially because they're priced so reasonably. I personally enjoy the freshness, herbaceous notes, and acidity that characterize the wine—the perfect complement to so many of the dishes on our menu." ■■

Just the Facts

Limoux encompasses more than 41 communes, 1,800 hectares of vines, and 400 producers.*

Crémant de Limoux is produced at 40,000 hectoliters, followed by Blanquette de Limoux (30,000 hectoliters), Blanquette Méthode Ancestral (4,000 hectoliters), and still wines (white at 5,000 hectoliters and red at 2,800 hectoliters).*

Limoux red wines are usually Merlot-based; still whites, meanwhile, must be fermented in oak and made from Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, or Mauzac.

Méthode Ancestrale wines must be 100% Mauzac.

Blanquette de Limoux wine must feature a minimum of 90% Mauzac supplemented by Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay produced in the traditional method and aged sur lie for a minimum of nine months.

Crémant de Limoux allows a blend of Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc to make up a maximum of 90% of the wine. The combination of Mauzac and Pinot Noir can comprise up to 40%.

*Figures according to *languedoc-wines.com*.

Limoux-vers and Shakers: A Sampling of Limoux Wines



Domaine Collin Crémant de Limoux AOP Cuvée Rosé Brut (\$18) This crémant (75% Chardonnay, 15% Chenin Blanc, and 10% Pinot Noir) is hit with a touch of still Pinot Noir before bottling, giving the wine a delicate, onion-skinned hue. The substantial hibiscus flower notes precede muted red berries and subtle stone fruits, which all depart via a very dry finish.

UNITED STATES WINE IMPORTS/
PATRICK ALLEN SELECTIONS



Saint-Hilaire Blanquette de Limoux AOP Brut (\$13) Named after the monks who are said to have first created sparkling wine more than 475 years ago, Saint-Hilaire is a Mauzac-dominant blend with 5% Chenin Blanc and 5% Chardonnay. A bit weightier on the palate, it still maintains its buoyancy. Bright pome fruit emerges on the nose and palate, particularly green apple followed by lemon rind and sweet Marcona almonds enveloped in a creamy texture.

JACK POUST & COMPANY, INC.



Antech Blanquette de Limoux AOP Brut Nature (\$22) Made true to Blanquette form, this blend of 90% Mauzac, 5% Chenin Blanc, and 5% Chardonnay goes through secondary fermentation and ages in bottle for 15 months. The lack of dosage, as this is a Brut Nature, perhaps contributes to the interesting yeasty-and-floral nose and palate, on which faint red apple and lime peel wrap around a saline, mineral-like core. This wine is reminiscent of a delicate Belgian beer.

EXCLUSIVE WINE IMPORTS



Domaine J. Laurens Brut Crémant de Limoux AOP (\$15) Grown on 30 hectares in Limoux, this crémant offers a big and toasty brioche quality that plays against quince, pear, and lime zest. With a weighty, frothy texture, it finishes quite dryly.

K&L WINE MERCHANTS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Anthony Dias Blue, Editor-in-Chief of *The Tasting Panel Magazine* and *The SOMM Journal*



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Events

The SOMM Journal and *The Tasting Panel* host multiple exclusive events a month for trade members that aim to be educational, interactive, hands-on gatherings ideal for networking within the industry.



Branded

As leading publications in the wine and spirits industries, both *The Tasting Panel* and *The SOMM Journal* plan events in a wide range of formats, including dinners and tastings. Every detail is customized specifically to adhere to the partnering brand's identity, ensuring originality, personality, and creativity sure to make a strong impression on guests.



Educational

While *The SOMM Journal's* wine events range in size, they all serve as informative seminars where industry leaders gather to discuss wide-ranging topics relevant to the business today. The magazine's wine-tasting competitions, meanwhile, give winning participants a chance to walk away with cash prizes.



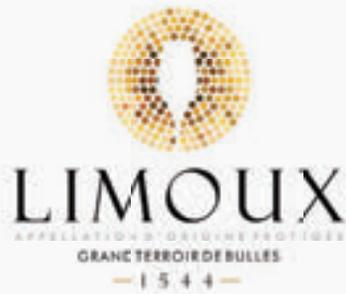
Interactive

The Tasting Panel hosts occasions varying in theme, from speed tastings to brand-specific events where guests have the opportunity to meet with ambassadors and learn about the company in an intimate group setting. In addition to sampling custom-made cocktails, guests can also take home branded goodie bags.

To get on our events list,
contact Events Director Francesca Marciano at
Francesca@TastingPanelMag.com.

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL
THE **tastingpanel**





ADDING SPARKLE TO LIFE SINCE 1544



Known as the 'Terroir of fine bubbles' – Limoux also has much else to offer. This is a world unto itself within Languedoc, with a number of micro terroirs, grapes and styles to explore. Discover these wines today, as the appellation celebrates its 80th anniversary.

Join the adventure today and explore all that Languedoc Wines have to offer

LEARN MORE AND FIND WINES AT LANGUEDOCADVENTURE.COM

Mauzac is the traditional variety in Limoux, known as 'blanquette' due to the fine white bloom on its leaves. This gives the Blanquette de Limoux appellation its name. Characteristic aromas of green apple, acacia blossom and apricot bring a freshness and vibrancy to these wines.

SPARKLING

Gabriele
Tacconi is
the Chief
Winemaker
for Ruffino.

LIVING LA DOLCE VITA

.....
**HOW FAMED
TUSCAN ESTATE
RUFFINO
MADE A MAJOR
SPLASH IN THE
PROSECCO
CATEGORY**
.....

BY RUTH TOBIAS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUFFINO



Ruffino Chief Winemaker Gabriele Tacconi characterizes the Prosecco as embodying “la vita Ruffino: our passion for enjoying good food and wine with family and friends.”

For a wine so synonymous with easy, breezy pleasure, Prosecco is the force behind a rather serious business. Virtually unknown to mainstream American consumers a decade ago, the Italian bubbly commanded 19 percent of the domestic sparkling-wine market in 2017, with sales rising more than 20 percent last year, according to Nielsen data.

Ruffino has emerged as a key player in Prosecco, with domestic sales of its products growing 28.6 percent last year to outpace category growth by nearly 19 percent, per the IRI Databank. Perhaps that’s to be expected from such a venerable estate: Founded in the Tuscan town of Pontassieve in 1877, Ruffino has gone on to become one of Chianti’s most formidable producers.

And yet, Ruffino’s success with respect to Prosecco is due precisely to its flair for pleasure as well as its business acumen. According to Chief Winemaker Gabriele Tacconi, the company’s popularity “was genuinely associated with *la dolce vita*”—the sweet life—beginning in the 1950s and ’60s: more than 50 years before Ruffino released its Prosecco in 2010. (The star

of Italian director Federico Fellini’s eponymous film, *Marcello Mastroianni*, was even known to visit the winery.) “*La dolce vita* is an attitude, a lifestyle that characterizes the people of Italy—a way of being the rest of the world would like to emulate,” Tacconi says. “We love dressing well, eating well, and spending time with the people we care about.”

Tacconi says that as Ruffino “saw sparkling wine growing in popularity around the world and Prosecco in particular really taking off” during the early years of the new millennium, the company saw adding the category to its portfolio as an opportune way to celebrate its long-held, thoroughly Italian values. “We’d always felt that Prosecco embodied ‘*la vita Ruffino*’—our passion for enjoying good food and wine with family and friends,” Tacconi explains. “So it was a natural next step for Ruffino to produce Prosecco and have it be a part of our wine family.”

Ruffino Prosecco expresses that zest for life simply yet elegantly, according to the winemaker, who waxes poetic when asked what he loves most about the wine. “It has the aromas of the local

fruit markets along our country roads,” he says of the hints of pears, apples, and white peaches that meld with the aromatics of “fresh spring blooms.” Sourcing Glera grapes from a DOC as vast as Prosecco for this single-varietal release means careful blending before secondary fermentation by the charmat/tank method is key; Tacconi says it’s also important “to taste every single blend before bottling” in order to strike the balance he seeks between bold fruit and delicate floral notes.

The result is “one of the best food-pairing wines” around, boasts Tacconi, who favors it with raw or cooked seafood, pizza bianca, or quiche with cheese, ham, and zucchini. But, he adds, “the absolute *best* pairing for Prosecco is Parmesan cut into small pieces to pop into your mouth.”

Of course, as the millions of Americans who’ve jumped on the Prosecco bandwagon are well aware, mealtime isn’t the only moment tailor-made for breaking out the bubbly. Asked when he recommends drinking Ruffino Prosecco, Tacconi says “that’s a very simple question to answer: on any and every occasion!” ■■

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

91 J. McClelland

Cellars 2014 JMC Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$45) Smooth, rich, and tangy with notes of ripe plum and berry fruit; velvety with a backbone of firm acidity from winemaker Mitch Cosentino.



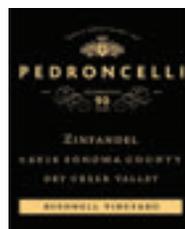
90 Spring Mountain Vineyard

2015 Sauvignon Blanc, Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley (\$45) Bright and clean with notes of citrus, spice, and peach; fresh and long from an estate with 226 acres of mountainside vineyards.

92 Pedroncelli

Winery 2016 Zinfandel, Bushnell Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley (\$26)

Very fluid texture; lush, dense, and flavorful with a long finish; a friendly, balanced wine aged 16 months in 40% new American oak barrels.





95 High Dive 2015 Red Blend, Napa Valley (\$95)

Soft and luscious with elegant, tangy blackberry and cassis; smooth, rich, and deep with an exquisite velvety texture; an impressive, complex blend of all the Bordeaux varieties, save Malbec.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

91 Mullan Road Cellars 2015 Red Blend, Columbia Valley (\$45)

Creamy, mellow, and lush with a long finish; soft yet surprisingly intense. 49% Cabernet Sauvignon, 34% Merlot, and 17% Cabernet Franc.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

92 Steele Canyon Cellars 2014 50 Harvests Meritage, Napa Valley (\$50)

Vivid, fresh flavors of juicy plum and spice; tangy and nicely structured; a lovely, well-balanced effort.

91 Artesa Winery 2016 Estate Vineyard Chardonnay, Los Carneros, Napa Valley (\$35)

Polished and sumptuous with refined notes of ripe pear and subtle toasty oak; silky with fine balance and considerable finesse courtesy of Artesa Director of Winemaking Ana Diogo Draper.

IMPORTED

93 Masi 2013 Costasera Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG, Italy (\$65) Dark, rich, and earthy; concentrated, complex, and well-balanced; a long and lush blend of three ancient varieties: Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

93 Tenute del Cabreo 2016 La Pietra Chardonnay, Toscano IGT (\$40)

Gentle and smooth with notes of toasty oak; juicy, bright, and elegant; fresh and beautifully balanced. Aged 12 months in 50% new French oak, followed by an additional six months in bottle.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

93 Frankland Estate 2014 Olmos's Reward Red Blend, Frankland River, Australia (\$55)

Sleek and flavorful with complex spice notes; a long and generous wine named for Dr. Harold Olmo, a Californian viticulturist known as a pioneer of the Frankland River wine region. ☺

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

95 Croft 2016 Vintage Port, Douro, Portugal (\$100)

Inky and rich with not-too-sweet and toasty flavors; spicy and incredibly nuanced; fresh, generous, and ageworthy from a late-ripening season in the Douro Valley.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

97 Fonseca 2016 Vintage Port, Douro, Portugal (\$120)

Dark and mildly sweet with density and notes of vanilla and toast; racy, luscious, and long; superb now—and built to last—from a producer that released its first Port in 1840.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

VALUE

91 Félix Solís Avantis 2016 Pulpo Albariño, Rías Baixas, Spain (\$14)

Aromatic, juicy, and fresh; spicy and crisp with a nice minerality. Delicate and sleek with balance and good length, it's a classic Albariño with depth and style—plus, it's an amazing value.



