

THE  
tastingpanel

SEPTEMBER 2019 • \$6.95



*Forging His Own*

# DESTINY

CHILEAN-BORN IMPORTER AND INNOVATOR

*Alex Guarachi*

SHARES HIS STORY OF STRUGGLE AND SUCCESS

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

**AVIATION 97 PTS**

**BOMBAY  
SAPPHIRE 92 PTS**

**HENDRICK'S 92 PTS**



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MAGAZINE



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# The Glass Ceiling



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

“I don’t feel like a full bottle of wine tonight—let’s each have a glass of Champagne. Hmm, Henriot Brut is one of my favorites, but \$22 a glass? Yikes! Oh, well. Here’s a nice Chenin Blanc from Chalone. Argh! It’s \$21 a glass. With a 4-ounce pour, that’s \$5.25 an ounce—or \$5.25 a swallow. Let’s have a beer. It’s only \$9.”

This little drama is playing out in restaurants all over the country as by-the-glass prices continue to soar. I sympathize. As a restaurateur, you realize that alcohol is your cash cow: You pretty much just break even on food, but wine brings in the bucks. And thank god for the rebirth of cocktails; if you’ve got a skilled mixologist and a snazzy drink list, you can get away with charging 15 bucks a pop. A four-top, before they even peruse the food menu, will have rung up \$60 on orders that contain just a few dollars’ worth of alcohol each. *Ka-ching.*

But let’s go over the math for those \$20 glasses of wine. That bottle of Henriot costs you around \$23 wholesale, maybe less, so you’re making that back on one glass. The five other glasses you squeeze out of each bottle are pure, unadulterated profit: 500%, or, if you’re generous and do a 5-ounce pour, 400%. Obviously, that’s nothing to scoff at.

My question to restaurateurs, though, is this: If you charged a more reasonable price—let’s say \$10 or \$12 per glass—would the customer be more likely to order a second glass? And if that’s the case, would increasing volume be better for your bottom line in the long run?

The answer to this complicated question depends on the goodwill generated by the friendlier price as well as the additional menu items that might be ordered by a more relaxed customer who will stick around a bit longer to drink that second glass. But it may be worth the gamble—after all, you’re already charging \$9 for beer. ■■



My question to restaurateurs is this: If you charged a more reasonable price—let’s say \$10 or \$12 per glass—would the customer be more likely to order a second glass?”

# UPFRONT



PHOTO: JOHN CURLEY



PHOTO: JOHN CURLEY

## Arts and Crafts

### HISTORIC KNITTING COMPANY— TURNED—DISTILLERY J.J. PFISTER HAS A GREAT YARN TO SPIN

by John Curley

At first glance, it makes no sense. What could a turn-of-the-century San Francisco knitting company known for its woolen bathing suits have to do with a year-old distillery on the outskirts of Sacramento—one that's already making an impressive entrance into the craft spirits market, with the capacity to yield 100,000 gallons of product a year?

To find out, we headed to the spacious tasting room of J.J. Pfister Distilling Company, where artifacts lovingly arranged in glass cases and on the walls offered Instagram-ready clues. There were more than a few bathing suits on display, along with photos of workers and pictures of the original building before it was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire. It all made for quite a story about a long-defunct textiles factory rising out of the ashes to become a thriving business once again run by members of the Pfister family, who have now traded out knitting goods for spirits.

Pictured clockwise from top left in the J.J. Pfister tasting room are Distiller Mike Moore; J.J. Pfister's great-great-grandchildren Brian Keck, Master Distiller, and Chief of Operations Michelle Keck Smith; and Kevin and Gail Keck, President and CFO, respectively.





**The J.J. Pfister name once belonged to a successful knitting factory.**

PHOTO: JOHN CURLEY



**Brian Keck and Mike Moore test mixtures as they craft new products.**

PHOTO: JOHN CURLEY

When Kevin Keck, J.J. Pfister's great-grandson, and his family were weighing names for their new distilling venture, they wanted to keep alive J.J.'s memory. They sought to establish a link between themselves and the man who, while still living in Switzerland, became so entranced with the then-new transcontinental railroad in the far-away United States that he came to this country, rode the train to California, and started his own company there.

To be sure, J.J.'s spirit of entrepreneurship is very much alive in Keck: It takes a strong belief in yourself and your cohorts to strike out for new territory with nothing to guide you but your smarts and your willingness to ask for help along the way. Keck had already had at least three successful careers before starting the distillery. Trained as an engineer, he helped design water projects in California before attending medical school; he then went into primary care, which led to an executive position designing and implementing health plans. "I guess I'm kind of a flake," he says. (Sure you are, Dr. Keck, sure you are.)

Similarly eclectic and brilliant is his son Brian, who was a few published papers away from a Ph.D. in chemistry when he decided he simply didn't want to be a chemist. Already a homebrewer, he enrolled in the graduate program in viticulture and enology at the University of California, Davis, with the goal of becoming a winemaker.

That's when serendipity came into play: An old family friend, Mike Noonan, asked Kevin and Brian if they would like to go into the distilling business.

Noonan, an organic potato farmer in Oregon, was making a good living selling his crop to Whole Foods, but it irked him that he had to throw away two-thirds of his potatoes because they didn't look perfect enough.

Together, they decided to make potato vodka. To that end, they brought in a childhood friend of Brian's, Mike Moore, a math major and teacher who wanted to use his skills in a capacity other than education; Chris Johnson, another friend and UC Davis classmate, soon followed. Set on executing their plans, they felt confident that Brian and Chris' training in viticulture and enology would help them succeed despite their lack of spirits experience.

"We knew that the craft beer market was about 12.5% of total beer sales," Kevin says. "And we knew that the craft spirits business was at about 3%—but it was expected to have the same trajectory as craft beer. So we wanted to ride that wave."

Indeed, enthusiasm proved just as critical to Brian in his transition into distilling as his formal training in sensory perception or the internships he'd completed (tremendously helpful as they were). "We like to make things that we enjoy," Brian says, "so if it tastes good to us, we hope others will enjoy it too."

The first big indicator that they'd created a winner came at the 2018 Farm-to-Fork Festival in Sacramento, which attracted about 80,000 people. At their booth, they featured a Moscow Mule made with J.J. Pfister vodka and another cocktail that showcased their gin. Both were hugely popular, and after



PHOTO: HARDY WILSON

**J.J. Pfister Gin stars in the hibiscus- and grenadine-accented Flora the Explora cocktail at Jackson's Bar and Oven in Santa Rosa, CA. See Bar Manager Alex Kaplan's recipe on page 7.**

some favorable reviews came in, they were really and truly on their way.

Speaking of his great-grandfather, Kevin says, "His thing was a high-end product at a fair price." That happens to be Kevin's thing, too. "The price point of our product is \$25 or \$30. What we are not doing is selling our high-end vodka at \$42—we're selling to compete with other well-established craft brands," he explains. "The value differential is way bigger than the dollar differential. We're going to do that with all our products. That's our value proposition to crack the market." ■■

# Weaving J.J. Pfister Gin into Crafty Cocktails

by *Meridith May*

Jackson's Bar and Oven in Santa Rosa, California, will celebrate its tenth anniversary this winter. The fast-paced and always-packed venue is popular thanks to its combination of high-end service and casual atmosphere, according to Bar Manager Alex Kaplan—even as both the creative, wood-fired American fare and the innovative seasonal cocktails keep evolving.

**Alex Kaplan, Bar Manager at Jackson's Bar and Oven in Santa Rosa, CA, presents his People's Choice cocktail, which combines J.J. Pfister Gin with flavors of strawberry and cucumber.**



In making buying decisions for the beverage program, Kaplan meets and tastes with many brand representatives. “A colleague of mine on the distribution side introduced me to J.J. Pfister Gin,” notes Kaplan. “I was impressed from first sip. The quality wowed me, as did the flavor profile and mouthfeel. I experienced the same reaction to J.J. Pfister Vodka, with its creamy, unbelievably smooth texture.”

Kaplan believes that well-made spirits must be mixed with the best ingredients he can find, and although he makes most of his syrups and shrubs in house, he still searches for purees and bitters that he can trust when concocting his signature cocktails.

## Flora the Explora

- ▶ 1½ oz. J.J. Pfister Gin
- ▶ ½ oz. hibiscus liqueur
- ▶ 1 oz. fresh lemon juice
- ▶ ¾ oz. housemade grenadine
- ▶ 1 egg white

“This cocktail is bright and beautiful in flavor and appearance,” Kaplan says. “The hibiscus and grenadine add nice floral and berry notes, playing well with the dry-style gin. The egg white helps round the cocktail out, giving it a nice, creamy mouthfeel and texture. And the gin’s flavors of fennel and spice are able to come through subtly.”

## People's Choice

- ▶ 2 oz. J.J. Pfister Gin
- ▶ ¾ oz. strawberry-infused Campari
- ▶ 1 oz. fresh lime juice
- ▶ ¾ oz. cucumber syrup
- ▶ 6 drops Monarch Wormwood Bitters

“This cocktail comes out extremely balanced and refreshing,” says Kaplan, who adds that strawberries sourced from Sebastopol “are the sweetest I have ever had; on my way to work I pass the farm stand where they are grown, harvested, and sold. The perfectly ripened berries take back some of the bitterness from the Campari and play so well with the gin and cucumber syrup. The wormwood bitters help pick up some of the bitterness that was left back with the infused Campari, allowing the gin to shine through.”

**J.J. Pfister London Dry Capitol Gin, USA (\$30)** John Jacob Pfister made a name for himself in the early 20th century with knitted sportswear; today, an exciting new distillery carries his name. (The icon on the bottle is a combination of a sewing machine and a copper still.) Organic rye from the Sacramento Valley is used as a base for the spirit, which exudes aromas of lavender, tangerine, and spearmint with an echo of juniper. The palate is blissful: soft and silky, with candied violet opening to lemongrass and exotic spices. Fennel root imparts a creaminess before the long finish leaves a sweetness on the tongue. **97** —*Meridith May*

**J.J. Pfister Organic Potato Vodka, USA (\$25)** Like its sibling in the gin category, this is a step above for vodka. The potatoes are organically grown in the Klamath Basin near the California-Oregon border at Noonan Farms, which floods its fields prior to cultivation, providing a habitat for millions of migrating birds every year. (J.J. Pfister also donates 1% of its profits to aid wildlife in the region.) On the nose, tarragon-spiced lemons and vanilla are delicate and vibrant. The creamy entry offers a layer of licorice covered by a wave of mocha, black pepper, and toasted marshmallow. The mouthfeel is fluid and lengthy. **95** —*M.M.*

**J.J. Pfister Distilling Navy Strength Rum (\$35)** A luminous hue of amber-gold meets a heady perfume of dried flowers and bittersweet orange peel. The palate is composed, elegant, and silky. At 114 proof, this navy-strength rum doesn't knock you over; rather, it's crisp and defined. Stone fruit weaves through vanilla extract, dark honey, and dried figs, followed by a finish of oak, apricot, and dark chocolate. **95** —*M.M.*

**J.J. Pfister Distilling DRAKAS Honey Spirit, USA (\$30)** Distilled from organic honey and housed in a slim 375-milliliter bottle, this complex 90-proofer is certainly in a category of its own. Its grappa-like qualities are multidimensional: Aromas of peaches, honeyed apples, walnuts, and orange blossoms give a clue to its layered nature. The roundness of its body engages a tickle of salinity in the back of the mouth. This “seasoning” opens up a seductive nectar of stone fruits and accents a subdued hint of honey, which has a pleasantly warming effect on the finish. **96** —*M.M.*

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Christine Wiseman, Bar Director  
at L.A.'s Broken Shaker, with an  
iichiko Saiten cocktail.

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PHOTO: REBECCA PEPLINSKI

PHOTO: DEVIN BERKIO

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2019 San Francisco Chronicle  
Wine Competition



## Double Gold Medal

2016 Meritage Red Blend  
Columbia Valley  
2019 San Francisco Chronicle  
Wine Competition

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# 42



中国珠茶



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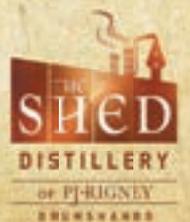
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*Patrick J. Rigney*



## Signature Serve

- 1.5 oz. Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin
- Top-off with chilled premium tonic water
- Fresh Ruby Red Grapefruit



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## The Tasting Panel Appoints Wine Veteran Lars Leicht to VP/Director–Communications and Trade Relations

The Tasting Panel and its sister publication, *The SOMM Journal*, have appointed wine-industry veteran Lars Leicht as Vice President and Director–Communications and Trade Relations. In this role, Leicht will write for the publication, organize special wine-education events, moderate seminars, coordinate sponsorship activities, and assist with web content and social media. He reports directly to Editor-in-Chief/Publisher Meridith May.



