

THE  
tastingpanel  
MAGAZINE

APRIL 2019 • \$6.95

SEERSUCKER

**“BUILDING A  
BRIDGE” TO  
GIN**

**TREY AND KIM AZAR ARE  
SHAKING UP THE GIN  
CATEGORY WITH SEERSUCKER  
SOUTHERN STYLE GIN**





90+  
CLUB

SINCE **BV** 1900

## Napa's Original Cult Cabernet

Few wines have the pedigree of Beaulieu Vineyard's Georges de Latour Private Reserve, a seminal wine that anchored Rutherford as a terroir for world-class Cabernet. The 2014, with its refined character and 90+ score, continues an exalted history that began in 1936.

Learn more about this iconic Cabernet at [bvwines.com](http://bvwines.com).



97  
**Beaulieu  
Vineyard**  
**2014**  
**Georges  
de Latour  
Private  
Reserve  
Cabernet  
Sauvignon**



# THE tastingpanel MAGAZINE

April 2019 • Vol. 77 No. 3

editor in chief

**Anthony Dias Blue**

*ablue@tastingpanelmag.com*

publisher / editorial director

**Meridith May**

*mmay@tastingpanelmag.com*  
818-990-0350

managing editor

**Ruth Tobias**

*rtobias@tastingpanelmag.com*

senior design director

Michael Viggiano *design@tastingpanelmag.com*

vp, sales and marketing

Bill Brandel *bbrandel@tastingpanelmag.com*

## CONTRIBUTORS

Devin Berko, Paul Cheney, Eduardo Dingle, Rusty Eddy, Alex Fondren, Josh Huskin, Melissa A. Marrapese, Michelle Metter, Marcello Rostagni, Alexander Rubin, Hana-Lee Sedgwick

[www.Facebook.com/TastingPanelMagazine](http://www.Facebook.com/TastingPanelMagazine)  
@TastingPanel on Instagram



Published eight times a year  
ISSN# 2153-0122 USPS 476-430

Chairman/CEO: Anthony Dias Blue  
President/COO: Meridith May

Subscription Rate: \$36 One Year; \$60 Two Years; Single Copy: \$6.95  
For all subscriptions, email: [subscriptions@tastingpanelmag.com](mailto:subscriptions@tastingpanelmag.com)  
Periodicals Postage Paid at Van Nuys and at additional mailing offices

Devoted to the interests and welfare of United States  
restaurant and retail store licensees, wholesalers,  
importers and manufacturers in the beverage industry.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:  
The Tasting Panel Magazine  
6345 Balboa Blvd; Ste 111, Encino, California 91316,  
818-990-0350

special projects editor

David Gadd *dgadd@tastingpanelmag.com*

senior editor

Kate Newton *knewton@tastingpanelmag.com*

senior wine & beer editor

Jessie Birschbach *jabs@sommjournal.com*

deputy editor

Eric Marsh *emarsh@tastingpanelmag.com*

business development director

Rachel Burkons *rburkons@tastingpanelmag.com*

features editor

Michelle Ball

east coast editor

David Ransom

vp/finance director

Anna Russell *arussell@tastingpanelmag.com*

event director/associate editor

Abby Read *aread@sommjournal.com*

administrative assistant

Sierra Doxey

contributing editors

Ian Buxton, Randy Caparoso, Emily Coleman,  
Jesse Hom-Dawson, Richard Carleton Hacker,  
Matt Jackson, Kelly Magyarics, Mara Marski, Lori Moffatt,  
Cliff Rames, Merrill Shindler

©2019 The Tasting Panel Magazine. All rights reserved.  
Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is prohibited.





# INTRODUCING AÑEJO THE NEWEST MEMBER OF LA FAMILIA

AGED TO PERFECTION.  
CRAFTED BY THE MOST AWARDED TEQUILA.\*

HECHO - EN - MEXICO

Tequila, Alcohol 40% by Volume (80 Proof), ©2019 Alto Spirits LTD, Hayward, CA. All rights reserved.

\*BASED ON ACCOLADES RECEIVED IN 2016 & 2017



# There's No Wizard Behind the Curtain

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



The first thing people ask me when they find out I'm knowledgeable on the subjects of wine and spirits is, "How do you get to be a wine (and/or spirits) expert?" as if something magical were involved. They seem to think I was born with a mysterious talent that only a chosen few possess.

Sorry to disappoint you, but there's no secret or mystical reason that I write about wine and spirits while others choose to spend their lives writing briefs, adding columns of figures, or snaking toilets. My profession requires knowledge and skills that I've acquired, and theirs require know-how that I don't possess.

In short, there's really no difference between what I do and what other people who are good at their jobs do: I think the key to being good at anything is to be interested in your chosen path. If you are interested, really interested, in your subject—law, medicine, electronics, plumbing—you will become an expert. The route to expertise is simple: *Pay attention*.

Lawyers go through three years of law school and then have to pass the bar exam. Doctors must complete years of medical school, internships, and residency before they get their license. Plumbers have to go to trade school and then spend time in apprenticeship. Wine writers—the good ones—may take a few classes or courses, but they need much less formal training.

What's common among people who achieve prominence in the field that interests them is that they all do one thing while they are learning, even after the formal part of their training is over: They pay careful attention. Books are helpful, but it's experience that is the true teacher.

So, if you want to become a wine expert, pay attention. Take that first sip and think about it. Write a note. Consider the different components and how they come together. Don't simply find a wine you like and buy case after case of it; instead, get a case of 12 different wines and taste through each one. Without knowing it, you're suddenly putting yourself through a stringent training program.

It's like that old joke, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" Answer: "Practice." How do you get to be a wine expert? Answer: Practice—and pay attention. ■■



# UPFRONT

## *History in the* **(Wine) Making**

SANTA RITA MEDALLA REAL GOLD  
MAKES ITS DEBUT IN THE U.S.

**It isn't every day** that a Cabernet Sauvignon sourced from ungrafted rootstock in a 350-year-old Chilean vineyard becomes available in the United States. But that rare day has come—and to add to the surprise, the wine retails for around \$16.

One of the New World's oldest estates, Chile's Santa Rita, has begun exporting its prized Medalla Real Gold Medal to the U.S. The story behind the brand name, which translates as "Royal Medallion," dates back to 1743, when the King of Spain appointed the Marquis of Casa Real—then owner of the property—to mint Chile's first coin.







**Winemaker Sebastián Labbé joined Santa Rita in 2017.**

The wine itself aims to commemorate this historic event. Grown on Santa Rita's original hillside vineyard, initially planted in 1651 in the upper reaches of the Maipo Valley, this classically styled Cabernet Sauvignon drew worldwide attention upon its premiere in 1987, when it became the first wine from the Southern Hemisphere to win the Gold Medal at Gault-Millau's International Paris Wine Olympics.

Today, Winemaker Sebastián Labbé, a native Chilean who joined the company in 2017, oversees its production. "Winemakers love the chance to create single-vineyard wines because we can focus on expressing the uniqueness of the site—especially [when it's] a prestigious site like the Santa Rita estate, which has been producing wine grapes for almost four centuries," Labbé says. "The character flowing from these vines is profound, so to experience it in a single-vineyard wine at this approachable price is rare."

To preserve that character in the 2016 vintage, Labbé employed a partial whole-berry fermentation, during which daily rack-and-return "added weight to the mid-palate," he says. Post-fermentation, he left some of the lots on the skins for eight days "to reach greater tannin texture and softness." The final blend, which includes 5% Cabernet Franc, aged for 14 months in one- to two-year-old French oak.

In February 2018, Delicato Family Wines entered the import-wine business and was appointed as the exclusive U.S. importer of Santa Rita—the top-selling winery in Chile and the number-two Chilean brand in the States. "Like Delicato, Santa Rita has a rich history, family-owned origins, and award-winning wines," says Delicato President/CEO Chris Indelicato. "This partnership is part of our strategy to build a world-class import portfolio, and introducing Medalla Real Gold Medal to U.S. wine consumers is an exciting step."

Retailers will need to act quickly, however, as Santa Rita is importing just 12,000 cases of the 2016 vintage, which was bottled in October 2018 and released in January. ■■

**Santa Rita Medalla Real 2016 Gold Medal Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Maipo Valley, Chile (\$16)**

Kind to the senses with an alert vividness, wild cherry jumps out of the glass. Marshmallow and charred oak converge with vivacious and persistently juicy fruit with cranberry-tea tannins. Finishing dry on the palate with a touch of nutmeg and cherry-vanilla, it's a true charmer and a champion for Chile. **92** —*Meridith May*

DELICATO FAMILY WINES





# MILLER FAMILY

## WINE COMPANY



*Stephen Miller*



*Marshall Miller*



*Nicholas Miller*

• Five Generations of California Farming •

## FINEST VINEYARD SOURCES

FRENCH CAMP VINEYARDS  
*Paso Robles, California*

## MILLER FAMILY WINES

## PRIVATE LABEL EXPERTISE





# contents

April 2019 Vol. 77 No. 3

## cover story

### 50 "BUILDING A BRIDGE" TO GIN

Trey and Kim Azar Are Shaking Up the Gin Category with Seersucker Southern Style Gin

## up front

### 6 HISTORY IN THE (WINE) MAKING

Santa Rita Medalla Real Gold Makes Its Debut in the U.S. Market

## features

### 42 FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

Wente Vineyards Leads the Way in Sustainability

### 46 AN EMERGING GEM ON LAKE GARDA

With Cà Maiol, the Lugana DOP Gets a Dazzling Stateside Debut

# 50

Craig Nelson, owner of acclaimed bar Proof in Charleston, SC, serves a Seersucker Southern Style Gin-based cocktail.

PHOTO: PAUL CHENEY



# contents

April 2019 Vol. 77 No. 3



PHOTO COURTESY OF IRON GATE

## departments

- |           |  |           |   |
|-----------|--|-----------|---|
| <b>5</b>  | Letter from the Editor in Chief        | <b>32</b> | ForceBrands Movers & Shakers                    |
| <b>12</b> | Industry Spotlight                     | <b>34</b> | On the Strip                                    |
| <b>16</b> | Brief Encounters                       | <b>36</b> | New Releases: Bently Heritage Estate Distillery |
| <b>18</b> | Taking Inventory                       | <b>38</b> | In the Kitchen: Stella Rosa Imperiale Moscato   |
| <b>22</b> | Lone Star Libations                    | <b>40</b> | Germany: Schmitt Söhne Family Wines             |
| <b>24</b> | The Ransom Note                        | <b>54</b> | Blue Reviews                                    |
| <b>26</b> | Capitol Chill                          | <b>60</b> | Publisher's Picks                               |
| <b>28</b> | Scotch Report                          |           |   |
| <b>30</b> | Five Minutes With ... Vanessa Phillips |           |   |

# 26



# Introducing Packable Saké: Enjoy On the Rocks and Off the Grid

[ACTUAL SIZE]

NEW 250ML CANS



Pack  
Drink  
Recycle  
Repeat

saké  
ONE

CRAFT BREWED IN THE PACIFIC NW  
FIND AT A RETAILER NEAR YOU  
VISIT [SAKEONE.COM](http://SAKEONE.COM)  
ALWAYS DRINK RESPONSIBLY



## Stephanie Peachey Joins Fetzer Vineyards as Fine Wine Division Leader



Fetzer Vineyards, a leader in sustainable and organic winegrowing, has hired Stephanie Peachey to develop and lead the company's Fine Wine Division. Peachey will report directly to Fetzer Vineyards CEO Giancarlo Bianchetti and hold the title of Vice President. Peachey comes to Fetzer Vineyards from Kosta Browne, where she served as Vice President for brand strategy and direct-to-consumer marketing.

In addition to its own fine-wine brands, including Sanctuary and Fringe Collective, Fetzer Vineyards also oversees U.S. marketing and distribution for the fine-wine portfolio of its

Chilean parent company, Viña Concha y Toro. The nation's largest importer of South American wines, Fetzer Vineyards markets acclaimed selections such as Chile's iconic Cabernet Sauvignon from Puente Alto, Don Melchor, and the Cono Sur, Marques de Casa Concha, and Terrunyo lines as well as the Trivento Golden Reserve collection from Argentina. Under Peachey's leadership, the Fine Wine Division will give these exceptional expressions from California and South America focus and strategic direction to further develop in the U.S.

"We saw the need for a Fine Wine Division following our expansion in South American imports in 2018 and also [a need] to address the growing interest among U.S. trade and consumers in the premium and luxury segments of the market," said Bianchetti. "It was important to find the right executive to steward this portfolio, and in Stephanie Peachey we have a leader with the experience, insight, and vision to successfully build Fetzer Vineyards' presence in the growing fine-wine space."

### WINE AND BEVERAGE TRAINING FACILITY FOR LEASE

- State-of-the Art Facility in Turnkey Condition
- 22 Station Laboratory for Wine & Beverages
- Located in Campbell, CA (San Jose area)
- Glass Enclosed Wine Room
- Fully Integrated Internet/Audio/Video Systems
- Adjacent Equipped Kitchen, Office & Classrooms Available for Lease
- Plenty of Free Parking

For More Information  
Gary Prell 303-915-5574  
[gary@excellenceinfoodservice.com](mailto:gary@excellenceinfoodservice.com)



## Tecate Challenges Boxing Fans to Throw a Knockout Party with The Official Beer of Boxing

As consumers get ready for the May 4 bout between champions Saul "Canelo" Alvarez and Danny "Miracle Man" Jacobs for the World Middleweight title, Tecate is bringing back its popular boxing promotion.

As part of the campaign, named "Throw a Knockout Party," on- and off-premise activations will capture the excitement of the showdown to engage boxing fans and beer drinkers nationwide. A variety of merchandising materials, meanwhile, will direct consumers to download the free Tecate app, where they can enter for a chance to win one of five pairs of tickets to the bout in Las Vegas (airfare and hotel included) and one of 100 Tecate-branded Nebula projectors. For more information, visit [tecatebeerusa.com](http://tecatebeerusa.com).





INTRODUCING  
**TEQUILA'S** NEXT  
BIG THING:  
**1L AÑEJO**

FINALLY, SOMETHING <sup>TO</sup> KEEP  
YOUR **1L ESPOLÓN**  
BLANCO <sup>AND</sup> REPOSADO COMPANY

**ORDER TODAY!**





## International Wine Center Announces Master of Wine Mary Gorman-McAdams as New Director

International Wine Center (IWC) President Mary Ewing-Mulligan, MW, recently announced that Mary Gorman-McAdams, MW, has been appointed to the position of Director for the school beginning May 1. Gorman-McAdams succeeds Linda Lawry, who held the role for 18 years before retiring last May.

"[Gorman-McAdams] has been a special part of the IWC family for 20 years, initially in a staff position and more recently as a valued instructor. All of us at IWC are tremendously excited about the energy and expertise she will bring to the school in her new capacity," Ewing-Mulligan says.

As Director, Gorman-McAdams' responsibilities will range from oversight of IWC's academic programs, business growth, and general management to optimizing the learning experience for students. In addition to her new role, she will continue as an IWC instructor for the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) Level 3 and the WSET Diploma Level 4. "International Wine Center has long been the standard in professional wine education, notably WSET, in New York and even across the U.S. I am excited to be part of its ongoing success and to work with such a great team," said Gorman-McAdams.

Gorman-McAdams is also a wine consultant, educator, and wine judge. She recently worked as the Bordeaux Wine Council's market advisor for North America, where she led its marketing and education programs focused on growing the North American market for Bordeaux wines. She is a founding advisory board member of the SommCon Wine Conference and Winebow's annual Women in Wine Leadership Symposium.

## Vitaminwater and Smartwater Release New Flavors



Vitaminwater has announced the release of two new flavors designed to give consumers the feeling of extreme temperatures on the tips of their tongues: Vitaminwater Ice and Vitaminwater Fire.

Vitaminwater Fire is a spicy watermelon-lime flavor that doesn't hesitate to bring the heat: With a touch of jalapeño and habanero flavors, it incites a slight tingling sensation in the mouth

and throat. Vitaminwater Ice's flavor profile of blueberry and lavender, by contrast, refreshes with a cooling effect in the mouth and nose.

Vitaminwater's sister brand Smartwater, meanwhile, has launched its first flavored offerings: Strawberry Blood Orange, Fuji Apple Pear, and Raspberry Rose. The three new sparkling flavors are now available for

purchase regionally at grocers or select retailers in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco; consumers outside of these markets will be able to purchase them online this summer.

Designed using premium ingredients, the sparkling flavors are priced at \$2.29 for a 16.9-oz. bottle. For more information, visit [drinksmartwater.com](http://drinksmartwater.com). ■■



*i i c h i k o*

SHOCHU

*Japan's #1 Shochu Brand*



*Introducing*

iichiko

SAITEN

彩天

Made specifically for the modern bartender, *iichiko Saiten* is a full-flavored expression of *shochu* that is perfect for cocktails at 43% ABV.

Crafted from 100% two-row barley and distilled only once for rich character and flavor. Blended with exceptionally soft, pristine iron-free spring water that is naturally filtered through 300 meters of volcanic rock.

Learn more at  
**[iichiko.com](http://iichiko.com)**



## Ricardo Zarate's Pikoh Keeps It Casual—and International—on L.A.'s West Side

With his longtime collaborator, chef de cuisine James Jung, acclaimed Peruvian chef Ricardo Zarate (of West Hollywood's Rosaliné and Las Vegas' Once) ventured far beyond the boundaries of South America to create the all-day menu at Pikoh, which opened in February. The restaurant's approachable prices, laid-back atmosphere (complete with a mini-lounge in the entryway), and prime location on Los Angeles' west side pave an accessible path for diners to embark on a taste bud-fueled trek around the world.

Start by stamping your passport at the bar, where Lead Bartender Jamie Clark has crafted a "Drinking with Locals" cocktail list meant to emulate beloved libations from a spectrum of international locales, among them Brazil (Batida), Italy (Milano Torino), and, of course, Peru (Pisco Sour). Standout cocktails conceived by Clark, meanwhile, include the El Jimador's Day Off, a well-balanced and aromatic blend of mezcal, Amaro Montenegro, herbal liqueurs, and lemon as well as the Don John, which melds rye and bourbon whiskeys with Fernet Branca, Green Chartreuse, demerara sugar, and Angostura bitters.



**Located on Los Angeles' west side, Pikoh serves internationally inspired fare and cocktails from acclaimed chef Ricardo Zarate, chef de cuisine James Jung, and Lead Bartender Jamie Clark.**

Zarate has said the menu will change often, with Pikoh's brunch offerings (available weekends from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.) providing him and Jung yet another outlet for experimentation as they seek to distill L.A.'s diverse dining scene into one cohesive—yet always eclectic—package. For more on Pikoh, visit [pikohla.com](http://pikohla.com). —Kate Newton



**One of Bar Franca's new cocktails, the creamy and fragrant First Flush, melds Suntory's Roku Gin with lemon, pistachio orgeat, matcha, and soda.**

## Bar Franca Blends Escapism and Comfort in Downtown L.A.

Downtown Los Angeles is hardly lacking in buzzworthy new bars, but for Rachel Thomas—a longtime downtown resident and former co-owner of popular rooftop bar/restaurant Perch—the area's dramatic transformation over the past decade has neglected to foster a very specific type of venue: a well-rounded, neighborhood-oriented bar that's decidedly "adult" in terms of both its offerings and ambiance.

Enter Bar Franca, Thomas' latest project in downtown's Historic Core, which checks off all of those boxes while managing to transport guests away from Los Angeles altogether. A neon sign of a pair of cherries draws passersby onto the front patio, which manages to feel secluded despite its proximity to the busy street; inside, a long bar spans the length of the narrow, European-inspired space, bathed in dusty shades of pink and striking printed wallpaper.

With Bar Director Laura Lindsay (formerly of Providence and The Fiscal Agent) at the helm, Bar Franca has revamped its cocktail menu for the first time since opening last September. A vocal proponent of using hyper-fresh, housemade ingredients wherever possible, Lindsay has conceived an incredibly versatile list of drinks primed for adventurous yet comfort-seeking palates. Among the most innovative is the First Flush, which combines Roku Gin, lemon, pistachio orgeat, matcha, and soda to create an irresistibly fragrant, creamy, and slightly nutty riff on a Gin Fizz, and the tiki-inspired Sur La Planche with Rhum JM Gold, Lemon Hart 151, lime, date, banana, and bitters.

With warm service to match the intimate surroundings, it's no wonder Bar Franca has filled a niche for discerning downtowners. For more information, visit [barfranca.com](http://barfranca.com). —Kate Newton ■■



# LA HORA *del* VERMUT



*Inspired by Spain's daily ritual of La Hora del Vermut, La Pivón embodies a flavor and a lifestyle you'll find strikingly attractive.*



94<sup>pts.</sup>  
Tasting  
Panel



@LAPIVONVERMOUTH  
LAPIVONVERMOUTH.COM



# TAKING INVENTORY YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR VOICES

## Q WHAT NOVEL OR UNUSUAL COCKTAIL TRENDS ARE YOU HAVING THE MOST FUN WITH RIGHT NOW AND WHY?

PHOTO: DENNY CULBERT



### BRYSON DOWNHAM

*Beverage Director, Toups South and Toups' Meatery, New Orleans, LA*

There's a current trend toward incorporating more flavors from the world of food into cocktails and I love it. From fat washes to the use of saline to the addition of savory seasonings, the flavor palettes bartenders are using are really growing!

I've been having a blast experimenting with weird combinations like corn and smoked paprika with rum or sesame oil-washed tequila with banana. It's a little out there, but I'm finding that many of our customers are ready to get adventurous. Right now I have a batch of crawfish fat-washed rum in the works. I like it when an idea makes people go "huh?" and engages their imagination before they even taste it. The crawfish rum is one of those concepts, and we're very excited about how the savory/spicy elements of the boil will play in a cocktail. It may seem too gimmicky or weird to some, but to me [experimentation] doesn't replace traditional cocktails. Rather, it's an expansion of the realm of possibilities that are out there to discover, make, and, most importantly, drink!

### MARLOWE JOHNSON

*Bar Manager, MAGPIE at Fort Street Galley, Detroit, MI*

The entire acid-replacement movement is so fascinating and opens so many doors. Using citric and malic acid and fructose to replace lime juice or citric and ascorbic acid to replace lemon juice, you can really achieve a unique texture and balance—particularly with stirred cocktails, since you remove the need to emulsify the juice. For instance, we make a drink with saké, aloe, absinthe, simple syrup, and lime acid that's almost completely crystal-clear. It looks just like carbonated water, but it explodes with flavor—it tastes like green Muscat grapes. We also do a lot of kegged cocktails, which the acid makes more sustainable and long-lasting—and it's a lot faster to use than to juice 150 lemons for each keg.

I bang my head a lot against the Justino concept of clarifying high-proof spirits in a centrifuge, but I think it's one of those cool up-and-coming methods that's going to change the world. It started with Dave Arnold, who blended bananas together with rum, added an enzyme, and spun it in the centrifuge to make this clarified rum with intense banana flavor. We've failed a lot more with the technique than we've succeeded by a really depressing margin; I put kiwis into rum agricole and it was a beautiful color, but it wasn't very good. Still, there are so many places we can go with it—we're going to start spinning things non-stop until we can use them.

PHOTO: JON ALBOSTA







**EIGHT 90+  
POINT SCORES**  
THE TASTING PANEL



**LEESE - FITCH**

LEESEFITCHWINES.COM    @LEESEFITCHWINES



# TAKING INVENTORY YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR VOICES

PHOTO: ANJALI PINTO

## CLAIRE SPROUSE

*Owner, Hunky Dory, Brooklyn, NY*

I keep joking that I secretly opened a brandy bar, but it's really just that I enjoy all the new (and old) fruit brandies coming into our market right now. There are some Old World producers like Rochelt, Reisetbauer, Capovilla, and various Calvados and Armagnacs—all wildly different in style, but 100 percent delicious. On this side of the pond, we have all these young distillers taking those [European] traditions and making them their own: Neversink Spirits, Rhine Hall, and Bertoux, to name a few. I have been sneaking them onto our menus both as featured spirits and in cocktails. They make everything pop!



## ADAM CHAPMAN

*Operations Director, Gibson, San Francisco, CA*

I'm kind of anti-cocktail trends, but one thing I'm really glad is happening is lower-ABV cocktails. Too many cocktails are [stuck] in the 1990s, with overpowering flavors and large portion sizes. Lower alcohol means I can mess around with flavors that high alcohol normally kills—for instance, we just put on a kombucha that we make from koji yeast, cucumber, lemongrass, and shiso, then add shochu.

[It also allows for] tasting menu-style service: If our guests look at our list and can't decide, we'll simply make smaller portions so they can try them all. [So it's good if] some of them don't have a lot of alcohol content, like our wine and beer cocktails. The Johnny Come Lately is one with apple cider vinegar that's going on a year and a half in barrel, so it's turning sweet with complex acidity, along with a vinegar we made from 1970s Château Margaux that we use as a mother; there's also Allegash Little Brett and charred, cedar-aged White Armagnac in there. Other wine cocktails are in the form of "still spritzers" that drink like wine, but in this completely different, funky way. For example, The Meritage is a super-petrolly Graves Blanc with pechuga, chervil, grape seeds, verjus, and wine diamonds.

We also just finished building out a boisson station, a cocktail station in our kitchen. We invite people in and do drinks there, from clear Bloody Marys to smoked fish-fumet hot toddies. We can get really weird and savory, because we have guests who don't even look at a menu—I just ask how thirsty they are, how hungry they are, and then go with it. That's why I said I'm anti-trend—my inspiration comes from customers and from how I like to drink. ■■■



PHOTO: ALISON CHRISTIANA



# JIDVEI, Transylvania uncovered!



Jidvei wines are nurtured in the DOC Tarnave Appellation, the heart of Transylvania. Surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains, with altitudes over 1000 feet and a cool climate, the rolling hills of the area provide the perfect starting point for these refreshing and fruity white wines with lively acidity.

These wines are available in the US market through:  
ALBUS IMPORTS LLC,  
CHICAGO, IL  
[www.RomanianWines.com](http://www.RomanianWines.com)  
[dan.albus@RomanianWines.com](mailto:dan.albus@RomanianWines.com)  
1 (773) 600 2794



CAMPAIGN FINANCED WITH EU FUNDING.





Kyle Hilla oversees multiple venues as the Beverage Director of historic downtown Dallas hotel The Statler.

# I'll Have What Coco Chanel Had

BEVERAGE DIRECTOR KYLE HILLA LIVES UP TO THE LEGACY OF THE STATLER IN DALLAS story and photo by Lori Moffatt

Fans of mid-century modern architecture had cause to celebrate last year when The Statler in Dallas—built in 1956 and once the largest hotel in the Southwest—reopened after a \$175-million renovation. So did drinkers with diverse tastes: The hotel is home to multiple restaurants and bars, where Beverage Director Kyle Hilla and his team at Epic Food & Beverage have developed menus that honor The Statler's place in the city's history.

Sports bar Scout offers craft cocktails and more than 20 local beer taps, while Fine China, the hotel's pan-Asian restaurant and cocktail bar, focuses on Scotch, saké, and shochu. In the basement, the hotel's former beauty shop has transformed into a speakeasy-style watering hole called Bourbon & Banter, which Hilla stocks with more than 250 spirits from around

the world. And on the 19th-floor rooftop, which affords a panoramic view of downtown Dallas, a lively gathering spot called Waterproof specializes in wine and Champagne—a favorite of onetime hotel regular Coco Chanel.

"As a kid, I spent a lot of time downtown with my mom, who was a property manager for some of the high-rises. I always liked the energy," says Hilla, adding that he has also always loved to cook. "I fell in love with bars and restaurants while I was studying business, and I got my start as a server at a farm-to-table restaurant called Bolsa."

At Bolsa, co-owners Chris Zielke and Chris Jeffers encouraged Hilla to apply his culinary talents behind the bar, and he soon joined the team that eventually became known as Turn the Tables Hospitality. The group developed such hot Dallas concepts

as Smoke and Chicken Scratch, and in 2016, Epic Food & Beverage formed as a partnership between Turn the Tables and hospitality-design company Plan B Group.

"My job these days involves a lot of time with the events department, training staff, and making sure we stay true to the original concepts," says Hilla. "I'm good at the numbers stuff, like teaching bartenders how to cost out a drink. But my favorite thing is creating new drinks. Sometimes I need to spend a week at the grocery store to find new inspiration."

As befits someone with a culinary focus, vegetables, herbs, and spices often find their way into Hilla's creations. "At heart, I'm a bourbon-on-the-rocks guy," he says with a laugh, "but I like a Boulevardier made with Cynar instead of Campari. The hint of artichoke makes it interesting." ■■



AMERICAN WINERY *of the* YEAR



SAN SIMEON



Bold and Rich from Paso Robles and Monterey

RIBOLI FAMILY

of SAN ANTONIO WINERY



# White Wines Worthy of a Spring Celebration

story and photos by David Ransom



Rachel Martin is the co-owner of Oceano Wines.

As winter wears on and red-wine malaise sets in, I look forward to the arrival of spring—and, of course, to the white wines that come with it. Some recent events got me in the mood to delve into the category; here are two expressions I found to be exceptional—and well-priced to boot!

At a meeting with Rachel Martin, who owns California winery Oceano Wines with her husband, Kurt Deutsch, I tried her barrel-fermented Oceano Chardonnay (\$36) and fell in love with it. Bright, rich, and filled with flavors of citrus, tropical fruit, and lily, it's a high-end wine that's nevertheless affordable (by California standards).

A native of Virginia, Martin started Boxwood Estate Winery on her stepfather John Kent Cooke's farm in Middleburg after attending enology schools in California and Bordeaux. While still in charge of operations for Boxwood, she now also makes Oceano wines from fruit grown in Spanish Springs, a vineyard only 1.5 miles from the Pacific on California's Central Coast near San Luis Obispo. A cool climate with significant diurnal temperature swings makes this site ideal for growing both Chardonnay and the Pinot Noir that Oceano will be releasing soon; Martin works with specific clones to craft her wines without the use of malolactic fermentation.

Next, at Gambero Rosso's Tre Bicchieri grand tasting in New York, I met Luigi Collavini of Eugenio Collavini Viticoltori, an Italian winery located in the northeastern region of Friuli-Venezia

Giulia. Collavini's Collio Broy from the Collio DOC (self-imported, \$32) is a masterpiece made from Friulano (50%), Chardonnay (30%), and Sauvignon Blanc (20%). The blend may not seem unique on paper, but what sets this wine apart is the fact that both the Friulano and the Chardonnay are placed on racks and air-dried for ten days before they're macerated and fermented in stainless steel. The concentration gained from this process gives the wine incredible depth of flavor, while the early-picked Sauvignon Blanc adds beautiful balance and acidity. ■■



Luigi Collavini with Eugenio Collavini's Collio Broy.