88 Caposaldo 2017 Pinot Grigio, Delle Venezie IGT (\$11)

Refreshing and silky with succulent, tangy fruit; bright, long, and satisfying, it's precisely the wine many want from this variety. ☺

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

89 Steele Wines 2014 Shooting Star Blue Franc, Washington (\$14)

Leave it to Jed Steele to make a delightful domestic wine out of the somewhat unexpected German/Austrian variety Blaufränkisch; glossy and fresh with tangy plum and spice. ☺

90 Don Rodolfo 2017 Art of the Andes Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$12)

Deep ruby color; lush and tangy with a streamlined texture and penetrating notes of plum, black raspberry, and cassis. Dense and spicy with a slightly warming effect on the finish, it's like biting into a ripe plum. At this price, it's an absolute steal.



BLUE REVIEWS

88 **Viña Eguía 2015**
Tempranillo, Rioja DOC
(\$14) Crisp, tight, and racy with a slightly creamy thread; clean, tart, and long. If you like Cabernet, I recommend you check this one out. ☺

FINE ESTATES FROM SPAIN

90 **Agricola Punica 2017**
Samas Isola Dei Nuraghi
IGT, Sardinia, Italy (\$22) Aromatic, flavorful, and polished with notes of soft minerals; a long, lovely, and sustainably farmed white from Sardinia. 80% Vermentino and 20% Chardonnay. ☺

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS



92 **Berton Vineyards 2017**
Metal Label The Black
Shiraz, Limestone Coast,
Australia (\$15) The potent, zesty nose is smoothed by concentrated and juicy notes of plum, currant, and black cherry. This well-balanced wine bursts with characteristic Aussie spice and fruit at an amazing price.

CABERNET CORPORATION

88 **Bumble & Bloom 2016**
Riesling, Columbia Valley,
Washington (\$17) Ripe and crisp with smooth texture, fresh acidity, and a slightly sweet character; food-friendly with vibrant citrus notes.

88 **Abbeyville 2016 Tanner's**
Passage Chardonnay, North
Coast (\$16) Sleek with a muted texture and abundant notes of fresh fruit; a very pleasant wine for the price. ☺

88 **Nola Grace**
Cellars 2017
Sauvignon Blanc,
California (\$13) Clean, refreshing, and simple; long and balanced with a striking label from the ever-ambitious Scotto family. ☺



91 **Jezreel Valley**
Winery 2016
Levanim White
Blend, Sharon, Israel (\$23) A silky, kosher blend of Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer; and Colombard with aromatic notes; tangy, fresh, and racy with lively acidity. Wines like this make it abundantly clear the Israeli wine industry has come of age.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

90 **Château Roubine 2017**
Côtes de Provence Premium
Rosé Cru Classé, France (\$23) Pale pink and certified organic; soft and lush with a dry and tangy style; a kosher blend of Cinsault, Grenache, and Cabernet Sauvignon with a small portion of Carignan, Tibouren, Syrah, and Mourvèdre.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

91 **Château de**
Berne 2017
Rosé AOP Côtes de
Provence, France
(\$21) A pale-pink, mellow blend of Grenache Noir and Cinsault with a core of crisp acidity. Dry, lush, and mouthfilling, it's fermented and decanted at low temperatures.

PROVENCE ROSÉ GROUP



90 **Pacifica by Evan's Vineyard**
2017 White Riesling,
Underwood, Washington (\$18) Juicy, crisp, and racy with buoyant acidity and refreshingly dry notes of peach and citrus; tangy and long. Kosher.

91 **Shiloh 2017 Rosé, Judean**
Hills, Israel (\$22) Vibrant pink hue; silky and smooth with bright, racy acidity; lush and dry with hints of strawberry and plum. Long, generous, and kosher from a scenic winery established in 2005.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

91 **B. Lovely 2017**
Gewürztraminer,
Washington (\$13) The soft floral aroma introducing this lovely wine precedes a silky texture followed by off-dry, juicy, and crisp flavors. Why don't more people utilize this exquisite variety? This example is elegant with a hint of the grape's characteristic rose.



**95 Booker's Bourbon
Batch 2018-02**

Backyard BBQ, USA (\$65)

This cask-strength release reveals a softly spicy and toasty nose after watering; smooth and refined with sweet oak, alluring dried fruits, and caramel; warming with floral notes and vanilla. A stunning, complex achievement.

JIM BEAM BRANDS

**93 Ming River
Sichuan Baijiu,**
China (\$34) Fragrant and smooth; sweet, toasty, and vegetal. Long and harmoniously balanced with intriguing pineapple notes, it's a clue that baijiu's moment has perhaps finally arrived.

PARK STREET IMPORTS



**94 Glenmorangie Signet Scotch
Whisky, Scotland (\$200)**

Soft, full-bodied, and elegant; mellow and smooth with toasty oak, spice, and vanilla. Balanced and deeply layered, this is a precise and complex knockout from this storied distiller.

**92 Basil Hayden's Two by Two
Rye, USA (\$45)**

A limited-edition release with a striking floral nose and pleasing notes of vanilla and smooth oak; tannic, lively, and silky with nice rye flavors, spice, and considerable balance. A long, smooth, and tangy blend of four spirits: two Kentucky straight rye whiskies and two Kentucky straight bourbon whiskies.

**92 Eastside Distilling Hue-Hue
Coffee Rum,**

USA (\$20) Deep mahogany color with a rich coffee aroma; smooth yet powerful flavor with some nice sweetness and pure, gorgeous mocha intensity; subtle and balanced enough to try some in your morning cup. ■■



SPIRITS

**92 Surf City Still Works
California Gin, USA (\$32)**

Vibrant nose with a silky texture and elegant flavor profile dominated by citrus; more finesse and style than you would expect from a first-time effort. This pretty bottle should be on every bar in Southern California.

SURF CITY STILL WORKS

93 Suerte Añejo Tequila,

Mexico (\$50) Pale amber; rich, deep, and creamy with some earthy agave notes and sweet caramel. Luscious and balanced, it's aged "twice as long as the industry standard," the company boasts—and it shows.

COLORADO SPIRITS IMPORTERS, LLC

ST. ELDER

NATURAL ELDERFLOWER LIQUEUR

Crafted in small batches from an extract of fresh elderflower blossoms, St. Elder brightens up every cocktail with notes of sweet citrus and floral honey.



**ST. ELDER
GREYHOUND**

1 ½ oz Vodka
½ oz St. Elder
Natural Elderflower
Liqueur
3 oz Grapefruit Juice
Lemon wedge
*Shake ingredients with ice &
strain into a rocks filled glass.
Garnish with a squeeze of
fresh lemon*

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PLEASE ENJOY RESPONSIBLY.

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: ALEXANDER RUBIN



WINES



Doña Paula Los Cardos Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14) Plums and dark chocolate waft from the glass with aromas of grilled steak. The palate is as focused and seductive as a couple dancing the tango: Iron and espresso wind around cocoa and nutmeg as licorice coats the tongue. Vibrant with good acidity and a long finish. **92**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



Cline Cellars 2016 Ancient Vines Zinfandel, Contra Costa County (\$15) A luxurious sipper! Coffee and strawberry please the nose as they lead to an intriguing mouthfeel. Blackberry jam washes over the soft, round palate dotted with white pepper. Plum notes go creamy on the finish with a dusting of heather.

The winery's oldest, most historic, and "shyest-bearing" Zinfandel blocks contribute to 94% of this blend. **93**



Baldacci Family Vineyards 2015 Allwin Syrah, Honey B Vineyard, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$45) This sumptuous, inky-black, cool-climate Syrah features a nose of grilled meat and summer plum. On the palate, rich notes of dark plum and blueberry are streamlined with heather and violets. A smattering of black pepper spices things up. **94**



Loveblock 2016 Pinot Gris, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$23) The orange-blossom aromatics steadily flow from this crisp, bright white. With searing acidity and a dry style, the freshness factor is firmly in place. On the salty mid-palate, zesty lime rind interplays with Asian pear. This wine is a perfect match for seafood. **92**

TERLATO WINES



Worthy of a smooch.



French-style double bizou.



Wildly infatuated.



Seriously smitten.



Head over heels in love.



Maryhill 2014 Malbec, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$24) This wine is rich, ripe, and meaty with notes of cedar and cherry liqueur. Rhubarb, coffee bean, and leather keep it savory and texturally concentrated. Aged 20 months in French oak. **92**



Clos Galena 2014 Crossos, Priorat, Spain (\$22) Aged six months in oak and planted in stone-filled soil, this blend of Garnacha, Carignan, and Cabernet Sauvignon is earthy and savory. Scents of cherries and tilled soil lead to a palate of black fruit, balsamic-laden orange peel, and coffee bean. The silky mouthfeel completes the journey. **91**



SNARKY & SPIRITED, LLC



Pellet Estate 2016 Un-Oaked Chardonnay, Sunchase Vineyard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$42)

From a site that's been producing wine grapes for more than 150 years comes this stunning unoaked Chardonnay (see the oaked version) aged nine months in stainless steel and produced with extended lees stirring. The richness is there, as is depth and mineral-tinged complexity, while the nose picks up notes of pineapple and white flowers blooming out of the glass. Its lees-y vanilla-pudding body is sumptuous, and the acidity underscores it all with a crisp-melon and Asian-pear "crunchiness." Spiced jasmine continues to add aromatics on the finish. **95**



Pellet Estate 2015 Chardonnay, Sunchase Vineyard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$68) In producing this wine aged 16 months in new French oak, winemaker Tom Rinaldi demonstrates his ability to keep things from tasting toasty as he brings forth savory aromas of oregano, spearmint, and lime-charged pears and pineapples. The crème brûlée effect glides in mid-palate as lemon curd and brush develop at the finish. **95**



Byron 2015 Julia's Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$40)

This iconic vineyard has graced many bottles and certainly shows respect for the fruit in this savory red. Hints of portobello mushroom, tilled soil, and tart cherry seem reserved at first, but once the wine opens up, their aromas seem to sweeten the air. Earth-kissed red fruit, cranberry tea, and that familiar forest-floor effect chime in as the acidity keeps flavors bright. Black olive and balsamic contribute, but raspberry and cherry lead the way. **93**



Sonoma-Loeb 2016 Sangiacomo Vineyard Fedrick Ranch Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$60)

A silky, elegant Pinot, this wine intrigues the drinker with aromatics of earth, boysenberry, and butterscotch. On the palate, the mouthfeel is luxuriously creamy and accented with mocha, ripe blue/black berries, and a touch of heather. This hails from a label owned by the Chappellet family and is crafted by the dedicated, talented winemaker Phillip Corallo-Titus. **96**



Tola 2016 Terre Siciliane Nero D'Avola, Sicily, Italy (\$13)

A fragrant nose of blackberry, currants, and mocha is indicative of ripeness and indulgence. The bright palate displays violets, toasted almonds, and black fruit seasoned with basil and thyme. Cedar soaks into the finish for a pleasant wash of flavor. **91**



SNARKY & SPIRITED, LLC



Levendi 2015 Stagecoach Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$95) Juicy elements meld with teeth-coating tannins as dark chocolate and black beans intensify this wine's depth. Luscious, sun-drenched black fruit and savory Worcestershire sauce lead into a chewy finish. So much going on here! **96**



Levendi 2015 Symphonia Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$60)

Select Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards from Napa Valley form the brass, strings, and woodwinds of Symphonia. On the nose, leather and black cherry dig deep as red-fruited notes exude juiciness on the palate, where they harmonize with a chorus of chalky tannins. Black tea, slate, cedar, and dark chocolate interplay with mouthwatering plum underscored by a hum of black pepper. It finishes boldly and sweetly in perfect pitch. **93**



Goldschmidt Vineyards 2014 Game Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$89)

Aromas of spiced cinnamon and cedar open up to a black violet/graphite texture and flavor profile with an underscore of intense blackberry and black plum. Smacking, dry tannins keep things in check as the wine opens up to a sensuously smoky, dark-chocolate finish. Aged 31 months in French oak. **94**



Katherine Goldschmidt 2016 Crazy Creek Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$23)

Perfumed with tart blackberries and chocolate-covered raisins, the palate possesses silky tannins spotted with white pepper and enveloped in notes of plum, raspberry, and heather. **91**



Viña Zaco 2015 Albariño, Rías Baixas, Spain (\$18) With lemon and a hint of flint on the nose, this wine features salty, lime-squeezed flavors softened by notes of lanolin and white flowers. It's both pretty and refined. **91**

AVENÍU BRANDS



Gehricke 2016 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$32)

This white draws you in with its intensely sensual aromas of lemon/lime tart, jasmine, and chamomile. Mouth-filling flavors enter the light as this Chard shines with notes of pineapple upside-down cake, toffee, pear, and Rainier cherries. The beautiful acidity balances it all out. This is the best yet for Gehricke. **95**



3 BADGE BEVERAGE

PHOTO: ALEX RUBIN

Best Value!