The appointment returns Leicht, who began his professional career as a reporter for *The Daily Star* in Oneonta, New York, to his journalistic roots. It will also allow him to take advantage of his extensive industry experience: His focus on Italian language and culture led him to Banfi Vintners, America’s leading importer of fine wine, where he remained for 33 years.

In various leadership roles in sales, marketing, and public relations, Leicht represented the Banfi portfolio across the U.S., Europe, Canada, the Caribbean, and Asia, working directly with the firm’s Mariani family proprietors and developing an unprecedented hospitality program at their Castello Banfi estate in Montalcino, Tuscany. He has led press trips to Chile and Italy; spoken at sommelier conferences, cooking schools, and culinary universities; and appeared in the movie *Somm II: Into the Bottle*. Since 1998, Leicht has brought over 100 wine professionals on scholarship trips to Italy for SommFoundation and SommSouth, and as the founder and de facto “Dean” of Cru College, he has taken Italian wine-makers to insightful seminars and exceptional tastings across the U.S.

## Sanden Launches WHYNOT Wine Saver and Dispenser System



Sanden Retail Systems Co. has launched the WHYNOT Wine Saver and Dispenser System, which utilizes FreshKeep wine-saver technology. The first of its kind, this patented system entirely prevents exposure to oxygen, keeping wine fresh for up to 11 months.

In addition to maintaining the taste of wine, WHYNOT lowers costs by mitigating waste, enables on-premise accounts to offer more high-end wines by the glass, and allows for the storage of customer bottles to increase repeat business. For more information, visit [whynotvin.com](http://whynotvin.com).

## RumChata Releases New Iced Coffee Tumbler

RumChata recently released a 26-ounce plastic thermal tumbler so that fans of the cream liqueur can enjoy it in their favorite coffee drink during the warmer months. The RumChata Summer Tumbler comes filled with eight 25-milliliter MiniChatas.

RumChata’s blend of Caribbean rum, real dairy cream, and spices has a third less fat content than traditional cream liqueurs, making it the ideal addition to a light and refreshing cold-coffee cocktail. The RumChata Summer Tumbler is available in all 50 states at an average retail price of \$9.99. For more information, visit [rumchata.com](http://rumchata.com).



## Correction

In the Industry Spotlight section of our July/August issue, the wrong website URL was provided in the spotlight on Acqua Smeraldina. The correct address for English-speaking readers is [smeraldina.us](http://smeraldina.us). We regret the error.



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## Jordan Winery Announces Changes to Its Winemaking Staff

Rob Davis, who has worked at Jordan Winery since the inaugural 1976 harvest and is considered the longest-tenured winemaker in Sonoma County, has transitioned into the newly created role of winegrower at the company. He has turned over lead winemaking and management responsibilities to Maggie Kruse, who has worked alongside Davis for the past 13 harvests.

Davis will continue to manage all grower vineyards and serve as a mentor and advisor to Kruse and assistant winemaker John Duckett on many aspects of winemaking—just as the legendary André Tchelistcheff did for him for the first 18 years of his career at Jordan.

Kruse graduated from the University of California, Davis, in 2005, joining Jordan the following year. She was promoted from enologist to assistant winemaker in 2009 and began overseeing all aspects of barrel use and bottling. For more information, visit [jordanwinery.com](http://jordanwinery.com).

## Dos Equis to Send Fans to the College Football National Championship

Returning this college football season as the official beer sponsor of the College Football Playoff, Dos Equis plans to give fans a chance to win over 400 football-themed prizes—including tickets to the national championship game in New Orleans in January 2020—through a promotion that ends in October.

To enter the contest, beer drinkers who show a passion for Dos Equis and college football can snap a picture of themselves with a Dos Equis and post it on social media (using #XXOFFICIALSWEEPS) or upload it to the Dos Equis CFP microsite. “It’s no secret that college football fans are checking in and cheering on their team every day of the week,” says Dos Equis Brand Director Karla Flores. “That’s why we’re reminding consumers that if they consider themselves official college football fans, they should be drinking the official beer of the College Football Playoff all season long.”



## Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi Announces New “From One For All” National Campaign

Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi, which ranks among the leading U.S. wine brands, has launched a new national brand campaign. Named “From One For All,” it brings founder Robert Mondavi’s story to life in Woodbridge’s first-ever 60-second commercial as well as in 15- and 30-second TV spots.

“Since its founding in 1979, Woodbridge has remained steadfast in its commitment to making quality California wines of exceptional value for everyday enjoyment,” says Jaymie Schoenberg, Vice President of Marketing for Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi Wines. “We know consumers are seeking a deeper connection to the brands they choose, and this new strategy celebrates Woodbridge’s 40-year commitment to our consumers by reliving the history that got us here.”

Woodbridge is airing these new advertisements during live sporting events on ESPN and the NFL Network. The commercials debuted in June on cable networks, including TBS, HGTV, Food Network, Bravo, and FX. Digital ads will appear on Facebook and Instagram through fall 2019. For more information, visit [woodbridgewines.com](http://woodbridgewines.com).



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COMPETITION  
2018  
DOUBLE  
GOLD

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POINTS  
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HIGHLY RECOMMENDED  
AMERICAN WHISKEY

LONDON SPIRITS  
WHISKY  
OF THE YEAR  
2019  
COMPETITION

2018  
DOUBLE  
GOLD  
NEW YORK  
WORLD  
WINE & SPIRITS  
COMPETITION

SAN FRANCISCO  
WORLD  
SPIRITS  
COMPETITION  
2018  
GOLD  
MEDAL

ULTIMATE SPIRITS CHALLENGE 2018  
FINALIST  
96  
POINTS  
EXTRAORDINARY  
ULTIMATE  
RECOMMENDATION  
AMERICAN BOURBON

SAN FRANCISCO  
WORLD  
SPIRITS  
COMPETITION  
2018  
GOLD  
MEDAL

2018 NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL SPIRITS COMPETITION  
94  
GOLD WINNER  
STRAIGHT RYE  
WHISKEY

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## In Memory of Wine-Industry Icon Stefano Riboli



Stefano Riboli, husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and patriarch of San Antonio Winery, died peacefully at his home surrounded by family on July 3 at the age of 97, the winery said in a statement.

Riboli was born in Los Angeles on September 8, 1921, and lived there until his parents returned to Italy when he was 3 years old. As a young boy growing up in the small mountain village of Berzo San Fermo, Riboli herded cows in Alpine mountain pastures during the spring and summer months. At the age of 16, he was sponsored by his uncle Santo Cambianica to come work at San Antonio Winery, which Cambianica founded in 1917 in L.A.'s Lincoln Heights neighborhood.

After World War II ended, Riboli met his wife, Maddalena, on her family's farm in Chino, California. They married in 1946 and settled down to raise a family a few blocks away from the winery—spending the next 73 years together. For decades, longtime patrons would visit just to see Riboli, who was fondly referred to as Papa Steve.

A dedicated family man, Riboli is survived by his three children: Santo (Joan), Cathy (Nino), and Steve (Sindee), who run the winery today. He leaves behind many grandchildren—Anthony, Steve, Lisa, Michael, Jennifer, David, Dante, Blake, Christopher, and Alex—and is also survived by seven great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to Saint Peter's Italian Catholic Church in memory of Riboli at [stpeteritalianchurchla.org](http://stpeteritalianchurchla.org).

## J. Rieger & Co. Opens New Distillery in Kansas City's Historic Electric Park

In July, J. Rieger & Co. opened its new distillery and spirits destination in the historic Electric Park neighborhood of Kansas City. Guests can enjoy an



PHOTO: SAMANTHA LEVI PHOTOGRAPHY

array of innovative cocktails and craft spirit experiences, including a custom-engineered 40-foot slide that ferries guests from the second-floor Monogram Lounge to the first floor; a whiskey-bottling station; a 3,500-square-foot history exhibit; two full-service cocktail bars and lounge spaces; daily distillery tours; educational seminars and on-site events; multiple private event spaces; and more.

Founded by Andy Rieger and Ryan Maybee in 2014, J. Rieger & Co. traces its origins back to the pre-Prohibition era. The new distillery represents a significant expansion to 60,000 square feet, allowing the team to increase production capacity while offering a world-class hospitality center. For more information, visit [jriegerco.com](http://jriegerco.com).

## Sokol Blosser Welcomes Chris Langan as Vice President of Sales

Sokol Blosser, one of Oregon's most iconic wineries, has hired Chris Langan as Vice President of Sales. Langan joins Sokol Blosser from K Vintners/Wines of Substance in Washington, where he helped grow Charles Smith brands with successful regional- and national-chain-sales programs for the past four years.

"[Langan's] passion for wine, coupled with his deep experience, impressive sales accomplishments and exceptional relationships in the industry, is exactly what we need to grow our distribution throughout the U.S.," says Alison Sokol Blosser, Co-President and CEO of Sokol Blosser Winery.



Based in his hometown of Austin, Texas, Langan will develop and execute strategic plans to expand distribution and sales of Sokol Blosser's signature Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, and Chardonnay as well as its Evolution wines and the newest addition to the Sokol Blosser portfolio, Bluebird Cuvée Sparkling Wine. For more information, visit [sokolblosser.com](http://sokolblosser.com). ■■

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PHOTO: CHRIS PEARCE

# Liquid Happiness

THE JOY OF SAKE BRINGS SERIOUS MIRTH TO MANHATTAN

by Rich Manning

How do you serve 512 sakés to a throng of hot, thirsty New Yorkers on the longest day of the year?

With eyedroppers, that's how—copious amounts of them.

The optometric doodads played a key role at the 15th annual Joy of Sake, a public tasting held at Manhattan's Metropolitan Pavilion on June 21.

First, they helped prevent tipsiness, as did the abundant water stations and killer Asian cuisine whipped up by Morimoto, Momofuku, 15 East, and 16 other culinary heavyweights. Second, and just as important, those microporations kept palates fresh throughout the three-hour gathering, providing attendees ample chance to discover the nuances and complexities of each label—the last no less than the first.

As joyful as every sip may have been, they carried an undercurrent of seriousness: Each of the daiginjos, ginjos, and junmais presented via

eyedropper had been submitted to the U.S. National Sake Appraisal board earlier in the year for evaluation. “The appraisal is a blind tasting over three days, with nine judges from Japan and two from the U.S.,” explains Chris Pearce, founder of both the U.S. National Sake Appraisal and The Joy of Sake (which also makes annual stops in Honolulu and Tokyo). “It’s a tough competition, and brewers send only their best saké. The entries are kept in perfect condition in an unbroken chill chain for both the judging and The Joy of Sake. As a result, the saké is at its peak in terms of aroma, balance, flavor, and overall impression.”

This year, 151 labels hauled in gold awards and 124 took home silvers. Their collective excellence was met by curiosity and appreciation from the sophisticated New York crowd, a fact that wasn't lost on event sponsors like Oregon-based brand SakéOne. “It's

such a great opportunity to learn from engaged consumers,” explained Paul Englert, SakéOne's Director of Sales and Marketing. “By presenting at The Joy of Sake, we get to hear [about] what they like and what they dislike. In some ways, it's like one big research focus group.” Englert also cited generational attitude shifts in explaining the event's importance. “Millennials tend to be more objective and open-minded when it comes to saké,” he said. “They don't like people telling them what they should and should not like; they want to make that call on their own. That was proved by how we were received—not one person hesitated to try our sakés when they found out we were an American brand.”

Englert's comments about savvy consumers made sense—after all, nobody balked at the use of eyedroppers, either. See our review of SakéOne's portfolio on page 132. ■■



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**Cristine (Hoffman) McNelis** has been named State Manager at **Taub Family Selections**. She had been the State Sales Manager at Ampel Wine.

**Jessie Behar** has been named Marketing Manager at Papa’s Pilar Rum, **Hemingway Rum Co.** She had been the Global Customer Marketing Manager at Bacardi.

**Lauren (LaRocque) Boyle** has been named NY Sales Manager at **Pampelonne**. She had been the Territory Manager at BrewDog.

**Rachel Sandstrom Morrison** has been named PR Manager at **Wild Roots Spirits**. She had been the Manager of PR & Consumer Engagement at Rogue Ales and Spirits.

### CAREER CORNER

## BevForce BUZZ:

# Benefits and Compensation Inside the Lucrative Beer Industry

From craft brews to legacy brands, the beer industry is bubbling over with exciting new products, trends, and innovations. No wonder it has a lot to offer top talent.

ForceBrands’ 2019 Talent Market Report, a cross-industry analysis of benefits and compensation in the consumer-packaged-goods (CPG) sector, surveyed more than 500 full-time hiring decision-makers—including leaders at the director, president/VP/SVP, and C-suite levels—to examine the CPG talent market in more detail. Beer respondents, who make up 21% of the total surveyed, shared insights into raises, salaries, benefits, and more.