#1

Selling Imported Riesling  
Brand in the US

From Our Family to Yours  
since 1919.  
Dedicated to producing  
world-class Rieslings for  
five generations.



(NIELSEN XAOC LIQUOR PLUS, 52 WEEKS ENDING 1/26/19)

©2019 SCHMITT SOHNE USA, MANTECA, CA



Rimmed with Pop Rocks, Iron Gate's "Lips as sweet as candy, taste is on my mind" cocktail with tequila, blood orange, Amaro Montenegro, and club soda was inspired by the golden oldie "Hooked on a Feeling."



PHOTO: KELLY MAGYARICS



The fourth drink on the Distortion menu at Columbia Room arrived atop a cloud of raspberry dry ice.

## Sound Sipping

LYRICAL LIBATIONS MADE FOR VISCERAL LIQUID EXPERIENCES IN FEBRUARY

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

PHOTO COURTESY OF IRON GATE

We can all point to songs that instantly transport us to another place and time, evoking memories both wistful and bitter of past loves. For Valentine's Day, Nick Farrell, the Spirit Manager at Iron Gate in Dupont Circle, produced a sheet music-style list of cocktails inspired by lyrics from a lineup of romantic tunes. When I went in for a preview, the bar area had been decorated to resemble a teenager's bedroom: Posters of heart-throbs from Ricky Martin to Ariana Grande flanked the walls, roses and CDs hung from the ceiling, and the playlist was like the best mixtape ever.

The Justin Timberlake lyric "Nothing I can see but you when you dance" found tangible form in an earthy and nutty drink with Virginia Highland Malt Whisky, Barr Hill Tom Cat Gin, Don Ciccio & Figli Nocino, and tahini. And while maybe 50 Cent wasn't quite as poetic when he declared "I love you like a fat kid loves cake," Farrell gave the sentiment complexity via vanilla-infused whiskey, Rinomato aperitivo, and lemon. As we sipped our drinks, Executive Chef Anthony Chittum served us arancino-like gemelli fritters and lip-tingling grilled White Stone oysters

with Calabrian chiles. As the lipstick scrawl on the backbar mirror read, "All you need is love"—that and passion-inducing, snack-paired potions.

Across town, I settled onto a stool inside Columbia Room's Tasting Room, where owner Derek Brown and his team had just released a new tasting menu; named Distortion, it featured cocktails meant to convey dissonance. An avid fan of distortion-heavy punk music, Brown wanted to see how light, color, and even sound as well as contrasting flavors could change drinkers' perceptions of a four-sip flight paired with bites from chef Johnny Spero.

One creation was inspired by the traditional cheese-spiked coffee *kaffeost* from northern Scandinavia; served in a wooden camping mug, it included vodka, espresso amaro, cream Sherry, and gooseberry jam topped with a parmesan tuile. Next, we were instructed to sip a spicy hot-chocolate riff with cocoa, milk, Port reduction, and Ancho Reyes Chile Liqueur before donning headphones emitting a low tone to see if the sound changed how we experienced the drink. (I thought it made the spice more integrated, but I was on my third drink, after all.)

Our bartender told us that the flight had indeed disoriented some guests. The last drink, however, was clean and aromatic: Gin stirred with Italicus Bergamot Liqueur, vermouth, maple, and acidified Sherry arrived atop a raspberry dry-ice "cloud" that looked and smelled downright dreamy. Meant to restore mental clarity, it was a welcome ending. ■■



Grilled White Stone oysters are spiced with Calabrian chiles at Iron Gate.

PHOTO COURTESY OF IRON GATE

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



# SEAGLASS

WINE COMPANY

*One of a kind coastal wines*



SAUVIGNON BLANC  
**"BEST BUY"**  
WINEENTHUSIAST

2015 VINTAGE, APRIL 2017 ISSUE

[SEAGLASSWINECO.COM](http://SEAGLASSWINECO.COM)

©2019 SEAGLASS Wine Company, St. Helena, CA 94574





# Innovation and Renovation on the Scottish Front

by Ian Buxton

There is much to report from Scotland. First, good news: Scotch whisky had a bumper year in 2018, with the U.S. leading the way to become the industry's first billion-pound export market. Growing to £1.04 billion in value, it experienced a healthy 12.8 percent increase against global growth of just under 8 percent.

One quality expression Americans are sure to appreciate is the **Glenmorangie Allta (51.2% ABV; \$99)**, which features a most unusual wild-yeast strain discovered on locally grown barley (Allta is the Scots Gaelic word for "wild"). It's the tenth release in the Private Edition series, whereby

the distillery aims to explore different aspects of production: in this case the little-studied influence of yeast on whisky flavor. The result is a fruity, creamy, and mouth-coating high-strength spirit that adds a new dimension to the brand—one its many fans will



enjoy exploring.

I have a great fondness for Glengoyne, as it was the first distillery I ever visited. That was more than 30 years ago; fittingly, its latest expression is the **30 Years Old (46.8% ABV; \$900)**. Only 5,200 bottles will be released, and given the distillery's growing popularity, demand will surely be high.

Fortunately, there will be greater quantities available next month of **Chapter One (48% ABV; \$70–\$75)**, part of Glengoyne's Legacy Series, which highlights key events in the distillery's storied past. Featuring notes of toffee, warm pear, spicy cinnamon, and



**Redevelopment of Islay's Bunnahabhain distillery is currently underway.**

vanilla, Chapter One derives its rich, fruity flavor profile from the first-fill Oloroso Sherry casks in which it's matured. Both releases are non-chill-filtered for greater flavor intensity, and I commend the distillers for the decision to bottle at higher strength. Would that other single malt producers followed their lead.

Last summer, I mentioned the proposed \$14-million redevelopment at Islay's Bunnahabhain distillery. Work has now begun on the property, which includes a visitor center, café, and retail space as well as six nearby cottages that will eventually be used for guest accommodations. Having stayed at Bunnahabhain many years ago, I can heartily recommend it as a destination for whisky lovers.

It just so happens that there's a new stop on the long and winding road to Bunnahabhain: The Ardnahoe distillery—Islay's ninth—will open in mid-April under the watchful eye of legendary distiller Jim McEwan, formerly of Bowmore and Bruichladdich. It will be some years before we can



taste the resulting single malt, but the investment here by independent bottlers Hunter Laing is a resounding vote of confidence in the future of whisky in general and Islay in particular.

The same could be said of the upcoming reopening of the revered Port Ellen distillery. Fans of its truly iconic single malt will be clamoring

for its latest official release—a magnificent **39 Year Old**. One of just 1,500 bottles can be yours for a mere £4,500, but only outside the U.S. Little wonder that the value of Scotch exports is growing! ■■



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUNNAHABHAIN



NAPA VALLEY  
Raymond

*Raymond*

THE DRESS CODE *is velvet*



**91** POINTS | 2016 RESERVE SELECTION  
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

**91** POINTS | 2015 RESERVE SELECTION  
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

**93** POINTS | 2014 RESERVE SELECTION  
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

**92** POINTS | 2013 RESERVE SELECTION  
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

*Robert Parker's Wine Advocate*

LUXURIOUS. EXPERIENTIAL. THEATRICAL. SUSTAINABLE.

*Napa's most diverse and dynamic destination,  
dedicated to inspiring passion, creativity, and discovery:*

RAYMONDVINEYARDS.COM



# Vanessa Phillips

**S**electd in 2018 to serve as a volunteer sommelier during SommCon in Washington, D.C., Certified Sommelier Vanessa Phillips works in client sales at wine purveyor Zachys DC. We asked her to share her insights on the relationship between personal and professional growth.

**You're relatively new to the D.C. dining scene, but how do you think it's evolving?**

Being new to the area, I was elated to see how eclectic the dining scene is. The community as a whole is so adventurous and curious, and you see that reflected in its wine programs. Enthusiastic and talented somms are creating programs that really educate but are also playful and approachable. I only see that continuing.

**What opportunities exist for D.C.-based sommeliers to find community with other wine pros?**

Oh, man. There are so many. The tasting groups in town are phenomenal. I moved to the area without any connections, just a job. In my first tasting group, I was told that [the members] were family. It's been [proving] true ever since.

**What's ahead for you as a sommelier? Are you working toward additional certifications?**

I constantly think to myself, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" I have a rather lofty dream of opening up a small shop, complete with a tasting space, that focuses on Iberian wines, but that would be far down the line. For now, I'm working toward preparing for the Advanced Course with

CLIENT SERVICE MANAGER AT ZACHYS DC, WASHINGTON, D.C.

by Michelle Metter



PHOTO BY DULIN VIA ADOBE STOCK

the Court of Master Sommeliers as well as looking at the new Spanish Wine Scholar [certification] through the Wine Scholar Guild. I'm a huge fan of focusing myself through exams.

**What's a geeky somm tool you're coveting right now?**

The PourVin! I had a friend show it to me, and I immediately bought one. It's a light that attaches to the bottle neck and [turns on] once you begin pouring. Such an easy way to decant!

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

This is easy: Luis Pato Sparkling Rosé, shared with the first person who knew that wine

would become my passion. She was the first person that I talked to about this path, and it was the last thing we spoke about before she passed away a few months later. She loved all things beautiful, so a beautiful pink bubbly to toast everything that I've accomplished in three short years would be perfect. ■■

**SOMM CON**

The Tasting Panel and The SOMM Journal are proud supporters of SommCon and its Young Leaders Summit. Join world-class educators at SommCon 2019 in Washington, D.C., June 23–25 and San Diego November 13–15.



# THIS BOTTLE BUILDS HOMES

**Sombra is the leader in  
sustainably produced mezcal.**

Sombra is the only major mezcal brand to own its distillery in Oaxaca, ensuring consistent quality and sustainable production methods.

Sombra upcycles the agave fibers, liquid left over from distillation, and local earth to create adobe bricks, which are used for local housing in earthquake-damaged regions of Mexico.



**SOMBRA MEZCAL.COM**



## The Leading Recruiting Firm in Beverage



Our industry-specific beverage division **BevForce** offers:

- EXECUTIVE SEARCH SERVICE
- BOARD OF DIRECTOR ASSEMBLY
- A SELF-SERVICE DIGITAL JOB BOARD



LEARN MORE AT  
[FORCEBRANDS.COM/BEVFORCE](http://FORCEBRANDS.COM/BEVFORCE)



**BevForce**  
ForceBrands | EXECUTIVE SEARCH + JOB BOARD

Movers & Shakers

ForceBrands is the leading specialized recruiting firm for the consumer-products industry—we build the teams that build the brands. Our industry-specific divisions BevForce, FoodForce, BeautyForce, and HerbForce offer executive-search services, board-of-director assembly, and a digital job board to connect directly with qualified candidates.

**Aaryn Thompson** has been named Market Manager at **Redwood Brands**. She had been Key Account Manager at The Winebow Group.

**William D. Hester** has been named Control States South Manager at **Stoli Group**. He had been Eastern Control and U.S. Military Area Manager at Disaronno International.

**Keith Pence** has been named Area Sales Manager at **Q Drinks**. He had been San Francisco Market Manager at Seedlip.

**Josh Quinn** has been named Territory Sales Manager at **Fishers Island Lemonade**. He had been Chain/Key Account Manager at The Bronx Brewery.

### CAREER CORNER

## BevForce BUZZ:

### How Beverage Companies Can Attract Top Talent

Today's candidate-driven job market means that recruiting and retaining talent is more challenging than ever. Candidates are often receiving multiple offers that, according to Rachel Doueck, ForceBrands' Director of Sales for the Spirits, Wine, and Beer Division, are the most competitive she's seen in her career. Couple that with low unemployment rates, and employers are finding it more difficult than ever to convince candidates to move from their relatively stable positions to other companies.

"In 2010, when I first started working in the industry, there were so many talented candidates looking for new career opportunities as the economic recession forced many companies to downsize their teams," Doueck says. "This made identifying talent easier as beverage-alcohol companies would post a job and great candidates would apply without hesitation."

But as the job market has changed, so too have the hiring strategies. "The key to attracting the right talent outside of compensation is having a strong employer brand, high retention rates, competitive brand positioning, and a powerful long-term business plan," Doueck adds. "Regardless of the market and how challenging it can be, the industry will continue to innovate in order to keep up with consumer trends and demands." ■■

Want to connect with beverage industry leaders? Tap into ForceBrands' specialized beverage division BevForce at [forcebrands.com/bevforce](http://forcebrands.com/bevforce) or email [hello@forcebrands.com](mailto:hello@forcebrands.com) for more information.





DRINK MEZZA RESPONSIBLY

JOIN THE WORLD OF

*MeZZa*

**MEZZA**  
di MEZZACORONA



[www.mezzacorona.it](http://www.mezzacorona.it)  
[www.worldofmezza.com](http://www.worldofmezza.com)

*The only Italian Glacial Bubbly.*

Wherever, whenever, with MeZZa. Savor all your favorite moments the Italian way by celebrating with MeZZa, the first Italian Glacial Bubbly, born in the Alpine terraced vineyards of Northern Italy.

THE FASTEST GROWING  
SPARKLING WINE FROM ITALY! \*

\* by case volume, according to Nielsen week-ending 2/24/18



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





# Low-Key in Sin City

MEET JENNIFER MURPHY, THE VEGAS CHEF WHO REALLY RUNS HELL'S KITCHEN by Richard Carleton Hacker



PHOTO COURTESY OF GORDON RAMSAY HELL'S KITCHEN AT CAESARS PALACE

Personally selected by Chef Gordon Ramsay, Jennifer "Murph" Murphy (left) serves as the Executive Chef at Hell's Kitchen in Las Vegas.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Hell's Kitchen, and it exists at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas: a city where reality and fantasy intertwine. It's here that Chef Gordon Ramsay's popular Fox series, *Hell's Kitchen*, is purportedly set—although up until recently, the "restaurant" viewers saw onscreen was actually a California soundstage (which will soon be relocated to Sin City for the filming of upcoming seasons).

The real Hell's Kitchen, fittingly, was designed to look like the studio set, with an open kitchen divided into two sides run by chefs on red and blue "teams"—though they don't compete as they prepare Ramsay's most coveted entrees. Since opening in January 2018, Hell's Kitchen has served more than 129,000 beef Wellingtons, 64,000 lobster risottos, and 80,000 pan-seared scallops.

And who oversees it all? Not Ramsay himself—though he does pop in occasionally—and not the winning contestants on his show, who only serve as Head Chef for a year. The real star of the real Hell's Kitchen is Executive Chef Jennifer "Murph" Murphy, a Le Cordon Bleu graduate who perfected her skills at some of the most prestigious restaurants in Las Vegas, including L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon, Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Steakhouse, Michael Mina's at Bellagio, and the Eiffel Tower Restaurant.

Such training prepared her for a heated competition against the numerous other chefs who vied for the coveted position at Hell's Kitchen. "Interviewing and cooking for Chef Ramsay was nerve-racking, to say the least," Murphy recalls. "I initially felt very confident going into my tasting with Gordon and his team. It was my third round, and I knew if I nailed this one, the job would be mine. But when Gordon walked into the kitchen, I suddenly got really nervous. The only thing I could do was put my head down and focus on my work. I executed seven courses for Chef and his team in 32 minutes . . . and I ended up getting the job."

It's a demanding one, Murphy admits, but it's made easier by what she calls "the best team on the Las Vegas Strip." "We have spent a lot of time training and developing our cooks," she adds. "Our guests come into the restaurant knowing what [Ramsay's] standards are because of what they've seen on television. The potential of being scrutinized is much higher than [in] other restaurants. As a result, my team and I have to be extremely critical over every detail." That's what it takes to be an unsung celebrity chef in a celebrity chefs' city. ■■



PHOTO: RICHARD CARLETON HACKER

The lobster risotto is one of the most popular items on the menu, as practically every Hell's Kitchen guest has seen it being made on TV.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GORDON RAMSAY HELL'S KITCHEN AT CAESARS PALACE

Ramsay at the entrance to Hell's Kitchen in Caesars Palace.



100% Premium  
Blue Weber Agave  
Estate Grown and Bottled



THE  
tastingpanel  
MAGAZINE

CONTIGO  
APRIL 2017

95  
POINTS

THE  
tastingpanel  
MAGAZINE

MARCH 2017

93  
POINTS

EL MACHO  
TEQUILA AÑEJO  
100% PURO DE AGAVE

**DON SEBASTIANI & SONS**  
ROOTED IN SONOMA SINCE 1904

CONTIGOTEQUILA.COM ELMACHOTEQUILA.COM

©2019 DON SEBASTIANI AND SONS, NAPA, CA



BENTLY HERITAGE ESTATE  
DISTILLERY GOES GRAIN  
TO BOTTLE IN NEVADA

# Striking Gold While Staying Green

by Rusty Eddy



Bently operates two distilleries: one in an ex-flour mill and the other in a former creamery (pictured).

Bently Heritage Estate Distillery opened to the public in Minden, Nevada, in early February, but it's been more than five years in the making—and the history it encapsulates goes back much further.

Christopher Bently grew up in this small town 45 minutes south of Reno; as a kid, he played inside the old creamery and flour mill that he and his wife Camille have now turned into one of the country's newest distilleries. Each building has been refurbished to meet sustainable-design standards, and the couple aims to achieve LEED Gold certification.

"These historic structures are part of the heart and soul of our small town, and I want to safeguard that history" by making them central to Minden's vibrant future in distilling, says Christopher. "My simple passion is to make the best American spirits possible, from gins and vodkas to single malt whiskeys, with most of the components sourced from our ranch."

The grains used at Bently Heritage are estate-grown: Oats, rye, wheat, barley, and corn are all cultivated at Bently Ranch and traditionally processed in Bently Heritage's Malt House. In addition to growing grains, Bently Ranch raises cattle and has its own butcher shop on the property. It also grows hops and alfalfa using sustainable, GMO-free methods.

There are two distinct distilleries at Bently Heritage: one that produces gin and vodka in a pot still and two column stills and another that makes American single malt whiskey in two Forsyth stills. Bently Heritage malts all of its own grains and can process up to 10 tons per week.

The first releases from Bently Heritage Estate Distillery, all of which are distilled from oats, are an unaged vodka, a vodka rested in Oloroso Sherry oak casks for 20 days, and a dry gin. The Source One Vodkas are named after the well that supplies the distillery's water. Juniper Grove American Dry Gin is triple-distilled from five botanicals for plenty of character with back notes of lime, and Atrium Gin and Alpine Gin will join the lineup soon.

While Bently Heritage spirits are currently available in Nevada, California, and Arizona, the company is planning for national distribution within the next few years. Breakthru Beverage Nevada has been selected as the Nevada distributor, and Young's Market Company distributes in both California and Arizona. The distillery is open to the public Thursday through Sunday for tasting and tours; for more information, visit [bentlyheritage.com](http://bentlyheritage.com). ■■



It's NOT CHAMPAGNE.  
It's ROTARI.

CLASSIC METHOD

CAMPAGNA FINANZIARIA  
SOGGETTA A VERIFICA  
CAMPAGNA FINANZIARIA  
CONFORME ALL'ART. 138/2013



DRINK ROTARI RESPONSIBLY



Estate grown in the shadow of the Italian Alps, Rotari Classic Method vintage dated Brut and Rosé are cellar rested two years until their peak of perfection. Luxurious taste and affordable elegance, worth the wait.

f t i www.rotari.it #letsRotari

TRENTODOC





Woodall's savory and spicy chickpea cake topped with duck confit, pickled Fresno chilies, and fresh herbs is an ideal match for Stella Rosa Imperiale Moscato.

# Sweet Wine, Savory Food

**CHEF DAVE WOODALL** PAIRS STELLA ROSA IMPERIALE MOSCATO WITH CHICKPEA CAKES, DUCK CONFIT, AND CURRIED CAULIFLOWER AT RED HERRING IN LOS ANGELES

story by Eric Marsh / photos by Devin Berko

Pairing sweet wine with savory food takes no shortage of skill. The dish itself needs to have some complementary sweetness, but striking the right balance can be tricky; it also needs contrasting spice, as well as acidity to bring out the acid in the wine that can hide behind residual sugar. For each installment of “Sweet Wine, Savory Food,” we present a bottle of sweet wine to an acclaimed chef and ask them to create a savory dish to pair with it. It's a challenge, but thus far we've been impressed with the results.

For this edition, Dave Woodall, chef and co-owner of Red Herring in Los Angeles, recommended pouring Stella Rosa Imperiale Moscato with an impressive dish consisting of a chickpea cake topped with vadouvan-spiced cauliflower, duck confit, and pickled chilies. “I'm a fan of pairing sweet wine with salty, fatty, spicy foods,” says Woodall, who explains how the abundance of flavors and textures in his recipe stack up: “The curry adds [the] savory component, the duck confit is fatty, and then the pickled chilies add spice.”

Alongside it, the Stella Rosa Moscato delivers a palate of honeyed stone fruit that playfully wrestles with the curry as it subdues the heat from the chilies; its residual sugar, meanwhile, elongates the buttery mouthfeel of the duck confit. The bubbles dance on the tongue just long enough—until you're ready to go in for more.

Red Herring is a lively and colorful fine-dining establishment that serves comfort food with a Mediterranean twist in L.A.'s hip Eagle Rock neighborhood. Woodall and his wife, Alexis Martin Woodall, opened the restaurant in August 2016 and will soon launch a second location on Grand Avenue downtown. ■■



**Chef Dave Woodall with a glass of Stella Rosa Imperiale Moscato at Red Herring in Los Angeles.**

## Chickpea Cake with Vadouvan Cauliflower, Duck Confit, and Pickled Chilies

*Courtesy of Chef/Co-Owner Dave Woodall, Red Herring, Los Angeles*

### CHICKPEA CAKE

1 cup chickpea flour  
2 cups vegetable stock  
2 Tbsp. butter  
Salt and white pepper to taste

### DUCK CONFIT

½ cup salt  
2 Tbsp. picked thyme  
¼ cup picked parsley, chopped  
2 bay leaves, chiffonade  
1 tsp. cracked black pepper  
6 duck legs  
1 quart duck fat  
1 lemon, zest removed in strips  
1 orange, zest removed in strips  
4 bay leaves  
4 peeled shallots  
4 garlic cloves

### CURRIED CAULIFLOWER

1 head cauliflower, grated  
3 Tbsp. butter  
2 Tbsp. vadouvan curry  
2 shallots, sliced  
2 garlic cloves, sliced  
2 cups vegetable stock  
Salt to taste

### PICKLED FRESNO CHILIES

1 lb. Fresno chilies, seeded and sliced  
500 g cider vinegar  
350 g water  
200 g sugar  
30 g salt  
15 g pickling spice  
2 Tbsp. mustard seeds  
2 Tbsp. coriander seeds  
2 Tbsp. hot red pepper flakes  
2 Tbsp. allspice berries  
1 Tbsp. ground mace  
2 small cinnamon sticks, crushed or broken into pieces  
2 to 4 bay leaves, crumbled  
2 Tbsp. whole cloves  
1 Tbsp. ground ginger

*For the full story and recipe with instructions, visit [tastingpanelmag.com/stella-moscato-chickpea](http://tastingpanelmag.com/stella-moscato-chickpea).*





# THE 'SHINE THAT KEEPS ON SHINING



TWO YEARS IN A ROW. A LEGACY IN THE MAKING  
OLE SMOKY® IS THE MOST AWARDED MOONSHINE IN THE WORLD\*



*Shine Responsibly®*

© 2019 Ole Smoky Distillery, LLC, Gatlinburg, TN

All Rights Reserved. OLE SMOKY, OLE SMOKY TENNESSEE MOONSHINE and SHINE RESPONSIBLY are registered trademarks of Ole Smoky Distillery, LLC.

\*Visit [olesmoky.com](http://olesmoky.com) to view awards.

[OLESMOKY.COM](http://OLESMOKY.COM)

[@OLESMOKY](#)



The Schmitt family celebrating the grape harvest in the Ahr, circa 1936.

# A Centennial Celebration



THE FIFTH GENERATION BEHIND THE FEMALE-LED **SCHMITT SÖHNE FAMILY WINES** IS DEDICATED TO PRODUCING WORLD-CLASS RIESLING

After decades in business, most wineries are set in their ways, yet Schmitt Söhne Family Wines is celebrating a century of winemaking by forging ahead toward the future. The Longuich, Germany-based winery kicked off 2019, which marks its 100th anniversary, with major announcements: the appointment of Juliane Schmitt as its Managing Director and Delicato Family Wines as its exclusive U.S. importer.

As a fifth-generation member of the family winery, Juliane is perfectly suited to the task of positioning it for 21st-century growth. She brings a wealth of experience to her role, earning a master's degree in international business from the European Business School before going on to hold various industry positions around the world from



China and Florida, where she worked at Premier Beverage in Miami, to Brazil and Bodegas Salentein in Argentina.

Juliane's great-great-grandfather Hilar Schmitt founded Schmitt Söhne Family Wines in 1919 as a small local winery that produced Rieslings from the Mosel, which Juliane describes as "the heart of the world's greatest territory for Riesling." According to Wines of Germany, Riesling became prominent in Germany after a 1787 decree in the region stated that all "bad" vines had to be replaced by Riesling within seven years. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, German Rieslings had earned respect around the globe.

As it happens, the grape Juliane's family has specialized in for so long is likewise suited to the trending tastes of today's American wine drinkers as they embrace the concept of wine as a lifestyle beverage: Its fruity acidity,

profiles and price points, starting with the Schmitt Söhne Family Wines line of Rieslings that, in its instantly recognizable blue bottle, is the top-selling German brand in the United States. Schmitt Söhne Family Wines is committed to producing a wide range of Rieslings, from its richly fragrant and approachable Qualitätswein to its complex, voluminous Auslese. These popular wines are perfect for pairing with appetizers and Asian dishes or enjoying on their own.

Schmitt Söhne's RELAX line includes the number-one imported Riesling in the U.S. as well as five other fruit-forward wines, from varietals to blends and rosé to bubbly, in an eye-catching rainbow of bottles to match. (Both the flagship Schmitt Söhne brand and RELAX are among the top 10 import brands in the \$8–\$11 price range.) Juliane describes the RELAX wines

**RELAX 2017 Riesling, Mosel, Germany (\$15)**

Tickled by honeysuckle, scents of candied pineapple are scrumptious. The delightful palate is airy and light, but not without shape and body. Summer peaches and pineapple are directed by an energetic acidity, and the finish of salted lemon is absolutely mouthwatering. **91** —*Meridith May*



also includes four premier German luxury estates distributed by Schmitt Söhne: Bischöfliche Weinguter Trier, Schloss Vollrads, Friedrich-Wilhelm-Gymnasium, and Franz Keller.

It's a heady time, in short, for Schmitt Söhne Family Wines to be celebrating its 100th birthday. Not surprisingly, it plans to observe the momentous occasion with a thoroughly modern promotional holiday campaign, which includes not only festive point-of-sale materials but a sweepstakes that consumers can enter by text.

What does the company have in store for anniversary number 101? That remains to be seen, but with Juliane at the helm and Delicato Family Wines behind it in the U.S., it's poised to be a market force for generations to come. Perhaps Juliane says it best: "As we celebrate 100 years of Schmitt Söhne, I'm excited to continue our family's tradition of quality and innovation into the next century." ■■



**Juliane Schmitt is the Managing Director of Schmitt Söhne Weinkellerei.**

earthy minerality, famously distinctive aromatics, and relatively low alcohol rank it among the world's food-friendliest varieties, complementing a diversity of cuisines to appeal to a new generation of consumers whose palates have been primed by an increasingly global dining culture.

As one of Germany's leading wine exporters, Schmitt Söhne delivers roughly 700,000 cases to the United States annually, accounting for nearly half of all German wines sold stateside. Its portfolio covers a spectrum of taste

as "innovative and modern products meant for everyday drinking," adding, "These are wines for enjoying with friends or family—nothing too complicated, just approachable wines for a good time."

For special occasions or Riesling aficionados, there's the Thomas Schmitt Private Collection of refreshing estate-bottled Rieslings, rounded out by a velvety Pinot Noir. Named for Juliane's father, these acclaimed wines highlight the best varietal expressions the Mosel region has to offer. The U.S. portfolio

THE GRAPE JULIANE'S FAMILY HAS SPECIALIZED IN FOR SO LONG IS LIKEWISE SUITED TO THE TRENDING TASTES OF TODAY'S AMERICAN WINE DRINKERS AS THEY EMBRACE THE CONCEPT OF WINE AS A LIFESTYLE BEVERAGE."



# FARMING *for the Future*

WENTE VINEYARDS LEADS THE WAY IN SUSTAINABILITY

by Alex Fondren

"Sustainability" is a buzzword that's tossed around a bit casually these days, but that doesn't diminish its ever-increasing importance as we face the consequences of a warming planet. California has always been a pioneer when it comes to conservation initiatives, and the universal appeal of the state's wine industry offers a unique opportunity to demonstrate true global leadership.

But even as more and more wineries attempt to go green, it's worth remembering that only 2 percent of producers in the state hold a Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CCSW) designation for both their winery and their vineyards. In addition to protecting the quality of their surrounding environment, those hoping to attain the CCSW designation must also consider how they treat their employees and local communities: It's a high bar to set.

It should come as no surprise that America's oldest continuously operating family winery, Wente Vineyards, is among that tiny percentage to clear it, becoming one of 18 pilot wineries to achieve CCSW status for both its winery operations and its vineyard practices in 2010. After all, without an enduring and evolving commitment to the land—and the people who work it—how could any producer expect to survive for 136 years (and counting)?

With regard to the Wente family's outlook on ethical farming and business practices, a fairly straight line can be drawn from Carl H. Wente—who helped establish Livermore Valley as a winegrowing region in 1883—to the fourth and fifth generations, who remain stewards of both the business and the land today.

Bud break on a  
Cabernet vine in  
Wente Vineyards'  
Sachau Vineyard in  
Livermore Valley.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WENTE VINEYARDS





**A toast to the fourth and fifth generations of the Wente family.**

Fourth-generation winegrower and family historian Phil Wente credits his great-grandfather for taking a responsible approach to farming from the outset: “There was no alternative to being frugal and moderate—if you didn’t treat the soil well and farm responsibly, you didn’t get a crop,” he explains. “It is a long, slow process, with one harvest per year, to see if your efforts are rewarded.”