Little Black Dress 2017 Rosé, California

(\$10) Created by Fetzer Winemaker Margaret Leonardi at the Mendocino winery, LBD is a wonderful wine to sip alone or paired with light fare. A value-driven release, it's accented on the nose with raspberry and plumeria flowers. Crisp acidity and a hint of minerality raise the bar for food-friendliness as white peach and pink grapefruit add a gemstone-like touch. **89**



Mother 2017 Rosé, California

(\$15) You wouldn't expect a snarling wolf on a label emblazoned with the name "Mother," as this bad-boy rosé probably isn't a mama's boy. On the nose, perfumed rose petals smeared with cherry make this wine more inviting than fierce, while the crisp acidity and cranberry-and-cherry-tinged minerality have a mouthwatering effect. Its "tough love" byline on the back label, which refers to the wine being "crushed, fermented, and raised in the California wilds," proves it's one mother of a ride. **91**



SPIRITS



Padre Azul Silver Tequila,

Mexico (\$55) Tied up in what looks like a leather bottle vest as part of its intriguingly dramatic packaging, this tequila opens with aromas of vanilla and fresh agave with a touch of salinity. It glides across the tongue with nary a bite—but perhaps a dot of white pepper—to morph into a creamy, lime-kissed beauty. **93**



Tequila Sin Rival Silver, Mexico

(\$37) This spirit features a pungent nose of cooked agave and fresh lime with a palate sweetened by marshmallow and mocha. The agave freshness shows through and contributes an earthiness to the finish. **92**

CORAZON AZUL SPIRITS



Chute Eight American Whiskey, USA

(\$35) An essence of orange peel, stone fruit, and brown sugar perfumes the air, and before the spirit's flavors even register, a satiny sensation preps the palate for high-toned peach notes. Mellow and approachable hints of dried mango and oatmeal emerge on the graceful finish. **93**

ROSE CITY DISTILLING



New Amsterdam No. 485 Gin,

USA (\$11) Juniper, pine, and coriander create a subtle perfume that simultaneously offers woody and salty tones. On the palate, chocolate mint aligns with lavender and grapefruit peel as the flavors broaden progressively toward the finish. Made in the USA, this spirit is thoroughly modern and sophisticated. **93**

E. & J. GALLO



La Pivón Vermouth Blanco,

Spain (\$29) This fantastically aromatic, 32-proof spirit is made in Madrid from locally sourced herbs and botanicals. Assertive notes of lemon blossom, cedar, Valencia orange peel, clove, and heather ring true on the nose and palate with vanilla entering midway. Lemon reigns on the finish with a burst of cinnamon. **94**

3 BADGE MIXOLOGY



Salish Sea Organic Maple

Liqueur, USA (\$36) At 39 proof, this handcrafted organic liqueur undergoes cold maceration; this process leaves some sediment in the bottle, which means the product is minimally filtered to ensure the highest quality possible. The maple aromatics are delicate and demure, yet they become more extroverted on the palate. Not cloying or sugary, the gracefully authentic thread of maple leaves behind a satisfying dry finish. This is absolutely exquisite. **95**



Burnside Goose Hollow RSV Garryana-Finished Small Batch Bourbon, USA

(\$39) With a nose of oatmeal, cedar, and toffee, this easy-drinking, 92-proof whiskey is produced in Portland and has an incredibly creamy mouthfeel (Garryana refers to a specific type of oak indigenous to Oregon). Delightful notes of burnt orange peel and pekoe tea lead to an astringent mid-palate that soon settles into a white-peppered, cinnamon-spiced cedar finish. **93**

EASTSIDE DISTILLING



OMAR Single Malt Bourbon- Type Whisky, Taiwan

(\$38) This spirit sends you to a garden with perfumed aromas of jasmine and ginger-caramel. On the palate, flavors of peach, melon, and honeyed orange peel are alluring. The lean, satiny, and sinewy 92-proof spirit goes grassy toward the finish with a green-pepper spice and a wave of salinity. **94**



OMAR Single Malt Sherry- Type Whisky, Taiwan

(\$38) This single malt takes to the forest with scents of cinnamon, date nut bread, and nutmeg. Sandalwood and caramel apple interplay with savory, woody notes of porcini mushroom, orris root, sandalwood, and bergamot. The long finish is dotted with a salinity reminiscent of Himalayan sea salt and a sweet note of spearmint. **97**



JCB Vodka, Burgundy

(\$125) With an expressive, feminine nose of blueberries, lavender, and vanilla bean, this charming spirit uses hand-harvested Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes from Jean-Charles Boisset's estate vineyards in Burgundy. After the varieties are fermented separately, the grapes are aged for six months in barrel before blending (they sit for two additional months for the flavors to meld). The result of this labor-intensive process is an exquisitely exotic vodka with flavors of summer roses, gardenia, and a continuous perfume on the nose and sumptuous palate.



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

100 ■

The Political Wedges— or Lack Thereof— in Wine

by Michael Cervin

If anything is certain in today's world beyond death and taxes, it's ideological division and inflamed rhetoric. This political divide, evidenced every day on TV and social media, proves we live in contentious times—but is the wine and spirits industry above the fray?

Driven by this question, we asked writers, distributors, and winemakers if the political leanings of their fellow industry members influence their impressions of a given brand, producer, or organization. Many chose not to respond given the sticky subject matter, but some willingly shared their thoughts.

"I don't consider political views with my reviews," Joe Roberts, creator of wine blog 1WineDude, tells *The Tasting Panel*. "I've spoken out against winemakers when I thought they were out of line personally, but their political bent has never entered into it. I've noticed that when I do debate politics, those in the wine business tend to be among the most balanced, respectful, and level-headed."

Personal views and causes also don't influence the wines Mike

Dunne, former wine critic for *The Sacramento Bee*, chooses to publicize. "I've written [about] wines that benefit animal shelters, theater companies, heart research, [and more], but only if they measure up to my standards of quality and value," he says.

On Facebook, one writer who wished to remain anonymous said that "as journalists, we must be objective and work with those who don't share our political beliefs." But are they partial to those they agree with? "Perhaps," they wrote before mentioning a Northern California winery owner and political commentator on cable news shows. "I don't agree with them, but their wines are great, and what they have done for the industry has been fantastic."

For San Diego-based sommelier Ben Silver, the political affiliations of a winery owner, winemaker, distiller, or supplier have no bearing on his decisions as wine director. "I want a great product with streamlined distribution. I'm more concerned about the quality of my wine program and my customers' experience than if the

person who made it or sold it leans right or left," he explains.

Others still opt to bridge the divide in lieu of avoiding it outright. Gary Eberle of Paso Robles' Eberle Wines, formerly a self-proclaimed "Kennedy Democrat" before embracing conservatism, recently hired an industry veteran who leans decidedly to the left: Tim McDonald of PR agency Wine & Spirits Spoken Here.

Eberle claims that he's been criticized and shunned by some wine reviewers for his conservative political beliefs. "I don't cling to my Bible or my guns—come talk to my people and get to know me," Eberle says. And while McDonald acknowledges that they're on near-opposite ends of the political spectrum, he says "friendship rules and quality of wine is paramount" when it comes to their relationship.

While we certainly won't always agree politically or even philosophically, wine proves far more unifying than it is divisive. Fortunately, that's a 6,000-year precedent unlikely to change anytime soon . . . that is, at least until the next election. ■■

COVER STORY

the iconic MADDALENA RIBOLI

MEET THE MATRIARCH AND VISIONARY BEHIND THE HISTORIC
SAN ANTONIO WINERY

by Michelle Ball



The gate leading to Maddalena
Vineyard in Paso Robles, CA.

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



Maddalena Riboli, the matriarch of the Riboli family, has been a driving force at San Antonio Winery for more than 70 years. Her charisma and work ethic have played crucial roles in its success.

the “women in wine” movement has been widely celebrated in recent years as more and more female professionals diversify a male-dominated field. As these women-led success stories rise to prominence at last, the ensuing conversation has also turned backward to acknowledge the determined women who defied cultural norms far ahead of their time—and, as a result, laid the groundwork for their modern-day counterparts.

One such icon is Maddalena Riboli, who joined her husband, Stefano, in working at his uncle Santo Cambianica’s winery in Downtown Los Angeles more than 70 years ago. Founded by Cambianica in 1917, San Antonio Winery would later become the young couple’s shared legacy: Over the years they’ve opened numerous tasting rooms, launched a 400-seat restaurant, expanded their vineyard holdings, and built a portfolio of successful national brands. “My grandfather has always been an incredible worker, and he loves interacting with people. He worked in the tasting room for 40 years,” says fourth-generation family winemaker Anthony Riboli. “But my grandmother was, in a lot of ways, the *fire*. She was the visionary.”



A TRUE PARTNER

Now 95 years old, Maddalena has long possessed a strong work ethic and savvy business acumen—both of which have proved integral to San Antonio Winery's sustained success in an ever-evolving industry.

After Maddalena's family immigrated from Italy's Barolo region when she was 7, they settled in the Guasti community near Ontario, California, where they worked as sharecroppers. Years later, a mutual friend invited Stefano to come and meet Maddalena, and when he arrived, she was out driving a tractor in the field. He waited 30 minutes for her to approach—time he knew even then was well-spent. "In that half hour, I already made up my mind," Stefano recalls. "If she could drive a tractor, she could run a winery, too."

Maddalena, on the other hand, was not so easily convinced. "He was in a car with a raccoon tail on his antenna and was too much of a city slicker for me," she quips. "However, I agreed to meet with him, and I realized he was a good man. I could also tell he was a hard worker."

They were married within the year, and Maddalena immediately went to work at the winery, where she oversaw the finances and handled bookkeeping. Cambianica, however, hardly welcomed her with open arms: Despite her skills, she had to prove herself again and again to earn his trust and respect. She demonstrated she was more than capable nonetheless, and after Cambianica died in 1956, the couple inherited the winery.