Highlights from the report’s data reveal that average annual raises are among the highest in CPG at 12%, a figure that’s 2% higher than the cross-industry average. When it comes to benefits, beer companies of all sizes prioritize traditional offerings: Paid maternity leave and retirement programs like 401(k) plans top the list. The community-oriented nature of the industry means that these companies are more likely to source local talent who possess regional knowledge of the market than they are to provide robust relocation packages. For more insights from the report, visit [forcebrands.com](http://forcebrands.com). ■■

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.

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# Late Summer Splash

TWO NEW ITALIAN PRODUCTS DEFINE REFRESHMENT

story and photos by David Ransom



**Francesca Nonino with Nonino Distillatori's newest release, L'Aperitivo Nonino, at New York restaurant Marta.**

My good friend Tony Abou Ganim, aka The Modern Mixologist, once told me, "There's a saying in the bar business that there really are no new cocktails, just newer versions of old ones." I largely agree, as cocktails, like dishes, are for the most part based on common ingredients; it's how those ingredients are interpreted and combined that creates the impression of originality. I recently got to try a couple of new products that got me to thinking about how best to interpret them. I believe I found a solution: pairing them together.

First, during a lovely dinner with Francesca Nonino at Marta, Danny Meyer's upscale pizzeria in Manhattan's NoMad district, I was among the first to taste Nonino Distillatori's newest release, L'Aperitivo Nonino (\$40; Terlato Imports). Francesca—a third-generation member of the family behind this woman-run Italian company, famous for its grappa—was in town to launch the apéritif during Brooklyn trade event Bar Convent. The blend of 18 different botanicals, made without any additives or artificial coloring, was designed as a natural alternative to some of Italy's more famous apéritifs; elegant, refreshing, and slightly sweet, it's a perfect accompaniment to Scotch or mezcal and is also good on the rocks.

Next, during an outing with producers from Italy's Lake Garda region, I was introduced to Garda DOC sparkling wine, a new category of affordable sparklers created to compete against the Prosecco juggernaut. Hailing from Lombardy and the Veneto—most notably Bardolino, Custoza, Lugana, Soave, Valpolicella, and Valtenesi—the wines differ from Prosecco in that they are not made from Glera and that they can be white or rosé (Prosecco labeling rules do not currently allow for rosé). Regional planting practices dictate their makeup, and they can be made in the metodo classico or Charmat method.

While still young and finding its way, Spumante Garda DOC has some serious muscle behind it, including Cantina di Soave, Cavalchina, Riondo (Terlato Wines), and Valdo (Taub Family Selections). I am very intrigued to see what happens as these wines enter the U.S. market.

As for my pairing? L'Aperitivo Nonino and Garda DOC sparkling wine, of course—with a dash of orange bitters and a slice of lemon. While I would never profess to be a bartender, I think I just invented a new spritzer! Now all I have to do is name it. ■■



# TIME BUILDS CHARACTER

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OUR HISTORIC VINEYARDS IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY ARE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES. THE SOIL AND TOPOGRAPHY HAVE BEEN LIKENED TO A SANDY BEACH. VINES PLANTED OVER A CENTURY AGO ARE HEAD-PRUNED AND DRY-FARMED, YIELDING SMALL BERRIES WITH AMAZING FLAVOR. THE RESULTING WINES ARE SOULFUL EVIDENCE THAT TIME DOES INDEED BUILD CHARACTER.

At Travis Heights Wine and Spirits, owner Rohit Topiwala and wine buyer Eric Pelegrin curate one of the best selections of Champagne, Sherry, and single malt whisky in Austin, TX.



# Neighborhood Niche

TRAVIS HEIGHTS WINE AND SPIRITS BRINGS THE WORLD TO AUSTIN story and photo by Lori Moffatt

The location of Travis Heights Wine and Spirits on the side of busy Interstate 35 presents both a challenge and an opportunity for owner Rohit Topiwala. The boutique Austin bottle shop gets plenty of traffic from passersby grabbing a six-pack or a chilled bottle of patio rosé—but only its regulars know it also offers one of the best selections of Champagne, Sherry, amaro, vermouth, single malt whisky, and agave spirits in the city.

“Sometimes people come in expecting to find what they see at the grocery store,” says Topiwala, whose parents opened the business in 2003 as a spin-off to their restaurant next door, which now has other owners. “But we tend to shy away from those kinds of things. We want people to explore what else is out there. We try to steer our

customers to products that represent a place or time.”

Topiwala, a fan of both single malt and wines from the Loire Valley, followed his passions when he hired his team: Resident whisky expert David Bartlett brings his expertise to the floor most evenings, while Marseilles native Eric Pelegrin—a former chef who now serves as the shop’s wine and spirits buyer—leads thrice-weekly tastings and advises customers about pairing their purchases with food.

“We dig around a lot, and one of the things I look for is value,” says Topiwala, who works with more than 20 vendors to bring in underrepresented wines that are not only delicious but also affordable. “Vendors seek us out, because they know we are willing to try different things.”

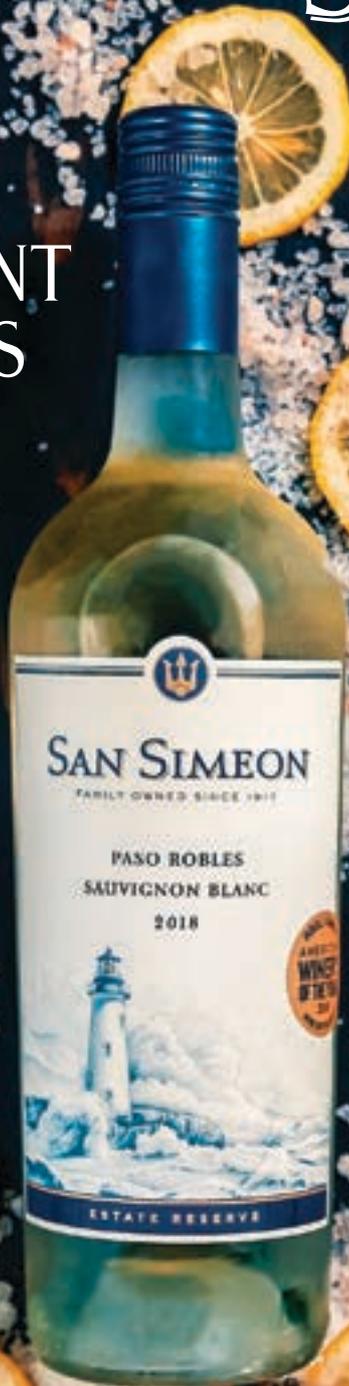
Lately, the team has rallied around Sherry, which can be a refreshing foil to Texas’ broiling heat. “One of my favorite things is to watch someone try a dry Sherry for the first time,” Pelegrin says. “It’s an experience, like your first sip of Laphroaig. People are usually surprised by the range of flavors in Sherry—how dry and salty it can be or how syrupy and complex on the other end of the spectrum. Sherries are usually traditionally made and well priced. And there is a Sherry for every food on the table.”

Customers often drop by for the booze-related banter, especially during Pelegrin’s tastings. They can even learn to say “Cheers” in another language, thanks to a mural out front that depicts a dozen global greetings, from Hindi—“Chiyars!”—to Italian: “Cin cin.” After all, a world of wines and spirits awaits. ■■

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The D'Zerac cocktail at Via Sophia contains apple brandy, absinthe, amaro, and mandarin liqueur.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HAMILTON HOTEL.

# A Smoldering Summer in D.C.

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

An Art Deco landmark, the Hamilton Hotel has hosted countless inaugural balls and served as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's War Room during World War II. Recently, a friend and I showed up for something decidedly more casual: drinks and dinner at Via Sophia, the modern Italian restaurant that opened when the hotel completed a sleek renovation this past spring.

The D'Zerac cocktail was a solid starter, with Chapman Apple Brandy, Amaro delle Sirene from local distiller Don Ciccio & Figli, mandarin liqueur, and absinthe. The wine list, meanwhile, ran deep with Italian options—from Gavi to accompany hamachi crudo with summer strawberries, tomatoes, asparagus, and almonds to Pinot Nero for pairing with whole branzino for two, which came wrapped in parchment paper with fennel and potatoes. On the way out, we peeked into Society, the hotel's new 14-seat cocktail bar. Its low-lit, library-esque interior—inspired by architect Jules-Henri de Sibour, who designed the hotel in 1922—beckoned, and we promised ourselves to book a cozy table soon.

Speaking of sexy spots to sip a cocktail, Hazel in the Shaw neighborhood plans to run a fun menu on its sofa-filled side patio until the weather turns. Dubbed Hazelito, the promotion features cocktails from Spirits Manager Nick Farrell and

chef Robert Curtis. I started with a White Negroni made with gin, Fino Sherry, and locally produced Capitoline Vermouth; it made such an impression that I procured the recipe and declared it my new house cocktail. (But I couldn't give short shrift to the Jungle Bird riff Turkish Jungle Penguin, either.) Nibbles included addictive crispy pork rinds that got their tang from powdered malt vinegar. And though it was hard to choose between six kinds of tacos, we could easily have reordered the sumac- and onion-topped smoked lamb, whose tortillas were slathered with Aleppo pepper aioli.

It'd been more than a hot second since I'd visited D.C. beer mecca Birch & Barley, which boasts a selection of 555 brews curated by sudsy wunderkind Greg Engert. The venue found a new chef late last year in Jarrad Silver, whose travels to Israel have influenced dishes like baked oysters with harissa butter and roasted garlic breadcrumbs as well as Rohan duck breast with green hummus and Marcona almonds. And though the staff is as well versed as ever in recommending a draft or bottle to accompany your dinner, the description of the Huckleberry Fin on the cocktail list, including the term "botanical dust," was enough to make me order the Ford's Gin, Averna, and huckleberry concoction. I can't wait to return soon to order another round. ■■

PHOTO: KELLY MAGYARICS



Hazel's pork rinds are dusted with malt-vinegar powder.

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

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# Sachiko Miyagi

SAKÉ SPECIALIST AT  
SAKE SCHOOL OF AMERICA,  
LOS ANGELES, CA

by Michelle Metter

After Sachiko Miyagi appeared at the SommCon D.C. blind tasting “Viewing Wines Through the Lens of Diversity,” we caught up with the Sake School of America instructor to discuss future trends in saké, the importance of saké programs in restaurants, and more.

## Can you tell us about your path to becoming an instructor at Sake School of America?

I was fortunate to hear about saké for the first time early on in my career, when I worked at a restaurant in Seattle, Washington. [As] I began to seek saké certifications and learned how saké-making is a dying art, I knew my mission [would be] to spread the love of saké.

## What trends do you see in U.S. saké consumption?

In the last few years, we’ve seen rapid growth in the U.S. saké market; [it has become] a favorite foreign beverage to many. People are drinking chilled saké in delicate stem glasses and enjoying the fruity and floral aroma, or *ginjo-ka*, obtained from careful brewing using highly polished rice. Another saké favorite is the more fun, vibrant, and seasonal *nama* (unpasteurized saké) and the earthy yet delicately nuanced *kimoto* and *yamahai* (sakés using old-school, labor-intensive fermentation starters). The modern-day saké knows no boundaries [when it comes to] aroma, taste, and subtle expressions.

## How are sommeliers adding saké programs at non-Japanese restaurants?

Saké is gaining momentum through talented sommeliers [who use] it as a surprise element to showcase [its] flavor profile and who understand that



temperature [affects] the impression of saké drastically. Saké sommeliers and professionals who connect the art of saké to the Japanese concept of hospitality known as *omotenashi* are true gems.

## You recently spoke at SommCon in D.C. about diversity within the wine industry. What were some of the key takeaways of that discussion?