Carl’s sons, Ernest and Herman, were also obsessive about soil health—not just in relation to winegrowing but also as an insurance policy against market fluctuations. Many family wineries were devastated by the sequence of Prohibition, two World Wars, and the Depression, but the Wentes “diversified and played all angles,” according to Phil. Their salubrious soils were legendary in the 1930s and 1940s for a wide variety of crops and were even credited with sustaining the champion racehorse Seabiscuit. Once the discern-

ing thoroughbred was introduced to the estate’s renowned red oat hay, he never ate anything else for the rest of his life.

### **Redefining Sustainability**

To this day, the Wentes sustainably manage roughly 1,600 acres of open-range land not planted to vine, cultivating native grasses and other beneficial flowering species to maintain an ecological balance where pests are naturally controlled.

Most family wineries that have been around as long as the Wentes’ have survived by capitalizing on the booming bulk-wine business that emerged after Prohibition. The Wente family doubled down instead, retaining their focus on premium, small-lot wines that didn’t require much equipment or energy use to farm. Staying small and sustainable not only made sense from a quality standpoint but also supported them through the 20th century’s

economic turbulence, ensuring their success during the more prosperous decades that followed.

In 1990—years before the formalization of any kind of sustainable winegrowing program—the Wente family pioneered its own initiative, Farming for the Future (FFTF). Encompassing 3,000 acres of estate vineyards in the Livermore Valley and Arroyo Seco appellations, it focuses on promoting water and energy conservation, reuse and recycling, cover crops and composting, and beneficial pests and biodiversity.

Today, with the help of the forward-looking fifth generation, the family remains a leader in ethical practices and continues to push the envelope in defining how sustainability is measured (see sidebar on page 44). A significant driver of that leadership hinges on the belief that a successfully sustainable business must look up from the soil from time to time to instead focus on its relationship with its workers and its community.



## Wente Vineyards Goes Even Greener

Eco-minded fifth-generation winegrowers Karl and Niki Wente have recently upgraded the Wente Vineyards winery, vineyard, and tasting rooms to meet (and exceed) their CCSW-inspired goals:

A BlueMorph UV light system replaces the typically chemical- and water-heavy rinse cycle during winery sanitation, saving roughly 150,000 gallons of water per year.



**Karl Wente at work in the winery.**

A STARS (Selective Tartrate Removal System) Filtration Unit reduces energy load during the winery's cold-stabilization process, which saves both energy and money (and vastly improves conditions for workers, who no longer have to work in frigid temperatures).

Incandescent and halogen light fixtures have been replaced

with natural skylights and supplemental LED lights to improve energy efficiency.

In 2018, 77 percent of Wente Vineyards' consumables waste was diverted from the landfill and instead recycled by local partners.

All water used in the production facility is reused to drip-irrigate the vineyards (and only when needed).

All Wente Vineyards tasting rooms serve as designated drop-off spots for Cork ReHarvest, a program focused on collecting and recycling used and surplus corks.

On-site weather stations use mildew-pressure models developed by the University of California, Davis, to pinpoint exactly where to spray, if at all. Environmentally friendly stylet oil (a combination of natural oils such as clove, black pepper, and cinnamon) is used to smother mildew and control pests.

Owl boxes and raptor perches help mitigate vineyard damage caused by gophers and ground squirrels. Aero falconry is also employed in partnership with a Master Falconer, making the vineyards a natural no-fly zone for starlings. (For more on this practice, see the January/February 2019 issue of *The Tasting Panel*.)

To communicate the importance of responsible farming, the CCSW logo will be featured on all Wente Vineyards back labels from the 2017 vintage forward.

In that vein, Wente Vineyards launched a groundbreaking new initiative in 2018 called Make Time, aimed at inspiring its workforce as well as its customers to unplug from their digital devices and redirect more time toward loved ones and personal development.

More policies followed, including Make Time Off (MTO), which grants paid time off for its nearly 700 employees to engage in activities they enjoy with the people they care about. A Make Time Committee is now dedicated to the ongoing advancement of "Make Time culture," cultivated through a program of HR practices that emphasize personal and professional growth. Together, they provide further indication of how Wente Vineyards is laying the foundation for another 136 years of ample reward. ■■

"[Winemakers] are conservative about conservation. When you are in the wine business you learn that it takes time and patience to produce the best results. We don't rush into every fad that comes along, but we don't hesitate to adopt a practice that has been carefully thought out, even if it may take a generation to accomplish the desired results."

—**Herman Wente,**  
*Second-Generation Winegrower*



The hilltop orientation of Wente Vineyards' Sachau Vineyard ensures all the sun and wind exposure Cabernet Sauvignon needs for even ripening.





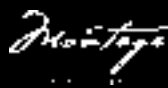


JUNE 7-9, 2019 • KAPALUA RESORT, MAUI

Join Host Master Sommelier Michael Jordan, MS, CWE and a contingent of world-renowned winemakers, celebrity chefs and Maui's own culinary stars at oceanfront galas, cooking demonstrations and interactive wine tastings.



Sponsored in part by:



KAPALUAWINEANDFOOD.COM



ITALY

# AN *Emerging Gem* ON LAKE GARDA

WITH **CÀ MAIOL**, THE LUGANA  
DOP GETS A DAZZLING  
STATESIDE DEBUT

by Ruth Tobias

**THOUGH IT'S HARDLY NEW**, having received its DOP classification in 1967, the northern Italian appellation of Lugana is likely unfamiliar to all but the geekiest of enophiles in the U.S.

There are any number of possible reasons for that: For one thing, at about 4,400 acres, Lugana is rather small, with the bulk of its like-wise modest exports typically going to Germany. For another, it's a bit of an anomaly: Despite its size, it straddles two regions, Lombardy and the Veneto, where a unique combination of geographical features contributes to a climate that's more Mediterranean than pre-Alpine. As a result, it isn't easy to characterize for a mainstream audience.

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

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SANTA MARGHERITA GRUPPO VINCOLO



The Cà Maiol tasting room.



And for a third, its signature grape, the white Trebbiano di Lugana, is virtually unknown to Americans. (The fact that it isn't actually Trebbiano—more on that later—only complicates matters further.)

Despite all that, there's a major reason that this white-wine appellation is nevertheless poised for imminent stateside stardom: the entry of the Marzotto family into the appellation via their purchase of Cà Maiol in 2017. As the owners of Santa Margherita Gruppo Vincolo, they pride themselves on a portfolio that includes many of northern Italy's best white wines; as Santa Margherita USA Wine Educator Kristina Sazama points out, "We're big in Alto Adige, Franciacorta, and Valdobbiadene." Getting into Lugana while the getting's good, she adds, "reinforces our leadership in the white-wine segment," giving the company an edge in introducing U.S. consumers to bottlings that are "really high-quality, especially for the price. It's kind of ridiculous how delicious they are."

### A Little Background

Sazama describes Lugana as "a plain that was carved out when the last glaciers were retreating back north" in the late Ice Age. Though it lies at about the 45th parallel north—which, she notes, is roughly the same latitude as Portland, Oregon—it's flanked by morainic hills that protect it from cold air currents. It's also blessed by the moderating influence of Italy's largest lake, Lago di Garda, making for conditions balmy enough to grow lemons. And with its stratified layers of clay and limestone, the area is naturally ideal for grapes as well. "Generally speaking, clay brings power and limestone brings elegance," Sazama says.

**The Lugana appellation sits on the southern shores of Lake Garda.**

MAP COURTESY OF CONSORZIO TUTELA LUGANA





# ITALY

Put together, these elements of terroir make all the difference between Trebbiano di Lugana and its better-known doppelgänger, Verdicchio from the Marche, of which it was discovered to be a biotype in 2008. “DNA-wise, it’s essentially the same grape as Verdicchio,” Sazama explains. “But as I like to say, while the nature is the same, the nurture is different.” Thanks to the mild climate and those variegated soils, Trebbiano di Lugana (which also goes by the local name Turbiana) tends to be fuller in body as well as rich in its own character. “In his book *Native Wine Grapes of Italy*, Ian D’Agata calls the Verdicchio of the Marche the most celebrated white wine of Italy. I just cross out ‘Verdicchio’ and drop in ‘Trebbiano di Lugana,’” she jokes.

No doubt Walter Contato would have concurred. The Milanese entrepreneur founded Cà Maiol on Lake Garda’s south shore the same year that Lugana became a DOP, naming it for Cascina Maiolo, a farmhouse built in 1710 that still stands on the property. In his zeal for the area’s viticultural potential, he also co-founded a local growers’ consortium now known as the Consorzio Tutela Lugana DOC. Today Cà Maiol’s vineyard managers oversee about 345 acres, farming the majority sustainably while increasing their reliance on organic practices.

## The Wines

Santa Margherita currently exports two Cà Maiol Lugana DOP wines, both 100% Trebbiano di Lugana, to the U.S. The fruit for the flagship expression, labeled simply by appellation, is handpicked and soft-pressed before undergoing cool-temperature fermentation and maturation in stainless steel to yield a wine that Sazama likens to the love child of Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio, delivering abundant apple, pear, and citrus notes laced with hints of almond. “It’s beautiful, fresh, and really juicy, with the richness of unoaked Chard but the zesty acidity of an Italian Pinot Grigio,” she says, adding that she thinks “it’s exactly what consumers are looking for” in that it offers the approachability of “the usual suspects” without their predictability.

The second label, Molin, derives its name from the vineyard that lies just beyond the winery’s cellar doors and



**Valtènesi Riviera del Garda is located on the western shores of Lake Garda, where it produces Groppello-dominant reds and rosés.**

contains the property’s oldest vines. The grapes selected therefrom receive a 48-hour cold soak prior to fermentation and four months of aging in stainless steel, revealing a whole other side to Trebbiano di Lugana in the finished product. Energetic where the flagship is delicate, Molin is bright, distinctly aromatic, and tangy with apricot, kiwi, and herbs such as lavender as well as citrus and almond. Above all, says Sazama, “It has amazing concentration, with a fresh and pure focus.” Her praise is only supported by the fact that it was the very first Lugana wine to receive Gambero Rosso’s prestigious Tre Bicchieri award.

If a more-or-less clear picture of the Lugana appellation is emerging here, it’s delightfully complicated by the third Cà Maiol wine now making its way to the States: Chiarretto, which is not a Lugana at all but a rosé from the neighboring Valtènesi Riviera del Garda Classico DOP. Established in 2011, this appellation can be loosely thought of as Lugana’s red-wine alter ego; as Sazama explains, “It’s located on the western shores of Lake Garda, which are slightly hillier, with more gravel in the soil. So it’s better suited for red grapes, including the local Groppello.”

This key variety, which she describes as “very dark-fruited and very structured,” must comprise at least 50% of any Valtènesi blend, red or pink. So it does in Chiarretto, the rest of which is composed of Marzemino—which she

says “brings a little more floral brightness” to the mix—as well as a little “Barbera for acid and Sangiovese for structure, as is traditional.” A short cold soak in stainless steel pre-fermentation gives the wine its nickname as a *rosato di una notte*, or “rosé of one night—it’s very sexy,” she adds.

For all their inherent charms, Sazama acknowledges that these little-known, fairly small-production wines require “more of a hand sell” at the boutique-retail and on-premise level, at least initially. But by employing a marketing approach that highlights “the ‘double Ds,’ for ‘diversity’ and ‘discovery,’” she believes consumers—particularly Italophiles with a sense of adventure—will be easily convinced of their virtues. “Once you get the wine in the glass, you look like a rock star in front of your guests because of that discovery that you’re walking them to,” she explains.

In promoting the 1,600-plus cases of Cà Maiol it’s now importing annually, Santa Margherita USA is getting a boost from the Consorzio Tutela Lugana itself, which made a few visits to the U.S. in 2018 and has a few more scheduled for this year. “People are starting to notice the quality,” Sazama asserts—which means that nationwide distribution is sure to follow: “We’re getting there,” she says. ■■



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



# LA WINEFEST<sup>SM</sup>

AN EXPLORATION OF TASTE

**SIP EXPLORE ENJOY**

*LA's Signature Celebration of All Things Wine*

14th Annual LA WineFest  
at The Pike Outlets  
in Long Beach

Saturday, June 1 • 2-6pm  
Sunday, June 2 • 1-5pm

Sip Wines &  
Artisan Beers from  
Around the Globe;  
Browse & Buy  
Gourmet Treats &  
Lifestyle Goods.

Music, Food &  
Much More to Enjoy  
in One Place;  
Fun for Novices,  
Enthusiasts &  
Connoisseurs!

**TICKETS ON SALE NOW • VISIT [LAWineFest.com](http://LAWineFest.com)**

SPONSORS INCLUDE:

Los Angeles  
MAGAZINE

King Barrel  
WINE & WHISKEY BARRELS

THE PIKE  
OUTLETS

PERFECT  
HYDRATION<sup>®</sup>

MedMen<sup>®</sup>  
Premium Dispensaries

THE SOMM JOURNAL

THE  
tastingpanel  
MAGAZINE

BENEFITING:



Wineries, Exhibitors, Sponsors  
Contact: [Office@LAWineFest.com](mailto:Office@LAWineFest.com)



Husband-and-wife team Trey and Kim Azar own the Seersucker Southern Style Gin Distillery in San Antonio, TX.

PHOTO: JOSH HUSKIN

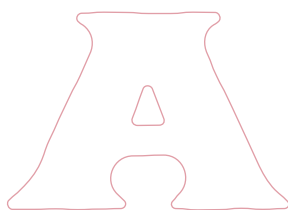
**“BUILDING A BRIDGE” TO**

**GIN**

**TREY AND KIM AZAR ARE SHAKING UP THE GIN CATEGORY WITH SEERSUCKER SOUTHERN STYLE GIN**



BY LORI MOFFATT



As hundreds of bottles move down the bottling line at the Seersucker Southern Style Gin Distillery in San Antonio, the crescendo of tinkling glass evokes a festive group toast. The sound is fitting, as owners Trey and Kim Azar, who introduced the Seersucker brand to the public in 2017, have plenty to celebrate these days.

For starters, the distillery's new 50-foot bottling line, which has a daily capacity of more than 500 9-liter cases, has the couple poised to expand beyond 14 states to all 50. Its cheery tasting room and bar—which opens onto a broad lawn with picnic tables and a bocce court—just marked its first anniversary. And that line of bottles containing citrusy, aromatic gin the color of rose-tinted glasses? That's the couple's latest release, Seersucker Southern Style Grapefruit: a grapefruit-flavored gin infused with a savory back note of rosemary.

The expression joins Seersucker Southern Style Lemonade and Seersucker Southern Style Limeade in the distillery's series of citrus-forward spirits; designed to shake things up at home or in the bar, they've given the Azars a chance to innovate upon the success of the original Seersucker Southern Style Gin. For Kim, its debut has been a long time coming. "I have been wanting to make a grapefruit [flavor] for a while, and I love how it turned out," she says. "It's fresh, clean, and summery."

In developing Seersucker's lineup, Trey and Kim collaborated with their State Sales Manager, longtime San Antonio barman Chris Ware, to bottle the flavor profiles of some of their favorite drinks—herbs, aromatics, and all. "It was fun and challenging to get the recipes right. They're flavored gins, but we use real juice and botanicals," Trey explains. "The whole concept of Seersucker Southern Style Gin is that we are giving you a shortcut to the cocktail process. The idea is: glass with ice, our gin, splash of club soda or your favorite mixer. Garnish, and let's go."

Coming up with the identity of the brand itself was another challenge entirely. After considering what Trey describes as "a million bad names," he spied a man wearing seersucker shorts at a coffee shop, and there it was: Seersucker. The word evoked images of comfort, relaxation, and sunny days spent with friends—all key tenets of the brand.

Trey brought a lifetime of experience in the alcohol business to Seersucker: His grandfather was a Coors distributor in El Paso, Texas, and his dad followed suit after moving the family to San Antonio in the 1970s. "I grew up knowing how to work in a warehouse, clean keg lines, drive a forklift . . . all that kind of stuff," Trey says.



PHOTO: JOSH HUSKIN

A variety of cocktails are offered in the Seersucker tasting room.



PHOTO: JOSH HUSKIN

The Seersucker distillery's light, bright tasting room.





**Craig Nelson, owner of acclaimed bar Proof in Charleston, SC, shows off his Seersucker-based Gin Collins.**

## HERE'S PROOF

Bartenders appreciate Seersucker Southern Style Gin for the same reason the spirit is so popular at backyard barbecues and porch parties: Its subtle botanicals make it easy to create nuanced cocktails without putting a lot of bottles in play.

At Proof in Charleston, South Carolina, where Gin & Tonics outsell all other drinks, owner Craig Nelson and Bar Manager Sam Gabrielli have created a Seersucker Collins using honey syrup and Italian amaro to complement the gin's fresh botanical profile. "It's a good recipe for springtime," Nelson notes. "We wanted to highlight the gin's honey and mint flavors, so we used a honey syrup and cut some of the sweetness with some Pasubio Vino Amaro from Italy."

When Nelson opened his 40-seat bar in 2012, the goal was to create a spot where wine, beer, and spirits shared equal billing. "I like a good cocktail and my wife enjoys a good glass of wine, but there weren't too many spots that had both," Nelson says. These days, Proof's easygoing ambiance—reinforced by recycled cypress woodwork, an eclectic music selection, and community tables—may be the best place to hoist a glass in downtown Charleston.

### Seersucker Southern Style Gin Collins

*Created at Proof, Charleston, South Carolina*

- ▀ 2 oz. Seersucker Southern Style Gin
- ▀ ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
- ▀ ¾ oz. honey syrup
- ▀ ¼ oz. Pasubio Vino Amaro

Combine all ingredients in a shaker tin, fill with ice, and shake. Strain into a Collins glass with fresh ice and garnish with fresh mint and blueberries. ("The berries bring out the amaro," Proof owner Craig Nelson says.)

In his early twenties, he sold wine to grocery stores while working for a distributor. His palate, however, increasingly led him to fine wine, and by the early 1990s—"at the ripe old age of 25," he says with a laugh—Trey was buying wine for 36 family-owned liquor stores across San Antonio. While he eventually took a detour into other career endeavors, those early lessons laid the groundwork for the brand he'd later help bring to fruition in his home city.

"I got to see the wine industry go through a complete transition in the '90s as consumers started knowing the difference in [grape] varietals," Trey says. "That helped me see how the beverage industry can change and grow. Another thing I learned in the wine industry is how to develop my palate, and how your palate can change over time."

Trey and Kim met through mutual friends a decade ago, and their families merged as the distillery took shape. They started with a slow-distilled vodka called Cinco, named in honor of their five children, before adding Seersucker Southern Style Gin to the Azar Family Brands portfolio.

As a former restaurateur who also worked previously for Chanel and in real estate, Kim had developed not only an eye for design and a discerning palate but also a deep understanding of what it means to make someone feel comfortable—and how to build a brand around that. "As a restaurant owner



PHOTO: JOSH HUSKIN

**Along with the Original expression, the Seersucker lineup of flavored gins includes Grapefruit, Lemonade, and Limeade.**

in the days before social media, I had to think of creative ways to get people to come to the restaurant, to keep things fresh," she says. These days, public tours of the distillery, a changing menu at the tasting-room bar, and events such as a Derby Day celebration in May help to convert gin skeptics into gin ambassadors.

"The gin market in the United States has been relatively flat for a long time, and it's currently under 10 percent," Trey notes.



"From a palate standpoint, Americans are somewhat intimidated by gin; maybe it's what their grandpa drank or they don't love a heavy juniper flavor profile. But mixologists like gin because it's already complex. We thought, why not make our own style and balance out the flavor profiles? Why don't we make the gin category friendlier and more inviting?"

To be sure, the category allows plenty of room for botanical tinkering. "For our original [expression], we arrived on a flavor profile you'd find in a Southern kitchen, including citrus, honey, and mint," Trey explains. "But for us, Southern Style Gin has never been geographical—it's about Southern hospitality, approachability, and building a bridge so that people will explore the gin category."

"We struggled at first to find the word we needed to describe the taste profile to



PHOTO: JOSH HUSKIN

#### Hand-labeling off the bottling line in the Seersucker facility.

consumers," he continues. "We finally gave up and listened to people as they tasted our gin. They'd say, 'This is so refreshing.' In two words, that's our brand: simple and refreshing."

Trey and Kim recognize their good fortune in having two of Texas' spirit powerhouses as teachers: Tito's and Deep Eddy vodkas. "[Tito's founder] Tito Beveridge challenged the system and is the reason so many Texas distilleries exist today," Trey acknowledges. "He was the first one to show that there could be a domestic premium-vodka player to take on the European brands. And we got to learn from Deep Eddy as they found success with flavored vodka."

While the Azars own their Southern Style Gin trademark, they can imagine a time when other distillers might follow suit to yield a style as recognizable as London Dry. "Southern Style Gin is a citrus gin, balanced with the appropriate amount of juniper and herbs," Trey explains. "When we got into it, one of our goals was to positively affect the gin category and possibly pass the company on to our kids. We want to leave a mark." ■



PHOTO: LORI MOFFATT

**Kyle Noonan, co-owner of FreeRange Concepts and The Rustic, makes his Gin Bramble with Seersucker and Combier Crème de Mûre.**

## A NIGHT AT THE RUSTIC

At the Dallas outpost of The Rustic, a wildly popular live-music and dining/drinking concept created by entrepreneurs (and former college roommates) Kyle Noonan and Joshua Sepkowitz, you'll find a refreshing concoction called the Seersucker Southern Style Gin Bramble on the bar's spring cocktail menu.

"If you're feeling adventuresome and usually drink vodka but want to try gin, Seersucker is a great choice," says Noonan, whose Texas entertainment empire now includes ten destinations statewide, including upscale bowling alleys, canine cantinas, and two other (so far) branches of The Rustic in San Antonio and Houston. The Rustic's seven-year-old parent company, FreeRange Concepts, now employs more than 1,200 people.

In creating The Rustic, Noonan and Sepkowitz sought to create the feeling of sitting around a roaring fire with friends, grilling steaks, enjoying cold drinks, and listening to live music under the stars. "Everybody has a connection to that," adds Noonan, who features Texas products in both the bar and kitchen as much as possible. "Whenever we make a decision, the first thing we ask is, 'Does it align with our brand?' Seersucker would be a good product even if it weren't a Texas brand, but that gives it an extra 'cool factor' for us."

### Seersucker Southern Style Gin Bramble

*Created at The Rustic, Dallas, Texas*

- 1½ oz. Seersucker Southern Style Gin
- ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
- ¾ oz. Combier Crème de Mûre
- ½ oz. simple syrup

Combine all ingredients in a shaker tin, fill with ice, and shake for 20 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass over fresh ice and garnish with a lemon wedge and blackberry skewer.



# 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 [bluelifestyle.com](http://bluelifestyle.com).

Prices are for 750-mL bottles unless otherwise noted.

### IMPORTED

---

**91 Bouchard Père & Fils 2016 Pouilly-Fuissé AOC, France**

(\$30) Crisp, juicy, and bright with rich minerality and lively acid structure; bracing, long, and balanced.

MAISONS & DOMAINES HENRIOT AMERICA

**94 Feudo Maccari 2016 Maharis Syrah, Sicilia**

IGT, Italy (\$70) Deep and silky with juicy, elegant flavors of blackberry and spice. Ripe, generous, and elegant with intensity and depth, this demonstrates a huge potential for Sicilian Syrah.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**91 Maison Louis Jadot 2017 Chardonnay, Pouilly-Fuissé, France**

(\$28) Fresh and tangy citrus with a smooth texture and stylish balance. It's long, pure, and classic: the way Chardonnay was meant to be.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**96 Tenuta di Biserno 2015 Biserno, Toscana IGT, Italy**

(\$200) Silky, concentrated, and intense with considerable grace and finesse; pure, juicy, and long with notes of coffee and spice. Mostly Cabernet Franc, it's great now, but give it five years.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**92 Tenuta di Biserno 2017 Insoglio del Cinghiale, Toscana IGT, Italy**

(\$45) Dark ruby with a ripe nose; smooth, lovely, and long with ripe, rich berry notes. In league with Lodovico Antinori, Michel Rolland strikes again in Alte Maremma.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**95 Tenute Silvio Nardi 2013 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Italy**

(\$70) Fresh nose; smooth and elegant with earthy and articulate flavors of berries and spice. From a very good—not great—vintage, it's still beautifully balanced and long.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**92 Tenute Silvio Nardi 2017 Rosso di Montalcino DOC, Italy**

(\$30) Medium ruby color with a spicy nose; silky, bright, and crisp on the palate. A baby Brunello with character and style that's equal parts fresh, lively, and totally charming.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**91 Villa Matilde 2014 Falerno del Massico Rosso DOP, Italy**

(\$30) Ripe berry nose; velvety and lush with blueberry and spice. Juicy, long, and balanced; 80% Aglianico and 20% Piediroso.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS



## 92 Moët & Chandon Brut Impérial, France (\$40)

Bright, refreshing, and juicy with silky texture and crisp apple; refined and luscious with balance and finesse.

MOËT-HENNESSY USA

## 92 Moët & Chandon Brut Rosé Impérial, France

(\$50) Lovely pink hue; fresh, fragrant, and smooth with notes of strawberry and apple; elegant and long.

MOËT-HENNESSY USA

## 95 Moët & Chandon 2012 Grand Vintage Brut,

France (\$75) Juicy and complex; balanced, clean, and rich with bright fruit and lovely depth. 41% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, and 26% Pinot Meunier.

MOËT-HENNESSY USA

## 94 Moët & Chandon 2012 Grand Vintage Brut

Rosé, France (\$85) Smooth and juicy with deep raspberry and strawberry. A blend of 42% Pinot Noir, 25% Chardonnay, and 23% Pinot Meunier; it's crisp, elegant, and nuanced with layers of mature notes.

MOËT-HENNESSY USA

## 96 Moët & Chandon 2002 Grand Vintage Brut,

France (\$109) Lush and rich with deep flavors of toast, almonds, and spice; fresh, complex, and refined. 51% Chardonnay, 26% Pinot Noir, and 23% Pinot Meunier.

MOËT-HENNESSY USA

## 98 Moët & Chandon 1992 Grand Vintage Brut,

France Deep golden color with a rich, toasted nose; a palate of nuts, spice, fine fruit, and more toast. A blend of 45% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay, and 15% Pinot Meunier that's totally balanced and quite remarkable.

MOËT-HENNESSY USA

## DOMESTIC

## 92 Flora Springs 2016 Merlot, Napa Valley (\$35)

Smooth, juicy, and lush with notes of plum, earth, and spice; fresh, bright, and balanced with generous length.

## 93 Flora Springs 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa

Valley (\$50) Fresh and bright with lovely notes of vanilla and tangy berries. Smooth, balanced, and long; it's a lovely wine from a consistently excellent winery.

## 92 Zaca Mesa Winery 2016 Inceptive Red Wine, Santa

Ynez Valley (\$35) A flavorful and bright GSM blend with a smooth texture and good balance; dense, rich, and long.

## 94 Three Sticks Wines 2016 Cuvée Eva Marie Pinot

Noir, Sonoma Mountain (\$90) Smooth and juicy with mellow cherry and toast; crisp and lively with deep fruit and a long, structured finish. This wine wows.

## 93 Three Sticks Wines 2016 Durell Vineyard Pinot Noir,

Sonoma Coast (\$70) Silky and lush with a gossamer texture and notes of bright cherry; rich and balanced with finesse and great promise.

## 97 Cardinale 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

(\$296) Ripe plum nose; dense and dark with a velvety texture and complex flavors of spice, chocolate, and black cherry. Intense but always refined and elegant, this is yet another Chris Carpenter masterpiece.

## 92 Foley Sonoma 2016 Brut Sparkling, Russian River

Valley (\$42) Golden pink color; bright, crisp, and juicy with elegant, clean fruit and lively acidity; long, fresh, and balanced.

## 92 Chalk Hill 2016 Estate Chardonnay, Chalk Hill

AVA, Russian River Valley (\$30) Toasted oak nose; silky with layers of pear and citrus and a lengthy finish.

FOLEY FAMILY WINES

## 91 Foley Johnson 2014 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$37)

Creamy with lush plum, spice, and earth; balanced, generous, and fresh.

## 90 Samuel Charles 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Oak Knoll District, Napa Valley (\$80)

Dark and dense with earthy notes, gobs of fresh plum, soft herbs, and a smooth texture; long and balanced.



QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

## 92 Dutton-Goldfield 2017 Dutton Ranch Chardonnay,

Russian River Valley (\$39) Fresh and juicy with floral notes and creamy texture; toasty, long, and complex, it's a benchmark for Sonoma Chard.

## 93 Dutton-Goldfield 2017 Dutton Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)

Smooth and lush with bright cherry; elegant and luscious with a long, stylish finish.

## 92 Dutton-Goldfield 2016 Dutton Ranch-Morelli

Lane Vineyard Zinfandel,  
Russian River Valley (\$50) Deep ruby color; smooth, lush, and intense; tangy, fresh, and long.

## 92 Dutton-Goldfield 2015 Cherry Ridge Vineyard

Syrah, Russian River Valley (\$50) Dark crimson color with smooth blackberry joining soft tannins in a rich, smoky style. Lively and long.



# BLUE REVIEWS

**93** **Merry Edwards Winery**  
**2016 Flax Vineyard Pinot**  
**Noir, Russian River Valley (\$63)**  
Concentrated and silky with a linear style and juicy cherry notes; stylish, generous, and balanced.

**90** **Ponzi Vineyards 2017 Tavola**  
**Pinot Noir, Willamette**  
**Valley (\$27)** Cherry-red color; smooth, savory, and earthy with toast and good balance. 🍷

**91** **Roger Roessler Wines 2017**  
**Black Pine Pinot Noir,**  
**Sonoma Coast (\$30)** Ripe berry nose; smooth texture with tangy black cherry. Rich and generous with intensity and finesse.

**91** **Roger Roessler Wines 2016**  
**Big Bend Chardonnay,**  
**Sonoma Coast (\$30)** Rich with lush fruit and toasty oak. Balanced with a core of crisp acidity, it's a solid effort from this ever-reliable winery.

**93** **Roger Roessler Wines 2016**  
**Lennox Vineyard Pinot**  
**Noir, Russian River Valley (\$60)**  
Cherry goes soft and stylish on the nose and palate; smooth, tangy, and subtle with excellent acid structure. Silky texture and some nice savory notes.

**92** **Scheid**  
**Vineyards**  
**2012 Claret Reserve,**  
**Monterey (\$75)**  
Deep ruby color; rich style with smooth and balanced notes of spice, toast, berries, and chocolate; long and elegant.