Anthony attributes much of the family business' success to his grandmother's ingenuity. "She was the one who would say, 'Hey, here's an idea I have,' and I think my grandfather was smart enough to go along with it," he adds.

For one, Maddalena believed it was essential to sell directly to consumers. With her guidance, the Riboli family opened one of the state's first winery tasting rooms; by 1965, they'd expanded to 12 locations throughout southern California, two of which are still in operation. "Our customers were all locals living in the neighborhood," Maddalena says. "We were very much like a convenience store today. Cigars, cigarettes, spirits, beer, wine—we sold it all."



Maddalena and Stefano Riboli on their wedding day in 1946.

As the company's informal CFO, Maddalena also served as the point person for inspectors from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (BATF). Anthony recalls his grandmother once describing a BATF agent as being "taken aback" that she was the person he was there to meet, even with her being the documented co-owner of the business. "Some people did treat me differently from my husband at first. However, I made a conscious effort to show them my competence," Maddalena says. "Occasionally I was treated unfairly, but I always thought of what was best for the company and its survival."

EXPANDING THE BUSINESS

At San Antonio Winery's downtown tasting room, Maddalena was known to prepare sandwiches for customers to enjoy with their wine. This gesture of appreciation eventually spawned a small deli, where customers lined up outside the door. "She's an amazing cook and has an incredible talent," Anthony says.

This side business proved particularly prudent when the City of Los Angeles restricted the processing of grapes in the late 1960s, prompting Maddalena to expand the deli into a full-scale restaurant in 1972. Today, San Antonio

Winery's former crush pad is a bustling establishment—aptly named the Maddalena Restaurant—that seats up to 400 people. “It’s been a great symbiotic relationship between the restaurant and the tasting room,” Anthony explains. “Some people come to eat and they end up buying wine; some come to buy wine and end up eating.”

By the 1960s, the vineyards that once carpeted the hills of Los Angeles were paved with housing tracts. The couple looked northward, purchasing grapes throughout the Central Coast and Napa Valley, and, with the help of their three children, eventually buying vineyards in Monterey during the 1970s. In 1986, Maddalena saw an opportunity to purchase yet another site: a small vineyard in Napa Valley’s Rutherford district.

Maddalena was well-aware that diversification would be critical to the longevity of the family business, and Anthony says his grandmother constantly sought ways to reinvest their



Maddalena and Stefano Riboli (both seated) are pictured with members of their family (standing, from left to right): Steve Riboli, Santo Riboli, Anthony Riboli, Lisa Riboli-Elzholz, Dante Colombatti, Cathy Riboli-Colombatti, and Christopher Riboli.

earnings. “She would say, ‘Don’t just sit on the money; you’ve got to do something with it.’ Real estate has become a part of who we are, and she was the one who really spearheaded that,” he adds.

GATEWAY TO GREATNESS

In its early years, San Antonio Winery was known for producing casual jug wines. However, as American palates began to favor more refined varietal

wines in the late 1970s, the family embraced this shift through the creation of the Maddalena line of vintage-specific releases. “She was very much a part of that [project], saying, ‘This trend is coming; we need to be moving forward with trends,’” Anthony says. “I think that’s been the greatest influence for me—she’s always told us to challenge things instead of being stagnant.”

Beyond their enduring partnership as husband and wife, Stefano and Maddalena have maintained a united front in their business relationship, as well: Their shared work ethic, combined with Maddalena’s savvy ambition, was fundamental to their prosperity.

Today, the Riboli family’s matriarch remains tenacious in voicing her merited equality. When the family recently purchased vineyards in Paso Robles, they named one of the parcels after Stefano. “When I found out, I was very happy. However, I also wanted a vineyard named for me, so I called Anthony and told him he needed to find a property for the Maddalena Vineyard,” Maddalena explains. “Once the Stefano Vineyard was completed, I saw a beautiful photo of a custom wrought-iron gate. I deserved a gate as well, so Anthony had a beautiful gate built for me.”

Even as female professionals increasingly wield more power and influence in the wine industry, the #MeToo movement and the still-underwhelming statistics of women in leadership roles should serve as a reminder that more progress is needed. After a career spent proving her indisputable worth, Maddalena has her own advice for women today: “Never be discouraged. Keep working hard. Success will breed more success with hard work and vision.” ■■■

Stefano and Maddalena have passed down their enduring wine legacy to their children and grandchildren.



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

MOONSHINE

Hooch and HOLLER

OLE SMOKY
TAKES THE SHOW—AND ITS
DISTILLERY—ON THE ROAD FOR
TALES OF THE COCKTAIL

by *Mara Marški*

Ole Smoky's flagship distillery, The Holler, sits in a heavily trafficked corridor of downtown Gatlinburg, TN. Its rustic décor beckons guests in for Appalachian hospitality, live bluegrass music, and, of course, moonshine.



Inside The Holler, the walls showcase a veritable rainbow of moonshine. Guests can watch the spirit as it runs off the still, taste through the lineup at their leisure, or browse a wide range of retail goods related to the brand.

PHOTO: VAN GALLIUX

PHOTO: RACHEL WEBB

Cory Cottongim is Ole Smoky's President of Retail and Operations.



Ole Smoky transported a little bit of east Tennessee to New Orleans' French Quarter this July, completely transforming its Tales of the Cocktail tasting room into The Holler, the brand's flagship moonshine distillery in downtown Gatlinburg.

In the converted space at the Hotel Monteleone, guests could get a taste of the Great Smoky Mountains firsthand through a miniature distillery experience complete with live bluegrass music, a photo booth, and, of course, an extensive lineup of Ole Smoky flavors and cocktails to indulge in.

As the world's most-awarded moonshine, the brand found it fitting to bring the world's most-visited distillery to the largest global cocktail networking event, according to Ole Smoky's Vice President of Marketing Meg Bruno. "Since opening the doors at the Holler in 2010, we have created countless moonshine flavors, added whiskey to our lineup, and opened two additional distilleries in east Tennessee," Bruno says. "With all this success, we wanted to show guests at Tales of the Cocktail where it all started."

The Holler is expected to play host to more than 2 million visitors this year, with an additional million anticipated to pass through The Barn—Ole Smoky's distillery in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee—and The Barrelhouse, located just down

the street from The Holler in Gatlinburg (a fourth facility is being built in Nashville). According to President of Retail and Operations Cory Cottongim, Ole Smoky's distillery was intentionally designed to handle this jaw-dropping amount of foot traffic through its large, consumer-facing retail outlet.

Given Ole Smoky's tourist-friendly location, Cottongim says retail emerged as the brand's primary focus at its inception. "The Smoky Mountains get approximately 12 million visitors a year, and we knew there was a retail opportunity at their base in Gatlinburg," he adds.

Founded after moonshine production was legalized in Sevier County, Tennessee, Ole Smoky opened The Holler's 2,500 square feet of retail and distillation space the following year. "People said we were crazy to manufacture downtown where the costs were so high, but we stayed true to our retail direction, and it has introduced us to a lot of people who otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to experience our products," Cottongim says.

The risky tactic paid off for the brand, and after just a year of operation, The Holler started to take over the outdoor area adjacent to the distillery. It's now home to dozens of rocking chairs, where Ole Smoky's visitors can sit and listen to live music daily from 10 a.m.

to 10 p.m. Production, meanwhile, unfolds at The Holler, The Barn, and The Barrelhouse virtually every day, giving guests the opportunity to see the cooking, fermentation, and distillation processes up close via self-guided tours. "The distillers are happy to chat about their work as long as they're not busy," Cottongim says.

Tastings serve as one of the distillery's biggest draws, with visitors encouraged to sample quarter-ounce pours from the brand's ever-expanding portfolio, including core flavors like Ole Smoky Hunch Punch Lightnin', White Lightnin', Blackberry, Apple Pie, Peach, and Moonshine Cherries. Guests can also taste Ole Smoky's new and seasonal flavors, which currently include Pumpkin Pie, Oatmeal Cookie, Banana Mudslide Cream, and Dill Moonshine Pickles. "We try to have something new each month to guarantee a fresh experience for our returning customers," Cottongim says.

The retail outlet and its built-in taste-testing component function as a daily focus group, giving Ole Smoky immediate feedback on new flavors. They also help the brand determine which products will perform well in its wholesale markets. "Customers vote with their wallets at The Holler," says Cottongim. "We listen and we develop our 'greatest hits.'" ■■

Community & Camaraderie on the Central Coast

ALL-STAR CAST OF MASTER SOMMELIERS & WINEMAKERS TO STEER **WINE SPEAK 2019**

Building upon the success of its inaugural experience last January, Wine Speak is set to return once again with an all-star cast of master sommeliers, wine industry leaders and hospitality professionals on January 7-10, 2019.

Wine Speak is a trade-focused experience geared toward fostering community and collaboration within the global wine industry. The main events take place at the Atascadero City Hall in the heart of the Paso Robles wine country, with additional events and technical tours happening around the region. "The feedback from the first Wine Speak was so incredible that we had to do it again," said Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, Ancient Peaks Winery's vice president of operations who co-founded Wine Speak with master sommelier Chuck Furuya. "This one will be even better, and our aim remains the same: to create a premier experience for wine industry professionals to grow and learn together."

Indeed, the inaugural Wine Speak last January was met with critical acclaim and set the pace for future events. "The depth and breadth of wine professionals, education and networking was

WINE SPEAK 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

Cabernet Sauvignon: Inside & Out

Panel discussion with Fred Dame, M.S., Eric Jensen, Helen Keplinger and Fred Scherrer

Rhône Renegade: Mourvèdre

Panel discussion with Cris Cherry and Greg Harrington, M.S.

Paso Robles Winey & Vineyard Tours Blend Your Own Bottle Workshop BYOB "Taste of the World" Dinner

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priceless," said Meridith May, publisher and executive editor of SOMM Journal and The Tasting Panel.

Fred Dame, M.S., global wine ambassador at DAOU Vineyards & Winery states, "For a first-time event it was exceptionally well organized, and the quality of the seminars and events was exemplary."

Now comes Wine Speak 2019, which will include winemaker panels, a blending seminar, winery technical tours, blind tastings, hospitality workshops, a public grand tasting and more. The events will be steered by more than 20 winemakers, master sommeliers and wine experts from around the world.

One particularly unique aspect of Wine Speak is that it combines elements from all facets of the wine industry. "It brings us all together to have an entire discussion about wine, and not just one segment of the market," said Greg Harrington, M.S., founder and winemaker at Gramercy Cellars.

"Wine Speak is an opportunity for all of us to learn from those who can share their insights and valuable experiences," Furuya said. "It is also a gathering place where you can make new friends, and most importantly, collaborate."

Tickets to Wine Speak 2019 are now available at

WINESPEAKPASO.COM



Pictured left to right: Chuck Furuya MS, Greg Harrington MS, Fred Dame MS, Nunzio Alioto MS

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A new nonprofit—Dream Big Darling—is offering five full-ride Wine Speak 2019 scholarships to up-and-coming female sommeliers.

Recently launched in the Paso Robles wine country, Dream Big Darling is on a mission to foster the success of women in the wine and spirits industry through mentorship, education, life enhancement and professional retreats.

"We are aiming to help the next generation dream bigger and show them what the possibilities are," said Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, founder of Dream Big Darling. *"Through personal mentorship and professional development, we want to make a difference in the lives of women who are aspiring toward long-term careers in our industry."*

Dream Big Darling's Wine Speak 2019 scholarships include access to all events as well as lodging. Qualified sommeliers are invited to apply at

DREAMBIGDARLING.ORG



FROM HERE TO

Eternity

Two men who love Jack: Frank Sinatra and Eric "ET" Tecosky, U.S. Brand Ambassador for Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey.