Diversity is an important topic in society right now, and I felt lucky to take part in this ongoing conversation. My main takeaway was to be open to something you don’t know, as [it may teach you] to understand

another layer of yourself and your values. I felt that everyone in that room appreciated what was different about one another, and that, to me, was an amazing experience. ■■



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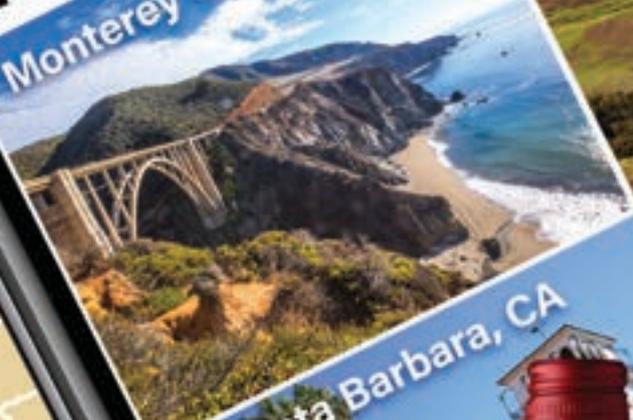
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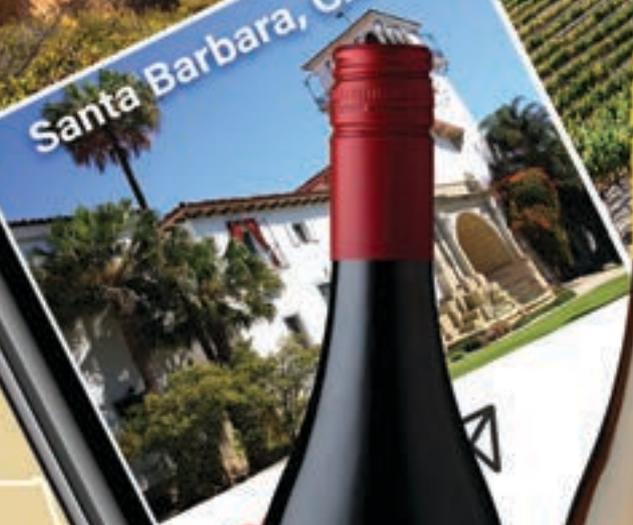
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# Concours d'Spirits



## Spirits Competition at SommCon San Diego

NOVEMBER 13, 2019

### The Judging

The **Concours d'Spirits** judging panel comprises Master Sommeliers, Masters of Wine, and professional somms embedded in the wine and spirits industry; their evaluation will recognize the highest-quality craftsmanship of craft distillers and global brands alike. Judging will be held on November 13.

### The Accolades

Medal award winners receive more than bragging rights: Earning a Concours d'Spirits medal means your product was chosen as a representative of its category by sommeliers whose palates are among the most renowned in their field. Medals are awarded in categories of Silver, Gold, Double Gold, and the *SOMM Journal* Award of Excellence.



### The Buzz

Medal winners receive immediate exposure to a buying audience; digital and print recognition; and promotional, license-free marketing assets with which to promote their award. Winners will receive:

- A display at the Concours d'Spirits tasting
- A listing in a special Results Report in the February/March 2020 issue of *The SOMM Journal*
- A winner announcement in the December issue of *SommConfidential*
- Inclusion in social media announcements on the SommCon Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn platforms that will be distributed to SommCon's beverage director and sommelier database
- Winners Circle placement on the SommCon website
- Prestigious medals for marketing and display
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- A press release template to publicize their win
- The ability to order royalty free point-of-sale materials such as bottle stickers and shelf talkers

### The Tasting

Held November 14 during the second day of the SommCon conference, the Concours d'Spirits tasting puts your brand on display for the 600-plus members of the industry in attendance. The tasting will unfold at the InterContinental Hotel on the shore of the San Diego Bay and is made available to conference attendees during the SommCon registration process.

### Concours d'Spirits Entries

Discounted pricing (\$595) for the 2019 Concours d'Spirits expires September 30; entries accepted after that date will cost \$695. No entries will be accepted after November 1. Each entry requires a separate registration and payment is due at the time of entry.

To enter, visit [sommconusa.com/competitions.html](http://sommconusa.com/competitions.html).



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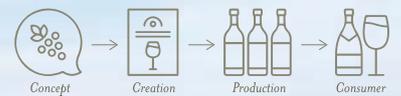
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# Scotland Rolls Out the Red Carpet

WHISKY DISTILLERIES ARE EXPLORING NEW AVENUES TO MARKET GROWTH by Ian Buxton

There's been a small but significant change to the regulations for Scotch whisky production—and it's attracting some controversy. Until recently, Scotch could only be matured in casks that showed "sufficient evidence of traditional use." In effect, distillers were limited to using ex-bourbon or Sherry barrels, though Port pipes and the occasional red-wine cask were permitted.

The new rules allow distillers to use a much wider variety of casks, including those previously containing tequila, mezcal, Calvados, barrel-aged cachaça, shochu, baijiu, and some fruit spirits. It's argued that the change will give the industry greater flexibility and attract younger drinkers, but not everyone is happy. Gavin Hewitt, former chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association, told the *Wall Street Journal*: "Scotch needs to be judged by its color, taste, and tradition. Clearly, if you then had a whisky that tasted of tequila, if it used an ex-tequila cask, it would not be Scotch."



PHOTO COURTESY OF LAGG DISTILLERY

**Complete with a gleaming visitor center, Lagg is the first new distillery to open on the island of Arran in more than 20 years.**

are making their way to Scotland's distilleries in greater-than-ever numbers, enjoying more than 2 million visits in 2018, up 6% from 2017. They were spending freely there as well, splashing out nearly £70 million (about \$88 million), a 12.2% jump over the prior year. With the pound sterling under pressure due to the continuing Brexit crisis, overseas visitors have obviously been cashing in on a very favorable exchange rate to take home some liquid souvenirs.

Tourism is increasingly important to brands both small and large. Providing a premium experience was a key strategy for The Macallan during its £140-million (approximately \$175-million) distillery redevelopment, and it's equally important to the Isle of Arran Distillers in developing Lagg, only the second distillery to open on the small island of Arran since the company established its flagship in Lochranza in 1995. It's expected that the total number of visitors to both sites will surpass 200,000 by 2020, making whisky the number-one attraction in a location long popular with vacationers. (We won't see the first Lagg whisky until March 2022, however.)

Meanwhile, Glenfiddich has adopted new packaging for its 12 and 15 Year

Old single malts. Rollout has just begun in the U.K. and the U.S., with an update for the Small Batch 18 Year Old to follow in 2020. The bold new look, the company said in a statement, aims to "celebrate Glenfiddich's maverick beginnings and family-run heritage and combine [them] with a more sophisticated and elegant design. The 12 Year Old has been given a refined makeover and is now known as 'Our



Original Twelve,' as a clear nod to the brand's signature expression." For this pioneer in both single malt marketing and distillery tourism, the makeover is designed to draw in new consumers—without the need for any unorthodox cask finishes! ■■



PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTCH WHISKY ASSOCIATION

**Scotch Whisky Association Chief Executive Karen Betts and Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism, and External Affairs Fiona Hyslop celebrate a milestone: 2 million visitors to Scotland's distilleries in 2018.**

Well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, they say, so stand by for some interesting barrel finishes in the next year or so.

In other news, it seems that tourists

# AQUINAS

*North Coast Redefined*



# A Grand Old Time

GRANVILLE RESTAURANTS' NEW PASADENA LOCATION  
MAKES GIN THE STAR OF ITS EXPANSIVE BAR PROGRAM

by Abby Read

With five locations across the Los Angeles area, Granville has built its name on globally influenced, accessibly priced cuisine for 12 years and counting. Newest to the lineup is the Pasadena location, which opened in April to bring something new to the table: a greater emphasis on the beverage program, with an expanded craft cocktail menu on offer at not one but two bars.

With a clear, crisp view of the San Gabriel Mountains and comfy day beds for guests to lounge in, Granville's rooftop bar, Bar Del Mar—aptly named after the street corner it sits on—boasts an impressive gin list that Food and Beverage Manager Marc Dix helped create. “We are starting to see the reinvention and renaissance of gin,” Dix told *The Tasting Panel*. “[Brands] are not only using lighter botanicals, floral components, hops, and essential oils; now there is also a huge, eclectic mix of regionality coming through

with gin that gives us versatility to go in any direction,” from Spanish-style Gin-Tonics and spritzers to five new “GINovative” cocktails made with fresh herbs and edible flowers.

The bar on the ground floor of the restaurant, meanwhile, is also a show-stopper, with a curated 150-bottle list showcasing spirits in every category. In addition to using housemade bitters, infusions, and liqueurs, they are in the midst of developing barrel-age cocktails on-premise. Two standout gin-based sips are the Ginny Hendrix with strawberries, cucumbers, mint, jalapeño, and chipotle-pineapple syrup and the White Lady with lemon juice, egg whites, and orange liqueur.

Even those visiting just to try the drinks will be hard-pressed not to stay for the food. “Because we are globally inspired, it opens up our menu design,” said Dix. “We take the classics

[that] we believe our guest will enjoy and then add one or two items that elevate the dish—or ‘Granville-ize’ it to a wow factor.” Crowd favorites include the Uptown Mac & Cheese with chicken, asparagus, and peas; the thick-cut grilled pork chop; and the spring chicken salad with caramel vinaigrette.

“The first Granville location started off more cafe-like, with a smaller bar footprint,” Dix acknowledged. “Now, in Pasadena with Bar Del Mar and the full ground-floor bar, we can showcase that we are a part of the beverage scene, and the community seems to love that.” ■■

**San Fernando Valley native and classically trained chef Marc Dix is the Food and Beverage Manager at Granville in Pasadena, CA, where his rooftop gin program is expanding the parameters of the category.**



PHOTO: JSEZ PR

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# A Q&A with E. Lloyd Sobel

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, BREAKTHRU BEVERAGE GROUP

As the Chief Operating Officer of one of North America's leading beverage companies, E. Lloyd Sobel works closely with Breakthru Beverage Group's portfolio of esteemed suppliers and customer partners and is responsible for optimizing company-wide sales and commercial functions to ensure superior performance.

**ForceBrands: What do you consider the most exciting initiative you've implemented as COO?**

**E. Lloyd Sobel:** Since I've assumed the role of COO, we've evolved our service model across our North American footprint to be more agile, and we implemented an EDGE program to reward and recognize high performers. We also accelerated our investments in more diverse technology platforms and commercial capabilities to help our supplier and customer partners grow their businesses and forge deeper relationships with consumers.

**FB: Given the industry trend toward consolidation, how do you see Breakthru setting itself apart from other major distributors?**

**ELS:** Across North America, Breakthru is united in its mission to help our partners grow and improve their business performance. What distinguishes us in the industry is our diverse portfolio of iconic, craft, and artisanal brands; our platform for service and performance excellence; and, most important, our dedicated associates. We stay ahead through our strong relationships and strategic partnerships; state-of-the-art facilities; logistics and operational expertise that ensure efficiency and execution across our footprint; and investments in our talented people. We top it off with a deep commitment to continuous improvement.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FORCEBRANDS

**to collaborate with this space?**

**ELS:** We are closely monitoring the cannabis market as it continues to emerge as a new frontier across North America. In 2018, we launched Kindred Partners, a wholly owned subsidiary providing recreational cannabis-brokerage services for the Canadian adult-use market. Kindred has not only allowed us to pursue a new growth opportunity, it has enabled us to get direct experience with this market and better understand [it].

**FB: Building a strong team culture is one of the most effective ways to attract and**

**retain talent. How would you describe Breakthru's culture and its impact on the company's success?**

**ELS:** We continue to build out our digital capabilities and platforms to make it easier for our customers to transact and do business with us. Our unified Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, SAP, has been the centerpiece of real-time business capabilities. Within the next year, our entire footprint will be running on this platform, which will enable financial, supply-chain, and operational efficiencies and equip our associates with real-time information to better serve our customers and suppliers.

**FB: One of the most disruptive industries to the beverage world is cannabis. Does Breakthru have any plans**

**ELS:** We are proud to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace with the best and brightest in the industry. We invest in associate education, training, and certification and recognize strong performance from our associates companywide. Rallying together in our commitment to grow Breakthru's business as a team benefits both our bottom line and our culture.

We are also defined by our relationships, rooted in integrity, trust, and transparency with suppliers, customers, and the communities in which we live and work. Giving back and being socially responsible is more than what we do, it's who we are. ■■



## THE ACCOLADES KEEP COMING



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ASIA WINE  
AWARDS  
2018



**93** POINTS  
- SOMMELIERS  
CHOICE AWARDS  
2019



# The Price Isn't Right

by Jesse Hom-Dawson

When I'm not espousing Very Deep Thoughts on the state of today's food culture via this column, I'm overseeing marketing and communications for a group of restaurants in a small town in Northern California. Sometimes my work takes some unexpected turns, as exemplified by a recent kerfuffle on Nextdoor—a hyper-local, Facebook-type website that's most often used for finding lost pets, promoting garage sales, or, as in this case, voicing perceived grievances.

It was a simple post complaining about the cost of a drink at one of our restaurants, a fast-casual seafood and burger joint with a focus on sustainability. "What a rip-off," the person said of our \$6 strawberry soda. What would warrant such a high cost for such a simple drink? Well, it isn't actually "simple": It's made with organic strawberries harvested by a local farmer, for whose produce we pay fairly. Our kitchen workers then make the strawberry syrup before the soda is mixed and served by our front-of-house employees; all of them earn a living wage, which is no small expense for restaurants in this part of California.

But the conversation didn't end there. "I'd rather just go down the street to [another restaurant] and get a burger for \$6 rather than pay \$12," another commenter lamented. Sure, our burger is twice as expensive, but it's also made fresh from organic ground beef that we buy from a local rancher who sells sustainable and pasture-raised meat—a mark of quality that warrants the higher price tag.