**91** **St. Supéry 2017 Dollarhide**  
**Estate Sauvignon Blanc,**  
**Napa Valley (\$35)** Grapefruit nose; juicy, tangy, and fresh with a lengthy finish.

**93** **St. Supéry 2015 Rutherford**  
**Estate Merlot, Napa Valley**  
**(\$50)** Dark ruby color; smooth and lush with bright black cherry; mature and tangy with balanced flavors.

**92** **Stags' Leap Winery 2016**  
**Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa**  
**Valley (\$60)** Ripe, earthy nose; rich and dense with deep plum, soft vanilla, and oak; smooth and long.

## VALUE

**90** **Parducci 2017 Small Lot**  
**Chardonnay, Mendocino**  
**County (\$14)** A fresh, clean, and lovely wine from this dependable winery. Smooth, creamy, and nicely balanced with a rich texture and pear notes, it's a terrific value.

MENDOCINO WINE COMPANY

**91** **Valentin Bianchi 2017**  
**Famiglia Bianchi Malbec,**  
**San Rafael, Mendoza, Argentina**  
**(\$20)** Silky, lush, and bright with tangy black raspberry; fresh and long.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

**88** **Calcu 2018 Reserva**  
**Especial Rosé, Colchagua**  
**Valley, Chile (\$13)** Passion-fruit nose; bright and tangy with crisp acidity and notes of fresh peach. Long and balanced, it's an excellent value. 🍷

GLOBAL VINEYARD

**89** **Eagle Rock Vineyards 2015**  
**Old Vine—Old Clone Regio**  
**Zinfandel, Lodi (\$10)** Polished, juicy, and forward without being brash. Fresh and tangy with balance and charm—all at a great price.

## Here Comes Bodvár

HOW DOES A SLICK Swedish dude become one of the top producers of French Provençal rosé? It helps to have 170 years of family tradition making luxury goods. Bodvár Hafström commutes between his home in Stockholm and his estate in Provence, where he produces a line of stellar rosés, including a dazzling sparkler. Hafström is also the marketing whiz behind National Rosé Day, celebrated on the second Saturday of June. So far, a festival celebrating the occasion has taken place in Stockholm, Los Angeles, and the Hamptons; this year, it returns to L.A.

**91** **Bodvár N° 1 Rosé,**  
**Languedoc-Roussillon,**  
**France (\$20)** Salmon pink; tangy, fresh, and juicy. Sparkling with bright spritz and lively, dry fruit; long, crisp, and lovely.

MERCHANT VINTNER IMPORTS

**88** **Bodvár N° 8 Rosé, Côtes**  
**de Provence, France**  
**(\$17)** Soft, floral nose; dry, silky, and fresh; crisp with a tangy finish that lasts.

MERCHANT VINTNER IMPORTS

**90** **Bodvár N° 7 Rosé, Côtes**  
**de Provence, France**  
**(\$22)** Very pale pink; smooth, dry, and brisk; fresh and long with some depth of flavor.

MERCHANT VINTNER IMPORTS

**91** **Bodvár N° 5 Rosé, Côtes**  
**de Provence, France**  
**(\$25)** Rich with balance and depth; juicy, fresh, long, and mellow.

MERCHANT VINTNER IMPORTS



**90 Feudo Maccari 2017 Neré Nero d'Avola, Terre Siciliane IGP, Italy (\$20)** Medium ruby color with an earthy nose; flavorful and juicy with racy acidity and crisp berry notes. A hint of earth reappears on the finish.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**93 Fonseca 2014 Unfiltered Late Bottled Vintage Port, Douro, Portugal (\$24)** Deep cherry color with a rich nose. Dense, sweet, and silky with blackberry and spice; luscious and long.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**92 Four Virtues 2016 Bourbon Barrel Aged Zinfandel, Lodi (\$25)** Rich, toasty nose; grilled meat, vanilla, and caramel are all present on the palate alongside succulent fruit. It has a classic toasted finish.

**88 Funckenhausen Vineyards 2017 Malbec Blend, South Mendoza, Argentina (\$17)** Fresh and juicy with ripe berry notes; clean, smooth, and simple in a 1-liter bottle. 65% Malbec, 20% Bonarda, and 15% Syrah.

GLOBAL VINEYARD

**90 Lastar 2016 Chardonnay, Levač, Serbia (\$20)** Creamy with clean, luscious flavors; bright, fresh, long, and balanced. Are you ready for Serbian wine?

BOZIC'S IMPORT AND WHOLESALE LIQUORS

**88 Lastar 2015 Pinot Noir, Levač, Serbia (\$15)** Silky with fresh, clean cherry flavors; balanced and long.

BOZIC'S IMPORT AND WHOLESALE LIQUORS

**90 Longhouse Wines 2017 Chardonnay, Lodi (\$18)** Bright, refreshing, and juicy, this is a charming, economical wine with remarkable style and finesse. Smooth and lush with a crisp acid core.

**91 Lubanzi 2017 Rhône Red Blend, Swartland, South Africa (\$18)** Medium ruby color with a spicy berry nose; balanced with notes of spiced black raspberry and plum. A generous and long blend of 39% Shiraz, 34% Grenache, 15% Mourvèdre, 9% Cinsault, and 3% Carignan.

CAPE VENTURE

**91 Lubanzi 2018 Chenin Blanc, Swartland, South Africa (\$18)** Creamy and lush with a nice core of bright acidity, it makes you wonder why California winemakers have all but abandoned this lovely variety.

CAPE VENTURE

**88 Matchbook 2018 Tinto Rey Estate Bottled Rosé, Dunnigan Hills, California (\$16)** Salmon pink; dry, smooth, juicy, and long. 54% Tempranillo, 30% Tannat, and 16% Verdejo.

**91 Matchbook 2018 Chasing Venus Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$16)** Bright, tangy citrus shows on both the nose and palate. Silky, clean, and juicy, it has an expressive finish that lasts a long time.

**91 Matchbook 2016 Estate Bottled Petite Sirah, Dunnigan Hills, California (\$17)** Dark cherry color; clean, smooth, and dense with lovely texture and good balance between rich blackberry and a core of crisp acidity. Long and generous.

**91 Morgan Winery 2017 Cotes Du Crow's, Monterey (\$20)** Silky and tangy with charm and finesse; a stunning Rhône-style blend that's both fresh and nicely priced.

**92 Morgan Winery 2017 Metallico Unoaked Chardonnay, Monterey (\$22)** Sleek and fresh with bright acidity and lively flavors that demonstrate that oak is not necessary if the fruit and the winemaking are first-rate.

**92 Morgan Winery 2017 Sauvignon Blanc, Monterey (\$18)** Smooth and juicy with tangy acidity and crisp, racy style; fresh, elegant, and classic.

**90 Mother Goose Wines 2018 The Infamous Goose Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$14)** Ripe grapefruit nose; refreshingly and crisp. Tangy with style and balance, it's a long and charming wine.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**88 Ricardo Santos 2018 Sémillon, Mendoza, Argentina (\$16)** Smooth, flavorful, and bright with minerals, tangy fruit, and a persistent finish.

GLOBAL VINEYARD

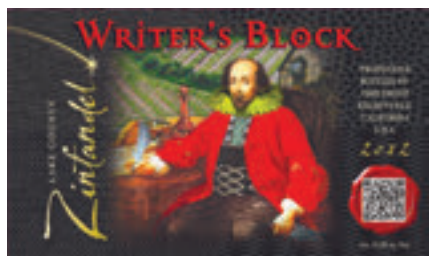
**90 Scotto Cellars 2017 Anthony & Dominic Pinot Noir, North Coast (\$15)** Creamy, juicy, and fresh with ripe black cherry and sweet oak. A lovely wine—and what a price!

**90 Sonoma-Cutrer 2018 Rosé of Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$23)** Beautiful pink color; dry, tangy, and luscious with crisp raspberry and citrus notes; bright and long.





# BLUE REVIEWS



**90 Steele Wines 2016 Writer's Block Zinfandel, Lake County (\$18)** Lush and smooth, this is another Jed Steele Zin triumph. Fresh and nicely balanced with plenty of ripe fruit; long and deep.



**91 Steele Wines 2017 Pinot Blanc, Santa Barbara (\$20)** Creamy and rich with mineral and ripe melon flavors; balanced with a long, mellow finish and a subtle acid structure.

**89 Steele Wines 2016 Shooting Star Cabernet Sauvignon, Lake County (\$16)** Fresh with a smooth texture and concentrated notes of plum; simple but charming with a hint of herbs and spice. ☺

**90 Steele Wines 2016 Shooting Star Zinfandel, Lake County (\$14)** Even in a bargain wine, Jed Steele shows his mastery of this variety. Silken, lush, and ripe with rich blackberry and spice; long and dense. ☺

**88 Viña Maquis 2018 Rosé, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$18)** A bright mix of pink/orange; tangy and dry with juicy fruit and crisp acidity. A lively, long blend of 85% Malbec and 15% Cabernet Franc.

GLOBAL VINEYARD



**90 Vino dei Fratelli Mochetto, Asti DOCG (\$18)** Bright pink color; spritzy with lovely fresh acidity and sweet, spicy apple notes. A totally charming blend of Moscato and Brachetto. ☺

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**89 Zin-Phomaniac 2016 Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi (\$18)** Despite the campy label, this is a wine to take seriously. Clean and silky with bright, crisp berry flavors; racy and fresh with a long, balanced finish.

**90 Tussock Jumper 2017 Cuvée des Fêtes Pinot Noir, Vin de France (\$13)** Smooth, fresh, and juicy; tangy, bright, and crisp with plum and raspberry. What a bargain! ☺

TRI-VIN IMPORTS

**90 Villa Matilde 2016 Rocca dei Leoni Aglianico, Campania IGP, Italy (\$20)** Deep ruby color with a rich, earthy nose. Dense, earthy, and ripe; fresh and long.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**92 Taylor Fladgate 2014 Vintage Port, Douro, Portugal (\$25)** A lush nose precedes the silky-smooth and elegant palate; austere and fine with balance and a lengthy finish.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

## SPIRITS

**91 Belle Premium American Vodka, USA (\$23)** Sleek texture; clean and fresh with medium weight. Balanced and bright with a hint of vanilla, it's a great value.

OLD DOMINION SPIRITS

**92 Tia Maria Coffee Liqueur, Italy (\$20)** Dark amber color with smooth, sweet, and authentic notes of toasted coffee; creamy and rich with a nice edge.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**94 L'Héritier-Guyot Crème de Cassis de Dijon, France (\$27)** Smooth and creamy with sweet notes of black currant. Going strong for 173 years, this is the definitive brand of cassis and the base of many a Kir Royale.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**92 Amaro Lucano, Italy (\$30)** Deep mahogany color with an aromatic, spicy nose. Creamy, rich, and sweet with soft bitters, spice, and notes of the more than 30 botanicals that go into this formula, which was perfected more than 120 years ago.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS





**94** Balcones Distilling  
Texas Single Malt Whisky Classic Edition, USA (\$80)

Rich and toasty with spice, dried fruits, and caramel; lush, intense, and elegant with amazing finesse. It's high proof, but adding a bit of water opens it up.



**94** Balcones Distilling  
Texas Rye, USA (\$80)

A luscious, lovely rye that's fresh and spicy; aromatic, silky, and toasty with long, memorable flavors of spice and caramel. Deep, balanced, and long.



**94** Balcones Distilling  
True Blue Straight Corn Whisky, USA (\$55)

Deep amber color. Made from roasted blue corn, this velvety expression shows toasted notes balanced with juicy fruit; it's elegant, rich, and generous.

**93** Amaro Lucano Anniversario Edition, Italy (\$33)

Dark amber hue with a soft, sweet herbal nose; smooth and dense with gentle herbs and complex flavors from the inclusion of more than 30 botanicals. Rich and softly bitter.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**91** MurLarkey Distilled Spirits  
Heritage Old Country Whiskey, USA (\$47)

Nose of spice and oak; toasty and smooth with lush flavors of spiced oak, rye, and barley. Balanced, long, and flavorful, it's finished in wine casks.

**91** MurLarkey Distilled Spirits  
Imagination Gin, USA (\$25)

Fresh and aromatic, this gin is made with 12 all-natural botanicals. Crisp with floral and spice notes; dry and long.

**91** MurLarkey Distilled Spirits  
Divine Clarity Vodka, USA (\$24)

Clean, silky, and completely neutral; long and balanced.

**90** MurLarkey Distilled Spirits  
Smokehouse Whiskey, USA (\$47)

Deep amber color with a smoky nose and intensely toasty, roasted flavors; long and complex. ■■

# SPIKE YOUR COCKTAIL

**NATURAL ELDERFLOWER LIQUEUR**

FOR MORE RECIPE INSPIRATIONS VISIT  
ST-ELDER.COM | @DRINKSTELDER

©2019 PRODUCED & BOTTLED BY ST. ELDER, LTD., BOSTON, MA.  
20% ALC/VOL (40 PROOF)

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: JEREMY BALL



## WINES



**Maggio Family Vineyards 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$12)** The Maggio family has been farming grapes in Lodi for five generations. The rich nose of boysenberry and a hint of coconut-tinged oakiness, leads to a sleek palate with good acidity and ripe blue and red fruit. The texture is round—no edges—with supple tannins. **89**

OAK RIDGE WINERY



**Contour 2017 Pinot Noir, California (\$14)**

Cool-climate growing regions throughout California impact the flavor profile of this 100% Pinot Noir. Aromas of heather, plum, and spiced berries precede a peppery palate of ripe blue fruit, cigar leaf, and Italian herbs. Broad strokes of boysenberry pie precede a finish enhanced by an earthiness and fine acidity. **89**



M.S. WALKER



**The Loop 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$13)** Iconic New Zealand aromatics draw you in with tart gooseberry and grapefruit. Grown in dry, windy, cool-climate conditions, this wine shows a striking acidity with icy hints of crisp lime that melt across the palate. Tarragon and brushy notes with a hint of spice dart across the tongue, but the overall texture is superb (fermenting 3% of the wine in old oak adds some weight). For us, The Loop represented the perpetual motion of sip and re-sip. **91**



**Mas Belles Eaux 2010 Les Coteaux, Languedoc-Roussillon, France (\$15)**

Overlooking the Peyre river valley, this winery/farm and its cellars were built in the 17th century. Numerous springs around the estate inspired the name Belles Eaux, which translates to "beautiful waters." This Syrah-dominant blend also comprises Grenache and Mourvèdre; the grapes were sourced from vines averaging 70 years old. The structure is upright with an underlying creaminess from 15 months of barrel aging. Flavors of meaty, spiced plum arrive on the heels of rich, gamey aromas. **90**

MONSIEUR TOUTON SELECTION, LTD



Worthy of a smooch.

French-style double bizou.

Wildly infatuated.

Seriously smitten.

Head over heels in love.





**Belles Eaux 2018 Cuvée Belle Epoque Pinot Noir, Vin de France (\$15)** This velvet-labeled bottle houses a lively and bright red with perfumed notes of cherry and strawberry. Cinnamon and nutmeg season its lightly oaked profile. **90**

MONSIEUR TOUTON  
SELECTION, LTD.



**Blazon 2017 Chardonnay, California (\$16)** The oak is well-integrated in this opulent white, which shows off an array of spices as well as almonds, toffee, and baked apple. The acidity is balanced and the medium-bodied mouthfeel is outlined with a sweet caress. **90**

OAK RIDGE WINERY



**Emporium 2015 Appassimento Rosso Salento IGT, Puglia, Italy (\$17)** Primitivo and Negroamaro are the players in this powerhouse red from southern Italy. Finely grained cherrywood tannins and delicious meaty notes are brightened by plum and cinnamon. The late-harvest drying process results in shriveled grapes, which concentrate aromas and flavors. Armed with great structure, it's a star for food pairing that overdelivers while maintaining a juicy character. **92**

ENOVATION BRANDS



**Mt. Beautiful 2018 Rosé, North Canterbury, New Zealand (\$17)** Blending Pinot Gris (35%) with Pinot Noir lends a light echo of pear and delicate, fragrant aromas of rosemary-kissed raspberry. Slate adds depth to the sweetness of the red fruit as a hint of sage and salinity give the wine strength and texture. Lively and rich with a nice creaminess, the blend was co-fermented in stainless-steel tanks and French oak barrels. **92**



**J. Wilkes 2017 Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$30)** This may be Winemaker Wes Hagen's most spectacular vintage yet. Aged ten months in neutral French oak after undergoing malolactic fermentation, the wine is evocative of an Old World profile. From its bright acidity to its earthy core and buoyant, pillow-like texture, it has a depth and complexity that stands out. Dusty cherry-cocoa tannins lead to earth and cinnamon as blue floral tones weave throughout this expressive Pinot Noir. **93**

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



**De Bortoli 2017 Woodfired Heathcote Shiraz, Victoria, Australia (\$19)** Red Cambrian soils are well-suited for Shiraz and bring out the mouth-filling, jammy palate. Aromas of mocha, oak, grilled meat, and dark fruit tempt as black fruit leads a parade of cedar and licorice on the palate. **89**



**Mt. Beautiful 2017 Pinot Gris, North Canterbury, New Zealand (\$19)** Honeyed lemon drops and jasmine spark intrigue on the nose. Pear and honeysuckle along with a fine, crisp minerality light up the palate with body. **90**



**Three Finger Jack 2016 East Side Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi (\$22)** It was almost 100 years ago that Gaspare Indelicato, the founder of Delicato Family Wines, planted his first vines on Lodi's east side; today, this wine represents the area's rugged terrain. Three Finger Jack was a legendary outlaw who roamed the nearby Sierra Foothills during the Gold Rush. Packaged in an unusual, jug-style 750-mL bottle reminiscent of days gone by, this dynamic wine fits the personality of its namesake rogue. Aromas of brush and dark berries lead to a fleshy, full-bodied red with exacting acidity that keeps the fruit bold and fresh. Slick coffee-brandy notes finish with a streak of pepper. **91**

DELICATO FAMILY WINES



**Trapiche 2016 Medalla Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$25)** This deep purple-hued, woody, earthy red exudes aromas of boysenberries and dried figs. Dusty tannins align with baker's chocolate on the palate as fine acidity lifts the structure with reined-in power. **92**

THE WINE GROUP





# Publisher's PICKS



## Trapiche Oak Cask 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendoza, Argentina (\$25)

Grapes from high-altitude vineyards in the foothills of the Andes provide strength for this power-packed red, which aged nine months in oak. With each sip, wild cherry delivers an elevating juiciness. The oak is well-integrated with lingering hints of tobacco and spice. **90**

THE WINE GROUP



## Gehricke 2016 Petite Sirah, Sonoma Valley (\$30)

This stunning, darkly hued red exudes scents of violets, bittersweet dark chocolate, and plum brandy. Graphite and dried violets merge with dusted cocoa on the palate, which finishes on an intense licorice-blackberry note. A vivacious acidity makes this a keenly perfect wine for food pairing; aged 18 months in French and Hungarian oak, it's impeccably balanced, even with an ABV of 15.5%. Only 235 cases were made. **93**

3 BADGE ENOLOGY



**Paraduxx 2017 Proprietary White, Napa Valley (\$32)** Following the Rhône variety theme, this stunning white blend of Viognier, Roussanne, and Marsanne uses no malolactic fermentation and ages in stainless steel. White flowers bloom from the glass, joining aromas of Honeycrisp apples. On the palate, bright acidity and slate lend an edge to succulent white pear in the lean-bodied texture. Midway to finish, pineapple, coconut, and tapioca keep it enticing. **92**



## Borgo Scopeto 2013 Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG, Italy (\$34)

Notes of almond-drenched coffee and wild cherry set the tone in this spicy, complex Sangiovese-based red, aged 14 months in oak and eight months in bottle. Soft tannins and Old World acidity define it as a wonderful food-pairing partner. **90**

VINEYARD BRANDS



**Domaine Weinbach 2017 Cuvée Théo Gewürztraminer, Vins d'Alsace, France (\$43)** Made with grapes planted on sandy silt and granite pebbles in the monopole Clos des Capucins vineyard, this stunning white emits succulent aromas of chamomile and sugared kiwi. With glowingly bright acidity and a hint of spearmint-lime, it's like nectar on the palate. **93**

VINEYARD BRANDS



## J. Lohr 2015 Cuvée POM Red Blend, Paso Robles (\$50)

Named for the wines of Pomerol on Bordeaux's Right Bank, this blend of 93% Merlot (from the El Pomar District's Creston Vineyard) and 6% Malbec with 1% Cab Sauvignon evokes aromas of leather, blueberry, and dark chocolate. Aged 18 months in 225-liter French Bordeaux barrels and an additional 18 in bottle, this showpiece red is structured like a couture gown yet goes deliriously creamy on the palate with plum-coffee nectar. Not to be construed as too rich, it possesses balanced acidity and a finish with gravitas that's tinged with black olive and graphite. **96**



## J. Lohr Cuvée St. E Red Blend, Paso Robles (\$50)

The Right Bank's Saint-Émilion appellation inspired this blend of 80% Cabernet Franc (from J. Lohr's Home Ranch in the Estrella District) and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. On the nose, lilacs and cherries come alive with ripe boysenberry and maple-coffee. Tightly wound tannins open slowly in this creamy, full-bodied red, whose pleasing, caressing texture is further accentuated by cassis and blueberry. **96**



## Paraduxx 2015 Candlestick Red, Napa Valley (\$58)

Grenache (37%) from the winery's Stout Vineyard blends with Syrah from four Napa Valley sites. Aged 18 months in French oak, this is a fine example of concentrated aromas: Meaty, red, fleshy fruit pops out of the glass. Peppery plum and rhubarb add more depth as silky tannins carry it all home. **93**



## Rockbound 2016 Pinot Noir, Bien Nacido Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley (\$65)

Shards of Monterey shale and diatomic rocks in fine, sandy loam make up a rugged site built for a truly luxe Pinot Noir. Aromas of rhubarb and cranberry blend with cinnamon and peppermint as this plushly textured red goes big with a burst of rose petal in tilled soil. The well-integrated minerality defines both the bright-tart notes of pomegranate and the savory elements of tea and tomato leaf. **95**



## Borgo Scopeto 2015 Chianti Classico Gran Selezione, Italy (\$65)

From dry-farmed vineyards in the southernmost commune of the Chianti Classico region, this elegant red offers scents and flavors of warm, brown-sugared cherries and espresso. **93**

VINEYARD BRANDS





**Hawk and Horse Vineyards 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Red Hills AVA, Lake County, California**

This broad-shouldered teeth-gripper shows itself in an impressively juicy and sensuously spiced format. Dynamic, energetic, and youthful, it prances out with black fruit, baker's chocolate, and fennel root. A deep line of graphite seals the deal with vivacious acidity. **93**



**Alejandro Bulgheroni Lithology 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$80)**

From the talented Michel Rolland and Philippe Melka, this outstanding wine was made with grapes from an assortment of Napa Valley's most renowned sites. Its black, inky hue is opaque, and its aromas, with hints of plum and Brie, are heady and deep. Concentrated notes of bright, ripe blueberry, boysenberry, and plum gently sink into the palate. Black olive and dried violets seasoned with black pepper come into play mid-length with a melting sensation reminiscent of blueberry cream. Tannins urge the fruit and savory flavors forward. **97**



**Sea Smoke 2016 Ten Pinot Noir, Santa Rita Hills (\$82)**

Spiced oak aromas entice in this intense and large-boned Pinot Noir, enhanced by the marine fog (aka "sea smoke") that travels up the Santa Ynez River canyon every evening. Made with low-vigor clones grown on shallow clay soils and aged 16 months in French oak, it has bright acidity and a dense texture. Robust meaty notes are tempered by lavender and cherry. **95**



**Tamarack Cellars 2013 20th Anniversary Emerald Release Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$100)**

This celebratory blend of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cab Franc, and 10% Petit Verdot is sourced from the Columbia Valley's finest vineyards, according to Winemaker Danny Gordon. Aged in 100% French oak for 45 months, it's a limited release that shows off concentrated red and blue fruit aromas partnered with mocha latte. On the palate, oak notes come through with spiced cranberry, dried violets, and licorice. **94**



**Maison de Grand Esprit 2015 Grand Esprit Saint-Estèphe, Médoc, Bordeaux (\$100)**

Comprising 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot, and 5% Cab Franc, this wine exhibits all the signature attributes of the renowned subregion it calls home. Its structure carries its flavors and textures all the way to the (left) bank as aromas of cranberry and earth radiate ripeness from nose to palate. Bright acidity and smacking, lean tannins taste like the skin of black plums, bringing out the savory, earthy soy-sauce components of a complex wine matured in new and seasoned oak for 12 months. **96**



TREASURY WINE ESTATES



**Spottswode Estate 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, St. Helena, Napa Valley (\$225)**

The Spottswode estate has been farmed Biodynamically since 2008, thanks to the efforts of Winemaker Aron Weinkauff and President/CEO Beth Novak Milliken (before that, it had been organically farmed since 1985). This is a wonderful quote from Weinkauff: "While Biodynamics is not something you can directly taste, you can taste what it allows us to do. We can pick less ripe with lovely flavor development and energy in the grapes, which in turn lets us preserve the complexity that defines our wines." A fragrant array of lilac-tipped blue fruit combines with slate and tobacco as red fruit kissed by chocolate and fresh soil streams forth on the mid-palate. Still young at heart, this is one for the ages. **97**





## SPIRITS



### New Amsterdam

#### Stratusphere London Dry Gin, USA (\$22)

This is a new formulation for the brand, which now has a more juniper-forward nature that contrasts with the citrusy personality of the original. Aromas of baby's breath, cocoa, and enticing jasmine generate warmth on the nose, and the sensation on the palate is equally soothing: a soft roundness without bite or burn. The juniper settles down with jasmine on a wave of creamy vanilla as a nostalgic echo of sweet cherry-flavored pipe tobacco arises. The finish is long, leaving behind tangerine zest. **95**



E. & J. GALLO



#### Grainger's Deluxe Organic Vodka, USA (\$16/750mL)

Crafted from organic corn, this gluten-free, Missouri-made spirit is distilled seven times. Aromas of toasted marshmallow and sweet corn lead to flavors of turmeric and white pepper. It finishes without burn and shows a high quality in its vibrant mouthfeel. **90**

M.S. WALKER



#### Till American Wheat Vodka, USA (\$19)

The distilling team at MGP Ingredients in Atchison, Kansas, created this 80-proof smooth operator using Kansas wheat. Following inviting scents of dusted flour, dried lilacs, and an echo of cherry-vanilla, red fruit surges with a creamy texture on a palate marked by peppermint and lime zest. The finish conjures up flavors of granola and berries. **92**



#### Coco Sky Coconut Crème Liqueur, USA (\$25)

This all-natural gin-based liqueur is also gluten-free and low-calorie, combining coconut water, gin, and fresh cream for a unique formula. With aromas of blue flowers and a hint of blue fruit, it's an easy quaff at 30 proof. Texturally voluptuous, the cream is rich but not cloyingly sweet; the gin, meanwhile, livens up the palate with an echo of juniper. **90**



#### Eight & Sand Blended Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$30)

The newest member of MGP Ingredient's Rack House Series is this 88-proof blended bourbon, named for the eighth (and fastest) notch on a locomotive's throttle and the sand used on the wheels to prevent slipping. Crafted in Lawrenceberg, Indiana, it's inspired by the E&S locomotive 811 in Atchison, Kansas.

A genuinely composed and elegant nose of warmed toffee peaches and candied almonds precedes a palate enveloped with a sheath of velvet richness, nougat, and a hint of minerality. The spirit is supple and subtle with remarkable character. **95**



#### Minor Case Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$43)

The fragrant nose of jasmine and caramel is illuminating, making this drinker eager to delve further into the glass. Finished in Sherry casks, this rye has a luscious perfume of sweet peat, honeyed apples, peppercorns, and peach blossoms that carries through to a finish threaded with maple and dried peach. **94**

LIMESTONE BRANCH DISTILLERY



PHOTO: JORDAN HUGHES



#### Amass Los Angeles Dry Gin, USA (\$65)

Made in the burgeoning Arts District neighborhood of downtown Los Angeles, Amass amasses 29 botanicals from the Southland, including bay leaf, cascara sagrada, hibiscus, and makrut lime. This 90-proof white spirit offers up aromas of grapefruit zest, cherry bark, and slate; on the palate, revelatory flavors of red and blue flowers, salted lime, and wild cherry glide in on a satiny texture. It paints colors with its perfume. **95**



#### Bethel Rd. Distillery Brandy, USA (\$65)

If you love pecan and peach pie, you'll love this 80-proof American brandy made in small batches on California's Central Coast. It combines the aromas of these luscious desserts with just a lick of minerality for added complexity. (Its estate-grown grapes, meanwhile, are sourced from the folks at Castoro Cellars in the Paso Robles region.) The palate's lean notes of slate and honey have a spicy pizzazz, and the backdrop of dried peaches and maple oatmeal warms things up for a well-focused finish. **93**

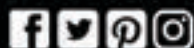




# Inspired wines, vine to bottle.

Over 1,200 estate-owned vineyard acres  
in Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino,  
innovative winemaking, premium barrel  
aging and an unwavering commitment  
to quality for over 35 years.

FERRARI-CARANO  
*Vineyards and Winery*



FERRARI-CARANO.COM



CERTIFIED CALIFORNIA  
SUSTAINABLE VINEYARD

PLEASE ENJOY OUR WINES RESPONSIBLY



# THE **tastingpanel** MAGAZINE

APRIL 2019 • \$6.95



Clockwise from top left: Fourth-generation winemaker Anthony Riboli; Sponsorships & Events Director Lisa Riboli-Elzholz; Marketing Director Dante Colombatti; Vice President Steve Riboli; Chief Financial Officer Cathy Riboli; and President Santo Riboli.

## *Awarding the Best* **Urban Winery**

FOUNDED IN DOWNTOWN L.A., RIBOLI FAMILY WINES' SAN ANTONIO WINERY IS BUILT ON GRIT, DETERMINATION, AND EXCEEDINGLY GOOD WINE





*The Man Behind the Brands*



123spirits.com





# Where's the Beef?

PHOTO: JENNIFER OLSON PHOTOGRAPHY



**Tasting Panel Managing Editor**  
Ruth Tobias lives in Denver, CO.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Ruth Tobias". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Beefs between rappers and reality stars happen day in and day out. Beefs between sommeliers? Not so much—until a few months ago, when a spectacular row broke out on social media after an article was published online in which two well-known, long-established wine professionals bemoaned what they viewed as a tendency among their younger colleagues to privilege style over substance. In particular, they worried, advocates of the natural-wine movement were doing their guests a disservice by eschewing finesse in favor of funk, the tried and true in favor of the wild and wacky—in short, by selling wines for their cool factor rather than their quality and value. And that, the article suggested, was also a disservice to service itself, antithetical to the very concept of hospitality.