CHANNELING THE SPIRIT OF FRANK SINATRA WITH JACK DANIEL'S AT THE SINATRA SUPPER CLUB

by Rachel Burkons
photos by Claire Barrett

In the realm of celebrity, there's a reason some headliners' names—Elton, Cher, Britney—consistently dominate the marquee. These megawatt stars don't share the spotlight often, but some legends are better served when their talents collide.

Such is the case with one of the industry's favorite historic pairings: Frank and Jack. Ole Blue Eyes and Old No. 7. The Chairman of the Board and, well, the bottle he was laid to rest with. If you live under a rock and still aren't following, we're talking about Frank Sinatra and the whiskey



Bartender Tokiwa Sears served up Jack Daniel's cocktails complete with handwritten notes bearing messages like "You are loved."

he chose to spend eternity with: Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey.

"Sinatra was one of the most iconic people on the planet who just happened to fall in love with Jack Daniel's," says U.S. Brand Ambassador Eric "ET" Tecosky. It was Tecosky's own love of Sinatra and Jack, in fact, that inspired



Each member of the Sinatra Supper Club's all-female bartending team is an alumna of Jack's Black Book, produced by The Tasting Panel in partnership with Jack Daniel's. Pictured from left to right: Keyatta Mincey, Shannon Kroll, Layla Linn, and Tokiwa Sears.

him to create an exclusive pop-up dining experience worthy of the Rat Pack king himself: the Sinatra Supper Club.

With Sinatra's pampered lifestyle serving as his inspiration, Tecosky has since launched these underground experiences in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Dallas, and San Francisco. "Sinatra spent his life wanting for nothing. If he needed a reservation, he got it; if his glass was empty, it was refilled," Tecosky says. "I wanted to create an event where each guest can have the Frank Sinatra experience. It's an evening full of delicious food, music, and laughter."

This July, Tecosky took the concept on the road to the annual Tales of the



At the Sinatra Supper Club, incredible food and libations are served up with the style and panache of Frank Sinatra himself.

Cocktail convention in New Orleans, a community he says is "all about friendship." "[Jack Daniel's founder] Jack Daniel and Frank Sinatra had that in common: taking care of their friends and loved ones," he adds. "It seemed natural to bring that to Tales and do the same for the people we love."

With bartenders from around the country gathered for a magical evening—during which we can indeed confirm no one wanted for anything—Tecosky and Chris Fletcher, Assistant Master Distiller for Jack Daniel's, treated guests to a classic Italian family-style meal. Each course was accompanied by a signature Jack Daniel's cocktail created by bartenders who fit the Sinatra/Jack Daniel's "mold of hospitality."

Each member of the all-women team has also all been featured in *The Tasting Panel's* very own collaboration with Tecosky and Jack Daniel's: *Jack's Black Book*. "Jack's Black Book and Sinatra Supper Club are both platforms for Jack Daniel's to give back something very cool to bartenders," Tecosky says. "This evening was extra special because I've felt that women in the industry still don't get all the credit they deserve, and we were able to spread that love around a bit tonight."

With an appreciation for bartenders and Sinatra in equal measure, Jack Daniel's has found an ideal balance with the Sinatra Supper Club; Tecosky, however, says the concept is driven by more than just industry platitudes. "I really believe that even though Sinatra and Daniel never met, they would have connected, because while they may have lived very separate lives, they had the same intention," he adds. "Both went after their dreams, did things their own way, and were helpful and hospitable to people in need. It seems like a natural connection to make a dinner like this by taking their ideals and practices and bringing them to life in new ways." ■■



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Photo Credit: Josue Castro



*As of August 20, 2018. Schedule is subject to change.

Schedule at a Glance

SAN DIEGO, CA NOV 14-16, 2018

Wednesday, November 14

Certifications:

WSET Level 1 in Sake*
9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

WSET Level 2*
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

CWAS® Intensive at SommCon*
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Certified Cicerone Exam*
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Registration Desk Open
8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Seminars:

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Dry White Bordeaux – Finding Its Place On Retail Shelves and Wine Programs
Mary Gorman-McAdams, Master of Wine

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Study Tips for Advanced to Master Level Exams

Lindsay Pomeroy, WSET

Panel: Laura Donadoni, Vinitaly International Ambassador

3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Digging Into Unique Terroir presented by The Somm Journal

Thursday, November 15

Registration Desk Open
7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Networking Coffee & Pastries
8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Seminars:

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Ageability for California Chardonnay

Nick Hetzel, Master Sommelier and Greg Brewer, Brewer Clifton

How to Discover a True Vin de Terroir in the New World

Randall Graham, Bonny Doon Vineyards

The Value of Single-Blind Tasting in Identifying Grape Variety and Region

Eric Entrikin, Master Sommelier

Nuances of Franciacorta: Exploring the History and Classifications

Vittorio Marzotto, Santa Margherita USA/ Ca'del Bosco; Cristina Renda, Ca' del Bosco

Hosted Tasting Break

10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Fireside Chats Presented by WSET

10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Seminars:

11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

The Origins of Wine and Ancient Varieties

Lisa Granik, Master of Wine

Cannabis + The Wine Industry: Debate and Discussion on the Implications and Intersections of Cannabis and the Wine Industry

Rachel Burkons, Associate Publisher of The Clever Root; Woody Van Horn, Sommelier; Max Montrose, Trichome Institute; Rebecca Stamey-White, Hinman & Carmichael LLP

Sparkling or Still: Which Loire Valley White Wine Are You?

Christopher Lavin, Broadbent Selections

The Better 'Bang for the Buck' - Second & Third Label Wines from Renowned

Châteaux or Unclassified Petits Châteaux Wines (Blind Tasting)

Mary Gorman-McAdams, Master of Wine

Syrah is the New Cab: A Blind Exploration of this Versatile Grape from Two Vastly Different Regions

Break

12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Seminars:

2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Alternate Universe: Whites of Bordeaux and Margaux vs. California presented by

The Somm Journal

Meridith May, The Tasting Panel, The SOMM Journal, The Clever Root and Panel

Sekt Sells: German Sparkling Wines

Molly Brooks, Advanced Sommelier

Guadalupe Valley: Past, Present, Future

Fernando Gaxiola, Baja Wine + Food and Panel of Experts

How Sand Helps Create the World's Best Wines

Will Costello, Master Sommelier

America's Invisible Rainbow: The Best Emerging Regions and Varieties from the Secret Wine Revolution

Lisa Granik, Master of Wine

Your Career In Wine: Managing Certifications, Crafting Resumes, and Having the Courage to Switch Gears

Geoff Labitzke, Master of Wine, Kistler Vineyards; GERALYN BOSTROM, MBA, CWE, IWP, Napa Valley Wine Academy

Tasting Break hosted by Black Stallion Estate, Wine Dialogues by E.&J. Gallo, Ziata, and Gloria Ferrer

3:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Fireside Chats Presented by WSET

3:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Seminars:

4:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

How the Country's Best Wine Directors Run Their Programs

Randy Caparoso, The SOMM Journal, The Tasting Panel and Panel

Does Being An Estate Winery Really Matter Anymore?

Andy Peay, Peay Vineyards and Panel

Napa Valley: Bordeaux Varieties, Burgundy Mentality?

Scott Barber, Advanced Sommelier, Green Pin Wines; Kenny Koda, Foley Johnson Wines

History of Wine Pangea To Pasteur

Wes Hagen, WSET 2, JWILKES WINES

The Flip Side of Champagne: A Comparative Exploration of Coteaux Champenois and Champagne

Alan Tardi, James Beard Award Winning Author + Journalist

Friday, November 16

Registration Desk Open

7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Networking Coffee & Pastries

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Seminars:

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

An Overview of Oxidation/Reduction Chemistry in Wines

Kerith Overstreet, MD

Win Win: How Understanding Your Customer Will Increase Beverage Sales Profits

Liz Mercer, WISE Academy

Master Class in Organic, Natural Farming + Grape Growing

Ivo Jeramaz, Grgich Hills Estate; Joseph Spellman, Master Sommelier

Shist! You Think You Know Languedoc?

Michael Meagher, Master Sommelier

Burgundy Growers, Negotiants & Monopoles (Blurred Wines, Great Wines)

David Glancy, Master Sommelier, San Francisco Wine School

Fire & Ice: the Forces that Formed the Terroir of Washington State

Sean P. Sullivan, Writer for Wine Enthusiast, Washington Wine Report

Tasting Break hosted by Lodi

10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Fireside Chats presented by WSET

10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Seminars:

11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Exotic Wines Blind Taste Challenge (Lodi)

Stuart Spencer, Lodi Winegrape Commission

Deconstructing Spirits presented by The Tasting Panel

Rachel Burkons, The Clever Root

Getting High: Appellation Elevation

Joseph Spellman, Master Sommelier

Champagne in Large Formats: A Technical Analysis

Diego Meraviglia, Dom Perignon; Garth Hodgden, Strategic Group KRUG

Build Your Own Personal Brand

Frans Van Der Lee, Somms List, Chef's Roll; John Rielly, Groth Vineyards

Rosé Any Way

Joshua Orr, Advanced Sommelier

Networking Lunch

12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Seminars:

2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Blind Taste with the Masters (MS Format)

Master Sommeliers: Joseph Spellman, David Glancy, Eric Entrikin

Greek Wines: Ancient Wines to Modern Blends

Ververis Polychronis, Hel, Ex.O

Delve into the Different Styles of Sake

Toshio Ueno, MSS, CSW, FWS, Sake School of America

Garnacha Unveiled: From Cariñena to the World

Bob Bath, Master Sommelier

A Retrospective on the 40th Anniversary of Castello Banfi

Lars Leicht, Banfi Vintners

The Grand Decant Tasting

4:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Produced by:



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LOVING THE LAND

NEW ZEALAND'S YEALANDS
ESTATE GIVES BACK TO THE
VINEYARD WHILE PRODUCING
REMARKABLE WINES

BY JESSE HOM-DAWSON

Yealands Estate lives by the motto “think boldly, tread lightly” as it crafts award-winning wine in partnership with nature.



“Lawnmowers you can pat”: Yealands uses Babydoll sheep to help control grass levels in its vineyards. The animals’ small stature prevents them from eating grapes off the vines.

Since the New Zealand government enacted the Resource Management Act in 1991—one of the first international efforts to introduce legislation focused on sustainability—the country has emerged as a world leader in the fight against climate change. It’s a philosophy reflected by the private sector, as well: Yealands Estate, the Marlborough winery established by Peter Yealands on the auspicious day of August 8, 2008, has joined its home country in promoting eco-friendly initiatives while producing award-winning and distinctive wines.

With a vision of becoming the world’s most sustainable wine producer, Yealands Estate centers its identity around its unique coastal location, rolling vineyards, and love of the land. With the latter serving as its guiding principle, the company’s environmentally friendly practices are at the forefront of everything it does.

Yealands Estate’s Seaview Vineyard is located on the coast of the Awatere Valley, the southernmost area of New Zealand’s famed Marlborough region. And while a portion of its vineyards are occupied by Marlborough’s most famous



Solar panels on Yealands’ roof generate 30 percent of its electricity needs.

SUSTAINABILITY

grape, Sauvignon Blanc, the winery's prowess extends to other varieties as well, including Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Portfolio highlights include the Yealands Estate S1 Single Block Sauvignon Blanc (\$30), which undergoes stainless-steel fermentation and spends three months on the lees—as does the Single Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$35), which follows a malolactic fermentation process divided between stainless steel (30%) and French oak (70%, with 20% new).