What followed was an astounding thread of 200-plus comments about how the town's businesses as a whole are overpriced (before the discussion turned, as they inevitably do in threads like this, to the state of the world in general). While many of our supporters made sure to point out that our pricing reflects our high-quality products, the negative commenters steamrolled over them, insisting that a burger should be cheap regardless of where the beef came from or how many (fairly paid) people had a hand in making it.

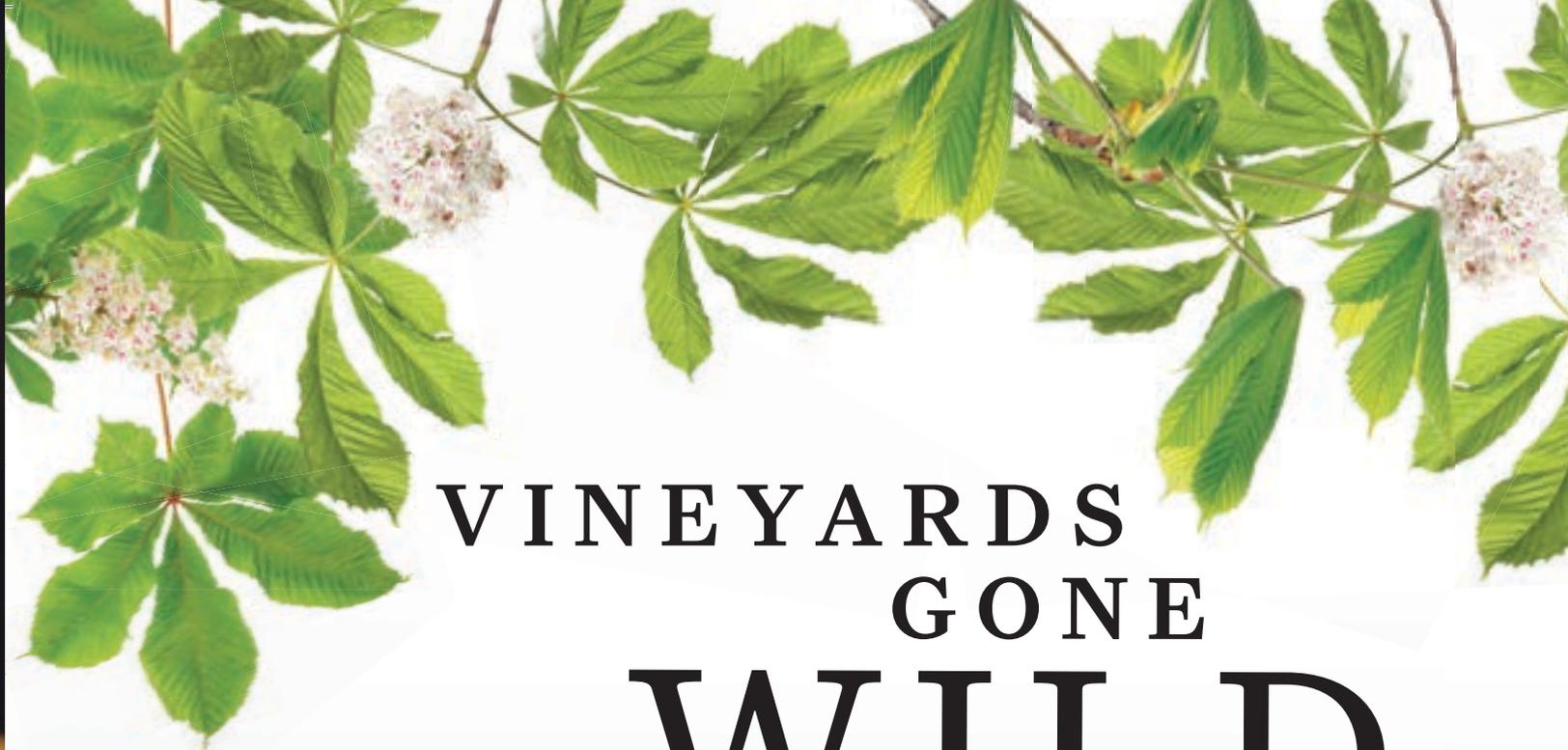
Two conflicting trends seem to be arising in the food world right now. On one end, people (usually of certain means) are seeking out organic vegetables, pasture-raised eggs, natural wines, and other goods that are sustainably and humanely produced. But on the other end, as inexpensive options for dining out proliferate, two-for-\$4 burgers at a fast-food joint and 99-cent tacos remain highly appealing to a large subset of consumers. For them, meat that's ethically raised and sourced, fruit that's non-GMO, and alternatives like oat milk to replace standard dairy products often aren't worth the price.

I didn't have the fortitude to explain the true value of our food to the anonymous commenters, and I'm not here to pass judgment on people's dining choices. But if I'd opted to log onto Nextdoor and post my own thread, it'd probably start something like this: There's a reason why your food carries the price tag it does, and I can all but guarantee that quality—good or poor—has something to do with it. ■■

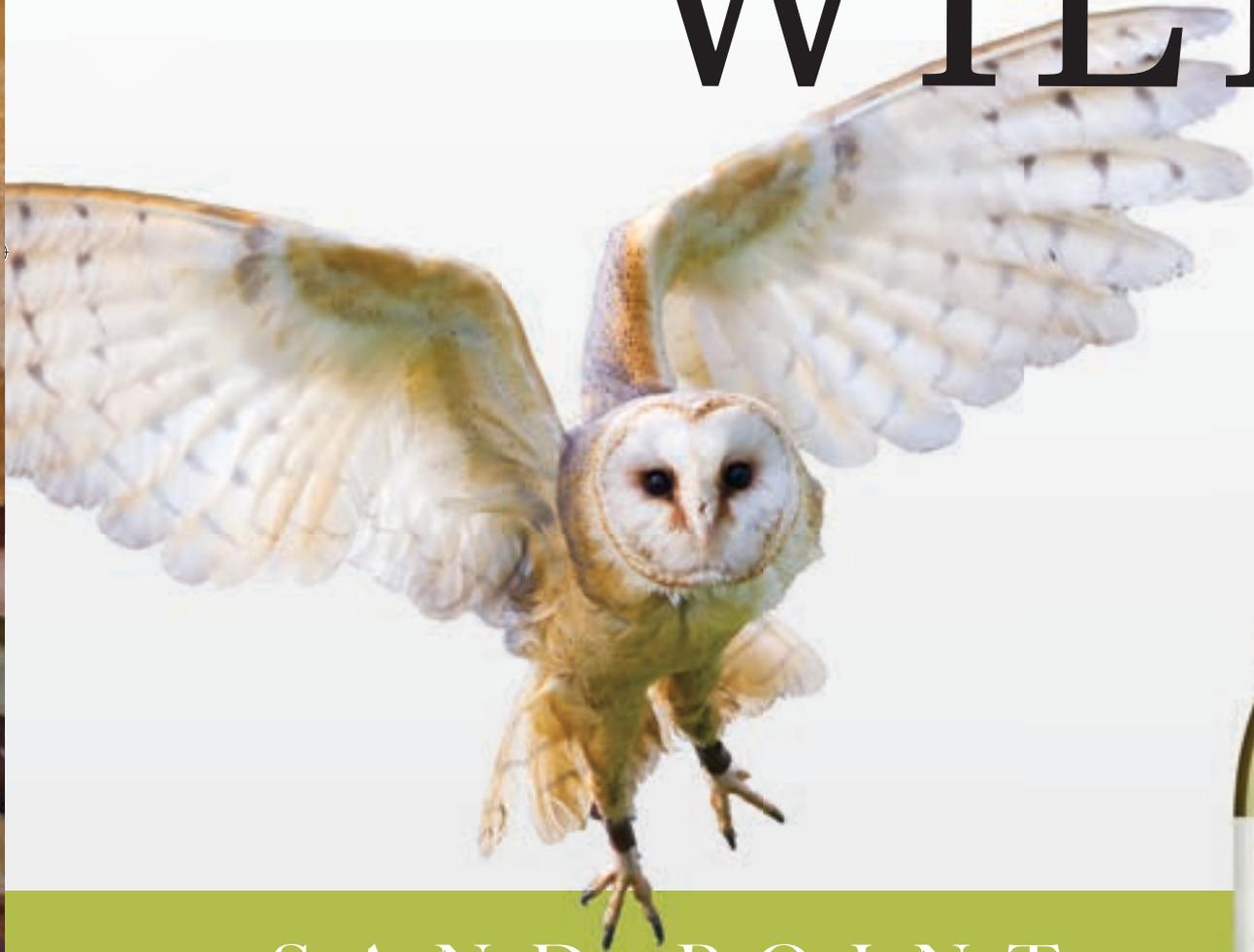


Made with sustainably raised beef, a locally made bun, organic lettuce, and fonduta cheese (also locally sourced), this burger warrants its \$12 price tag.

PHOTO: DAWN HEIMANN



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**Stella Rosa Orange Moscato makes a stellar match for citrus-splashed halibut with romanesco coulis, tomato vinaigrette, and cucumber-mandarin salad.**

# Two Pairings to Prolong Patio Season

**STELLA ROSA ORANGE MOSCATO MEETS ITS MATCH IN CITRUS-BRINED HALIBUT AND BERRY-BLOOD ORANGE SORBET AT OCEAN PRIME DTC**

story by Ruth Tobias / photos by Jennifer Olson

The conventional wisdom on pairing sweet wine with savory food is that it's tricky. The truth—as we've aimed to show throughout this series—is that it's really no more complicated than any other pairing: The central goal as always is to strike a balance among flavors and textures.

For the final installment, we challenged the culinary team at Ocean Prime in Denver's Tech Center district to come up with a dish that would complement Stella Rosa Imperiale Orange Moscato. Executive chef Michael Denton, executive sous chef Ryan Finnegan, and pastry chef Lisa Fejeran succeeded twice over, producing both a fish course and an icy dessert “that would be great for a hot summer day,” as Denton explains. “The thought was, what would we want to eat out on the patio if we had a glass in front of us?”

The answer to that question, as it turned out, was also right in front of them: “We'd been playing around with a citrus-brined halibut anyway,” Denton admits, “so Orange Moscato just kind of fell into that wheelhouse.” Which isn't to say that simply combining “light, fresh, effervescent flavors to go along with light, fresh bubbles,” in

Finnegan's words, was all there was to it. In search of elements to offset the wine's sweetness without overwhelming the fish, Finnegan decided on a coulis featuring romanesco as well as some toasted garlic and shallots to add “a rounded earthiness” plus a touch of richness; he also prepared a vinaigrette from Moscato-marinated tomatoes and Champagne vinegar for a splash of acidity. Finally, says Finnegan, cucumber-mandarin orange salad “is one of my little go-tos, with a bit of mint to brighten everything up.”

As for the sorbet, Fejeran smartly obeyed the golden rule of dessert pairings—the food must be less sweet than the wine to avoid the perception of bitterness in the glass—and created an ultra-refreshing strawberry-blood orange concoction that's also spiked with the Stella Rosa Moscato. It has proven such a hit in the kitchen that, according to Denton, Fejeran took the exact same recipe and turned it into a granita to feature on oysters during the summer months. ■■

*For the full recipes with instructions, visit [tastingpanelmag.com/stella-rosa-ocean-prime](http://tastingpanelmag.com/stella-rosa-ocean-prime).*



**Michael Denton, Ryan Finnegan, and Lisa Fejeran serve as the executive chef, executive sous chef, and pastry chef, respectively, at Ocean Prime DTC in Denver, CO.**



**Made with Stella Rosa Orange Moscato, Ocean Prime DTC's strawberry-blood orange sorbet will soon be reimaged as a granita to accompany oysters on the half-shell.**

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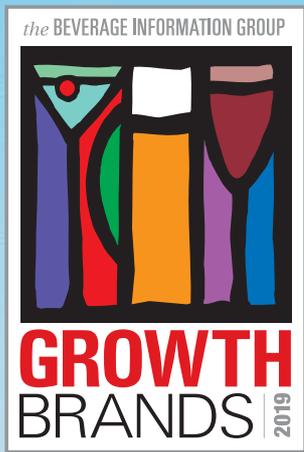
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# DOWN THE AISLE

## Chardonnay Leads the Way into Fall

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

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

### 1 TALKIE 🗨️

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

### 2 TALKIES 🗨️ 🗨️

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

### 3 TALKIES 🗨️ 🗨️ 🗨️

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

### 4 TALKIES 🗨️ 🗨️ 🗨️ 🗨️

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

### 5 TALKIES 🗨️ 🗨️ 🗨️ 🗨️ 🗨️

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



**Shafer 2017 Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay, Carneros (\$52)** Whole cluster-pressed and fermented with ambient yeast, this wine aged 14 months—75% of the time in new French oak and 25% in stainless. Caramelized banana and pineapple jump from the glass before intense notes of tropical fruit are edged with razor-sharp lime curd on the creamy yet buoyant palate. A roasted, nutty mid-palate moves toward bitter walnut shell and ends in a stony finish. This is an excellent \$50 Chardonnay that drinks at twice the price.