The story went viral, the backlash was swift, and soon one could go down a rabbit hole of discussion forums and Instagram posts filled with accusations of elitism, narcissism, and narrow-mindedness on both sides. I know, because I went down that hole. Unexpectedly, I came out of it not disheartened but oddly optimistic about the state of the on-premise industry.

After all, a debate like this can only be had if there are people who care enough to have it—and until very recently, there were not. For far too long across much of the United States, there were only two kinds of restaurants when it came to wine: The kind that served red or white—take it or leave it—and the kind with massive cellars full of precious bottles that most people could only afford on rare occasions if at all, proffered by sommeliers who largely conformed to an old-school model of service: crisp, discreet, butler-esque. Either way, there wasn't much opportunity for diners to engage in genuine discussion on the topic of wine.

As times changed and dining out became a form of entertainment for more and more Americans, the old guard's protégés saw fit to bring a touch of personality to the proceedings—priding themselves on their approachability as well as their highly trained palates. The move was consistent with the rise, over the past 20 years or so, of upscale as opposed to fine dining, whereby innovative, chef-driven cuisine was served against a more casual, come-as-you-are backdrop. Goodbye, white linen and formal waitstaff; hello, community tables and your new best friends.

If you ask me, that level of comfort has lots to do with the much-ballyhooed interest in wine shown by millennials. Now up-and-coming in the industry, this next generation has correctly been taught by the last that wine is supposed to be fun, not intimidating; it's hard to fault them, then, for taking the lesson to heart by pouring just what they like and encouraging diners to experiment.

Surely the fact that Americans today have a wealth of options for wine service can only be a good thing. In the end, the market will determine what suits it—but I suspect there will be plenty of room for both the Court stars and the rebels, just as there's room for beef Wellington and bulgogi tacos. ■■



# contents

April 2019 Vol. 77 No. 3

PHOTO: SORAYA MATOS



Andrew Marks, Northern California Brand Ambassador for Maker's Mark, attended a recent event for the brand at Tartine Manufactory in San Francisco.

# 40b

## cover story

---

### 46b AWARDING THE BEST URBAN WINERY

Riboli Family Wines' San Antonio Winery Is Built on Grit, Determination, and Exceedingly Good Wine

## back story

---

### 6b NEW ZEALAND MEETS NAPA

Going Beyond Sauvignon Blanc at the Fourth Annual Sommelier Summit

## special report

---

### 18b SPIRITS FROM THE HEART

Tequilas and Mezcal to Savor Now

## features

---

### 14b GOING KOSHER

Anthony Dias Blue Reviews High-Scoring Kosher Wines

### 30b ELEVEN'S ELITE

Assessing a Crop of Singular Wines from a Recent Blind Speed Tasting at Craft Los Angeles

## departments

---

1b Letter from the Managing Editor

4b ForceBrands Hot Shot

8b France: Jean Frédéric Hugel of Famille Hugel

12b Bordeaux: Crus et Domaines de France

38b What's New: Dining Out in Montecito

40b Bourbon: Maker's Mark

42b Spain: Cariñena

44b Somm's List

52b Chew on This

53b Where We're Eating



# We're making a big deal about nothing.

With great taste, zero alcohol and only 69 calories, Heineken® 0.0 is on the leading edge of the growing non-alcoholic beer category.

**30%**

**Attract new customers & drive incremental sales**  
30% of adults 21+ in the US don't drink alcohol.<sup>1</sup>

**\$\$\$**

**DRIVE more sales!**

Heineken® 0.0 gives consumers more choices for the times they want a great tasting beer, but not the alcohol – such as before a workout or while driving.



**Fully-integrated marketing & advertising campaign**

Sampling programs, compelling POS, national TV/OOH and a social media influencer campaign will work together to create awareness and drive sales.



Available in 6-pack 11.2 oz bottles and cans

Contact your HEINEKEN® USA sales representative today.



Please visit:  
[EnjoyHeinekenResponsibly.com](http://EnjoyHeinekenResponsibly.com)

©2019 Imported by HEINEKEN USA, White Plains, NY.

1. Source: <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2018/assessing-the-reduced-growth-of-the-us-adult-beverage-market.html>



# A Q&A with Alison Hamm

DIRECTOR OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS,  
BREAKTHRU BEVERAGE GROUP

**A**lison Hamm joined Breakthru Beverage Group in fall 2016 as a digital-content team lead and was promoted to Content Manager in 2017. In her current role, she leads a team of writers and designers responsible for creating digital marketing campaigns that drive sales for Breakthru's entire footprint across the U.S. and Canada.

**ForceBrands: What do you find most rewarding about the work that you're doing?**

**Alison Hamm:** Working with such a talented, smart group every day is far and away the most rewarding aspect of my job. Although we're split up by design and content specialties, I would describe every team member, regardless of title, as a creative storyteller. For some, their role involves telling stories through writing. For others, it involves photos, infographics, or illustrations. I love that in the digital space, you can tell an engaging story in many ways to connect with different audiences—from an Instagram story to an email campaign to a feature article.

**FB: Can you give us an example of an effective digital marketing campaign you recently completed?**

**AH:** Last spring, we launched a feature series called Women in Wine. Our goal was to tell what's unfortunately still a largely untold story: Who are the women shaping today's evolving wine industry? We felt it was crucial to tell a more complete story of the talented people behind so many award-winning wines.

To date, we've partnered with more than 14 wine brands to highlight these leaders—everyone from winemakers to sustainability specialists to CEOs—and the campaign is ongoing across all our digital channels. Each story we publish is a collaborative effort to write, design, and promote, and I'm proud of my team's small role in working toward a more inclusive industry.

**FB: What is the most important thing brands today can do to make a meaningful—and lucrative—connection with consumers?**

**AH:** In a constantly evolving and highly competitive digital marketing landscape, brands have the power to reach bigger consumer audiences all the time. But that crowded digital space can also equate to fleeting attention spans and less brand loyalty, considering we're all continually introduced to new things. We know that millennials in particular, who are hugely influential buyers and consumers of alcohol, place a huge value on authentic experiences. When brands are active in local communities and support causes on both local and national levels, that creates a real, memorable connection.

**FB: It's 5 p.m. and you're taking a seat at the bar. What are you drinking?**

**AH:** It will likely be a beer, but my specific choice depends on where I am and the time of year it is. I love trying out local beers wherever I travel. I'm more than ready for some warmer weather in Chicago and the lighter beers to accompany that, like fruited sours and easy-drinking pale ales. Aside from beer, tequila or mezcal cocktails are my favorite, no matter the season or the city. ■■





PHOTO: ANNALEAH DE VASI



*Life is beautiful*  
LIFE IS BOLLA



  
**BOLLA**

[bolla.com](http://bolla.com)  



# Back Story

by Melissa A. Marrapese, Ph.D. / photos by Alexander Rubin



New Zealand  
Meets

*Napa*

Pictured celebrating the success of New Zealand's wines at the 2019 Sommelier Summit are Mt. Beautiful Marketing Manager—U.S. Suzanna Mannion; Dan Keith, West Coast Regional Marketing Manager for NZ Wine Navigator; and Tiffany Tonnerre, Mt. Beautiful Western U.S. Sales Manager.



# GOING BEYOND SAUVIGNON BLANC AT THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA'S FOURTH ANNUAL SOMMELIER SUMMIT

The annual Sommelier Summit attracts a wide range of food and beverage professionals to the Culinary Institute of America at Copia in Napa Valley, inviting them to explore the latest industry trends from all over the world. *The Tasting Panel's* sibling publication *The SOMM Journal* was on hand for the spectacular event, including the New Zealand Winegrowers Lunch.

Kiwi producers showcased 65 wines from six regions at the Summit, encompassing eight varieties and a multitude of styles, according to David Strada, Marketing Manager USA for New Zealand Wine. These included not only Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir but also Pinot Gris, Riesling, Chardonnay, Syrah, Gamay, red blends, rosés, and a refined selection of sparkling wines.

While New Zealand's viticultural history dates back to the 1800s, it wasn't until Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough was introduced to the global market in the late 1980s that the country's wines found a place on the world stage. New Zealand is now home to ten major growing regions, nine of which are situated directly on the coast, where the maritime influence contributes to the wines' distinctive character.

Despite the global success of Sauvignon Blanc, production in New Zealand accounts for less than 1 percent of the world's total volume. Yet the vast majority of the country's growers are certified as sustainable, underscoring Kiwi producers' commitment to quality as they continue to simultaneously focus on innovations in canopy management and stainless-steel fermentation.

One producer that captures the essence of New Zealand wines is Mt. Beautiful. What is most notable about this North Canterbury winery, according to its U.S. Marketing Manager, Suzanna Mannion, is its focus on brand development and tourism as well as on the production of elegant, balanced wines. See the sidebar below for tasting notes on a series of Mt. Beautiful selections. ■■

## Summit Highlights from New Zealand



**Mt. Beautiful 2016 Pinot Noir, North Canterbury (\$28)**  
Medium-bodied with aromas of toast and blackberry; subtle flavors of violet, black cherry, and brambleberry.



**Mt. Beautiful 2018 Rosé, North Canterbury (\$16)** This unique combination of 65% Pinot Noir and 35% Pinot Gris was well-received at the Summit. Medium-bodied with an enticing aroma of berries, hints of melon, and a lasting finish.



**Te Mata Estate 2017 Gamay Noir, Hawke's Bay (\$19)**  
Located in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand's oldest winery packs a punch with its Gamay, another standout of the tasting. Light- to medium-bodied with hints of cherry and raspberry, a dash of pepper, and a touch of meatiness.

**Mt. Beautiful 2016 Riesling, North Canterbury (\$22)** A lovely off-dry white with scents of lemon, hay, and grapefruit; notes of honeysuckle and citrus on the palate.

**No. 1 Family Estate NV Rosé Méthode Traditionelle, Marlborough (\$33)**  
The first Marlborough winery to make wines in the méthode champenoise produces this 100% Pinot Noir, which is dry, fresh, and simply elegant.



# History is More Than an Obligation



**JEAN FRÉDÉRIC  
HUGEL** FOLLOWS  
380 YEARS OF SAFE-  
GUARDED FAMILY  
TRADITION IN ALSACE

by Meridith May

While it's a major life decision to follow in a family business, it's somewhat of an obligation for many whose ancestors have built successful small companies or, perhaps, empires. For Jean Frédéric Hugel, 13th-generation member of Alsace's Famille Hugel, it was what he calls a "progressive decision."

When I recently met with J.F., as he is known, in Los Angeles for lunch, we talked about the force behind his passion for these world-class French wines and the consideration it took to step into his role as their ambassador. "Every single member of the family weighed the pros and cons of continuing in the heritage [and] taking part in the day-to-day life," Hugel noted, admitting that, at age 16, wine was not his number-one interest: "I made some money in the vineyards over one month in the summer, while I played the other month."

In the meantime, another life-giving liquid held his fascination. "My first move was to follow my love of science, where I studied to become a hydrobiologist. I love fishing and water—being next to the ocean is inspiring," he confessed, noting that Alsace, which is bordered by the Rhine, is far from the maritime climate he adores. But working in the Hugel tasting room did eventually reinforce his love for wine, prompting him to pursue his rightful career: "I would talk enthusiastically to the customers about our wine, mindfully hiding my identity; that was my guilty pleasure," he said.



Hugel, who turned 30 in April, is a global traveler who espouses the good reputation of the almost four-century-old family winery while also assisting in an education and sales capacity. “I have learned how important it is to safeguard our traditions in Alsace,” he said. “So many regions are conducting such an enormous amount of research for their indigenous grapes, such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy. For Alsace, we must protect our varieties and our great terroir. After all, it was Hugel that pioneered much of the region’s advancement, including the early creation and classification of Grand Cru vineyards that [have been] the same sites for the last 500 years.”

No thanks to political instability over many centuries, Alsace’s proximity to Germany has sometimes made it unclear to which country the region owes allegiance. “We are the furthest east of the French regions, and we were the shining star of Europe once, dwindled to a relatively unknown

growing region,” Hugel said. “It’s time to come back into the spotlight.”

Thirty to 40 years ago, harvests were typically around mid-October; in 1976, for example, Alsace recorded a harvest of October 7. “This past year, we harvested September 5, and that [has seemed] to become the norm,” Hugel said. But he believes climate change has actually aided in the development of the wines, with recent vintages showing better than ever (along with 2010, which he claimed possesses stunning ripeness, acidity, super-extraction, and aging potential for centuries). “If my great-uncle was alive and could taste our Riesling now, even if it was not a decent vintage, it would taste like the best he ever had,” he added.

During our lunch, Hugel also noted that Famille Hugel doesn’t employ a winemaker. “The true aromatics of the soils, the vintages, and this place of origin determine the character of our wines, not what’s made in the cellar or the arrogance of a winemaker,” he explained. ■■

“We are the furthest east of the French regions, and we were the shining star of Europe once, dwindled to a relatively unknown growing region. It’s time to come back into the spotlight.”

—Jean Frédéric Hugel

## Exploring a Selection of Wines from the Famille Hugel Portfolio:



Jean Frédéric Hugel is a 13th-generation member of Alsace’s Famille Hugel.

**Famille Hugel 2015 Pinot Blanc Cuvée Les Amours, Alsace (\$17)** is a well-structured, delicate, floral-linen white with notes of chamomile and a slight creaminess from being left longer on the lees. It finishes with traces of minerality on the tongue. 50% Auxerrois/50% Pinot Blanc. **91**

**Famille Hugel 2016 Gentil Hugel (\$17)** is the family’s field blend of noble varieties: 7% Riesling, 15% Gewürztraminer, 22% Pinot Gris, and 6% Muscat along with a blend (50%) of the indigenous Pinot Blanc and Sylvaner. Produced from plots of the Hugel estate in the heart of the Grand Cru Schoenenbourg, it’s lightly floral with pretty acidity and notes of salted pear. **90**

**Famille Hugel 2016 Classic Riesling (\$25)** is what Hugel referred to as the “textbook version” of the variety: “This is what Alsace is all about,” he said. Grapes are sourced from four top sites with a mosaic of soil types before the juice is blended to represent the regional style. It shows green apple with notes of beeswax, lime, and salt. **92**

**Famille Hugel 2011 Riesling Grossi Laüe, Grand Vin d’Alsace (\$40)** is fleshy, salty, and savory (its grapes come from a vineyard planted in the 1400s). Aromas and flavors increase with each sip: cashew milk and peach blossom with a ladle of tangerine, a dollop of nougat, and an earthy core from the unique marl soils of the Riquewihr crus. **95**

**Famille Hugel 2016 Classic Pinot Gris (\$25)** has a lilting 13% ABV and a nectar-like mouthfeel that grows rounder and more powerful. It’s an expressive white with flavors of banana and lemon custard in a body of sesame seeds and honeyed white flowers. **92**



# full circle beverage conference



**Full Circle Beverage Conference** is a wine and spirits conference exclusively for 100 top retail and restaurant buyers, wine directors, journalists, and sommeliers. In its fifth year, the program will take place on **September 4 - 6** at the beautiful **Drake Hotel** in **Chicago, IL**. The three-day conference is a wonderful networking opportunity for you to attend educational workshops, lunches and breakout sessions led by an esteemed team of Master Sommeliers which include **Evan Goldstein, Tim Gaiser, Keith Goldston, Peter Granoff, John Szabo, and Madeline Triffon**.

Attendees can expect over **20 master classes, lunches and tastings** featuring leading wines and other beverages from around the world including: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, England, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, United States, and Uruguay. On the second day of the conference on Thursday, September 5th from 3:30 - 8:00PM, a large-scale tasting called **Full Circle Around the World Tasting** will feature a global selection of over 300 wines curated by Master Sommelier Evan Goldstein.

## SCHEDULE AND TICKETING INFORMATION:

### FULL CIRCLE BEVERAGE CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 4-6

Full access conference passes available at  
**FullCircle2019.eventbrite.com**

Use code **SOMM** for 40% off.

*Available for qualified sommeliers, retail buyers,  
restaurant wine directors and wine journalists only*

### FULL CIRCLE AROUND THE WORLD TASTING - THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH

Register for the Trade tasting from 3:30 -  
5:30pm at **FullCircleTasting.eventbrite.com**  
*Complimentary for qualified wine trade and  
media only*

Purchase tickets for the Consumer tasting from 5:30 -  
8:00pm at **AroundTheWorld2019.eventbrite.com**  
Tickets cost \$70 each, use code **TASTE** for 40% off



**#FullCircleBevCon**



## DAY 1 – SEP 4, 2019

PROGRAM STARTS AT 3PM

### SEMINAR 1

Unexpected Gems From Around The World

### SEMINAR 2

VIGNO 2019: Old-vine Cariñena from Chile's Secano

### SEMINAR 3

Whiskey and Whisky: Does Terroir Really Matter?

## DAY 2 – SEP 5, 2019

### SEMINAR 4

Wines of Roussillon: Banyuls and Beyond

### SEMINAR 5

Patricio Tapia's Best of Descorchados 2019

### LUNCHES:

Terroir and Style: A Universe of Pinot Noir

Extreme Chile: Pushing Boundaries

Salt and Grit: Volcanic Wines

### SEMINAR 6

Many Faces of Touriga Nacional from Portugal

### SEMINAR 7

Franc(ly) Speaking: Global Cabernet Francs

### WALKABOUT

Trade & Media Tasting | Consumer Tasting

## DAY 3 – SEP 6, 2019

### SEMINAR 8

Where the Wild Things Are: An Exploration of Native Yeast Fermentation

### SEMINAR 9

Up, Up and Away: Exploring High Altitude, Terroir-specific Argentinian Wines

### SEMINAR 10

France's Hidden Corner: Discover Wines from Southwest France

### LUNCHES:

Right Bank Rules: Saint-Emilion, Pomerol and Fronsac

Explore Portugal at Table

Três, tres, tre, three: Alentejo, Rioja, Tuscany and Washington

### SEMINAR 11

Maturity Counts: Old Vine Chenin Blancs of South Africa

### SEMINAR 12

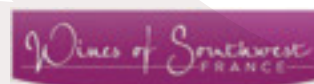
Retrospective Vertical featuring Bodegas Faustino

PROGRAM ENDS 5:30PM ON DAY 3

## PLATINUM SPONSORS



## GOLD SPONSORS



## MEDIA SPONSORS



## SILVER SPONSORS

VIGNO  
Wines of Argentina  
Wines of Chile  
Wines of South Africa

## BRONZE SPONSORS

Saint-Emilion, Pomerol and Fronsac  
Westland Distillery  
Winesellers  
Wines of Alentejo  
Woodinville Wine Country Association

## EXHIBITORS

Alto Adige  
Bodegas Vinícola Real  
Chufly Imports  
DOCa Rioja  
Domaine Bousquet  
Evaton  
Garage Wine Co.  
Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery  
Guarachi Wine Partners  
Petainer  
Ridgeview Wine  
Stoli Group USA  
Trinchero Family Estates  
Vino del Sol  
Wine Australia



BORDEAUX

WITH A UNIQUE MARKETING MODEL,  
**CRUS ET DOMAINES DE FRANCE** PRESENTS AN  
ENTICING PORTFOLIO OF GRAND BORDEAUX  
WINES AT ATTRACTIVE PRICES

Crus

CONTROL

by David Gadd

*"Our job  
doesn't stop  
when bottles  
are sold to our  
customers."*

—MARION LOPEZ,  
*Export Manager USA  
and Canada, Crus et  
Domaines de France*

While Bordeaux is celebrated globally for its wines, its sometimes-impenetrable marketing model can mystify even industry insiders. One experienced French company is making great Bordeaux less complicated for retailers—easier to understand, easier to buy, and easier to sell to eager consumers.

With five generations of experience in Bordeaux dating back to 1873, Crus et Domaines de France (CDF) serves as the Bordeaux arm of Les Grands Chais de France, the country's largest privately owned wine company. As a key stakeholder in this historic and coveted region, CDF markets wines from its 23 properties, which cover 650 hectares (1,600 acres) in leading appellations such as Pomerol, Saint-Émilion, and Margaux. In addition, the firm holds exclusive distribution rights to well over 60 additional partner châteaux, making it a singular source for a wide range of wines from throughout the Bordeaux region.

The company exports to more than 165 countries worldwide, but in the all-important U.S. market, CDF has a distinct advantage thanks to a unique marketing structure that differs significantly from the standard Bordeaux model. "We work with our properties and exclusivities differently from the other crus, which are in the open market," explains Marion Lopez, CDF Export Manager for the U.S. and Canada. "For our châteaux, we control the volume entirely; that's why we can build the distribution as we want."

Adding to its strength in the States, Les Grands Chais de France has its own U.S. import company, Advantage International, based in Doral, Florida. "They have their own portfolio with a selection of our properties and exclusivities, and work with distributors in various states in order to bring our châteaux to the market," Marion says.

Savvy retailers understand that no wine—not even a classified Bordeaux—sells itself. That's where CDF's extensive experience comes into play, helping retailers

**Crus et Domaines de France handles Labastide  
Dauzac, the second wine of Château Dauzac, a  
5ème Cru Classé in Margaux.**





**The chai at Château Bastor Lamontagne in Sauternes.**

build sales and loyalty. “The retailer takes advantage of CDF’s expertise [in terms of] not only in our wide range of products but also our involvement in the market,” Marion says. “Our job doesn’t stop when bottles are sold to our customer. We must visit and train the market with our importer’s team. We also need to promote the châteaux in the market via tastings, wine dinners, and other events.”

Keeping a rein on pricing is also part of CDF’s strategic plan for expanding long-term Bordeaux sales and attracting repeat customers. “Our goal is to have the right price in order that our partners can thrive while establishing our wines in the market in a sustainable way,” Marion explains.

With its broad portfolio, accessible price points, and hands-on attentiveness in building relationships with clients and consumers alike, Crus et Domaines de France provides one-stop shopping for Bordeaux. ■■

*For additional information, visit [cdf-chateaux.com](http://cdf-chateaux.com) or contact Marion Lopez, Export Manager for USA & Canada, at [malopez@crusetdomainesdefrance.com](mailto:malopez@crusetdomainesdefrance.com).*

## A Trio of Coups de Coeur

The French term *coup de coeur* may not have an exact English translation (“heartthrob” is close), but every enophile knows the thrill of discovering a new favorite bottle. Crus et Domaines de France suggests these Bordeaux wines to set the heart racing.

### Labastide Dauzac 2016, Margaux

Labastide is the second wine of Château Dauzac, a 5ème Cru Classé of Margaux. Produced on the same terroir overlooking the Gironde but drawn from younger plots, it has its own personality and character: a supple and pleasant wine that can be enjoyed young but with good potential over time.

An Indian summer in October 2016 resulted in the longest harvest in the history of Dauzac (21 days), with the Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes picked at peak maturity. Rich and precise without being excessive, it shows bright fruit and dense complexity. The high percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon gives it the exceptional balance between acidity and alcohol that indicates a great vintage. *Certified as vegan, it’s available in magnum at Trader Joe’s for \$40.*



### Château de Lamarque 2012, Haut-Médoc

Some Bordeaux châteaux are just houses, but this one is a real castle; the oldest in the Médoc, it dates back to the year 1050 and was built as a defense against Viking invasion (winemaking began there in the 15th century). A member of the prestigious Union des Grands Crus since 1983, Château de Lamarque practices sustainable “integrated” agriculture. The wines are made in classic Bordeaux tradition with modern equipment, including optical sorters.

A blend of 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, and 10% Petit Verdot from 40-year-old vines, this stylish, concentrated Bordeaux shows notes of ripe black fruit and cocoa with a racy finish. The property’s original *château-fort* (“stronghold”) is pictured on the label. *Available at Total Wine & More for \$25.*



### Château Bastor-Lamontagne 2012, Sauternes

Another Union des Grands Crus member, Château Bastor-Lamontagne was acquired in 2018 by the Helfrich family, founders of Les Grands Chais de France. Located in Preignac, one of the five communes of the Sauternes appellation, Château Bastor-Lamontagne produces rich, vigorous wines from its 52 hectares (128 acres) of vineyards on siliceous-gravel soil.

Often considered a “modern Sauternes,” it exudes an elegant harmoniousness that makes it enjoyable as a dessert wine or as a “meditation wine” at any time of day. Although, like most Sauternes, it can age for decades, Bastor-Lamontagne is temptingly delicious young thanks to its vivaciousness and finesse. *Available at wine.com for \$29 (750 mL) and \$16 (375 mL).*





GOING KOSHER

# REVIEWING HIGH-SCORING KOSHER WINES

BY ANTHONY DIAS BLUE





## IT USED TO BE

that if you were looking for a kosher beverage, you were relegated to certain soft drinks or that syrupy sweet wine in the square bottle. No more! Thanks to the leadership of the remarkable Herzog family, proprietors of Royal Wine Corporation, there are now numerous kosher wines on the market that are surprisingly delicious—some made by the Herzogs, many imported by the family through Royal Wine, and a few produced and imported by others.

Over the past few months, I have tasted nearly 80 kosher wines, most of which stood tall in comparison to premium non-kosher expressions. Here are my select notes.

**88 Alfasi 2018 Pinot Noir Reserva, Valle Central, Chile (\$12)** Clean, silky, and juicy with bright cherry and hints of herbs; crisp and long.

**88 Alfasi 2017 Carménère Reserva, Valle Central, Chile (\$12)** Clean, smooth, and spicy with an herbal component; juicy, bright, and long.

**92 Baronne Nadine de Rothschild 2014 Chateau Malmaison Moulis-en-Médoc, France (\$35)** Medium ruby color; spicy, dusty, and smooth with notes of plum and earth; balanced and long.



**92 Barons Edmond Benjamin de Rothschild 2015 Haut-Médoc, France (\$35)** Bright ruby color; juicy, toasty, and medium in weight. A classic, fine Bordeaux from the Rothschilds.

**91 Bartenura Moscato, Italy (\$22)** Pale pink color; at once fresh and spicy, sweet and tangy, smooth and balanced. A lovely Moscato.

**87 Binyamina 2011 Reserve Shiraz, Galilee, Israel (\$25)** Smooth and lush; earthy, spicy, and bright.



**91** Capçanes 2014 Carignan La Flor del Flor de Primavera, Montsant, Spain (\$70) Deep ruby color. Smooth, bright, and juicy; lush and aromatic; deep and rich; long and balanced.



**91** Capçanes 2016 Peraj Petita, Montsant, Spain (\$22) Smooth and ripe with dense, rich black raspberry; spicy, earthy, and long.

**90** Carmel Winery 2013 Admon Vineyard Malbec, Galilee, Israel (\$37) Dark ruby color. Fresh, ripe, and juicy with blackberry; smooth, dense, and rich; balanced and long.

**92** Chateau Haut Condissas 2013 Médoc AOC, France (\$66) Medium ruby color with a smooth nose of earth and spice. Lush, tangy, and elegant with a silky texture and toasty oak; balanced and long.

**92** Château Lascombes 2015 Margaux AOC, France (\$125) Smooth, clean, and nicely structured; lush yet elegant. Give it time. 55% Merlot/45% Cab.

**90** Chateau Remo Winery 2014 Hosen Blend, Galilee, Israel (\$30) Smooth and juicy with spice, herbal notes, and a silky texture; an impressive effort.



**90** Chateau Roubine 2017 Cru Classé Premium Côtes de Provence Rosé, France (\$23) Pale pink color; smooth, soft, and lush with a dry, tangy, juicy style. Fresh and long.

**92** Château Royaumont 2016 Lalande de Pomerol, France (\$45) Deep ruby color; smooth, ripe, and juicy with lush, tangy, and crisp plum and notes of earth. A solid Bordeaux.

**91** Chateau Tour Seran 2014 Médoc AOC, France (\$60) Medium ruby color; smooth and juicy with light plum and berry notes. Tangy, elegant, fresh, and long.

**86** Château Trijet 2017 Bordeaux AOP, France (\$12) A crisp, fresh, and juicy wine with good structure and lively acidity. Fairly basic, but at this price, it's to be expected.



**92** Covenant Wines 2016 Syrah, Israel (\$75) Dark ruby color; smooth, creamy, and ripe. Tangy and long with spice and pepper; rich, balanced, and deep. A stunning wine by Jeff Morgan.

**92** Covenant Wines 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$100) Opaque ruby color; rich fruit nose; smooth and luscious with ripe berries and soft spice. Tangy and long with good balance and a deep finish.

**92** Des Domaines Edmund de Rothschild 2015 Les Lauriers Montagne Saint-Émilion, France (\$22) Smooth vanilla and floral nose; juicy and rich with soft plum and fine balance.



**87** Domaine du Castel 2016 La Vie, Jerusalem, Israel (\$25) Smooth, tangy, earthy, and balanced.

**86** Domaine du Val Brun 2011 Saumur Champigny Bay Rouge, France (\$25) Earthy nose; silky-smooth and juicy; tangy, long, and balanced.

**91** Domaine Pradelle 2015 Syrah, Crozes-Hermitage, France (\$29) Deep and dark; smooth and rich with dense blackberry and a hint of earthiness; juicy and long.

**92** Elvi Wines 2012 Herenza Crianza Tempranillo, Los Majuelos Vineyard, Rioja DOC, Spain (\$30) Bright and crisp with smooth, tangy style. A lovely, balanced showcase for Tempranillo.

**90** Elvi Wines 2012 Herenza Tempranillo, Rioja DOC (\$27) Bright, crisp, and juicy with fresh, racy acidity and red berries; long and balanced.

**90** Flam Winery 2016 Reserve Syrah, Galilee, Israel (\$45) Deep ruby color; smooth, juicy, and rich with blackberry and spice; tangy, lush, dense, and stylish.



**91** Flam Winery 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, Galilee, Israel (\$55) Smooth, earthy, rich, and juicy with a lush texture as well as balance and finesse. Fresh plum and berries. Long and stylish with good depth.

**92** Flechas de Los Andes 2013 Gran Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$25) Dark ruby color; lush and smooth with lavish black fruit and a rich, intense style; spicy, balanced, and long.

**92** Flechas de Los Andes 2015 Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$25) Smooth, fresh, and spicy with notes of vanilla and bright plum; juicy, generous, long, and balanced.