“Think Boldly, Tread Lightly”

Although Yealands currently implements many sustainability initiatives, it's constantly exploring new ways to minimize its environmental impact. The estate is hardly a novice when it comes to reducing its carbon footprint: It's one of the few wineries in the world certified as carbon-neutral from its inception. Yealands' ultimate goal is to generate enough energy to become self-sufficient—ideally supplying any surplus back to the national grid.

In celebration of the winery's motto to “think boldly, tread lightly,” we've highlighted some of the ways Yealands is leading the wine industry by enacting eco-friendly practices from vineyard to bottle:

Solar, Vine, and Wind Power

With the Marlborough region receiving the most hours of sunlight in New Zealand, Yealands opted to use the climate to its advantage by installing solar panels on its roof. The panels produce more than half a million kilowatts per year, enough to power 86 households; the three wind turbines on the winery's property, meanwhile, produce an additional 48,000 kilowatts of energy annually. Approximately 10 percent of the vineyard prunings are harvested, baled, and burned at the winery, with one 440-pound bale generating the equivalent of 60 kilograms of LPG (liquified petroleum gas).

In the Vineyard

Yealands employs numerous environmentally friendly strategies in its vineyards, from using wildflowers as a natural form of pest control to creating 25 wetlands to promote biodiversity at its Seaview Vineyard in the Awatere Valley. Barnyard animals also make appearances among the vines, with free-range chickens performing additional pest control duties and Babydoll sheep helping to control the grass levels (fortunately, they're too small in stature to reach the grapes!). ■■

Wildflowers grow between vineyard rows at Yealands Estate, serving as a natural form of pest control.



Yealands Estate 2014 Single Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$35)

Plum spice on the nose is tinted with freshly tilled soil and dried red flowers. Black cherries are heartened by sweet violets and a hint of mocha. Black pepper, forest leaves, and shiitake mushroom warm up the lengthy finish with savory tonality. The harshest growing conditions in New Zealand can be found at the Seaview Vineyard.

94 —Meridith May



Peter Yealands 2017 Pinot Gris (\$15)

Delicately aromatic with salty-peanut and toffee notes. A dollop of pear à la mode comes in mid-palate, finishing with honey and white tea. Searing acidity keeps it pure and fresh.

92 —M.M.



Yealands Estate S1 Single Block 2017 Sauvignon Blanc (\$30)

Spiced gooseberry and white grapefruit: iconic flavors in a lean body framed with flint. Peach pith and just-ripened stone fruit sweeten the finish.

92 —M.M.



Yealands Estate 2018 Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc (\$25)

Aromas of tarragon and basil spice up white grapefruit. A gemlike quality of Asian pear, honeysuckle, and honeydew melon fills the mouth with a fine crispness as white pepper glides along, seasoning snap peas and white grapefruit zest.

92 —M.M.

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Outshining

THE BAND



The Banfi gang at Commander's Palace in New Orleans, seated from left to right: Jacob Gragg, Artisan Vino Advisor at Cru Artisan Wines; Alberto Lazzarino, Directing Winemaker at Banfi Piemonte; Gabriele Pazzaglia, Cellarmaster at Castello Banfi; Andrea Sartori, family proprietor at Sartori di Verona; Lars Leicht, National Director of Cru Artisan Wines; Enrico Cerulli, family proprietor at Cerulli Spinozzi; and Kenny Boudreaux, Banfi On-Premise Manager for Louisiana.

The beloved *cochon de lait* eggs Benedict served at Commander's Palace. ▶



Pictured in the front row from left to right: Papillon Prince, Sommelier at Emeril's Delmonico; Dan Davis, Wine Director at Commander's Palace, and Coryn Caspar, General Manager/Director of Operations at Bacchanal. In the back row: Byron Halliburton, Beverage Manager at the Ritz-Carlton New Orleans; Kevin O'Neill, Wine Director at Antoine's; Douglas Fortinberry, Sommelier at The Tasting Room; and Christopher Curtis, Sommelier at Marcello's. ▼



NEW ORLEANS-BASED SOMMS TASTE THE GREATEST HITS FROM BANFI'S CRU ARTISAN WINES IN A RAUCOUS BLIND SPEED TASTING

by Jessie Birschbach
photos by Chris Granger

Perhaps it wasn't the best idea to host a serious speed tasting the same raucous weekend the world-famous Commander's Palace hosts its live jazz brunch, but at least it made for an accurate representation of the magnetizing charm of New Orleans.

On a particularly hot and muggy summer day, some of the best palates in Louisiana assembled to blindly sip their way through eight wines while "Jambalaya (On the Bayou)" blared at least twice from the neighboring room during the 30-minute limit.

Once the time expired, the somms inhaled *cochon de lait* eggs Benedict as each of the four Banfi winemakers took turns yelling over a three-piece jazz band's rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In" to reveal their wines. Despite their trademark Italian projection, it appeared they'd met their match.

In fact, it's impressive they were still able to use their voices at all. The Banfi crew had disembarked the day prior from the metaphorical speeding-bullet train that is the annual Cru Artisan College (CAC) tour, which made stops in three cities across the United States. Luckily for us, however, they and fearless leader/translator/CAC dean Lars Leicht, National Director for Banfi's Cru Artisan Wines, were excited enough to shout. Intrigued by the quality of wines, the NOLA-based somms seemed equally eager to listen.

ALBERTO LAZZARINO, DIRECTING WINEMAKER, BANFI PIEMONTE



Surprised reactions echoed throughout the room when Alberto Lazzarino, Directing Winemaker for Banfi Piemonte, revealed that the Cuvée Aurora Rosé from Italy's Alta Langa DOCG was 100% Pinot Noir. "Do you have any more?" asked outspoken Commander's Palace Wine Director Dan Davis. "It's perfect for what we're eating now." "Not to mention very pretty," added Bacchanal General Manager Coryn Caspar. Their peers concurred, extending their empty glasses just above the 16-hour barbecued pork topped with a poached egg and hollandaise sauce over buttermilk biscuits, which proved a serendipitous pairing with the incredibly bright and creamy 2014 Cuvée Aurora.

According to Lazzarino, there's "a few rules" in the Alta Langa: "You can really only use Chardonnay or Pinot Noir or a blend of the two; also, the wines must always be vintage-dated. 2014 was a good, cool year, so we had higher acid," he said. Lazzarino then explained that Banfi Piemonte's wines "spend a minimum of 36 months on the lees": "Champagne is 12 months after *dégorgement*; Franciacorta is 18 months; and Alta Langa is 30 months. In fact, we're actually working on a reserve that will be released ten years after the harvest date," he added proudly.



Lars Leicht and Alberto Lazzarino lead the first reveal.

Tasting Notes



Banfi Cuvée Aurora 2014 Rosé

This wine is a light salmon color with medium alcohol and medium-plus acidity. Flavors of stone fruit, strawberries, and saltiness find excellent balance. I could incessantly fill my cup with this wine and easily drink a whole case. —Kevin O'Neill

Notes of raspberry, strawberry, apricot, and baby powder with high acidity; dry with medium body. A youthful wine with a bottle-fermented, creamy character. —Papillon Prince



Banfi 2015 La Lus Albarossa

Dry, medium-plus tannin, medium-plus acidity, and medium-plus body. Leafy with blackberry, plum, tobacco, tar, raspberry, cocoa, and higher alcohol. Great color, great fruit, nice structure. —P.P.

Deep, inky, enticing appearance. Tobacco and blueberries on the nose. Higher tannin and acid; spicy with much complexity. This is for Napa Cabernet Sauvignon drinkers. Cloves glisten through the fruit. —K.O.

ANDREA SARTORI, FAMILY PROPRIETOR, SARTORI DI VERONA



In a playful introduction, Andrea Sartori, family proprietor for Sartori di Verona, quipped that “the Sartoris are known for their madness.” “It started with my great-grandfather Pietro, and luckily it skips every other generation—I’m a little worried for my son,” he added with a smirk.

Although Sartori di Verona is lauded for its Amarones (as well as other Veronese treats like Valpolicella and Ripasso), the first wine he presented strayed a bit from the traditional formula. When Sartori asked the group to identify the Sartori di Verona 2013 L’appassione, Coryn Caspar, having just learned of Sartori’s background, replied, “Well, it’s not a really well-made Dolcetto, but it’s delicious,” as she jokingly scratched out her guess. Sartori responded by listing the varietal breakdown: a blend of “about 20% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon with at least half Corvina and the rest Corvinone.”

While it’s unclear the somms internalized anything after the word “Cabernet,” the use of Merlot had the room aflutter: “I told you, madness striking!” Sartori said. “This is a relatively new project—it’s the second release but the first time here in the U.S. The idea behind this project was to create a global wine, but with local traditions.”

Sartori then presented the Sartori di Verona Corte Brà 2010 Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico. “This wine comes from vineyards surrounding the Villa Maria, the headquarters of the family,” he explained. “Here the blend is slightly different than traditional Amarone because we have a small percentage of Croatina and also some Oseleta, which is a lesser-known indigenous grape.”

Otherwise, Sartori said, the process is “pretty traditional”; roughly four months after the grapes are dried at the end of January, they undergo temperature-controlled malolactic fermentation for about 25 days in stainless steel. The wine is then aged in small and mid-sized barrels. “I think this is a traditional Amarone—a lot of Amarones are 17% alcohol,” he added. “I don’t want to have my meal with a Port or Madeira, so why would I want my Amarone to drink like a Port or Madeira? This way you can walk back home in one piece.”

Tasting Notes



Sartori di Verona 2013 L’appassione

Youthful aromas, candied cranberry, pure fruit, rolling acidity, and pleasant tannin. The savoriness wakes up the mouth. This wine begs for another sip. —*K.O.*

Minerality on the nose and palate with sound structure. Dried garden herbs and dried cherries.

—*Douglas Fortenberry*



Sartori di Verona 2010 Corte Brà Amarone della Valpolicella

Yum! Macerated berry salad and bright fruit notes with well-integrated tannin and acids. —*D.F.*

Ripe black and red fruit on the nose with dried flowers, cedar chest, tomato skin, and black plums. Lush on the palate with solid tannins, but not too much.

—*Dan Davis*

GABRIELE PAZZAGLIA,

CELLARMASTER,
CASTELLO BANFI



The Banfi 2017 La Pettegola Vermentino distinguished itself when a few somms managed to name its variety correctly, despite initially being thrown off the scent by its heightened aromatics. Their decision to list its place of origin as Sardinia, however, showed they were simply choosing the most likely region: The island off the coast of Italy is known for producing high-quality Vermentino, and although this bottling was perhaps grown just as close to the sea, it comes from a much larger Italian land mass—specifically, the Maremma region in the coastal area of Tuscany.

Made with grapes grown in sandstone-dominated soils, the wine benefits from “a good synthesis of acid and, above all, the aromatic profile is even greater than a lot of classic Vermentino,” according to Castello Banfi Cellarmaster Gabriele Pazzaglia. “Tuscan Maremma gives us a lot good fruit: 2017 was a hot vintage, but we still got about 6 grams per liter of acidity. We keep the wine on lees as long as possible, for five months, and this rounds out the higher acidity found in Vermentino,” he added. “We like to fatten it up a bit on the palate.”

The next wine Pazzaglia revealed was almost unanimously mistaken for Nebbiolo, which is surely a testament to the power of this particular expression of Sangiovese. Pazzaglia unsheathed the Castello Banfi 2013 Poggio alle Mura Brunello di Montalcino from a blue velvet bag, presenting it to the incredulous group of somms before detailing the effort required to make the wine.