**J. McClelland 2016 Chardonnay, Oak Knoll District (\$35)** Ripe yellow apple tinged with bitter apple seeds trails off with a saline-like minerality. The salinity works well with the smattering of buttered popcorn that arises mid-palate.



**Eberle 2018 Chardonnay, Paso Robles (\$26)** Bosc pear, pineapple, talcum powder, chamomile tea, and sesame oil make their presence known in this relatively light Chardonnay. Eighty-five percent of the wine was aged in 35% new French oak barrels while the remainder aged in stainless steel. After the lots were stirred twice a week for eight weeks, they were left to age sur lie for six months before blending.



**Landmark Vineyards 2016 Lorenzo Vineyard Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$55)** Sourced from the coldest vineyard within the Landmark portfolio, this Chardonnay is whole cluster-pressed and fermented in 40% new French oak. It conjures a cartful of desserts: Baked pineapple, butter, lemon curd, and vanilla sugar cookie come forth with a tannic sweetness and end with a bit of lemon rind.



**Maggio Family Vineyards 2018 Chardonnay, California (\$12)** The bottle says California, but for the sake of specificity, it’s worth mentioning that the fruit within is sourced from the Lodi AVA. The wine was fermented in temperature-controlled stainless steel for 45 days to help retain acidity—and it shows. Citrus dominates, with ripe grapefruit and clementine preceding white peach. Nearly dry, the finish introduces a lingering note of peach pit. This drinks well above its station.

OAK RIDGE WINERY



**Simple Life 2018 Chardonnay, California (\$13)** This crowd-pleasing Chardonnay expresses peaches and cream with globs of lemon candy.

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# 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.

## Laura Barrett

Winemaker at Clif Family Winery,  
St. Helena, CA

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CLIF FAMILY



### Q What's something you wish more people understood about your job?

Harvest only happens once a year, and every vintage is different. What's interesting about this, and what most people do not consider, is that a winemaker with 25 years of experience has only made wine 25 times. So, we need to remember every move, every heat spell, and every stuck fermentation and how we handled it in order to make good decisions on what's happening today.

### Q What's the most surprising wine you've had recently?

Bela Voda, a red blend of Plavec and Vranec from the Tikves region of Macedonia—so many names I had not heard before, and it was delicious.

### Q You've been in the wine industry for 15 years. What's the most valuable lesson you've learned over the course of your career?

As winemakers, we make hundreds of decisions on every single wine we make. The most valuable lesson I have learned over the years is that sometimes the best decision is to do nothing. There are times to intervene, but the very best wines I have made were a product of patience.

### Q How is Clif Family Winery incorporating sustainable practices into the winemaking process?

The starting point is farming our vineyards organically. There are many good reasons for this, but the most simple and powerful reason is to keep harmful pesticides out of our wines. All of our estate vineyards at Clif Family are certified organic by the California Certified Organic Farmers, and we make every possible effort to source from organic grower partners.

## Joey Gillmore

Level 2 Sommelier,  
Los Angeles, CA

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOEY GILLMORE



### Q What sparked your interest in wine?

I got started in the restaurant industry while working and living in Maui, Hawaii. It was a very unconventional place to learn about wine, but I was working in a restaurant that had a decent cellar, with some really nice leftover bottles from previous beverage managers. I started as a busser and worked my way up to a lead server, and shortly after I signed up for the intro sommelier exam. That jump-started my thirst for knowledge of wine. Nine months later, my neighbor and I had taken the Level 2 test and both passed.

### Q What's the most valuable piece of advice you've received along your journey to become a sommelier?

The fact that there is so much to learn about wine can be overwhelming sometimes, but if you take it step by step, you will eventually get through all of it and it will be very rewarding. That is what a Master Sommelier told me when I was inquiring about going for my advanced certification.

### Q What's the rarest or most expensive wine you've had the privilege of tasting?

I had a guest come in who had brought a 1999 Domaine de La Romanée-Conti La Tâche—one of the most difficult bottles of wine to get because of the price tag it holds.

### Q In your opinion, which region is producing the best wine right now?

One of my absolute favorites right now has been Chenin Blanc from Saumur. I love anything by Arnaud Lambert. ■■

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).

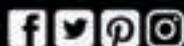


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# As Lively as Ever

VINITALY 2019 OFFERS A TASTE OF WHAT'S TO COME

by Raimondo Boggia

PHOTO: EKATERINA BELOVA

All Vinitaly attendees seem to have one thing in common after the four-day event: They're in dire need of a vacation, or at least some serious rest on the flight back home. Held annually in Verona, the international wine competition and exposition unfolded in early April at the Fiera di Verona exhibition hall. The show didn't stop when the daily business meetings and wine tastings wrapped, however; as is the case every year, it's what happens at night that makes Vinitaly unique.

After the convention lets out, wineries and importers host events in bars and restaurants throughout the city. These gatherings are followed by what's referred to as the Champagne Nights, during which thousands of magnums and double magnums are opened and glasses are offered to passersby. It may seem odd to serve Champagne—Verona is in Italy, after all—but the country's winemakers and importers adhere to the same unwritten rule: After a full day of tasting Italian wines for business, wine consumed for celebration has to be Champagne.

Over the course of four days, 33,000 wine buyers from 50 countries tasted as many as 17,000 labels, nearly 90% of which were Italian; the 2015–2017 vintages, sourced from all over Italy,

drank exceptionally well. Buyers tend to be most interested in the usual suspects—Barolo, Brunello, and the other gems of Piedmont and Tuscany—but some new trends and interests were evident this year.

If I had to pick one denomination that was most surprising for affluent buyers, it was the Lugana DOC, which lies partly in Veneto and partly in Lombardy. We will likely hear more about this region in the future, namely regarding the crisp, fruity Trebbiano di Luganas it produces from grapes grown on the hills overlooking Lake Garda.

Organic wines, meanwhile, are hardly new, but their popularity is growing fast—especially in Italy. They account for 6% of wine production in the world overall, compared to around 9% in Europe and more than 20% in Italy, with a few regions already closing in on making 35% of their total production certified organic.

Organic or not, there were quite a few ageworthy Italian whites presented, several of which are worth mentioning. Historically, Italian white wines have been known for being



PHOTO: RAIMONDO BOGGIA

**Vinitaly attendees and locals fill the streets of Verona for Champagne Nights.**

fresh and rather simple, but the La Scolca 2009 Black Label Gavi di Gavi is incredibly nuanced: Equal parts long, smooth, and crisp, with a fruity, floral, and spicy palate, it shows the potential of the Cortese grape in the Gavi area. The wine's bright acidity and abundant minerality, meanwhile, illustrate the complexity of the terroir.

We know Chardonnays can age well, but tasting

the Chiarandà 2005 Donnafugata was a memorable experience to say the least. I tried it in a blind tasting and got the sensation of a Meursault combined with the elegance of a Chablis.

To conclude this exploration of ageworthy Italian whites, a winemaker from Vignaioli Specogna in Friuli poured me a Pinot Grigio Ramato that mixes the 2012–2016 vintages (each sees 15 days of maceration and partial aging in small barrels). The finished product is a complex and smooth wine, with notes of berries, cherries, and stone fruits leading into a velvety finish. It was nothing you would normally expect from a Pinot Grigio, making it truly one of a kind—not unlike Vinitaly itself. ■■



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF PENFOLDS

Siblings Stanislas and Garance Thiénot in the cellar of Champagne house Thiénot with Penfolds' chief winemaker, Peter Gago (center).

# A New Era for Penfolds

CHAMPAGNE BRINGS A SPARKLE TO THE FAMED AUSTRALIAN PRODUCER'S GROWING PORTFOLIO by Tony Love

Renowned Australian producer Penfolds has taken its next step toward becoming a major player on the global market. Seeking a broader platform for its famous name—built mostly on its Grange Shiraz and other iconic red wines—the South Australian company, under the umbrella of Treasury Wine Estates, has joined forces with highly regarded Champagne house Thiénot. Together, they're releasing a trio of 2012 vintage Champagnes, the first of which hit the market in June.

The move follows last year's release of Penfolds Lot. 518 Spirited Wine with Baijiu, a Shiraz fortified with the namesake spirit and marketed intensely throughout China and in Chinese communities worldwide. It will be followed in turn by new products from California as well as France: Penfolds winemakers Steph Dutton and Andrew Baldwin have been partly based in Napa Valley for the past few years, laying the foundations for work that began in earnest with the 2018 harvest. Company executives have yet to reveal details

concerning the new wines' vineyard sources or varietal makeup, though they estimate a 2022 release date.

Meanwhile, the May launch of the Thiénot x Penfolds label to a select audience in Paris doubled as a celebration of Penfolds' 175th anniversary, chief winemaker Peter Gago said, adding, "This is the start of our second



Penfolds chief winemaker Peter Gago.

era." One of the challenges of the collaboration was giving the Champagne an authentic Australian touch, as the wines were already en tirage in Thiénot's cellars. "We didn't want to mess with them . . . but we wanted a

little bit of Australia in each of these bottles," Gago noted, adding that they came up with a plan to use Penfolds' top-of-the-range Yattarna Chardonnay for the liqueur d'expédition in the Blanc de Blancs and unoaked St. Henri Shiraz in the Blanc de Noirs, both to be released in 2020. But that was frowned upon by Champagne's official trade association, the CIVC, so instead Penfolds sent several ex-Yattarna barriques to Thiénot to house the French liqueur d'expédition. "It was a definitive link," Gago said.

The already available 2012 Thiénot x Penfolds Lot. 1-175 Chardonnay Pinot Noir Cuvée (\$280) is a 50-50 blend of the named varieties, sourced from vineyards across the region. It underwent 100% malolactic fermentation and has a final dosage of 4 grams per liter. Gago wrote his official tasting notes with siblings Garance and Stanislas Thiénot, describing the wine as "complex yet pure . . . even and assured across the palate, at once alluring, rich, opulent, [and] majestic . . . refreshingly expressive." ■■

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Bone marrow is grilled on the robata, flavored with smoked soy, and served atop garlic toast at Inko Nito in Los Angeles.

# Saving the Neighborhood

LOS ANGELES' ARTS DISTRICT IS NOW A CULINARY ARTS DESTINATION TOO

by Merrill Shindler

Some years ago, a real-estate developer told me how he had made tens of millions by betting on neighborhoods that were falling into decline. As working-class families fled and prices plummeted, he'd step in to buy up all the property he could. Artists in need of large, cheap spaces would move into the now-abandoned warehouses, soon followed by other creative types, including restaurateurs. Then came urban professionals wanting to live on the edge—and the realtor would make a killing.

Just as New Yorkers were once surprised when the Lower East Side became trendy, so no one likely imagined that an area just off Skid Row in downtown L.A. that was once dominated by industry—and at one point virtually abandoned—would eventually come to be filled with some of the nation's most important restaurants. And yet, in the span of just a few years, it has.

Just as the developer said, the artists came first—and now the fittingly named Arts District is home to such major culinary destinations as Bestia and Bavel, arguably the best Italian and Middle Eastern restaurants, respectively, in

the city. Some of the finest Southern cooking on the West Coast, meanwhile, can be found at Manuela, which shares its space with an art gallery. And what may well be the next wave in sushi is represented by sprawling Japanese restaurant Inko Nito, which also has a branch in London.

For those who have grown weary of the ghastly trend toward deep-fried rolls packed with ingredients like cream cheese, ham, and pineapple, Inko Nito is both refreshing and reassuring, as it reminds me why we fell in love with sushi in the first place. The selection is eminently clean and elegantly simple: Here foodies can joyously inhale tuna-belly rolls garnished with Petrossian Shassetra caviar and yellowtail served over spicy mizuna greens in yuzu-truffle dressing, along

with a fine supporting cast of meats and veggies grilled over bincho charcoal.



**Nori, a type of seaweed, infuses Inko Nito's Old Fashioned.**



**Inko Nito's sushi selection is eminently clean and elegantly simple.**

coal. From the robata, bone marrow flavored with smoked soy arrives on garlic toast, and corn on the cob comes slathered in smoked chile butter with the seven-spice powder called shichimi.

On the edgier side, there's nori seaweed in the Old Fashioned and fermented miso in the Highball. And for dessert, do get the chocolate brownie. It sounds generic—but with a topping of sweet-potato toffee and miso, it's anything but. Like the neighborhood it calls home, Inko Nito is filled with surprises, and tasty ones at that. (By the way, my guess for the next neighborhood to gentrify is the South Bronx. But if you choose to invest now, don't blame me if I'm wrong.) ■■

PHOTOS COURTESY OF INKO NITO



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# The New Harlem Renaissance

by Paul D. Poux, CSW

As guests finished up their lobster farrotto, crispy duck breast, and raspberry-strawberry shortcake during a dinner at the fifth annual Harlem EatUp! festival in May, visiting celebrity chef Anne Burrell did something unexpected: She got up on stage with the band and began singing “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” as the crowd cheered. She continued with “Time After Time,” and she might have kept on going if her ride hadn’t arrived to take her home.