**90** Gush Etzion Winery 2016 Long Oak Tree Sauvignon Blanc, Judean Hills, Israel (\$23) Smooth, clean, and rich with mineral and citrus; balanced, long, and classic.

**91** Herzog Wine Cellars 2016 Late Harvest White Riesling, Monterey County (\$25) Golden color; clean, sweet, and tangy. Juicy, fresh, and smooth with a nice tension between acid and sweet.



**90** Jezreel Valley Winery 2016 Rosé, Galilee, Israel (\$20) An eclectic blend with a bright pink color; dry, crisp, and tangy; juicy, fresh, and long.



**84** Kedem Estates 2012 Cabernet Franc 18 Months Barrel Aged, Finger Lakes (\$13) Soft, floral nose; smooth, clean, and simple; light and tangy.

**90** Koenig Brut Crémant d'Alsace, France (\$22) Bright golden color; fresh and juicy with a smooth mousse and a tangy, dry style; crisp, lively, balanced, and long.

**91** Matar Winery 2016 Matar by Pelter Stratus, Galilee, Israel (\$35) A deep and smooth Shiraz-based wine with rich blackberry and spice; tangy and lush with a silky texture and a long, balanced finish.



**92** Nativ Winery 2016 Matan, Judean Hills, Israel (\$40) Deep ruby color; smooth and velvety with rich blackberry and a hint of herbs; lush yet balanced and long.

**90** Or Haganuz Winery 2016 Amuka Single Vineyard Gewürztraminer, Galilee, Israel (\$21) Silky and smooth; juicy, spicy, and graceful; rich and mellow.

**91** Or Haganuz Winery 2016 Marom Vineyard Nitai Plot Merlot, Galilee, Israel (\$30) Dark ruby color; lush, spicy, smooth, and dry with balance and heft; juicy, fresh, and long.

**90** Pacifica 2016 Evan's Collection Pinot Noir, Oregon (\$23) Bright with fresh cherry and spice; tangy and lush with an earthy and savory style; balanced and long.

**90** Pacifica 2015 Evan's Collection Rosé, Columbia Gorge (\$22) Deep pink color; smooth, off-dry, and juicy with a good core of tangy acidity; lush, dense, and balanced.



**90** Psâgot 2013 M Series Cabernet Sauvignon, Jerusalem, Israel (\$70) Earth and petrol nose; rich, dense, and smooth with juicy plum; balanced and lush.

**92** Psâgot 2014 Peak, Jerusalem, Israel (\$55) Smooth, lush, and spicy with dense, ripe fruit and fine balance. Another stellar effort from the new wave of Israeli winemaking.

**92** Porto Cordovero 2005 Late Bottled Vintage Port, Portugal (\$45) Smooth and rich with juicy, ripe berry notes; dense, tangy, and sweet; bright and long.



**88** Ramon Cordova 2017 Albariño, Rías Baixas DO, Spain (\$22) Fresh, light, and juicy with tangy citrus acidity; minerally, silky, and long.

**84** Shiloh 2017 Chardonnay, Judean Hills, Israel (\$28) Smooth, rich, clean, and balanced; dense but needs acidity.

**92** Shiloh 2016 Secret Reserve Malbec, Judean Hills, Israel (\$35) Fresh berry nose; juicy and bright with black raspberry and boysenberry; clean, fresh, and long.

**91** Tabor Winery 2014 Malkiya Cabernet Sauvignon, Galilee, Israel (\$60) Smooth, juicy, and dry with balance and depth; clean and long.

**91** Tabor Winery 2012 Limited Edition, Kfar-Tabor, Israel (\$40) Smooth, lush, balanced, and rich; toasty, deep, and generous; a lovely Bordeaux blend.

**91** Teperberg 2016 Inspire, Negev, Israel (\$25) Dark and smooth with depth and juicy, clean blackberry and plum flavors; rich yet balanced and complex.

**91** Terra di Seta 2013 Chianti Classico Assai Gran Selezione, Italy (\$50) Deep ruby color; smooth and juicy with tangy red fruit and hints of violet; fresh, balanced, and long.

**91** Tío Pepe Extra Dry Palomino Fino, Jerez, Spain (\$27) Golden color; rancio nose; smooth, dry, and crisp with toasty barrel notes. It's perfect served chilled with tapas.



**91** Tzafona Cellars 2016 Icewine Cabernet Sauvignon, Niagara Peninsula (\$80) Silky and smooth with a lush, creamy texture; rich and very sweet; deep, long, and intense.

**88** UVA 2013 Montepulciano Limited Edition, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOP, Italy (\$30) Dense, earthy, and rich with meaty, intense flavors; long and balanced.

**91** Vitkin Winery 2016 Collector's Edition Grenache Blanc, Galilee, Israel (\$45) Smooth, aromatic, and juicy; lush and rich yet tangy and bright; fresh and long.

**90** Vitkin Winery 2016 Cabernet Franc, Galilee, Israel (\$40) Dark ruby color; silky and earthy with herbal notes; deep, elegant, and long.

**92** Vitkin Winery 2016 Old Vines Carignan, Sharon, Israel (\$45) Deep ruby color; spicy and earthy nose; smooth and ripe with tangy fruit and clean, balanced flavors; deep, fresh, and long.

**90** Zion Winery 2013 Fortissimo Dessert Wine, Jerusalem, Israel (\$110) Smooth with some volatility on the nose; lush, sweet, ripe, and juicy; mature and long. ■■





# SPIRITS *from the* HEART

TEQUILAS AND MEZCALS TO SAVOR NOW

Move over, barley, rye, and corn: Agave's gaining on you, and fast. According to Nasdaq data, U.S. sales of tequila by volume grew by 121 percent between 2012 and 2018, led by the rise of the super-premium sector—which the Distilled Spirits Council estimates to have grown in the same time period by a whopping 706 percent—to outpace that of the drinks market as a whole. And while mezcal currently represents a much smaller piece of the pie, it's primed for rapid expansion as well, if reports that exports to the U.S. have quadrupled since 2013 are any indication.

But if agave spirits are big business these days, their success is ironically grounded in small-scale enterprise—namely the painstaking handiwork of farmers and craft distillers in Jalisco, Oaxaca, and a smattering of other designated production zones in Mexico. Quenching the American thirst for authenticity with their traditionally, and often sustainably, made spirits, these agave artisans have helped make the U.S. the number-one importer of both tequila and mezcal: As a matter of fact, we're the world's leading consumer of tequila, ahead of Mexico itself.

Whether you seek a cocktail-ready flavored expression or the smoothest of sipping spirits, the brands highlighted in this report offer a wealth of options, all fermented and distilled from the core of the agave plant—that is, from the heart. —*Ruth Tobias*

## *Historic Hacienda:* TEQUILA CORRALEJO



PHOTO COURTESY OF TEQUILA CORRALEJO

Tequila Corralejo is one of the few tequila distilleries to operate outside the main production region of Jalisco, Mexico. Located in Pénjamo, Guanajuato, the Hacienda Corralejo “exemplifies Central Mexico’s richness in culture, history, and heritage,” says Director Ray Ramos: Dating back to the 1700s, it was the birthplace of Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, known as the “Father of Mexican Independence,” and in 1755, it became one of the first estates in Mexico to produce tequila as a commercial venture. In 1994, Don Leonardo Rodriguez Moreno took ownership of the Hacienda and continues to run it today.

In addition to growing its own agave on the property, Corralejo operates the glass factory where its bottles are made. Its production sets it apart as well: “We are the only distillery to use Charentais distillation for tequila,” says Ramos, referring to the 400-year-old process commonly associated with Cognac that occurs after the agave cooks in adobe ovens for 36 hours and ferments.

The result includes three core expressions, all made with 100% Blue Weber agave. Corralejo Silver, bottled unaged, yields fresh scents of peppercorn and mint, which mingle on the sweet-agave palate before a light, crisp finish. Corralejo Reposado—which is aged for four months in casks made from French, American, and Encino oak—offers up notes of wood, honey, warm spices such as vanilla, and a touch of citrus. And the Corralejo Añejo, a full-bodied tequila aged for 12 months in American oak barrels, delivers ample oak, vanilla, and spice along with hints of caramel and cocoa. —*Abby Read*



# #ReignSupreme with EL REY TEQUILA

Produced in the Valle Region of Jalisco, Mexico, at the legendary Cascahuín distillery, El Rey Tequila represents every agave connoisseur's desire for a well-made and natural spirit. While the California brand—which plans to expand to neighboring states in the near future—relaunched with a new look two years ago, its quality remains as excellent as ever. In addition to the Blanco, which won a Gold Medal at the 2017 San Francisco World Spirits Competition, El Rey crafts award-winning Reposado, Añejo, and three tequilas made with 100% natural flavoring: Silver Strawberry, Silver Hibiscus, and Silver Pineapple Coconut.

They're all made with 100% Blue Weber agave



grown in rich volcanic soil, which aids in imparting smoothness and spice in the finished expressions. Most of the plants are hand-harvested with a *coa*, a traditional tool that removes the leaves and exposes the *piña*, or heart, of the agave—although the sustainability-oriented distillery leaves 2 percent of its agave alone to bloom and attract pollinators, which provides sustenance for wildlife and also helps the plant develop natural defenses.

The *piña* is split and steam-cooked for 72 hours in a *horno de mampostería*, or traditional masonry oven; the juice is then fermented for 48 hours and distilled twice. Unlike many expressions in its category, the Blanco rests for three months in stainless-steel vats to add complexity before bottling; the Reposado, meanwhile, is aged for six months and the Añejo for 14 months in hard-toasted or burnt American oak barrels. The design of the bottles is as well thought-out as the liquid inside, with a crown-shaped glass cap—an allusion to the brand name, which translates as “the King”—that can be used as a shot glass.

—Jesse Hom-Dawson



El Rey's bottle caps double as shot glasses.

## El Rey Silver Tequila (\$34)

Citrus-fresh and potent lime and agave aromas pave the way for vibrant flavors of strawberry, grapefruit zest, and salted earth.

**95** —*Meridith May*

**El Rey Reposado Tequila (\$35)** A subdued perfume of butterscotch and chamomile leads to a palate that's soft and delicate. Piquant notes of agave and garden herbs are layered, with salted citrus bridging the gap for a mineral quality on the finish. **93** —*M.M.*

## El Rey Añejo Tequila (\$37)

Scents of pears, apricots, and cashews are graceful. This is an elegant aged expression, with candied pineapple seducing more savory notes of cigar leaf and peppered cocoa. It's dizzyingly sensuous. **95** —*M.M.*

## El Rey Silver Hibiscus (\$38)

Heady notes of sweet flowers are redolent of spring. The lovely pink- and purple-petaled flavors are pleasantly aromatic and authentic, with no cloying sweetness. Side notes of blueberry and vanilla round them out on the finish. **93** —*M.M.*

## El Rey Silver Pineapple Coconut (\$38)

Soft notes of coconut are accented by jasmine with an echo of ripe pineapple. The down-pillow buoyancy on the palate further enhances the mellow-flavored tequila. **93** —*M.M.*

## El Rey Silver Strawberry (\$38)

Aromas of candied strawberry, a hint of mint, and a dollop of coconut are pleasant for red-fruit fans. The mouthfeel is sumptuous and enticing. Vanilla and mint linger on the finish. **92** —*M.M.*



# *The Culture Club of* **CLASE AZUL**



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

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

Despite Clase Azul's rapid growth

over the past two decades, Lomeli insists on handmade craftsmanship and small-batch production over mega-factories and cheap glass. His employees come first, as evidenced by the company's forthcoming "Great Place to Work" certification. Fundación con Causa Azul is the company's charitable arm, a philanthropic project dedicated to the preservation of Mexican artisan culture and its traditional techniques.

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

In addition to its noteworthy tequilas, Clase Azul also produces Mezcal Clase Azul. Made from Cenizo agave grown

in the state of Durango, the mezcal draws its complexity from the region's extreme climate and rich soil.

Another member of the brand's portfolio is La Pinta, a blend of Clase Azul Plata tequila and bright, crisp pomegranate. This ultra-premium liqueur, inspired by a traditional pomegranate punch made in Nahuatl, defies categorization while paying homage to its Mexican roots and inherited Spanish tradition. The liqueur perfectly balances tart and sweet, and can be enjoyed neat or as the base of any number of cocktails.

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





## SOMBRA MEZCAL:

### *Rooted in History, Anchored in Community*

Twenty-six of Mexico's 32 states have a history of mezcal production, but Oaxaca, with its varied terrain and diversity of agave varieties, has become the epicenter of the mezcal movement.

It's here that Sombra is produced in the same way that mezcal has been made in Mexico for several hundred years. The painstaking process requires much time, effort, and age-old expertise: Organically farmed, mountain-grown agave is hand-harvested, stone tahona-ground, roasted in pits, wild yeast-fermented, and copper pot-distilled. The resulting spirit is 90 proof, which is a rarity in the world of mezcal—but it's a deviation that provides greater flavor and texture.

For all the care it puts into creating the finished product, Sombra is also about making a difference beyond the bottle. The distillery team is constantly looking for ways to improve the traditional methods of production in order to generate less waste and use Oaxaca's resources responsibly, keeping their mezcal clean and modern without sacrificing artisanal craft. To that end, they're committed to such environmentally friendly practices as sustainable forestry, water conservation, composting, solar energy, and upcycling. The Sombra Adobe Brick Project, which uses leftover agave fibers to create building materials, has been a major undertaking for the team. To date, they've built more than 20 houses for earthquake victims with their upcycled bricks.

Sombra honors the Oaxacan traditions and ideals of *te divierte* ("have fun"), *sigue aprendiendo* ("keep learning"), and *ama la tierra* ("love the earth") while taking a more contemporary approach to local and environmental responsibility. In addition to finding ways to give back to the land, Sombra has partnered with 1% For the Planet, donating 1 percent of sales to charities and educational initiatives in the community.



## *A Taste of Terroir:* **ASTRAL TEQUILA**

It's no wonder Astral has won Double Gold at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition: Traditionally produced and meticulously crafted, this artisanal blanco tequila is a special expression of a heritage spirit that's perfect for drinkers in search of authenticity.

After maturation, the single-estate organic agaves harvested for Astral in the mountains of Jalisco are slow-roasted in traditional *hornos*, or stone ovens. The juice then undergoes native-yeast fermentation, which takes eight times longer than conventional fermentation. Moreover, the *bagazos*—the solid pulp from the crushed roasted agaves—is retained during the process to capture maximum agave character.

Along with the forwardness of the agave, which fills the mouth with a rich floral spice, Astral has a certain salinity that evokes both the rugged and refined personality of Mexico. It can be served neat or used in any number of tequila-centric cocktails while reflecting its terroir in every sip.

### **The Most Interesting Margarita™**

- 1½ oz. Astral Tequila
- ¾ oz. fresh lime juice
- ½ oz. orange liqueur
- ½ oz. agave nectar

Shake and serve over ice.



# ESPÒLON: *Tequila, Art, and Folk Tales*

Decades ago, Master Distiller Cirilo Oropeza set out to make exceptional tequila that everyone could enjoy, studying the science behind the spirit while applying a hands-on approach to its production. After years of research, his efforts came to fruition in 1998 with the inception of Espòlon Tequila.

Espòlon is made from 100% Blue Weber agave that's cooked for twice as long as the industry standard. It's then double-distilled in both a column and pot still to yield four expressions. The Blanco has a soft mouthfeel and a bright agave flavor with a note of charred pineapple, while the Reposado and Añejo, according to Senior Category Director of White Spirits Bernadette Knight, "are aged in smaller 200-liter oak barrels, giving [them] more complexity." The Reposado rests for three to five months and the Añejo for 12 months, the latter making for a copper-hued sipping tequila with hints of caramel, dried fruit, and dark chocolate. Espòlon also makes a limited-edition Añejo X, which matures for six years in American oak.

But the story doesn't stop with the spirit, says Knight: "Espòlon has a powerful combination—striking package, high-quality liquid that is incredibly popular with bartenders, and an approachable price point." While the brand logo alludes to the potent symbolism of the rooster in Mexican folklore, the bottles bear illustrations that honor one of Mexico's great artists. As Knight explains, "The unique label artwork pays tribute to 19th-century artist and printmaker José Guadalupe Posada, who made rebellious yet witty commentary on the social injustices of his time through his art." The images denote everything from the Mexican Revolution to fellowship in the marketplace to a protest dance—which Espòlon will provide plenty of courage for reenacting. With its delicious liquid, brilliant bottle design, and fair price point, it's easy to see why Espòlon is one of the fastest-growing premium tequila brands in the United States. —Eric Marsh



## **Espòlon Añejo Tequila**

**(\$35)** is finished in Wild Turkey bourbon barrels and is marked by scents of sweet toffee, lemon chiffon, and candied pineapple. Spiced celery root, grapefruit zest, chamomile, and mature agave notes come through on first sip, layered with a minerality that tastes salty on the palate. Lemon blossom keeps the perfume steady on the tongue for an exquisite finish. **95** —M.M.





*Making a Mark:*

# TATTOO TEQUILA

An expressive and artistically driven brand, Tattoo Tequila might be recognized for its partnership with Red Rock Harley-Davidson & Count's Kustoms in Las Vegas—and the \$50,000 blood-orange Margarita that comes with the purchase of a customized motorcycle—but it's much more than a luxe rocker brand.

For Tattoo Tequila CEO John Atanasio (also known as Tequila John), everything starts with the USDA-certified organic Blue Weber agave he sources from the lowland region of Jalisco. As Atanasio told *The Tasting Panel*, “Organic [production] is a viable and very different type of approach to making tequila, and it starts with the farming experience.”

The brand works with sustainable farmers on award-winning agave plantations and sources organic Belgium wine yeast for the fermentation process. The distillery itself is also dear to Atanasio's heart: “Some of the most fun I have had has been tasting through productions with my distiller-partner Ruben Rodriguez,” he says.

When Tattoo Tequila formally launched in 2011, Atanasio wanted “to create a new class and category of tequila—a super-premium level.” And while the brand is not the first organic tequila on the market, it is the first to be given subcategory classification for organic expressions (i.e. “Organic Añejo”). Atanasio and his team continue to push the envelope on how tequila is made—they're currently experimenting with aging in Cognac barrels—but he says they refer to themselves as “more artisan than craft” in their approach.

Tattoo Tequila has now been picked up by several retail and on-premise outlets, including Total Wines, Whole Foods, Costco, BevMo!, Kroger, Kudo Lounge Canal's, Buy- Rite, Lee's, The Cabo Wabo Cantina, Rat's, The Cabin, the Bloody Nose Saloon, the Full Throttle Saloon, Roy's, and The Gazebo. Its newest expression, the aforementioned Organic Añejo (which is barrel-aged for 30 months) recently made its debut in select locations across the East Coast.

As success continues to follow Tattoo Tequila, Atanasio feels empowered to pursue philanthropic initiatives and contribute to organizations like St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. “It is our hope and vision to be at the forefront of artisan tequila making while being a part of the wonderful traditions that have come before us,” he says. —*Abby Read*



PHOTO COURTESY OF TATTOO TEQUILA

**Tattoo Tequila Organic Añejo (\$50)** A white-wine appearance with golden highlights. The aromas are nuanced, with yeast, white peach, and toasted hazelnut. Understated flavors of banana, orange zest, and toasted oak are striking in their soft entry. This is an elegantly aged tequila with grace and finesse. **93**  
—*M.M.*





# A Gift of Agave

## 3 BADGE MIXOLOGY SHOWS OFF THE BEST OF MEXICO WITH **BOZAL MEZCAL** AND **PASOTE TEQUILA** BY EMILY COLEMAN

When sommeliers speak about wine, they often allude to the food it complements. With its background in the wine industry, it's no wonder that 3 Badge Mixology takes a similar approach to its spirit selections by focusing on premium expressions that work well with food. "Like wine, mezcal also has a food pitch," notes August Sebastiani, President of 3 Badge Beverage Corporation. "You can pair it with lighter, fresh dishes, or you can pair it with dessert."

As a relatively nascent craft spirit category, mezcal has a stigma to shed among consumers who might think of its taste as overpowering, and 3 Badge Mixology hopes to elevate it in their minds with its lineup of Bozal Mezcal. The entry-level tier features one offering, Ensemble, which blends together three types of agave—Espadín, Barril, and Mexicano—into a light but complex sipping mezcal. A popular choice for guests new to the category as well as those well-versed in the ways of mezcal, this expression saw a 60 percent increase in shipments in 2018 alone.

The Single Maguey tier of varietal-specific mezcals packaged in blue bottles is the one Sebastiani has found to resonate most with bartenders. Each of these spirits highlights the purest form of the Cuishe, Tobasiche, and Tepezate plants; both members of the Karwinskii family of agave, Cuishe and Tobasiche feature strong mineral notes, while Tepezate, a subspecies of the Marmorata family, has floral and white-zest layers.



As for the Sacrificio tier, Sebastiani sees it as "one of the most exciting categories in adult spirits." These mezcals honor the cultural practice of including animal products in the distillate: Take the Pechuga, whose soft smokiness derives from the chicken protein introduced during the distillation process, or the Borrego, which is distilled with a leg of lamb suspended in a basket over the bottom of the still. Sebastiani says he enjoys the latter with carnitas tacos, as "the flavors of [the] smoked lamb cut the fat of the taco beautifully."

3 Badge Mixology also produces a tier of limited-release mezcals in black bottles. While the agave species and production methods used vary, each involves distillation in traditional clay pots. Smaller than the more common forms of pot stills, they impart a soft yet distinct mouthfeel to the spirits.

Sebastiani admits that the 3 Badge team initially hesitated to enter the crowded tequila category, but upon finding an offering they were excited about, they decided they couldn't pass up the opportunity. Pasote Tequila follows the same dedication to craftsmanship as Bozal: The Blanco, Reposado, and Añejo are all made with estate-grown blue agave, crushed using a mechanical tahona and fermented with a strain of wild yeast that's been passed down through generations. The Reposado and Añejo age in American oak barrels for six and 18 months, respectively.

Having outpaced the sales growth of the rapidly expanding tequila industry, Pasote plans to expand its portfolio with an Extra Añejo later this year.



**Bozal and Pasote feature in a number of cocktails at Pignic Pub & Patio in Reno, NV.**

PHOTO: MARCELLO ROSTAGNI



**Bozal Mezcal Tepeztate Single Maguey (\$80)** offers up aromas of salted bread, grapefruit peel, and wet stone. The smokiness on the front of the palate melts and morphs into white floral blossom with dusky orange and meringue. Spicy on the finish, the 90-proof Tepeztate is made a subspecies of the Marmorata agave grown on steep, rocky cliffs. **97** —*M.M.*

**Bozal Mezcal Chino Verde Reserva (\$129)** is made with a rare type of agave from the Sierra Madre del Sur Mountains; the plant is known to be difficult to harvest due to its unusual single-stalk structure. Unique aromas range from new-car leather, tar, and persimmon to spring flowers. The subdued smoke wafts away on the palate, leaving a clean array of flavors that are disparate but complex: chili powder, dried herbs, and lime zest. 96.8 proof. **96** —*M.M.*

**Bozal Mezcal Tobalá Reserva (\$129)** is a joven 92.4-proof spirit made from a subspecies of the Potatorium family of agave. This single-maguey mezcal offers feminine, perfumed notes of raspberry, apricot, and marshmallow. It's sweet on the palate, with a creamy texture outlined by pomegranate, ripe pineapple, and clay. **97** —*M.M.*

### El Tigre

- ▮ 1 oz. Pasote Blanco
- ▮ 1 oz. Bozal Ensamble
- ▮ ¼ oz. Cappelletti Vino Aperitivo
- ▮ ½ oz. fresh lime juice
- ▮ ¼ oz. passion-fruit syrup
- ▮ 1 oz. WTRMLN WTR

Add all ingredients to a large shaker tin, then add ice, cap with small tin side, and shake for seven to eight seconds. Uncap and strain with a Hawthorne strainer over ice. Serve over 1.25-inch cubes in a Double Old Fashioned glass rimmed with Tajín and sesame seeds.

### Escape (Do You Like Pina Coladas?)

- ▮ 2 oz. Pasote Reposado
- ▮ ½ oz. Don Q Coco
- ▮ ¼ oz. Giffard Caribbean Pineapple Liqueur
- ▮ 5 drops Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters
- ▮ 2 drops Angostura bitters

Add tequila, rum, and liqueur to a mixing glass, then add bitters and ice. Stir for about 25 revolutions with a mixing spoon and strain with a Hawthorne strainer into a Double Old Fashioned glass over a large cube. Garnish with a slice of dehydrated pineapple.

## The Biggest Little City in the World

In Reno, Nevada, Trevor Leppek oversees the beverage programs at several prominent accounts: Pignic Pub & Patio and two locations of the Noble Pie Parlor. Making East Coast-style pizza with West Coast flavors, Noble Pie focuses on using the best ingredients it can find—in its cocktails no less



PHOTO: MARCELLO ROSTAGNI

**Trevor Leppek oversees the beverage programs at Noble Pie Parlor and Pignic Pub & Patio in Reno, NV.**

than its pies. The drink list features classics with Italian flair and unexpected twists, such as a White Negroni that derives its smokiness from Bozal Ensamble. "People are really receptive to Ensamble," Leppek explains, "so I like to add it to cocktails with other base spirits to draw people into the category, allowing the flavors to come through without overpowering the drink."

At Pignic Pub & Patio, Leppek focuses on creating fun, whimsical cocktails such as the El Tigre and the Escape (see recipes below). "Every quarter,

we have staff pull a spirits category out of a hat," he explains, "and they have to develop a [corresponding] cocktail that will go on the menu." The program has generated drinks such as The Gold Fashioned—which combines Bozal Ensamble with pineapple rum, amaro, Madagascar vanilla liqueur, smoked-orange and tiki bitters, and dehydrated pineapple—and the Thunder Island, created by Kris Sorenson with Pasote Reposado, spiced-pear liqueur, coriander and agave syrups, lemon and lime juice, egg white, and cilantro.

A cocktail featuring both Bozal and Pasote will make its way onto the spring drink menu. "Pasote is a big seller for us," Leppek says. "We like to support smaller brands that are made well. We sometimes go through two cases a week; it's an easy sell once people try it."

**Pignic Pub & Patio's Escape cocktail is made with Pasote Reposado, coconut rum, and pineapple liqueur.**



PHOTO: MARCELLO ROSTAGNI



## Sweet Heat from Mexico: AGAVE LOCO



On a quest to find the most distinctive tequila in Mexico, Agave Loco founder Tom Maas traveled through Arandas, near Guadalajara, where he discovered that locals had their own way of preserving chile peppers—they steeped them in tequila.

What was of particular interest to Maas was the liquid left over once the peppers were removed. It was too fiery to consume on its own, but when cut with straight tequila, it retained its kick without incinerating the taste buds. Intrigued, Maas decided to develop his own recipe, and the end result is Agave Loco.

Made in the Jalisco town of Santiago de Tequila, Agave Loco is infused with six types of chiles and aged six to eight months in bourbon barrels to give consumers what Maas calls “the opportunity to taste fresh pepper flavor, without bitterness, in a spicy, 100%-agave tequila base.” Smooth and balanced, the spirit provides a dynamic experience on the palate: subtly sweet at first before bursting into richly tempered flavors of habaneros and serranos with a peppery finish.

It works well as a bartender’s companion, too—that is, if that bartender gets frequent requests for “something spicy.” Agave Loco heightens any variation of a Margarita, and its sweet heat enhances a Bloody Mary so well that the brand trademarked its own recipe: the Agave Maria™. —Eric Marsh

### Agave Maria™

- ▀ 1 part Agave Loco
- ▀ 4 parts Bloody Mary mix

Combine ingredients and pour over ice. Garnish with a pickle and a jalapeño and enjoy!



The Agave Maria, made with Agave Loco.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AGAVE LOCO

## The Spirit of Giving Back: MEZCAL AMARÁS



Spirits producers, especially those who produce mezcal, often talk about giving back, but Mezcal Amarás does more than talk about it. At the heart of its business philosophy is responsible, sustainable, and community-minded production.

Not only does the Amarás team plant ten agaves for each one that they harvest, they spend a whopping 15 percent of the company’s net profit on a range of sustainability and community projects in Mexico, particularly the production regions of Oaxaca and Guerrero—from the composting and repurposing of used agave fibers to microloan and fair-trade programs for the *maestros mezcaleros* they work with.

Amarás also honors the land by showcasing its terroir. At the core of the company portfolio are two expressions that ferment naturally in the open air. With floral aromas that lead to flavors of wood and mango before a spice-touched finish, Amarás Espadín is created by a cooperative called Laajsh Doob, meaning “Land of Agave” in Zapotec. Amarás Cupreata is made from the wild and rare Cupreata agave to yield nuanced notes of leather, cocoa, and toasted pumpkin seed along with a hint of wet earth.

In addition, there’s Mezcal Verde Momento, which uses a blend of three types of wood—ocote pine, Holm oak, and pepper tree—in the agave-roasting process to lend a beautifully distinctive flavor profile with the perfect touch of smoke. Created for use in cocktails, it’s bottled with labels bearing artwork from emerging Mexican artists.





### Dulce Vida Organic Blanco Tequila (\$30)

The perfume exuding from Dulce Vida Blanco Tequila is mesmerizing. Salted pears, toffee, and fresh lime are well-defined. On the palate, the liquid flows like cool lava, generously spreading to reveal a minerality between the layers of stone fruit, blueberry, and peppered tobacco leaf. **96** —M.M.



## *The Right Tequila at the Right Time:* **DULCE VIDA**

In keeping with its name—which translates as “the sweet life”—Dulce Vida aims to make tequila drinking easy, breezy, and fun again.

The brand launched in 2009 with all-organic 100-proof blanco, reposado, and añejo expressions that caught the eye of Milestone Brands founder Eric Dopkins, who, with his partner Chad Auler, acquired Dulce Vida in 2016 and has since launched 80-proof versions of all three. “Now,” he says, “we’re one of the fastest-growing tequila brands in the country,” currently available in about 25 states and quickly “heading to 30.”

Leading the charge for growth is the 80-proof Blanco, a citrusy, lightly spicy-sweet, super-premium tequila made in the Mexican highlands of Los Altos. But it’s not alone: Three flavored versions—Lime, Grapefruit, and Pineapple Jalapeño—are hot on its heels. That comes as no surprise to Dopkins, who saw the potential for infusing spirits with real fruit while serving as the CEO of Deep Eddy Vodka.