Sourced from a cru of thoughtfully chosen vineyards surrounding a medieval castle on Banfi’s Montalcino property, the big and bold Sangiovese is aged for two years in French barriques with an additional two spent in bottle before release. “This wine specifically represents the history of the last 30 years of the estate,” Pazzaglia said.

Tasting Notes



Banfi 2017 La Pettegola Vermentino

Lemon-lime peel on the nose with star fruit, white flowers, calla lilies, and a touch of honeysuckle. On the tongue, the wine is deceptively complex. Tropical tones with unripe pineapple and ripe peach. Finishes long with moderate acid, ending in a clean dryness with memories of bright fruit. —Byron Halliburton

Deep gold in color with notes of peach, apricot, underripe pineapple, lemon peel. Dry with medium acidity. —P.P.



Castello Banfi 2013 Poggio alle Mura Brunello di Montalcino

Bright red cherry and forest leaves on the nose. Very firm tannins. Dried roses and cherries, brown twigs, and raspberry on the palate. —D.D.

Damn, son! This is why people love the big Italian boldness, brashness, and fearlessness. This badass has tannins for days and structure that takes no prisoners, but ripe, lush fruits calm the beast. Elegant, daring, and prickly. —Coryn Caspar

ENRICO CERULLI,

FAMILY PROPRIETOR,
CERULLI SPINOZZI



According to Enrico Cerulli, family proprietor for Cerulli Spinozzi, the best expressions of the white Pecorino variety should offer plenty of acid. His family's version—Cortalto, grown in the hills of Abruzzo's Colli Aprutini IGT—does just that: "When we first started making the wine we'd let it go through malolactic fermentation, but then realized that acidity was the key to good Pecorino, so we stopped," said Cerulli. The wine rests sur lie and is bottle-aged for a minimum of two months, creating a creamy counterpoint to the bright fruit.

While somms identified it as a Chardonnay, a few called it a Soave and another a Soave Superiore. They may have missed the variety, but they easily detected the tension between the acidity and creaminess.

Before Cerulli revealed the next wine, the Cerulli Spinozzi 2012 Torre Migliori Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, the somms made varying calls ranging from Sangiovese to Nebbiolo; the one characteristic they mutually recognized, however, was its great structure. As a bonus, the somms had a chance to taste the same wine's 2004 vintage, which a few mistook for an Amarone.

It proved an interesting exercise: If the 2012 vintage showed that the Colline Teramane Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOCG—a subzone of the Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC—adheres to higher standards for winemaking and viticulture, the 2004 sealed the deal. "The challenge is to change the perception that Montepulciano d'Abruzzo is not just a good wine, it's a great wine," Cerulli said. ■■

Tasting Notes



Cerulli Spinozzi 2016 Cortalto Pecorino

Honeysuckle, ripe apple, zesty citrus acids, and a lingering finish. —D.F.

Lemon color with gold hues and a vanilla/crème brûlée nose. The fruit is subdued with hints of minerality and white flowers reminiscent of chamomile. The wine opens with seamless balance between green-apple acid and fruit with a very pleasing, refreshing finish. Medium body with evidence of malolactic

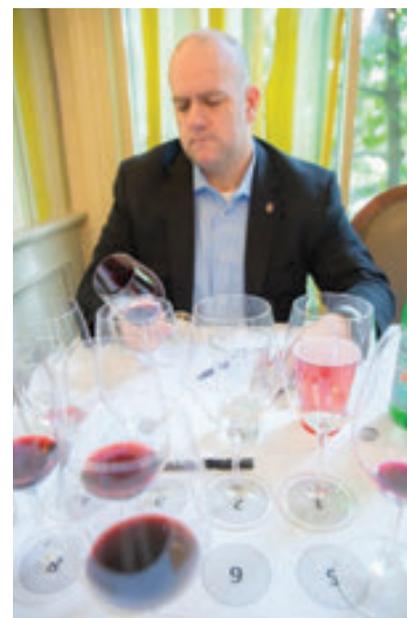
fermentation and some oak. —B.H.



Cerulli Spinozzi 2012 Torre Migliori Montepulciano d'Abruzzo

A sexy aroma of dried cherries and rose petals gives an inkling that this wine takes itself very seriously. It's chewy, tannic character of dried earth and cured meat calls for a bearskin rug, a roaring fire, a big, shaggy dog wearing glasses, and the love of your life gazing into your eyes. —Coryn Caspar

Leathery and dry with dark red fruit and tons of tannin; big and full, as if the wine was aged in a leather saddle. —Christopher Curtis



Byron Halliburton closely inspects the color of the sixth wine poured at the tasting.

Look for a recap of the 2018 Cru Artisan College tour in the October/November issue of our sister publication, *The SOMM Journal*. In its fifth consecutive year, the 2018 CAC tour was easily the most successful yet.

Clear the Udday

MAKE ROOM FOR THESE
WHITE SPIRITS ON YOUR
SHELVES THIS SEASON

by Emily Coleman

*U*hite spirits can be a deceiving category: Perhaps due to their transparent nature or because they often act as the neutral base of a cocktail, it's easy to forget how versatile and nuanced these expressions can be. Considering their role as a backbone, we often underestimate how much character the right selection can add to a drink.

Don't let your customers fall prey to the common misconception that all clear spirits are created equal—instead, elevate their drinking experience to the next level by adding these labels to your repertoire.

Tradition Meets Innovation: **NOLET'S SILVER GIN**

After tasting their spirits, it's evident the Nolet family of Schiedam, Holland, has successfully showcased their distillery's 327 years of experience with a gin that's accessible to both contemporary drinkers and bartenders. The company's **NOLET'S Silver Gin (\$49)** expresses unique fruit- and floral-forward layers due to the rose, peach, and raspberry botanicals featured prominently in the spirit.

"My brother and I—with the guidance of our father—aimed to craft something very special that is both rooted in our family's distilling tradition and representative of the modern styles in which gin is now appreciated and enjoyed," says Carl Nolet, Jr., President and CEO of Nolet Spirits U.S.A. and an 11th-generation member of the spirits-producing family.

NOLET SPIRITS USA



From Soil to Sip: **BOOT HILL DISTILLERY**

More than a century ago, a general store owner named George M. Hoover set up a bar on the western Kansas prairie to sell whiskey to soldiers from nearby Fort Dodge—and thus Dodge City was born. Inspired by Hoover and the city's virtual birth from the barrel, western Kansas farmers Roger and Hayes Kelman and Chris Holovach decided decades later that rather than selling their entire corn and wheat crops, they would transform some of their yield into a locally produced spirits portfolio.

After establishing the company in 2014, the trio of farmers still produce the grains used in each spirit, which they distill on site in 500-gallon batches. Made from pure hard red winter wheat, **Boot Hill Distillery Vodka** undergoes two distillations in Boot Hill's whiskey pot stills before it's filtered over charcoal and bottled at 40% ABV. This process results in a clean spirit that still retains distinctive wheat notes.

The distillers use this spirit as a base for the **Boot Hill Distillery Gin**, which boasts a flavor profile of eight vapor-distilled botanicals: juniper, coriander, bitter orange peel, angelica root, licorice root, orris root, chamomile, and sarsaparilla root.

To make the **Boot Hill Distillery White Whiskey**, the company uses a bourbon mash bill of 51 percent yellow corn and 49 percent hard red winter wheat; instead of aging like bourbon, the spirit rests for only one week in American white oak barrels to develop a softer, more approachable palate than moonshine is typically known for.

Tapping into the do-it-yourself attitude of the Old West, Boot Hill Distillery has taken control of its future and portfolio to give the world high-quality spirits straight from the heartland.



tasting notes

Boot Hill Gin (\$30) Aromas of pine sap, vanilla, and key lime lead to a creamy palate of peanut brittle, sarsaparilla, and green tea. Unique and complex at 86 proof. **93**—*Meridith May*

Boot Hill Vodka (\$25) This release exudes an ethereal perfume of gardenia, vanilla bean, and pink grapefruit. Flavors emerge with a frame of black pepper and subtle cranberry, tingling on the tongue and finishing on a dry note. **90**—*M.M.*

Boot Hill White Whiskey (\$25) Oatmeal, maple, and cinnamon please the olfactory senses. Aging only one week in white oak has some influence on this palatable spirit. Flavors come on slowly and softly with whispers of white pepper, toffee, and spiced pears. Pine and cedar integrate with a peach- and apricot-dusted finish. Super smooth on ice, it's an easy drinker. **94**—*M.M.*

BOOT HILL DISTILLERY

Fit for a Goddess: **CRÁNEO ORGANIC MEZCAL**

With a reputation for having a powerfully smoky finish, mezcal can be an intimidating category for consumers despite its growing popularity. A good bartender, however, knows pouring the right expression for a guest could make them a lifelong fan with a single sip: In mezcal's case, the light and silky body of **Cráneo Organic Mezcal (\$58)** makes it an ideal ambassador primed for helping customers appreciate the tradition of this exquisite spirit.

To produce this artisanal mezcal, maestro mezcalero and Master Distiller David Ravandi sources organic Espadín agave grown at 5,600 feet above sea level in the heart of Santiago Matatlán, Oaxaca. After they're harvested at full maturity, the piñas are oven-roasted in a char pit and crushed using a tahona stone; they then undergo a natural fermentation process and are distilled twice in small batches with copper pot stills.

Beyond the appealing contents of the bottle, it's hard not to be lured in by the brand's label itself. The eye-catching design draws inspiration from the Aztec goddess Mictecacihuatl (*Meek-teka-see-wahdl*), who signified strength and influence as queen of the underworld. By honoring this cultural history and working to preserve ancient Oaxacan methods of artisanal distillation, Cráneo Organic Mezcal entices consumers to give mezcal a chance with satisfaction all but guaranteed.

tasting notes

Classically structured on the nose with sweet barbecue smoke and hints of citrus, Cráneo is lightweight and creamy in body with flavors of orange and grapefruit peel, green banana, and spun sugar that punctuate a modestly sweet smokiness. **94**

—Anthony Dias Blue



123 SPIRITS

Harmony of Balance: FENIMORE GIN

When his custom still from Germany's legendary CARL Distilleries was finally installed, Gene Marra, founder of the New York-based Cooperstown Distillery, pondered which spirit he wanted to produce first. As a chef who'd been tinkering with a gin recipe for the past 20 years, it didn't take long to decide. "I knew I wanted to see how my crudely created gin I had been making in gallon batches would translate when made properly in a still," Marra explains.

Everyone who tasted that first batch, including Marra himself, was blown away by the results—so much so, in fact, that the award-winning **Fenimore Gin (\$26)** continues to follow a very similar recipe. The spirit begins with a 100 percent wheat base, as "wheat adds a singular profile and depth to the spirit that no other grain can claim," Marra says.

By employing a botanical basket in the gin-making process, a fairly unconventional method, the distillery team ensures the botanicals are gently "kissed" by the ethyl alcohol vapors as they rise through the helmet, creating an incredibly soft and delicate mouthfeel. The gin's flavor profile of 14 botanicals includes usual suspects such as juniper and citrus as well as more unexpected characters, among them star anise, eucalyptus, two rose varieties, marshmallow root, and native New York lilac that the distillery harvests and processes. This extremely complex and unusual gin allows fans of the category to appreciate it in a way they never have before.

tasting notes

This shows lovely, soft, and gentle aromas of lilac, linen, lanolin, cucumber, and orange. On the palate, the 80-proof white spirit pops with flavors of white pepper, white tea, and honeysuckle-kissed juniper. It's perpetually fragrant in the nose and mouth with a backing of dried roses and spiced coriander. **92**
—M.M.