The week-long festival, which celebrates one of the country’s most storied neighborhoods, has grown since 2015 to attract 15,000 guests and a



**Celebrity chefs Marcus Samuelsson and Anne Burrell with E. & J. Gallo Winery’s Gina Gallo and Herb Karlitz, who co-founded Harlem EatUp! with Samuelsson.**

who’s who of talent. That’s partly due to the emotional impact it has on guests, chefs, and sponsors. “The atmosphere at Harlem EatUp! is totally unique,” said Derek Epps, Events Marketing Strategist for E. & J. Gallo Winery. “Guests engage with a much different energy . . . [It] allows us to speak to and reflect the diversity of consumers that enjoy our wines.” Throughout the



**The Hendrick’s Gin bar team vamps for the crowd during the Harlem Stroll.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARLEM EATUP!

dine in Harlem dinner series, Gallo poured wines from across its portfolio and even brought in Gina Gallo, Vice President of Winemaking–Estate Wines, to experience the event for herself.

These dinners were hosted by Harlem chefs like Melba Wilson of Melba’s Restaurant; JJ Johnson, whose cookbook *Between Harlem and Heaven* won a 2019 James Beard Award; and Red Rooster Harlem’s Marcus Samuelsson, who co-founded the festival with veteran event marketer Herb Karlitz. Other award-winning chefs on hand included Mashama Bailey, Daniel Boulud, Scott Conant, Kwame Onwuachi, and Andrew Zimmern.

The Harlem Stroll, the festival’s largest event, welcomed thousands in Morningside Park, where spontaneous dancing broke out as DJs spun. Local chefs Adrienne Cheatham and Juliet Masters joked with *Top Chef’s* Gail Simmons and Food Network’s Amanda Freitag during their cooking

demonstrations, and Erik Andersson, East Coast Brand Ambassador for Hendrick’s Gin, supervised an immersive bar experience complete with a “cocktail configurator” machine in a large beverage tent. “Harlem EatUp! stands out from all the events I have done,” said Andersson. “It feels like you’re having a party at someone’s house, and that’s what makes it special.”

Added Govino founder Joseph Perrulli, who provides the festival’s reusable glassware, “We do a lot of events where attendees are expecting to be wowed, like the 25th anniversary of The French Laundry or Taste of Vail. I put Harlem EatUp! on the same level as some of these events. It’s like wine—the festival has its own distinct feel, its own ‘terroir.’”

The next Harlem EatUp! takes place May 11–17, 2020. For sponsorship information, visit [harlemeatup.com](http://harlemeatup.com) or contact [ppoux@karlitz.com](mailto:ppoux@karlitz.com). ■■

# E&J REMASTERED

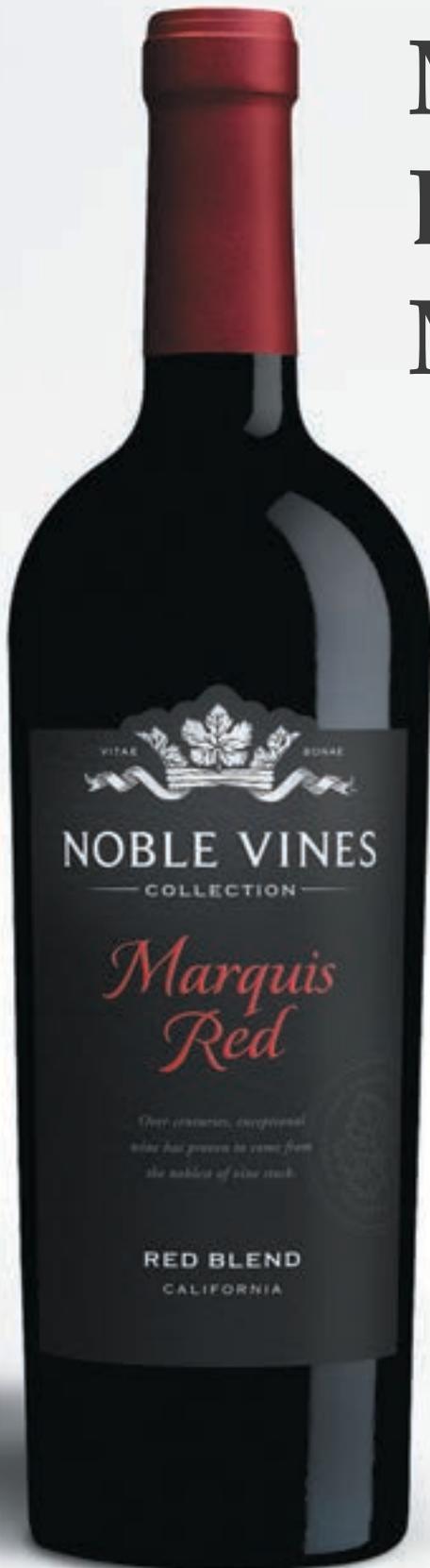
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# PEANUT BUTTER WHISKEY

**SKREWBALL** MAKES FOR  
SERIOUSLY FUN COCKTAILS

story by Jonathan Cristaldi / photos by Alexander Rubin



Howie Slater, Bar Manager at Drexl in Oakland, CA, enjoys surprising guests with custom cocktails featuring Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey.

To ensure consistency, most bars have specs even for classic cocktails. But when potential hires arrive for an interview at Drexl in Oakland, California, Bar Manager Howie Slater points to a cocktail on the menu and asks them to make it without the specs “just to see how they approach creating a balanced drink,” he explains. Imagine the look on those bartenders’ faces when Slater chooses a drink featuring peanut butter whiskey.

When a bottle of Skrewball—the world’s first peanut butter-flavored brown spirit—initially showed up at Drexl, Slater recalls, he thought it would be “funny to make a peanut butter-and-jelly shot.” He whipped up a half-and-half shot of Skrewball and jam-flavored liqueur that “tasted so good,” he says—an epiphany that’s being repeated in bar after bar every time a member of the Skrew Krew, as the whiskey’s group of brand ambassadors is called, shows up with a bottle.

Leading the Skrew Krew are husband-and-wife co-founders Steve Yeng and Brittany Merrill Yang, who have quite the inspiring backstory. Brittany, the daughter of a Navy veteran, grew up in the Ocean Beach neighborhood of San Diego a few blocks from Steve, who came to America in his youth as a Cambodian refugee of Chinese descent. He became a fanatic of peanut butter, as it was one of the first foods he tasted on U.S. soil, so after launching his restaurant OB Noodle House—where he worked the bar most nights despite



Fresh, citrusy, nutty, and toffee-driven: That’s a peanut butter lover’s take on a Brandy Old Fashioned.

paralysis in one leg due to polio—he eventually introduced a peanut butter-infused bourbon, which became a massive hit among locals.

It took four years to perfect Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey and get it to market with Infinium Spirits—but it was well worth the wait. The spirit delivers heady, mouthwatering aromas that call to mind a Butterfinger candy bar, with notes of caramel, almond-infused Armagnac, and toffee. It’s mouth-coating, with a gentle sweetness up front and a pleasing whiskey burn on the finish.

“I didn’t realize it had so much staying power until I really started playing with it,” Slater says. After a

bit of experimentation, he created a drink that “outlasts the novelty of the peanut butter thing” to remain on the menu as a signature, he says. He also readily enjoys pulling out the whiskey for a dealer’s choice—a key focus of the Drexl program—because, he adds, “You don’t make a serious cocktail with Skrewball, you make a fun cocktail,” one that often leads to equally fun conversation.

On a recent evening at Drexl, I asked for a dealer’s choice made with Skrewball Whiskey, and Slater produced two. “I make a lot of novel cocktails that don’t have names,” he said, “so you get to name these.” Good deal. ■■

### Skrew Krew Sour

- ▶ 1½ oz. Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey
  - ▶ ½ oz. Merlet Blackberry Liqueur
  - ▶ ½ oz. Kalani Coconut Liqueur
  - ▶ ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
  - ▶ 1 egg white
- Combine all ingredients and dry-shake. Add ice, shake again, and double-strain into a chilled coupe glass. Garnish with Angostura bitters.

### Skrewball’s Old Fashioned

- ▶ 1¼ oz. Bertoux Brandy
  - ▶ ¾ oz. Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey
  - ▶ ½ oz. Tempus Fugit Crème de Banane
  - ▶ ½ oz. St. George Nola Coffee Liqueur
- Combine all ingredients over ice, stir, and strain into a rocks glass with a large cube. Garnish with a flamed orange peel.



A riff on a Whiskey Sour, this dealer’s choice cocktail is light, frothy, and refreshing, its high-toned peanut and toffee notes mingling with coconut.

**"I didn't realize  
it had so much  
staying power  
until I really  
started playing  
with it."**

*-Howie Slater, Bar Manager,  
Drexel, Oakland, CA*



## TAKING INVENTORY

# YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR VOICES

## WHAT IN YOUR VIEW IS THE MOST IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF STAFF TRAINING AND WHY?



### ERIK SCHWEITZER

*Bar Master, Press & Pony, Boise, ID*

We try to hire people who have less experience rather than more, because the thing for me is breaking bad habits. We're in a tight space—most of the time two people are bartending from one well—and if everyone's doing things their own way, it can be chaos.

I can't teach personality; that's something [else] you tend to hire for. But I can bring people into the fold during training and make sure they're on the same page [in terms of] knowledge. We do a longer apprenticeship and cover everything. How to juice. How to make every single syrup. Why we do this and why we don't do that. We drill in every alcohol that we have behind the bar. And I tell them, "I'm not gonna shut up—if you retain just 25% of what I'm saying, you'll have a foundation to study on your own." Knowledge sells a lot of drinks.

### PIPER KRISTENSEN

*Beverage Director, Oxalis, New York, NY*

The most important thing to me is tapping into someone's enthusiasm and passion, finding out how they connect personally to the products they're selling. We change the menu a lot, which means we're constantly bringing on new wines—and I have a tendency to buy on a whim, because the kind of limited-production stuff that we're working with, you have to act fast. So I'm uploading a ton of information to the staff all the time. And sometimes their eyes can glaze over—anyone's would.

When we're tasting, [then,] I lead with enthusiasm and try to get their buy-in. They don't have to love the wine, but there has to be something they can relate to and get excited about. A lot of times, it's the winemakers—people who are keeping traditions alive, using rare grapes or ancient techniques. But it can be the flavor, the texture, the pairing . . . Whatever it is, that's the best sales tool they have.

We have this Dornfelder, a German grape that's [typically] very dark, but [the style here] is fresh and vegetal. I was blown away by it, but it didn't really fit with our menu and it's a little too volatile to sell by the glass, so it was just sitting on our list. I [finally] said, "Let's taste it again," and this time one server's tail perked up. He was like, "It's fruity and fresh but also earthy, and I've never tasted anything like it before." This was his bottle. It spoke to him. No one else knows how to move it, but he sees how it fits in the meal, he knows which tables are going to love it, and he's selling it nonstop. It's very cool. I'm chasing those moments—when I know someone's really clicking with the wine. ■■



PHOTO: LOUISE PALMBERG

# DISCOVER OLD VINE GARNACHA & GRENACHE

## EUROPEAN QUALITY WINES

### PROVE THAT VINES GET BETTER WITH AGE



While the grape known as both Garnacha and Grenache is a world-renowned classic, it digs its deepest roots in its birthplace regions of northeastern Spain and France's Roussillon. Need proof? Just look at these European vineyards themselves, which showcase a plethora of coveted, old vines to produce the highest quality Grenache possible.

Thanks to a favorable Mediterranean climate (sunny, dry and windy), as well as the new winemaking generation's efforts to protect existing centenary vines, old Garnacha vines abound in France's Roussillon and Spain's appellations of Catalunya, Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Somontano, and Terra Alta regions. These old vines dig deep through poor, well-drained soils, increasing strength, sustainability, and concentration in the resulting wines. For each appellation, European quality schemes define a minimum age for old vine, starting at 35. Guaranteed by the European quality schemes in place for all of these regions, European Grenache is a cut above the rest.

Old vines produce excellent Garnacha for many reasons, from low yields that concentrate flavor to strong, drought-resistant roots that increase quality and consistency from year to year. These deep roots also give European Grenache from its origin a distinct minerality and sense of place that can only be tied to these European origins - another key factor ensured by the European PDO and PGI quality schemes. This is why, although the grape is well known as the centerpiece of GSM blends, EU Garnache/Grenache produces high-quality, complex varietal wines in its perfectly-suited birthplace.