Reprising his success at Dulce Vida was an obvious move for two key reasons. On the one hand, he says, “There’s a trend toward a healthier lifestyle”—and on the other, “Our goal was to simplify tequila cocktails.” Using flavored expressions in drinks addresses both issues at once, allowing bartenders both on-premise and at home to make cocktails more quickly with fewer ingredients, including less sugar: easy, breezy, fun.

Take the Lime tequila, which “mimics a skinny Margarita, with just a little bit of salt on the finish,” Dopkins explains. Or the Grapefruit, which he likens to “a skinny Paloma—all you need is a squeeze of lime and carbonation.” Either way, “you’ve got a simple cocktail with only 66 calories and 2.4 carbs.” As for the “PJ,” as Dopkins calls the Pineapple Jalapeño, “adding sweet to heat is a real trend among bartenders, but it’s very hard to have a shelf-stable cocktail” using those ingredients in house. When they’re already in the bottle, you’ve got a winner—one that’s beginning to outsell the Blanco in certain markets, including Maryland and Georgia.

As Dulce Vida continues to experiment with such releases as its Extra Añejo—aged for five years in Napa Valley wine casks—and Lone Star, matured in Garrison Brothers Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey barrels, it keeps its track record as “an approachable brand that brings people into the category” in mind, says Dopkins. “We have people writing in, telling us they hadn’t drunk tequila in 20 years—and now they do.” —Ruth Tobias





# A MASTER *Tequilero* COMES TO TOWN

DAVID RAVANDI OF 123 ORGANIC  
TEQUILA TEAMS UP WITH GRACIAS  
MADRE IN WEST HOLLYWOOD

Led by 123 Organic Tequila's David Ravandi, a comprehensive training session for the staff at Gracias Madre in West Hollywood, CA, included a tasting of all six of the brand's spirits.





story by Eric Marsh / photos by Devin Berko

On a Wednesday evening in March, Gracias Madre in West Hollywood, California, hosted a dinner for 123 Organic Tequila. It was a fitting venue: Not only does the restaurant serve organic, plant-based, Mexican-inspired fare, but the airy space, with its whitewashed brick walls and reclaimed wood floors, has a cultivated yet natural feel that mirrors 123 Spirits' approach to making tequila and mezcal.

Serving as the company's CEO and Master Distiller, 123 Spirits founder David Ravandi held a comprehensive tasting for the restaurant's staff prior to the dinner. Quick-witted, worldly, and jovial, Ravandi is an imposing figure who speaks with conviction about his passion for tequila and the great care he puts into growing agave. He's been producing the spirit for more than 30 years, bottling his first 123 (pronounced "Uno Dos Tres") Organic Tequila in 2010—a decade after planting blue agaves on his USDA- and EU-certified organic estate in Amatitán in Mexico's Tequila region. Now as then, all of his tequilas are made from 100% estate-grown organic blue agave no younger than ten years old.

Ravandi's approach to production is similar to that of winemakers: "It's all about terroir," he said. "The agaves are grown at 4,200 feet [above sea level] or higher, and every 100 feet the soil changes and creates a slightly nuanced agave. At high altitudes, the temperature varies greatly; it can be 100 degrees in the day and then drop down to 50 degrees overnight—and [as with] grapes for wine, the more you stress the plant, the more complex the spirit."

The agaves cook for 24 hours in an old-fashioned oven and sit for another day to cool before being milled. Their juice is then fermented in open tanks with no added yeast or sugar before double-distillation. Ravandi proudly states that, as the liquid comes out of the still, "We use only the hearts [of the spirits], unlike a lot of other tequila makers who use both the heads and the tails."

123 Organic Blanco, also called Uno, has a silky mouthfeel, with notes of lemon zest and flint on the palate and a sweet kick on the backend. It serves as the base for the Reposado and Añejo but drinks perfectly well on its own, evincing the quality of both plant and production. The Organic Reposado, or Dos, rests for six months in new, slightly toasted white-oak barrels, which makes for a subtle, feminine expression with chamomile on the nose and flavors of crème brûlée and salted caramel. And the Organic Añejo (Tres), which ages for 18 months, carries some of the oak from the barrel into a profile that shows noticeable tannins, woody spices such as cinnamon, and a hint of dark chocolate.



**Maxwell Reis, Beverage Director at Gracias Madre, created three cocktails for the dinner, including the King Paloma'loma with 123's Blanco Tequila, coconut-grapefruit sorbet, fresh grapefruit juice, lime, and soda.**



**For dessert, a fudge brownie with salted-mezcal caramel, coconut bacon, and whipped cream was paired with 123's Extra Añejo Tequila Diablito.**

In 2014, 123 released its Extra Añejo expression, Diablito. The spirit spends some 40 months in new French Limousin oak, and the result reflects its name, which translates as "Little Devil": With a creamy texture, black pepper on the nose, and vanilla and butterscotch on the palate, it can go down a little *too* easy.

The latest additions to the 123 portfolio are El Luchador Organic Tequila Blanco—which makes its presence in a cocktail known at 110 proof—and Cráneo Organic Mezcal, whose subtle flavors of citrus fruit and unripe banana come as a surprise given its powerful aromas of barbecue smoke.

Gracias Madre created a four-course tasting menu for the aforementioned dinner, which started with 123's Uno alongside a coconut-ceviche tostada, followed by a pairing of Dos and a pumpkin empanada in mole with caramelized onion. The Tres expression, meanwhile, was accompanied by enchiladas verdes filled with zucchini, potato, and avocado, and lastly, for dessert, the Diablito was sinfully coupled with a fudge brownie drizzled in salted-mezcal caramel and garnished with crumbles of coconut bacon. All who attended left replete with empanadas, an increased awareness of the brand, and, of course, tequila. ■■





# *Eleven's* ELITE

*photos by Devin Berke*

ASSESSING A CROP OF SINGULAR WINES FROM A RECENT  
BLIND SPEED TASTING AT CRAFT LOS ANGELES



A talented group of Los Angeles–based wine buyers (from left to right) attended a recent blind speed tasting at Craft: Morgan Wallen, Wine Director for Gwen; Dino Marone, Wine Director for Nerano; Gavin Humes, Director of Food & Beverage for Scratch Bar & Kitchen; Catherine Morel, Lead Sommelier for 71Above; Elizabeth Kelso, Beverage Director for Craft; Lynn Becker, Sommelier for Monty's Steakhouse; Christine Tran, Sommelier for Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House; Alicia Ajolo, Wine Director for Terranea Resort; and Sam Matatyan, co-owner of Village Liquor.

Behind a wall of frosted glass in a private room at Los Angeles' elegant Craft restaurant, 11 wines shrouded in velvet bags awaited assessment from an esteemed group of area wine buyers at a recent tasting hosted by *The Tasting Panel*. Tasked with blind tasting the wines, the participants prepared to share their thoughts with the respective winemakers and winery representatives in attendance. One by one, the winery representatives entered the room, revealing their respective labels while presenting the story behind each bottle.



Catherine Morel, Lead Sommelier for 71Above, penned an eloquent collection of tasting notes for *The Tasting Panel*.



## A Refresh for OAK RIDGE

As Oak Ridge Winery Area Manager Natalie Shaffer presented the 2016 OZV Old Vine Zinfandel from Lodi, she let the tasters in on a secret: "It's the number-one Zinfandel in California, but you guys are the first group really to taste the new juice from this vintage in the new package," Shaffer said.

After the reveal, a few of the somms pointed out that they had nailed the wine as a Zinfandel in their tasting notes. As skilled as they are, however, it wasn't the most difficult assessment: The typicity of the estate-grown, fruit-forward, and rich wine was obvious, but perhaps a bit less conspicuous was the price: Shaffer touted the expression's success as a happy-hour house wine with mass appeal, considering it retails at just \$13. Made with grapes from vines averaging 30 years in age (OZV stands for Old Zin Vines), it spent a year in American and French oak with minimal toast.



Natalie Shaffer, Area Manager for Oak Ridge Winery, presented the 2016 Old Vine Zinfandel.

**Oak Ridge Winery 2016 OZV Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi (\$13)** Sweet, very fruit-forward. Lots of berries, very nice color, and silky texture with a floral aroma and rich finish. As a retailer, I like the price for what I tasted. —Sam Matatyan, co-owner, Village Liquor





## Showcasing THE SPUR

It's no wonder a few of the somms pegged this as a Left Bank Bordeaux: Murrieta's Well, located in Livermore Valley, was first established in 1884, when Louis Mel planted cuttings from Château d'Yquem and Château Margaux of France. Descendants of these vines still grow on parts of the sustainably farmed 600-acre property.

Robbie Meyer (formerly of Peter Michael Winery, Lewis Cellars, and others) currently serves as the Director of Winemaking at Murrieta's Well. According to Senior Brand Manager Heather Everett, his philosophy centers around "preserving the vineyard and capturing the essence of the vineyard in the bottle."

A blend primarily comprising Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, The Spur is meant to showcase the best of the estate. "It's a little bit of everything," Everett added, though most of the fruit comes from the winery's Sachau vineyard, which she described as a "gravelly, loam-based" site.



**Heather Everett, Senior Brand Manager for Murrieta's Well, presented the 2016 The Spur from Livermore Valley.**

**Murrieta's Well 2016 The Spur Red Blend, Livermore Valley (\$35)** Dark ruby with a nose of pepper and dark fruit. Elegant palate lifted by acidity; gripping but elegant tannins; roasted coffee and chocolate notes with a long finish. This will develop well with time. —*Dino Marone, Wine Director, Nerano*



## A Higher ACUMEN

Though some of the buyers might not have heard of the small but mighty Acumen in Napa Valley prior to the tasting, they were surely familiar with other producers and winemakers who buy the winery's organic fruit, grown at a high elevation. "We're very small-production and we do sell a lot of our fruit to clients like Celia Welch [of Scarecrow], Chris Carpenter [of Cardinale and La Jota Vineyard Co.], Chappellet, and Silver Oak," said Western Regional Sales Manager Carlo Mathosian as he revealed the 2016 Mountainside Red, adorned with a sepia-toned label.

After lamenting the 2016 death of Acumen's founding winemaker, Denis Malbec of Château Latour, Mathosian praised the current efforts of Acumen Executive Manager/Director of Winemaking Henrik Poulsen (formerly of Alpha Omega), who also worked closely with Malbec. Furthering Malbec's vision, Poulsen's goal is to continue bringing "Old World winemaking sensibilities to Napa," Mathosian said, adding, "This vintage is a bit higher in alcohol for us at 14.2% [ABV]—we're usually below 14. The blend for 2015 is 61% Cab, 22% Merlot, 6% Malbec, 6% Cab Franc, and 5% Petit Verdot aged 18 months in French oak [72% new]."



**Carlo Mathosian, Western Regional Sales Manager for Acumen, shared the 2016 Mountainside Red Wine from Atlas Peak in Napa Valley.**

**Acumen 2015 Mountainside Red Wine, Atlas Peak, Napa (\$45)** An earth-driven, Bordeaux-like blend. This is a cool wine that's really quite good. —*Elizabeth Kelso, Beverage Director, Craft*



# *The Storm and the* **STORMWATCH**

Presenter Arnaud Debons, the calm and collected Head Winemaker for Riboli Family Wines, offered a bit of background on the historic Los Angeles-based winery. “Our San Antonio Winery has been located in downtown L.A. since 1917,” he said. “We are family-owned and have been sourcing grapes from Paso Robles and Monterey since the ‘60s, but all of our wine, even when it was from Paso Robles, came down here to be bottled.”

Debons was there to reveal San Simeon, a label under the Riboli Family Wines banner that was created to honor the influence of the Pacific Ocean: a fitting concept given the stormy weather raging on outside the tasting. Considering he hails from southwest France near Cahors, the birthplace of Malbec, it was no surprise to learn that Debons is a fan of the Bordeaux variety. “I’m a lover of Malbec, but I believe in blends like this because it’s a way to bring a lot more complexity than any single-varietal wine,” he said while unsheathing the San Simeon 2015 Stormwatch. “This is a Bordeaux blend—46% Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot [plus] Cab Franc, Malbec, and Petit Verdot. We use around 95 to 98% new oak on this wine, which makes it pretty spicy.”

Stormwatch’s fruit was entirely sourced from the El Pomar District AVA on the east side of Paso Robles, where Riboli Family Wines owns five vineyards. “This area is very interesting in Paso because there is a water table but also the Templeton Gap, which brings cooler weather into the area at night and early morning,” Debons said. “This in turn allows us to achieve the right maturity in the fruit.” (For more on Riboli Family Wines, see page 46b.)

## **San Simeon 2015 Stormwatch, Paso Robles**

Sweet red fruits, macerated cherry, strawberry with pomegranate juice, sweet tobacco, sweet herbs, suede, mocha, kirsch, sweet candied rose florals, potting soil, licorice, and deep red color. Gripping tannins and medium-plus acid. —*Catherine Morel, Lead Sommelier, 71Above*

Deep and intense, this wine is not shy with its heartier body full of black cherries, black plum, and black raspberry. It alludes to firm yet silky tannins with a lasting finish. —*Alicia Ajolo, Wine Director, Terranea Resort*

**Arnaud Debons, Head Winemaker for Riboli Family Wines, with the San Simeon 2015 Stormwatch blend.**



“This is a Bordeaux blend—46% Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, [plus] Cab Franc, Malbec, and Petit Verdot. We use around 95 to 98% new oak on this wine, which makes it pretty spicy.”





### *Trendsetting in the* **BAROSSA**

Since family-owned and -operated Delegat acquired Barossa Valley Estate about six and a half years ago, they've done some great things—the two most important of which, according to On-Premise Sales Manager Chris DePaco, were keeping the alcohol down to 14% and using French oak exclusively. “It’s traditionally 15% [ABV] in the Barossa Valley, but now we’re seeing more producers trying to do the same thing,” he added. “The tannins are softer as a result and a lot more conducive to food.”

The bright GSM blend, one of three of Barossa Valley Estate’s designated on-premise offerings, comprises 39% Grenache, 37% Shiraz, and 24% Mourvèdre in the 2016 vintage. Barossa Valley Estate is known for producing the iconic E&E Black Pepper Shiraz, but the most recent vintage of this GSM blend has garnered critical attention. Delegat also owns New Zealand-based Oyster Bay and focuses on the super-premium wine category.



**Chris DePaco, On-Premise Sales Manager for Barossa Valley Estate, with the 2016 GSM blend from Barossa Valley.**

**Barossa Valley Estate 2016 GSM, Barossa Valley (\$15)** Bright cherries; hints of allspice in a medium density. —Christine Tran, *Sommelier, Del Frisco’s Double Eagle Steak House*

### *More Than* **ITALIAN**

Lignum is an atypical Italian red blend (40% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 30% Shiraz from northwestern Sicily) with an equally atypical label made of wood: a flourish that’s one of the first of its kind. Dane Throop, Divisional Sales Director for importer Enovation Brands, passed the bottle around for observation. “Lignum is the ancient Latin word for ‘wood,’” he explained. “No two labels are quite the same thanks to the wood grain.”

“We’re really excited about this Terre Siciliane IGT—we just released it in August of last year,” Throop added. “We don’t try to limit Lignum as an Italian red blend—it’s just a great red blend.”

**Lignum 2017 Italian Red Blend, Sicily (\$16)** Rose petal and espresso nose. Palate has gripping tannins with lighter red fruits; great minerality with elements of tar. —Gavin Humes, *Director of Food & Beverage, Scratch Bar & Kitchen*

**Dane Throop, Divisional Sales Director for Enovation Brands, presented the Lignum 2017 Italian red blend from Sicily.**







## Moving to the B SIDE

As the group compared notes between presenters, a general consensus seemed to emerge that there wasn't a bad apple in this group of wines. Favorites varied, of course, but the B Side Pinot Noir garnered an impressive handful of votes.

A brainchild of Don Sebastiani & Sons (one of Sonoma County's pioneering families), B Side originally featured Napa-based fruit with its first vintage in 2005. West Division Manager Steve Pearce explained that B Side "just recently moved over to the North Coast appellation." It was a move B Side Winemaker Greg Kitchens was happy to make given the AVA's flexibility and, "oftentimes, better fruit from different regions, like Pope Valley and the Petaluma Gap," Pearce said. The 2016 vintage is the inaugural for B Side's Pinot Noir, with the majority of the fruit coming from premier growers in the Napa/Carneros regions.



**Steve Pearce, West Divisional Manager for Don Sebastiani & Sons, with the B Side 2016 Pinot Noir.**

**B Side 2016 Pinot Noir, North Coast (\$20)** Fresh, floral component with lots of red fruit: red berries and red cherries. Softly structured with silky tannins and a little herbaceous; a touch more oak than expected. This is one of my favorites. —*Morgan Allen, Wine Director, Gwen*



## EMPHASIS *on the "S"*

In the 1970s, Don and Rhonda Carano moved to Sonoma because it reminded them of Italy. They purchased 60 acres of property and planted half of it under vine, thus establishing Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery in 1979.

Today their company owns a whopping 1,900 vineyard acres in Dry Creek Valley, Alexander Valley, Russian River Valley, Napa/Carneros, and Mendocino Ridge/Anderson Valley—adding a new dimension to the "s" in Ferrari-Carano Vineyards. Fruit from "13 different Chardonnay vineyards make up" the 2017 Chardonnay, according to Southwest Regional Manager Tammi Wyckoff, who explained that Winemaker Sarah Quider ferments 60 separate blocks before sampling and blending them.

Wyckoff also discussed Ferrari-Carano's extensive winemaking facilities as well as its sustainable farming efforts and 85,000 square feet of cave systems in the Alexander Valley. During the blind tasting, Village Liquor co-owner Sam Matatyan fittingly wrote that the wine "tastes quite similar to a Ferrari-Carano Chardonnay," later noting after the expression's presentation that "it's [the] number one-selling Chard" in his store.



**Tammi Wyckoff, Ferrari-Carano's Southwest Regional Manager, presented the Ferrari-Carano 2017 Chardonnay from Sonoma.**

**Ferrari-Carano 2017 Chardonnay, Napa Valley Carneros** Tropical spice and fruits; baked apple and baked pineapple. Creamy, lactic note, so likely malolactic fermentation and oak. Notes of coconut/vanilla, peach yogurt, creamed corn, and popcorn. —*Catherine Morel*





**Sales Manager Suzette Hébert and Crown Point Vineyards General Manager David Francke presented the Crown Point 2015 Estate Selection.**

## CROWN *Ringer*

Crown Point Vineyards' competing wine was a Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend from the small appellation of Happy Canyon, which General Manager David Francke admitted was "a bit of a ringer" at the tasting. Its reveal was met with a collective "ohhhh," because while nearly everyone had made the Cabernet blend call, attempts to pin down the region fell all over the map. The group found common ground once again, however, in deeming this wine one of their favorites of the lineup.

"Happy Canyon is a unique AVA in the very far eastern end of Santa Ynez Valley," Francke said. "When you think Central Coast, you think Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah, but where we are really is perfect for growing Bordeaux varieties. It's basically one big rock pile, and we very carefully decided which rootstocks to plant in which areas."

Winemaker Adam Henkel (formerly of Harlan Estate), in collaboration with consulting winemaker Philippe Melka, produces two wines utilizing fruit from Crown Point's 52 acres of vines. The 2015 vintage represents Crown Point's third release and the Estate Selection, a Cabernet-dominant (71%) Bordeaux blend, is set to debut this spring.

**Crown Point 2015 Estate Selection, Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara (\$150)** The palate is smooth with chocolate and little green notes. Lots of structure and tannins; good acid with lots of earth and minerality. —*Gavin Humes*

## SEA VINES

The 2015 vintage might have ushered in some unexpected challenges for winemakers in the Fort Ross–Seaview AVA, but there was no denying the typicity in the well-made Pinot Noir from Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery. "This is an extreme vintage. Yields were down about 40 percent, so it's a much more opulent wine than we normally get on the coast," said Johanna Bernstein, the winery's Vice President of Brand Marketing.

According to Bernstein, microfarming is key to the success of Fort Ross' viticultural efforts. Its roughly 53 acres of vines, planted about 20 years ago by proprietors Linda and Lester Schwartz, range from 1,200 to 1,500 feet above sea level. "Given the shift in elevation and soil variation, we really do think of our approach as microfarming," she added.

The same small-batch approach is taken in the winery: Winemaker Jeff Pisoni, who has overseen the program for more than a decade, vinifies each of the five distinct Pinot Noir clones separately. He also employs five coopers and an extensive barrel-blending process.

**Fort Ross Vineyard 2015 FRV Pinot Noir, Fort Ross–Seaview AVA** The wine is very dry with silky yet firm tannins and lively acidity. The notes of dried cherry, steeped tea, and cola root play well together in the glass. —*Alicia Ajolo*



**Johanna Bernstein, CSW, is the Vice President of Brand Marketing for Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery.**





## TO KALON'S *Definitive White*

In 1964, Robert Mondavi was strapped for cash, borrowing a combined \$200,000 from friends and the bank to purchase 12 acres of the To Kalon Vineyard in Napa Valley. He had a sense the site was special, and he was right: The vineyard would eventually become one of the best properties in the world to grow Cabernet Sauvignon.

At the tasting, attendees' glasses were filled with "the white wine of To Kalon," according to Robert Mondavi Winery Sales Manager Jeremy Harrison: the 2014 Reserve To Kalon Vineyard Fumé Blanc. (In fact, Mondavi owns the only Sauvignon Blanc grown on the property.) The majority of the wine's fruit came from the historic T Block, planted in 1959, and was supplemented by a dollop from the historic I Block, planted in 1945. "This is old-vine, head-trained, dry-farmed fruit with low yields at about a half-ton per acre," said Harrison.

The Fumé Blanc—a name created by an inspired Mondavi, after a visit to the Loire in the '60s, that served to separate this style from the sweeter Sauvignon Blancs of the time—is 98% Sauvignon Blanc and 2% Sémillon barrel-fermented in neutral French oak.



**Robert Mondavi Winery Sales Manager Jeremy Harrison with the 2014 Reserve To Kalon Vineyard Fumé Blanc.**

**Robert Mondavi Winery 2014 Reserve To Kalon Vineyard Fumé Blanc, Napa Valley** Gooseberry, ripe pear, fresh yellow flowers, and Meyer lemon. Medium-plus acid, medium-plus concentration, and medium alcohol. —Lynn Becker, Wine Director, Monty's Steakhouse ■■



**The focused group dove into blind tasting the 11 wines at Craft in Los Angeles.**



Elaborate 18-course tastings are the calling card of The Silver Bough.

PHOTO: JOE SCHMEIZER

# Stealing the Culinary Show in Montecito

THERE'S A NEW DINING SCENE TO EXPLORE JUST SOUTH OF SANTA BARBARA by Hana-Lee Sedgwick

PHOTO: JAKOB N. LAYMAN



Meals at The Monarch are served family-style.

At first glance, Montecito may seem like just another posh coastal enclave—a hideaway for Hollywood A-listers nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Ynez Mountains just outside of Santa Barbara, California. But behind the veil of secluded luxury is a town with a laid-back vibe and deep sense of community—one that's proving its resiliency after a devastating year of disasters in 2018. Indeed, thanks to a spate of new restaurants, Montecito is not just surviving but thriving as a culinary destination.

Among its most recent debuts is **The Silver Bough**, an ambitious fine-dining concept from Phillip Frankland Lee and his wife, Margarita Kallas Lee, of Scratch|Bar & Kitchen in Los Angeles. Located inside the Montecito Inn, this intimate eight-seater is a showcase for 18-course tasting menus; split up into three main parts called “acts,” they’re composed of exquisitely plated dishes featuring high-quality ingredients from around the world.

Complementing the meal is a lineup of curated wine pairings that likewise span the globe: Think vibrant Sancerre alongside lightly grilled king crab with sea-urchin emulsion, gooseberries, and caviar or vintage Napa Valley Cabernet with center-cut Olive Wagyu rib-eye with pommes puree and black truffles. Between the ticket price of \$550 per person and the limited number of seatings—only four are offered each week—The Silver Bough isn’t exactly an option for everyday dining, but it delivers a memorable experience unlike any in the area that’s rich in flavor and high on opulence.

At **The Monarch**, their first venture at the Montecito Inn, Lee and Kallas Lee take a more relaxed approach, serving family-style meals that celebrate the bounty of





PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

**Naturally leavened sourdough is used for the wood-fired pizza crusts at Bettina.**



PHOTO: SILAS FALSTICH

**Khao Kaeng's Northern Thai-style curried noodles.**

Santa Barbara County in a lively yet elegant setting. Though the wine list does include a large selection of local bottlings, highlighting small producers from Ballard Canyon, the Sta. Rita Hills, and Happy Canyon, it also features numerous Old World options, with an emphasis on organic and Biodynamic producers.

Tucked inside the Montecito Country Mart less than a mile down the road is cozy neighborhood gem **Bettina**. Opened late last year by another husband-and-wife team, Brendan Smith and Rachel Greenspan, Bettina specializes in delectable Neapolitan-style pizzas made from naturally leavened sourdough; topped with local, seasonal ingredients, the pies are charred to perfection in the wood-fired oven.

Though the two met while Smith

was running the bread program at Roberta's in Brooklyn, New York, they have certainly made their mark on Montecito, drawing people from all over to savor specialties like the pepperoni pizza with chili oil and local Hollister Ranch honey as well as the sunchoke pie with aged cheddar, escarole, and torpedo onions. A mouthwatering array of antipasti and farmers market-driven fare round out the menu, and to wash it all down, the vermouth-heavy cocktail list ranges from a refreshing Venetian Spritz to a complex Americano. The frequently rotating wine and beer list, meanwhile, highlights global producers spanning from Santa Barbara to Sicily.

Bettina isn't the only new Montecito restaurant capturing the culinary essence of another country. At

curry"—crafts a variety of dishes from organic ingredients and free-range proteins to reveal the regional diversity of Pannak's homeland, including stewed lamb shoulder with roasted baby potatoes, cherry-tomato confit, and housemade massaman-curry paste and Jidori chicken with bamboo shoots, makrut-lime leaves, and green-curry paste, also made in house. The wine list features 16 pours by the glass and 120 bottle selections that range from Central Coast favorites to Old World classics from Burgundy, Sancerre, and the Loire, plus several Rieslings and an Austrian Grüner Veltliner to complement the spicy, vibrant flavors.

While not technically new, **The Stonehouse** at the San Ysidro Ranch—which was closed for the entire year of 2018 following extensive damage from mudslides—has reopened for lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch, providing the same romantic atmosphere and superb service it had previously been known for along with a noteworthy new wine list. Also notable on the high-end hotel-dining front is Italian restaurant **Caruso's** at the much-anticipated new luxury property Rosewood Miramar Beach. With a stylish interior reminiscent of a glamorous yacht—all blue hues and glossy lacquered wood panels—and unobstructed views of the Pacific, Caruso's is yet another welcome addition to Montecito's increasingly impressive dining scene. Time to dig in. ■■



PHOTO: BLAKE BRONSTAD

**Renaud's Patisserie has three locations, two in Santa Barbara and one in Montecito; only the latter serves bistro fare for dinner.**

**Renaud's Patisserie**, chef/owner Renaud Gonthier's French pastries are served alongside a menu of bistro favorites like croque monsieurs plus a selection of wine and beer. Nearby, **Khao Kaeng**—sister restaurant of the popular Empty Bowl Gourmet Noodle Bar in Santa Barbara's Public Market—specializes in elevated Thai food.

Owned by Chef Nui Pannak, Jerry Lee, and Emre Balli, Khao Kaeng—which translates to "rice



## BOURBON

In honor of the mash bill used in Maker's Mark bourbon, Tartine crafted a bread comprising 70% corn, 16% red winter wheat, and 14% malted barley.



# *A Toast to* LIQUID BREAD

## MAKER'S MARK REVEALS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MASH BILLS AND LEVAIN AT TARTINE MANUFACTORY IN SAN FRANCISCO

story by Jesse Hom-Dawson / photos by Soraya Matos

Walking into a bakery can signify one of life's most pleasurable little moments. As warm, fresh, yeasty aromas fill the air, you can almost taste the sourdough just out of the oven—springy with a perfectly crunchy crust, slathered in warm butter, and sprinkled with salt. Nowhere does this sensory experience arise more vividly than at Tartine Manufactory, a celebrated bakery and cafe in San Francisco's Mission District.

The taste of Tartine's world-famous bread relies on one seemingly unremarkable ingredient: bubbly, beige *levain*, a fermented mixture of flour and water. Full of yeast and bacteria, it gives many loaves their rise and flavor. Since levain is a living thing, it must be fed regularly, in this case with more flour and water. What's more, like all living things, each batch is its own distinct entity: Because its bacteria comes from the air around it, the "same" levain used in two parts of the world—or even two neighborhoods in one city—will yield different flavors.

Of course, bread is not the only product that draws its signature flavor from yeast. The parallels between bread and bourbon may not be obvious right away, but a recent class I attended on the subject, hosted by Maker's Mark at Tartine, made their similarities very clear. Andrew Marks, Northern California's Brand Ambassador for the legend-



Maker's 46 and Maker's Mark Cask Strength follow in the footsteps of the original Maker's Mark.





**Andrew Marks is the Northern California Brand Ambassador for Maker's Mark.**

ary Kentucky bourbon, noted that Maker's Mark in fact owes its very creation to bread. "Founders Bill Samuels Sr. and his wife, Margie, first tested their mash bill by baking bread with it before they even used it to distill bourbon," he explained. "The flavor of the bread helped them come up with the right blend."

The yeast strain Maker's uses is also similar to that of levain. "Our yeast strain is fed daily by a family that lives down the road from the distillery in Loretto, Kentucky—the same family that's been feeding [it] for three generations," Marks said. "The yeast, called Jug Yeast, lives in copper jugs and is propagated each day, then added to each batch of mash in our fermenters. It is the same yeast strain we have used since 1953." Without this vital ingredient, the Maker's Mark mash bill—70% corn, 16% red winter wheat, and 14% malted barley—couldn't ferment into alcohol. Because the strain is so critical to a bourbon's flavor, it's considered proprietary, although Marks admits that distillers freely shared their strains with one another back in the day.

As guests sipped a Western Sour—a bright take on a traditional Whiskey Sour—Tartine baker Nick Beitcher and Wine Director Vinny Eng demonstrated how to keep levain alive with daily feedings. Heeding Eng's warning that "it takes time and patience to feed and maintain the starter so you can bake sourdough bread," attendees followed the instructions for their own levain, which they would eventually take home with them.