COOPERSTOWN DISTILLERY



Invention and Innovation: EDINBURGH GIN

Straight from the heart of Scotland's capital city, the award-winning Edinburgh Gin has paid tribute to its home country's heritage of gin-making since its founding in 2010. The company makes every bottle of its small-batch gin and gin liqueurs at its West End and Leith distilleries, which both have a history of production dating back to the 1700s.

Driven by a spirit of invention and innovation, Edinburgh Gin's team frequently collaborates with area leaders in science and botany—including Heriot-Watt University and its dedicated distilling program, of which Head Distiller David Wilkinson is an alumnus—to inform its ever-evolving gin distillation techniques.

The company's core label, **Edinburgh Gin**, balances its zesty, juniper-forward palate with soft spices and bright citrus.

Its blend of 14 signature botanicals includes lavender, mulberries, and fresh, wooden notes of pine buds, as well as lemongrass and orange and lime peel. The London Dry style, meanwhile, makes its way to the beaches near Edinburgh with the **Seaside Gin**; marine plants like scurvy grass, ground ivy, and bladderwack seaweed infuse minerality and soft salinity into the spirit.

Another popular member of the portfolio, Edinburgh's 114.5-proof **Cannonball Gin** packs a wallop with Szechuan peppercorns and twice the juniper oil of the Edinburgh Gin. The Navy Strength spirit is an homage to Edinburgh's maritime heritage: The famous One O'Clock Gun is fired every day at 1 p.m. to help ships adjust their clocks before setting out to sea. If that seems a bit too early to pour a drink, rest assured that imbibing any Edinburgh Gin—day or night—simply means you've fully embraced the essence of Scotland.



A Work of Art: **GLASS VODKA**

Ian MacNeil, founder and Chief Distiller at Seattle's Glass Distillery, says he chose to produce vodka for two reasons: "One, I can use a locally produced product—wine grapes—to create an exceptionally different product," he explains. "Two, for my taste, vodka is a delicate and elegant spirit with many expressions and is part of a massive category within the spirits industry. Quite a few craft distilleries start out making vodka but then quickly move on to chasing brown liquors. The problem with that model is that they are literally chasing the market with young spirits as the market moves toward older and more sophisticated spirits."

Opting to focus solely on crafting the finest artisan vodkas possible, MacNeil has a knack for both outstanding product quality and beautiful packaging: The brand's been recognized with more than 40 international awards and 90-plus-point ratings since 2012. "[Glass Vodka] is *different* because it's distilled from wine grapes, but it's *exceptional* because I am fanatical about every detail—from the creation to the presentation," MacNeil says.

Opening a distillery wasn't the first time MacNeil decided to forge his own path. He says he lives with "a spirit of curious rebellion" by seeking out new adventures, whether he's flying his airplane, painting, skiing, or enjoying incredible food, wine, and spirits with his family and friends.

Meanwhile, MacNeil's commitment to philanthropy across the U.S. and Canada—primarily regarding health and human services, the arts, and educational organizations—has become a goal of the Glass Vodka brand, as well. To date, Glass Distillery has contributed to more than 750 organizations through donations at more than 1,000 events.

The brand's **Glass Vodka (\$30/750mL)** is made from Washington white wine grapes. "I have found that the terroir of the Pacific Northwest imparts subtle nuanced flavors and characteristics in the vodka that leads to a light, dry-floral nose, a silky mid-palate, and an unforgettably refined, clean finish," MacNeil says.

Using this flagship expression as a base, **Glass Nectar Vodka (\$32/750mL)** is infused with honey from beehives in Western Washington, while **Glass Kona Vodka (\$32/750mL)** is blended with Hapuna Kehai coffee (sourced from Hawaii, the coffee is hand-roasted in small batches by Seven Coffee Roasters just outside of Seattle). Finally, **Glass Spice Vodka (\$32/750mL)** undergoes a post-distillation infusion with hand-rolled quills of Ceylon cinnamon sourced from Sri Lanka.

Presented in elegant crystal bottles in 50-milliliter, 375-milliliter, 750-milliliter, and 1.75-liter sizes that beg to be put on display, these expressions are a delight to the senses either served neat or in a simple cocktail.

GLASS DISTILLERY





Beyond the Need for Glitz: **RÅVO**

Vodka has begun to shed its old stigma in the eyes of the consumer. No longer is the category doomed to exist as a covered-up base as artificial flavors reign supreme on the shelf; instead, today's consumers seek a vodka brand they can appreciate without masking it with other ingredients.

One such brand is **Råvo (\$22)**, an exceptional vodka from a distillery in the Swedish town of Lidköping, located in the country's rural Västergötland province. The distillery uses natural spring water and winter wheat from the region to create a straightforward, quality spirit: With a name inspired by the Swedish words for "raw" and "vodka," Råvo is both gluten-free and kosher.

Unsatisfied with flashy marketing, modern consumers are also drawn to expressions that offer both quality and value. They see right through gimmicky campaigns and will avoid brands that seem like they're attempting to distract from a product's lack of quality. After all, marketing doesn't add much to the taste profile of a spirit.

Råvo's parent company, MNM Spirits, wanted the vodka to be able to speak for itself, so the creators of the expression decided on a simple design for the bottle while opting to forego any superficial marketing strategies. By choosing to be more authentic and transparent in its approach, Råvo has been able to focus on what truly matters: the quality of its vodka, enabling the brand to offer a superior spirit at an affordable price point.

In a world filled with complications and overstimulation, let your customers revel in the straightforward nature and value of Råvo. ■■



OUT AND ABOUT

CULINARY

Carnival

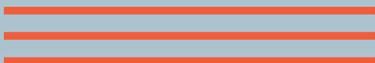


At the *L.A. Times* Food Bowl's Night Market event in Downtown L.A., a disciplined diner let our photographer snap a shot of the grilled lobster and garlic "noodz" from Lobsterdamus before devouring their meal.

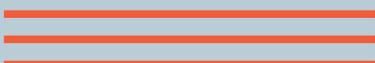


At Night Market's Filipino Feast, Charles Olalia of Ricebar and Chase and Chad Valencia of Lasa created a meal with ingredients sourced from local farms and gardens. Farmer and artist Britt Browne also led a discussion on urban agriculture.

This bright neon sign welcomed Night Market attendees to L.A.'s Grand Park.



AT NIGHT MARKET, THE L.A. TIMES FOOD BOWL FESTIVAL TRULY HITS ITS STRIDE



by Mara Marski
photos by Jennifer Johnson

This May, the *Los Angeles Times* celebrated Southern California's bustling food and beverage industry with its second annual Food Bowl: a month-long festival featuring activities that run the gamut from pairing dinners, Q&A sessions with acclaimed chefs, film screenings, book signings, and even a hands-on butchery class.

Night Market—which ran May 16–20 in Downtown Los Angeles' 12-acre Grand Park—managed to be one of Food Bowl's most approachable events, albeit a massive undertaking: So many vendors participated that the event occupied three city blocks. To the east, the Super Market housed an eclectic collection of cuisine, with Earle's on Crenshaw serving up vegan chili cheese dogs, Hip Hot cooking Sichuan specialties, and Delmy's Pupusas drawing crowds with Chef Ruth Sandoval's Salvadorian stuffed tortillas. It also hosted restaurants for limited engagements, including David Chang's Momofuku and a merry-go-round of heavy hitters from Patina Restaurant Group.

A line of local food trucks formed a barrier between the Super Market and the Lantern Garden, which provided a stunning open-air backdrop for the festival's pop-up events, among them the opening-night Filipino Feast, the Donut Party, and the Charity Bake Sale on the final night.

Past another line of trucks—where Dang Brother Pizza served up its Boring Cheese and Sexy Pepperoni from a portable, wood-fired oven—was the Food Court. There, market-goers could nosh on plates of whole lobster served on garlic noodles from Lobsterdamus, scoops of globally inspired ice cream flavors from Wanderlust Creamery, and "sexy scrapes of Reading raclette" over locally grown potatoes from Cheezus . . . hopefully not in that order.

Maker's Mark and Hornitos Tequila stepped up as the fest's most valuable players on the beverage side, encouraging attendees to participate in hands-on activations like wood-stamping on barrels or crafting custom drink koozies with the help of a local letterer. More importantly, they could get away from the crowd in an adults-only section of the park, where festivalgoers could pick from a selection of cocktails including Juleps, Mules, Palomas, and Margaritas.

Of course, no Southern California food showcase would be complete without tacos, which were consumed in spades at Taco Alley (other offerings included tamales, tortas, and plant-based fare from Todo Verde). And for those attendees seeking a reprieve from a heavy food coma, Unique L.A. provided a curated marketplace of locally made goods like artisanal chocolates and jam, while several sound stages with DJs and live bands helped diners dance off the calories. Maybe by the time the third annual Night Market rolls around next May, we'll be able to squeeze into our jeans again. ■■

JOSH HADDOCK

HEAD BARTENDER AT
**THE NEST AT THE THOMPSON
HOTEL** IN SEATTLE, WA

by Madelyn Gagnon

PHOTO: RACHEL COWARD



As the Head Bartender for The Nest in Seattle's posh Thompson Hotel, Josh Haddock expresses a style behind the bar that draws from the classics while incorporating flavors from the Pacific Northwest and paying homage to the area's rich Asian heritage. "I want to create drinks that have broad appeal but also approach that boundary where people might not feel comfortable," Haddock says.

With a shared focus on seasonality—bolstered by frequent trips to nearby Pike Place Market and Vietnamese grocery stores in the International District—Haddock and his team craft cocktails that are inventive but not unrecognizable. Haddock recounts a visit to a Vietnamese market that inspired him to use pandan leaves in a drink for the coconut-like flavor they exhibit, resulting in a Tom Collins with a twist: The Panda Cooler with rum, pandan syrup, lime juice, and toasted coconut water (the drink was featured on The Nest's summer menu).

Haddock first started bartending after working several jobs in food service, a fitting trajectory given his claim that he was always "sort of fascinated with cocktails." After spending time at several smaller bars like Suite 410 and Bathtub Gin & Co., Haddock soon sought his next challenge at The Nest, where he was hired as Head Bartender earlier this year after hitting it off with the staff and Chef Derek Simcik. "We found that we all had a general vision for what to do with the space," Haddock says. "It was exciting to take my personal skills and put them into a much larger setting."

Haddock says Simcik's sense of playfulness in curating ingredients can prove an asset when drawing inspiration for new cocktails, while the aforementioned focus on seasonality prompts the bar menu to undergo a complete overhaul twice a year. "I think that's the big thing that we've worked really hard at: delivering cocktails that are complicated and challenging while utilizing fresh and seasonal ingredients at a pace that is just insane," Haddock says. ■■

THE "5" LIST

JOSH HADDOCK'S TOP FIVE FAVES:

Drinking Vinho Verde, preferably outside.

Bananas and whiskey. It just works.

Motorcycle rides through the Cascades when I just gotta get away.

The old coffee and amaro combo. Averna with nitro cold brew reigns supreme.

Doing prep and R&D for new drinks. I love looking at a blank slate of possibility.

JOSH HADDOCK'S TOP FIVE PET PEEVES:

Men refusing to drink out of a coupe/cocktail glass. I cannot roll my eyes hard enough.

People not using their turn signals. It's an epidemic in Seattle.

Two-ounce shots—I prefer my spirits in 1-ounce doses.

IPAs. Blowing out your taste buds with hops doesn't make you tough.

Nonsensical cocktail menus. Why is there a "Painkiller" at your French bistro?



The Man Behind the Brands



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