While they worked, the group sampled a perfectly crusty loaf with an airy interior that the Tartine team had baked using the same mash bill Maker's Mark uses. When the time came to leave the bakery, one thing was clear to everyone: The same reverent attention to detail the Tartine bakers lavish on their bread can be found in a glass of Maker's Mark. ■■



**Guests mix their own levain during the Maker's Mark workshop at Tartine Manufactory in San Francisco.**

## WESTERN SOUR

*Created by Julian Cox, Beverage Director for Tartine Group*

- ▮ 1½ oz. Maker's Mark Bourbon
- ▮ ¾ oz. clarified lime juice
- ▮ ½ oz. fresh grapefruit juice
- ▮ ½ oz. cane syrup
- ▮ ½ oz. velvet falernum
- ▮ 2 dashes Scrappy's Grapefruit Bitters

Build in a tin and quick-shake with ice. Pour into a rocks glass and garnish with a slice of grapefruit and sprig of fresh mint.





# Garnacha

## Gets Its Due

BLAZING A PATH FROM **CARIÑENA** TO THE GLOBAL GARNACHA SUMMIT, VINEXPO NEW YORK, AND BEYOND by Eduardo Dingler

If there was one thing we learned at the first annual Global Garnacha Summit on April 24, 2018, it was an appreciation for the current relevance as well as the historical importance of the Spanish-born variety also known as Grenache. Sponsored by D.O.P. Cariñena, *The SOMM Journal*, and SommFoundation, the unprecedented event brought together wine experts from around the globe along with more than 100 wine enthusiasts eager to learn more about the grape's multifaceted identity and role in world winemaking.

During the morning seminar, "Garnacha Unveiled," Bob Bath, a

Master Sommelier and Professor of Wine and Beverage Studies at The Culinary Institute of America, led the panel as they took attendees through the grape's history, explaining how it originated in Aragón in northern Spain and later traveled to Sardinia and Sicily before finding homes in Australia, the United States, and the Roussillon region of France.

The education-packed program continued with "Garnacha Rising," a business-oriented panel of on- and off-premise wine professionals led by Master Sommelier and wine merchant Peter Granoff. It also included a series of tastings that showcased Garnacha's

versatility and future prospects in the market. The featured wines represented diverse terroir while pushing the boundaries of style—from Bonny Doon's fresh and fruity Clos de Gilroy from the Central Coast, which undergoes carbonic maceration, to rich, bold, and serious examples from Montsant's Clos Pissarra.

We also enjoyed some of Cariñena's finest, among them the 2015 Bodegas San Valero—a juicy and elegant blend from an iconic estate—and the deeply complex 2015 Bodegas Paniza Garnacha from Slate, grown in a gnarly head-trained vineyard. Meanwhile, a blind tasting led by *SOMM Journal* Global

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM D.O.P. CARIÑENA AT VINEXPO NEW YORK, MARCH 4–5, 2019



Master of Wine Pedro Ballesteros led a comprehensive Master Class, "Garnacha Unveiled," where attendees explored Garnacha from Cariñena and other leading wine regions while tasting rare, old-vine, and fruit-forward styles.



Pedro Ballesteros joined Grandes Vinos Director José Antonio Briz and Export Manager Ricardo Ventura at the winery's Vinexpo booth to review the current lineup.



Bodegas San Valero representatives Raquel Satolaya Díaz and Eduardo García Mauleón took a prospective buyer through their portfolio, which includes a range of old-vine and young Garnacha from Cariñena.





**At the Global Garnacha Summit in 2018, the fascinating “Garnacha Unveiled” seminar featured a strong panel of the grape’s evangelists. Pictured from left to right: moderator Bob Bath, MS, followed by panelists Randall Grahm of Bonny Doon Vineyard; Pedro Ballesteros, MW; Emmanuel Kemiji, MS, owner of Miura Vineyards and Managing Director at Clos Pissarra; Chelsea Franchi, Sr. Assistant Winemaker for Tablas Creek Vineyard; Angela Osborne of Grace Wine Company; and Even Bakke of Clos de Trias in the Ventoux.**

Wine Editor Deborah Parker Wong allowed attending sommeliers to test their skills.

A year hence, Garnacha experts continue to sing the Summit’s praises. Noting that sales of his Spanish Garnacha have increased 50 percent in recent years, Master Sommelier and vintner Emmanuel Kemiji observed how the Summit resonated with attendees: “I will say that sommeliers in San Francisco were still talking about how much they enjoyed the event several weeks after it had occurred,” he said.

Master of Wine Pedro Ballesteros, a

tireless promoter of Cariñena who was also instrumental in the planning of the Summit, said the time was right for such an event. “Garnacha is entering a second period of international relevance because of a number of circumstances,” he explained. “One of the consequences of climate change is water shortages; Garnacha is quite resilient to drought. It can also deliver ripe fruit at low pH, which is excellent for producing pure wines—not acidified as most Merlots and Cabernets are. With the advances on big data and artificial intelligence for viticulture, it will be possible to mechanize bush vines; this will be a major advantage for Garnacha.”

Finally, he added, “Its chameleonic character, delivering wines that represent a landscape rather than a variety, is a great asset” that encompasses refreshing Grenache Blancs, feminine rosés, and the compelling reds now produced in virtually all corners of the world. At Vinexpo New York’s Master Class in March, Ballesteros covered this expansion of Garnacha from Spain to other key wine-producing areas around the globe, leading attendees on a guided tasting of top wines from Cariñena and beyond.

Regarding Cariñena in particular, Ballesteros said, “I think that consumers are starting to understand that Garnacha represents a lifestyle rather than a wine style. Nobody would request a light Cabernet Sauvignon, but people can very easily assume that one day they may want a full-bodied

Garnacha, while the day after they may be in the mood for a delicately floral Garnacha rosé or a fruity and juicy young Garnacha. All these wines share a vision rather than a style. This can be an important novelty.”

California winemaker and Campesino Cellars proprietor Macario Montoya feels strongly about the positive impact of the worldwide attention being paid to Garnacha. “I think the demand for Grenache has increased as American consumers are starting to desire different flavors,” he said. “Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon are always going to be dominant, but consumers are learning more and more, and now they want diversity; Grenache is a great gateway to ‘the other side.’”

Montoya admits, however, that “it is still very much a hand sell. People don’t often gravitate directly to Grenache; they need to be encouraged. As a small producer, our production has stayed pretty constant—our largest sales usually come from our direct mailing list of people who know we produce Rhône varieties. Other large sales come from boutique wine shops and bistros; people go to those spots seeking something different, as opposed to larger restaurants, where I feel they want more of the same.”

Still, there’s no doubt that educated suggestions from sommeliers and retailers have helped Garnacha begin to capture the attention of even mainstream consumers. Advanced Sommelier Laura Koffer, who oversees the wine programs at San Francisco’s Coqueta and Yountville’s Bottega as Beverage Director of Gruppo Chiarello, mentioned that “Garnacha has enjoyed a growing demand among our diners—the diverse styles from Californian, Italian, and Spanish producers have been quite successful in our restaurants.” And Vanessa Conlin, Head of Wine at online retailer WineAccess, has discovered that “Grenache sales have increased in the past months with [WineAccess] members. The numbers speak highly of this varietal, and interest has led to healthy sales in the category.”

As Master Sommelier Emmanuel Kemiji summed up, “I think it is up to all of us to promote this incredible variety, in all of its very diverse forms, as an alternative to the ‘usual suspects’ that we generally limit ourselves to in California.” ■■



**Diego Pinedo, Export Manager for Bodegas Paniza, poured one of the winery’s latest releases from Cariñena that’s heading to market this spring.**



# CHEF'S ROLL | SOMM'S LIST

PRESENTATION IS EVERYTHING

*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.*

## JONATHAN MORAN

*Head Bartender/Beverage Program Manager at Bord'Elle Supper Club, Montreal, Canada*

**Q** What's your process for designing the drink menus at Bord'Elle?  
Being a supper club, we have a full-service supper before flipping to a club after the kitchen closes. One of the biggest challenges we face is making a beverage menu worthy of the five-star sophistication our food delivers while maintaining a certain simplicity to allow us to properly serve the same menu to a packed house of more than 500 with only six or seven bartenders. This has proved especially challenging because of modern drinkers' increasing knowledge of cocktail culture (and their constant search for that perfect Instagram shot).

**Q** What defines Montreal's craft beverage scene?  
Montreal is just such an amazing melting pot—it's becoming one of the major hubs for cocktail culture in Canada and even the world. Being a bilingual city with a relatively young population definitely helps keep our creativity flowing, and the unbelievably long and cold winter months tend to keep us exploring indoor activities. What better way to chase away the cold than with a nice cocktail in good company?

**Q** Are there any trends that are here to stay in the world of mixology?  
People are loving the increase in local product. So many great products have been coming out of Quebec recently that it's hard not to encourage local producers and distilleries. Gins especially have been gaining popularity in the past decade. Mezcal was huge last summer and I predict will see another surge in popularity this coming season.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAMANTHA BRIAND

## JEAN-PIERRE BELONNI

*Lead Bartender at Burlock Coast in The Ritz-Carlton, Fort Lauderdale, Florida*

**Q** When was the first time you knew that you wanted to pursue a career in the beverage industry?

It was 13 years ago. After long years of doing sports and music, I decided to try something different that was also competitive. In my first interview, the first question was "Can you handle pressure?" I answered, "Of course." Well, I was wrong—I was running on my first day like I have never run in a job. But I survived, and from that day on I knew that I really enjoyed the industry.

**Q** Where do you draw your inspiration from when you're experimenting with new drinks?

My inspiration comes from my roots. As a Puerto Rican, I am into different flavors. I like to use ingredients that are not that common so we can have a conversation. There are also cocktails that are pretty famous depending on the season, so I work around those.

**Q** When overseeing a team, how do you maintain standards when you can't personally make every drink?

It's hard work. It's all about constant training but at the same time showing your coworkers that you are there for them. Sometimes I work as an expeditor; I'll make sure that instead of making the drinks, someone else is making them and I'm adding the last decorations to it—and that if something is made the wrong way, we fix it in the moment. If you teach them right, you can trust that your team will make the cocktails the right way. ■■



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE RITZ-CARLTON

*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](mailto:featured@chefsroll.com).*



# Elevating Zin

LA'S Greatest Trade  
& Consumer Gathering

May 15, 2019 | Peninsula Beverly Hills

Eminent Zinfandel winemakers meet the best in the  
business in Los Angeles and Southern California

Trade Tasting 11 AM - 3 PM

Consumer Tasting 6 PM - 9 PM

## 2019 Participating Wineries



Mark Malpiede | VP  
**Williams Selyem**



Ian Blackburn | Winemaker  
**Beekeeper Cellars**



Clay Mauritsen | Winemaker  
**Mauritsen**



Joe Healy | Winemaker  
Scott Adams | Owner  
**Bella Vineyards**



Mindy Kreck | Owner  
Jeremy Kreck | Winemaker  
**Kreck**



Tres Goetting | Winemaker  
**Robert Biale Vineyards**



Christina Turley | Owner  
**Turley**



Jane Portalupi | Owner  
Tim Borges | Winemaker  
**Portalupi**



Coral Brown | Owner  
**Brown**



David Amadia | President  
**Ridge Vineyards**



Julie Martinelli | Winemaker  
**Martinelli Winery**



Andy Robinson | Winemaker  
**Seghesio Family Vineyards**





A happy family, and rightfully so: Over four generations, the Ribolis have gone from making sacramental wines at San Antonio Winery in Los Angeles to becoming an international, award-winning brand. Pictured from left to right are Steve Riboli, Lisa Riboli-Elzholz, Anthony Riboli, Santo Riboli, Cathy Riboli, and Dante Colombatti.

# *Awarding the Best* Urban Winery

FOUNDED IN DOWNTOWN L.A., RIBOLI FAMILY WINES' SAN ANTONIO WINERY IS BUILT ON GRIT, DETERMINATION, AND EXCEEDINGLY GOOD WINE







What to do with your previously used, 20-foot-tall redwood wine tanks? Make skylights out of them, of course, as seen at right in the San Antonio Winery tasting room. Pictured above is an old photo of the winery in the 1930s.



*by Eric Marsh*

Just across the Los Angeles River from downtown L.A.'s fenestrated high-rises and a few blocks east of Chinatown—near where Dodger Stadium can be found atop a hill in neighboring Elysian Park—sits San Antonio Winery close to the corner of Main and Lamar. Serving as the headquarters of Riboli Family Wines, it's an edifice that's hard to miss considering it spans a whole city block.

In addition to housing the winery and production area, it encompasses several event spaces, a 400-seat restaurant, and a tasting room replete with a deli and gourmet food shop. Lofty ceilings give the building's vast rooms an almost ethereal quality, with each space helping to share the history of the winery since its founding in 1917.

They also tell the story of how Riboli Family Wines has grown over the course of 100 years and four generations: With a little elbow grease and ingenuity, the Ribolis have gone from making sacramental wines to producing internationally distributed, award-winning selections—a transition made possible by San Antonio Winery and the consumer interaction that's occurred there for more than a century.

Over the course of this lengthy tenure, the family and their winery have persevered through Prohibition, the Great Depression, and other trials of the 20th and 21st centuries as they've continued to make great wines for every type of wine drinker: wines that have prompted *The Tasting Panel* to honor San Antonio Winery as the "Best Urban Winery."

### A Shift in View

The wide vestibule between the San Antonio Winery tasting room and fermentation room serves as a museum of sorts: Of the black-and-white photos that hang on one of its walls, one captures the winery in the 1930s during Prohibition. During these dry years, San Antonio Winery founder Santo Cambianica produced altar wines, making use of a loophole to continue production.

The winery was then a fraction of the size it is now: The front building wasn't much larger than a mechanic's garage and the wine was fermented in a slightly taller A-frame out back. Standing in front of these photographs today, if you look to your right through glass doors and across an event space, you can see the roof of that same A-frame housed inside a much larger space—which is to say that there's now a whole other roof above it. "When my

uncle Santo first opened the winery, the neighborhood was residential. Over the years it became more industrial, and as people moved out my family bought more and more property and expanded the winery," says fourth-generation winemaker Anthony Riboli.

With several "rooms" built around it by each generation, the vestigial A-frame could be called the nucleus of the winery. The facility as a whole, meanwhile, serves as a living, breathing artifact of a bygone era, with hourly tours offering something for both wine novices and erudite connoisseurs.

Though they're billed as a recent trend, urban wineries are nothing new: Before Prohibition, there were nearly 100 wineries in Los Angeles alone. After falling out of favor in the United States during the latter half of the last century, these facilities have played a crucial role in the craft and artisanal revolution of the past 15 years, particularly in cities like Portland, New York, and San Francisco, where distilleries, breweries, and wineries abound. There's a collective wine press in southeast Portland, a vineyard on a rooftop in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and wineries in locales as far inland as Cincinnati and Albuquerque.

As part of this shift, a more conscious consumer has emerged—one who wants to be cognizant of where



PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO



Guests enjoy a late-afternoon lunch in the winery's 400-seat restaurant.

and how their food is grown, how humanely animals are treated, and, in the case of wine, where its grapes are grown and how it's made. A stop at an urban winery can address these questions with relative convenience, giving guests an educational experience that doesn't require a trip to wine country and provides a semblance of escape from the fast pace of city life.

### Establishing Roots

From another perspective, urban tasting rooms give winemakers a chance to interact with a larger pool of visitors on a year-round basis rather than just during popular times for tourism. As a result, they help wineries keep a finger on the pulse of changing tastes and trends in the wine world.

Anthony Riboli knows the importance of understanding exactly what consumers are looking for, given that this knowledge has played an integral role in San Antonio Winery's prosperity over the years. "Direct-to-consumer is a concept that's a big part of our success. We've always been direct-to-consumer—that asset is a main reason we survived," he says. "Focus groups are great and all, but nothing tells you what a customer really thinks of your wine like the expression on their face after taking a sip."

Urban wineries can also provide a way for aspiring winemakers to

launch a business with a start-up cost lower than, well, buying the side of a mountain. But they make commercial winemaking more accessible through a variety of other factors, too: City-dwelling winemakers short on spare time can opt to purchase juice from vineyards, affording them a way to produce wine that's not only less costly but less time-intensive. Eventually, with some hard work, clever marketing, and luck, they may be able to someday procure their own plot of land or at least have a successful business to leave to their families, which was likely Santo Cambianica's goal when he founded San Antonio Winery before passing it on to his nephew Stefano Riboli in 1956.

Now four generations deep into the business with the fifth emerging, family has always been paramount to the Ribolis. After investing through the years in San Antonio Winery's expansion until it became the behemoth it is today, they felt it was important to remain in L.A. Eventually, however, they outgrew the winery—one could also say that the winery outgrew the block—and they wanted to have more control from terroir to palate in order to make the best possible wines. "We knew as a family that owning estate vineyards would produce the greatest wine quality. Therefore, we began to buy land and plant vineyards in the

mid-1980s," says Riboli Family Wines President Santo Riboli. "It was definitely a turning point in the evolution of our company."

The Ribolis now own several vineyards in Napa, Monterey, and, most recently, Paso Robles, where they completed a state-of-the-art sustainable facility in 2016. The winery, which will open to the public this spring, prioritizes energy efficiency through features like solar power, a water-conservation system, and advanced temperature controls that shut off the winery's cooling system when the cold winds characteristic of the region pick up overnight.

### Built for Escapism

Hospitality has proven to be just as key to the longevity of San Antonio Winery—named the "American Winery of the Year" by *Wine Enthusiast* in 2018—as the Ribolis' beloved wines. The family wants people to feel comfortable and welcomed as they taste their selections and learn about them: how they're grown, fermented, aged, and, for the novice, how to detect acidity and tannins.

They also want people to arrive with an appetite: In the 1970s, the winery became the first in California to operate



PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO

Fourth-generation winemaker Anthony Riboli.





its own restaurant, and the expansive space continues to serve visitors today before a backdrop of vintage wine barrels. In addition to welcoming diners and tasting-room visitors, San Antonio Winery hosts everything from business dinners and family reunions to wedding receptions in its various event spaces, which include a family-style dining area, a sleek lounge ideal for a cocktail hour, and a formal space that emulates a fine-dining establishment. "When production ceases on the weekends, hospitality takes over," Anthony says.

Above all, San Antonio Winery aims to remain a welcoming place where city dwellers and tourists alike can come to eat, drink, be merry, and, perhaps above all, escape. "When you pass through these doors you can, with a little imagination, transcend to Piedmont or Tuscany," says Anthony as he stands in the tasting room, where natural light pours through wide skylights made out of 20-foot-tall vintage redwood wine tanks. If that's the case, tasting the wine might also help you envision the clean lines of grapevines climbing up a hillside in Napa. For at least a few hours, it's possible to forget you're in the center of a sprawling metropolis. ■■

PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO



**Riboli Family Wines President  
Santo Riboli.**



PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO

**With vineyards in Paso Robles, Monterey, and Napa Valley, the Riboli family produces wine from just about every grape that thrives in California, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Grigio, and Malbec.**

## Here are just a few of the wines that inspired *The Tasting Panel* to honor San Antonio Winery as the "Best Urban Winery":

**Riboli Family Vineyard 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$80)** This expression comes from the Riboli family's 16 acres in the Rutherford District. Fennel and blueberry combine with deep espresso for a structured, mighty red as sweet oak and dark cherry impart goodness on the finish. This vibrant inky-purple wine (just 6% Petit Verdot is added in) is barrel-aged 24 months in 70% new French oak. A classic. **95** —*Meridith May*

**San Simeon 2015 Stormwatch, Paso Robles (\$80)** Hailing from the El Pomar District, with its steep hillsides and rocky soils, this blend contains all five Bordeaux varieties and is dominated by Cabernet Sauvignon (46%) and Merlot (27%). Aromas of Bing cherries, salted plums, and graphite supercharge the intensity while also maintaining balance. Strong-willed and broad-shouldered, it expresses savory tones of soy sauce and black olives. The mid-palate introduces coffee liqueur sweetened by brown-sugared blackberry. This wine defines opulence. **98** —*M.M.*

**Opaque 2016 Darkness Red, Paso Robles (\$32)** Speaking to the blackness in the glass, this wine is ensconced in shadow and depth with scents of dark-chocolate fudge, leather, and black fruit. A blend of 57% Zinfandel, 18% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 13% Syrah with some Petite Sirah, Malbec, and Petit Verdot added, it lines the palate with chocolate-espresso notes. Bracing tannins take hold with a towering effect as sandalwood envelops jammy blackberry like a pie crust. Intense and delicious. **93** —*M.M.*

**Maddalena 2018 Estate Reserve Rosé, Paso Robles (\$18)** Decidedly bright and refreshing aromas of cranberry and kiwi accompany stone fruit, which adds a sweet side to the palate with watermelon, plum, and raspberry. There's a delightful taste of springtime in the glass of this prom dress pink-hued beauty: a masterful blend that includes 40% Graciano, 29% Syrah, and smaller percentages of Primitivo, Grenache, Grenache Blanc, and Zinfandel. **90** —*M.M.*

**San Simeon 2018 Estate Reserve Sauvignon Blanc, Paso Robles (\$24)** This expression fermented in stainless-steel tanks—a long, cold process that preserved the wine's delicate flavors of lemon ice and golden pears. Aromas range from honeysuckle to candied citrus. The breezy crispness of the mouthfeel works well with a seasoning of saffron and finishes with a salted-peach tone, a result of the rocky soils on which the grapes were grown. **93** —*M.M.*





# SOMM|CON<sup>®</sup>

## YOUNG LEADERS SUMMIT

Walking the hall last November during SommCon's West Coast Conference in San Diego, the excitement was contagious. The verve was perhaps felt deepest by the circle of Young Leaders who had gathered to meet alongside their mentor for the day and sponsor of the program, Meridith May, publisher of Tasting Panel and SommJournal.

SommCon, which is held annually in both San Diego, CA., and Washington, D.C., invites young professionals under 30 to apply for the Young Leader's Summit in which rising stars are granted hosted scholarships to SommCon, invitations to special dinners, and tasting experiences led by industry legends and top educators.

With applications currently open for the Young Leader's Class of 2019, we sat down with past recipients to learn more about their experience.



Our first roundtable includes:

- Megan Bauer, Sommelier, Rosewood San Hill – Mountain View, CA
- Caitlin Carter, Wine Sales Supervisor, Stave Wine Cellar at Pebble Beach Resorts – Monterey, CA
- Cassandra Felix, Head Sommelier, The Breakers Palm Beach - West Palm Beach, FL
- Allison Gabdois, Beverage Manager, Triple Creek Ranch – Lindstrom, MN
- Edward Lee, Hospitality Sales Manager – Mandarin Program, Treasury Wine Estates - American Canyon, CA
- Caitlin Taglia, Wine Buyer, Holeman and Finch Bottle Shop – Atlanta, GA

### Q: Why did you apply for the Young Leader's Scholarship at SommCon?

**Caitlin Taglia:** As one of the leading beverage conferences in the country, SommCon was high on my list to attend. Engaging with likeminded people in the industry makes me a better Sommelier. I jumped on the opportunity to attend in the most cost effective way. The Atlanta Sommelier community is small, but growing. I wanted to gain knowledge and connections to somms in other communities.

**Cassandra Felix:** I was encouraged to apply by MW Geoff Labitzke of Kistler, after participating in the Chaine des Rotisseurs Young Sommelier competition. There were some definite room for improvement in certain areas of my performance and I knew that if I had the opportunity to attend SommCon, I would learn a lot. I was excited to bring my wine knowledge to the next level by attending seminars led by the best in the business.



### Q. Did you have a favorite session?

**Edward Lee:** The topic by Scott Barber, co presented by Anthony Muller, Napa Valley with Burgundy Mentality. At events like these, you can tell that there are professionals taking the time to distill their lifelong learning into insightful messages. It helped me better position Napa Valley when I am out talking to my brands.

**Caitlin Taglia:** Sandy soils with Will Costello. Will taught us about the many ways that the specific soil would affect the wine. His incredible level of knowledge on the subject was inspiring and intertwined the whole course with a level of fun and humor that made it even more enjoyable.





**Q: What tools did SommCon provide you with in your professional career?**

**Allison Gadbois:** SommCon was crucial in my passing of the Court of Master Sommeliers Certification. I was studying for my Level Two when I attended and as a result I am proud to say I am now a Certified Sommelier. SommCon gave me the opportunity to taste and learn about so many wines, I know it gave me an advantage in studying.

**Cassandra Felix:** SommCon was very helpful in preparing for the Advanced Sommelier Exam, specifically with the blind tasting portion. Breaking down grape varietals with the Blind Tasting with MWs seminar, Honing in on Cabernet Franc with Master of Wine Geoff Labitzke and Garnacha with Master Sommelier Bob Bath, and competing in the Game of Wines competition was a great way to get in gear for the exam.

**Q: What advice do you have to 2019 Young Leader's Scholarship winners during SommCon?**

**Caitlin Carter:** Listen, drink and write down everything! Sit through each lesson with pride and remember you have been granted this amazing opportunity to learn so much about your field of choice. The people that have been selected with you will become lifelong friends and colleagues so appreciate the amazing bond you all share. Have a blast!



**Registration Coming Soon!**

**Book Your Hotel**

Hotel reservations are booking fast for SommCon D.C. Secure yours today at [www.sommconusa.com/register](http://www.sommconusa.com/register)

**Book Your Become A Young Leader**

Apply now at [www.sommconusa.com/young-leaders-summit](http://www.sommconusa.com/young-leaders-summit)  
Deadline to apply is March 29, 2019

**Contact Us**

Email: [info@sommconusa.com](mailto:info@sommconusa.com) | Phone: 619.312.1212  
[www.sommconusa.com](http://www.sommconusa.com)







While China Live serves dumplings to rival those of its predecessor, dim sum restaurant Golden Mountain, its elevated fare more closely reflects the tastes of modern-day San Franciscans.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHINA LIVE

# A Taste of the Old San Francisco

THE CITY BY THE BAY  
STILL HAS SOUL

by Jesse Hom-Dawson

My Bay Area friends and colleagues regularly complain about the changes San Francisco has gone through since innumerable tech companies claimed the city as their home. From Google bus traffic to sky-high rents and rampant gentrification, the city has become all but unrecognizable to longtime residents: To hear it from them, “San Francisco has lost its soul.”

I grew up in the Bay Area, and many of my childhood memories revolve around the city’s celebrated food scene. There was brunch at Mama’s on the corner of Washington Square, where we would arrive early to avoid the line; with my voracious appetite, I’d chow down on its fantastic coffee cake, smoothies, and eggs Benedict with Dungeness crab. Then we’d head across the street to Liguria Bakery, where what looked like an empty storefront sold the most fantastic green onion-and-tomato sauce focaccia I’ve ever had.

Other days were spent meeting my grandma at Golden Mountain, the cavernous dim sum hall situated on the border between North Beach and Chinatown. I’d point at the lotus-leaf sticky rice or steamed pork buns on the carts, too embarrassed to order them in English while everyone at the tables around me spoke Mandarin or Cantonese.

During a recent weekend excursion to San Francisco, I was happy to find that at least parts of the city hadn’t changed much. There was still a line out the door at Mama’s, and a quick peek at its menu confirmed that the crab Benedict remains. Liguria still sells the same focaccia, and the Italian bakery where we used to order St. Honoré cakes had moved only a few blocks down.

I could still get the Peking duck displayed in the window at the shop on Stockton Street, where it’s chopped into pieces by a man wielding the same giant, fast-moving cleaver that used to fascinate me as a child (and still does today). Golden Mountain, though, is gone, replaced by the sleek restaurant and market China Live. It, too, serves up delicious Chinese food—though I miss the old ladies pushing the dim sum carts.

Meanwhile, Zuni Café endures on the Hayes Valley street corner it’s occupied since 1979, serving the roast chicken it made famous back in 1987, and Slanted Door has managed to stay relevant since it began serving upscale Vietnamese food 24 years ago. If we’re judging strictly by its food scene, I’d say this city still has a soul—even if it’s located firmly in its stomach. ■■



The roast chicken for two at Zuni Café has been a classic San Franciscan dish since it was introduced in 1987.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZUNI CAFÉ



WHERE WE'RE

Eating

**Chef/partner Minoru Ogawa**  
of Zeppelin, a new Japanese  
restaurant in Washington, D.C.



An assortment of yakitori, sashimi, and shishito peppers (top) is available at Zeppelin. At any given time, Ogawa may feature as many as 30 types of seasonal fish (above) on his menu.

# Picky Diners Need Not Apply

by Merrill Shindler

I really like the Japanese tradition of omakase because, well, I eat everything—and in the world of omakase, “everything” is what you might well be served. The word is often translated as “I’ll leave it up to you,” though some chefs prefer the phrase “Trust me.” And I do—even though, some years ago, that trust earned me a plate of grilled salamanders. I thought they were pretty tasty, as salamanders go, which helped when I had to eat my companion’s as well so as to not insult the chef.

As with many prix fixe feasts, omakase often includes dishes that are a bit (or a lot) edgy. Presented one course at a time, omakase is culinary theater: At a recent omakase in Tokyo, the chef decided to show off his skill with sea urchin, serving it several ways during the meal. I happily gobbled it

down as my wife and daughter sipped their green tea and slid their uni over to me. As with caviar, I don’t think you can eat too much uni, but I certainly came close.

If you identify as a fellow adventurous diner, perhaps you’d like to know where to find some of the most defining omakase experiences in America. The most expensive is certainly at Masa in New York, where it runs \$595 per person (while tip is included, beverages and tax aren’t). At \$395, the omakase at Beverly Hills restaurant Urasawa is practically a bargain. And at Kazunori Nozawa’s SUGARFISH chain, with ten branches in Los Angeles and a new concept in New York, the “Trust Me” options are many. There’s “Trust Me Lite” for \$19, “Trust Me” for \$27, “Nozawa Trust Me” for \$37, and “Don’t Think. Just Eat” for \$52. In

exchange for the attractive prices, you’d best be on good behavior—house rules include the refusal of requests for extra sauces, salt, or additional rice. (Salt? Who salts sushi?)

The latest of these Japanese fine-dining temples is Zeppelin in Washington, D.C., which draws its design inspiration from the 1985 book *The Golden Age of the Great Passenger Airships*. Located on the second floor, where it’s separated from the rest of the restaurant, the omakase bar is a sanctuary in which one can contemplate any of the 30 seasonal fish options brought in by Chef Minoru Ogawa, who offers three levels of omakase from \$65 to \$100 per person for optional pairing with any of 80 sakés. There’s no mention of salamander, but then again, they may not yet be in season. ■■