As a bonus, not only do old vines enhance Garnacha's quality, but they increase the wines' sustainability as well. Because old vines have such deep roots, they are able to access subterranean resources, meaning that old vine Grenache is not as dependent on rainwater or irrigation and can survive on very poor water stress soils. When it comes to Garnacha/ Grenache, what's old is definitely new again.



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# PIÑA BY



# PIÑA

*Chris Radomski's La Adelita Tequila  
Shines at the 2019 Food & Wine Classic  
in Aspen, Colorado*

STORY BY JONATHAN CRISTALDI / PHOTOS BY DEVIN BERKO

Chris Radomski can't stop reinventing the wheel. He did it with wine, having developed both world-class cult expressions and luxury value brands. Then he did it again with whiskey, joined by Ethan Wayne, son of the late John Wayne: After they unearthed the legendary actor's personal recipe for bourbon, buried among his memorabilia, they went all in on a collaboration that brought the recipe to fruition in the form of Duke Spirits.

Now, never one to rest on his laurels, Radomski is at it again. I caught up with him at the Gorsuch Ski Cafe in Aspen, Colorado, to get the scoop on his latest and greatest effort—La Adelita Tequila.

"I am fortunate to have a partner who is the proprietor of Hacienda la Capilla, a boutique distillery in the Los Altos region of Jalisco just east of Guadalajara," he said. "It has its origins in the late 19th century; its first owner was Don Antonio 'El Amo' Aceves, who devoted his life to cultivating agave and tequila production. Here, we oversee the farming and harvesting of agave that averages seven to eight years in age. The rich, red, high-altitude soils are among some of the best terroirs in Mexico, which allows us to farm and harvest in a method akin to cult wineries in Napa." In order to ensure optimum sugar levels and ripeness, he added, "We pick piña by piña and take only the best."

Once harvested, the piñas are taken to the distillery, cut in half, and steamed to convert the starchy sap into fermentable sugar. After the piñas are crushed and shredded, the sugary juice is fermented. Distillation is performed by hand in small copper pot stills originally acquired from pre-Castro Cuba and brought to Mexico.

"In Mexican history, Adelita was the woman who pioneered and led the women's fighting forces for their rights in the Mexican Revolution," explained Radomski. "The bands of women that fought became known as the 'Adelitas,' and their struggle, strength, and perseverance were legendary. We wanted to pay homage to them: in short, a renegade persona representing some truly exceptional tequilas."

The La Adelita portfolio includes five labels, all texturally rich and beautifully balanced: Blanco (\$44); Reposado (\$49), which is barrel-aged for nine to 12 months; Anejo (\$55), typically aged two years; Extra Anejo (\$120), a blend of three- to five-year-old barrel-aged tequila; and, lastly, Anejo Cristalino (\$73), a two-year-aged Anejo whose color is removed via filtration. For more information, visit [laadelitatequila.com](http://laadelitatequila.com). ■■



Chris Radomski, founder of La Adelita.

*"The bands of women that fought became known as the 'Adelitas,' and their struggle, strength, and perseverance were legendary. We wanted to pay homage to them: in short, a renegade persona representing some truly exceptional tequilas."*

# FREE *Spirits*

*Lyre's Alcohol  
Alternatives  
Take a Seat at  
the Bar*



**STORY BY DEBORAH PARKER WONG  
PHOTOS BY ELYSA WEITALA**

### *Imitation is called the*

sincerest form of flattery; in the case of Sydney, Australia-based company Lyre's, which makes a range of alcohol-alternative products that mimic classic spirits, it's an artful homage.

After three years of obsessive research and development by founder and CEO Mark Livings, Lyre's will make its debut in California, where—under the guidance of Global Brand Ambassador Jeremy Shipley—it's bound to find a receptive audience. Shipley and Christian Butler, Lyre's VP of North America, brought the portfolio to San Francisco for a tasting and to shed some light on the ingredients behind these doppelgänger spirits.

"The team at Lyre's collaborated with Australian sommelier David Murphy to craft and refine the 12 flavor profiles that make up the portfolio," said Butler, who describes Murphy as their "flavor architect." Livings and Murphy's recipes are based on all-natural, botanical essences, extracts, and distillates sourced from all corners of the globe, particularly Germany.



Shipley recommends layering multiple Lyre's expressions for a cocktail that suggests the presence of alcohol without actually containing any.



Lyre's Global Brand Ambassador Jeremy Shipley with VP of North America Christian Butler.

***“The essence of Lyre's is freedom, giving consumers non- or low-alcoholic options for occasions that once offered few inspiring alternatives. We have crafted the world's finest range of non-alcoholic spirits with the tastes you know and love. Now you are free to drink your drink, your way!”***

***—Christian Butler, Lyre's VP of North America***



**The Lyre's portfolio currently includes 12 alcohol-free spirit alternatives, four of which—Dry London Spirit, Coffee Liqueur, American Malt, and Italian Orange—will be the first to enter the U.S. market.**

“For example, we tasted 350 different kinds of vanilla to find the six right ones,” said Butler, whose beverage-industry savvy has been honed from all sides: He’s owned a wine bar in Shanghai and developed both a vodka brand and a négociant wine brand that’s sold in the U.S. All in all, he counts more than 1,200 ingredients derived from fruits, herbs, spices, nuts, seeds, and such, which were carefully analyzed and combined to create the range of 12 alcohol-free spirit alternatives: Absinthe, American Malt, Amaretto, Coffee Liqueur, Dark Cane Spirit, Dry London Spirit, Dry Vermouth, Italian Orange, Spiced Cane Spirit, Triple Sec, Vermouth Rosso, and White Cane Spirit.

### ***The Art of Imitation***

As if nailing the aroma and flavor profiles of classic spirits weren’t challenging enough, the team at Lyre’s also attempted to mimic the sensation alcohol imparts on the palate. They’ve achieved that by using tongue-numbing botanicals like grains of

paradise, an aromatic species of pepper that’s related to ginger and cardamom; possessing a pungent black-pepper quality along with hints of citrus, it’s often found in the cuisines of West and North Africa.

Capsicum and ginger play a similar role, but the absence of higher alcohols like isoamyl and isobutyl is nevertheless unmistakable. “The first spirit we took on was gin,” said Butler. “We relied on a focus group [that] comprised highly experienced bartenders who work at some of Sydney’s top bars—One Penny Red, Barangaroo House, Opera Bar, and Vernon’s Bar—and went back to the drawing board several times to get it right.” Persistence clearly paid off, as the expressions are compelling, with pure, natural aromas and lively, balanced, complex palates; the lack of synthetic flavors is one of the brand’s most appealing features.

Layering the products is another way to simulate the presence of alcohol, according to Shipley, a native of Christchurch, New Zealand, whose tenure as a Bacardi ambassador and working knowledge of large hospitality



groups means he has industry best practices in his back pocket. In acting as an advocate for the adoption of Lyre’s products, he observed, “We’re seeing bars serving only non-alcoholic cocktails popping up in major cities

around the U.S. There's no question that booze-free drinks have found a spot on bar menus." He has come up with a short list of the flavors to be introduced to the U.S. market first, each for an SRP of \$36: Dry London Spirit, Coffee Liqueur, Amaretto, and Italian Orange, a riff on Campari with a distinct amaro-like quality.

### **Social Camouflage**

Although he has yet to taste through the Lyre's portfolio, bartender Eric Castro—the talent who reshaped San Diego's bar scene with Polite Provisions and Raised by Wolves—agreed that virgin concoctions are a rising trend: "We're selling a ton of alcohol-free cocktails, as the real estate we devote to them on our cocktail menu at Raised by Wolves attests." He's enthusiastic about alternatives like Lyre's largely because they're shelf-stable: "They address the real need for nonperishable, botanical ingredients [and] allow us to be very creative while keeping costs down," he adds.

According to Castro, "A good half of our customers are moderating." By that, he means they're enjoying one alcohol-based beverage before moving to an alternative. What's more, he's seeing no resistance to alcohol-free cocktails that are priced on par with traditional drinks.

Butler believes there's less stigma around moderation than outright abstinence, calling alcohol alternatives "a form of 'social camouflage' for those who choose to abstain." From his perspective, "Lyre's gives consumers an out when the pressure is on to consume. The trend toward healthier consumption habits doesn't just extend to those who are alcohol-free; there's a lot of appeal for consumers who want to consume less alcohol in an environment where, until recently, there were few alternatives."

As to exactly how bartenders will use complex, finely crafted alcohol alternatives like Lyre's beyond emulating standard cocktails is anyone's guess. But knowing the creative impetus that drives mixology, they're bound to come up with solutions that run the gamut. "From a sensory standpoint, there's not a lot of diversity in alcohol alternatives," said

Castro. "So Lyre's is clearly an early mover in the segment."

### **Spirit Animals**

The team at Lyre's hasn't overlooked the importance of compelling branding, rallying both colorful package design and whimsical critters to their cause. The range is named after the lyrebird, a native of southern Australia and one of Mother Nature's most talented impressionists, with a vast repertoire of songs and the ability to mimic everything

from a camera shutter to a chainsaw. Each bottle in the lineup, meanwhile, has a designated animal that reflects the faux-spirit inside.

With patents pending on the flavor architecture of its botanical recipes, the company aims to maintain its early advantage in a segment that, based largely on consumer demand, is quickly evolving. Beyond finding a home on backbars or in wells, Lyre's also has plans for ready-to-drink non-alcoholic cocktails in 200-milliliter packaging in the works. ■■



#### **Lyre's Negroni**

- ▶ 1 oz. Lyre's Dry London Spirit
  - ▶ 1 oz. Lyre's Vermouth Rosso
  - ▶ 1 oz. Lyre's Italian Orange
- Stir all ingredients briefly in an Old Fashioned glass with fresh ice. Garnish with an orange slice.

#### **Lyre's Gin & Tonic**

- ▶ 1½ oz. Lyre's Dry London Spirit
  - ▶ 3 oz. premium bottled tonic
  - ▶ 1 slice pink grapefruit
- Build all ingredients in a Highball glass and fill with fresh cubed ice. Garnish with a rosemary sprig.

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

# Publisher's PICKS

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



## WINES



**Dark Horse Canned Rosé, California (\$10)** This vibrant canned wine offers pretty aromas of rose petal and flavors of Ruby Red grapefruit and raspberry. An underlying stony minerality keeps the mouthfeel dry as the acidity remains bright, leaving no doubt that the canned format has crossed a threshold of quality. **89**

E. & J. GALLO



**Maggio Family Vineyards 2016 Petite Sirah, California (\$12)** With its nose of violets and black pepper, this blend of Petite Sirah and Merlot comes off ripe and savory. Juicy from the first sip, it displays silky tannins that engage with notes of bittersweet dark chocolate and fig. **90**

OAK RIDGE WINERY



**Ballard Lane 2017 Pinot Noir, Central Coast (\$12)** Expressive notes of black cherry and black pepper arise alongside a hint of bramble and bergamot. On the palate, generous flavors of wild berries complement a silky body and tinges of spice that touch the middle of the tongue. Meaty au jus further seasons these earthy red berries, imparting an umami character. Aged for four months in French oak, this wine represents the kind of beauty the Central Coast can offer—we did a double take at the price. **92**

MILLER FAMILY WINES



**Ménage à Trois 2017 Red Wine, California (\$12)** Blackberry, strawberry jam, and brown sugar create quite a trio of aromas for this blend of 54% Zinfandel, 33% Merlot, and 13% Cabernet Sauvignon. Blue flowers add a sweet perfume to ripened cherries, tart rhubarb, and a distinct, lingering finish of orange peel. There's a reason this expression continues to earn our respect with each new vintage: its balance of acid, fresh fruit, and well-integrated oak. **91**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



 Worthy of a smooch.

 French-style double bizou.

 Wildly infatuated.

 Seriously smitten.

 Head over heels in love.



**Oak Ridge Winery 2017 OZV Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi (\$13)** Enticing scents of blueberry pie and mocha latte serve as the pleasant entrée into this Zin. Flavors of plum liqueur add density to ultra-ripe blackberry and bramble dotted with white pepper. The tannins are round and in check, and the acidity is well balanced. **91**



**Nola Grace Cellars 2018 Dry Rosé, California (\$15)** This label is named for Anthony Scotto III's "strong-willed" daughter. The nose offers delicately scented red flowers and a kiss of cranberry. Minerality drives the ship as melon, blooming rose, cherry, and a hint of tangerine accent the palate. **89**



SCOTTO CELLARS



**Oak Ridge Winery 2016 3 Girls Pinot Noir, California (\$14)** This label refers to the tribute Oak Ridge Winery's three owners have paid to their three daughters as they "transition from childhood to adulthood" and join the family business. Following a pretty perfume reminiscent of a strawberry patch interspersed with heather, bright acidity interplays with black pepper, parchment, and spicy rhubarb on the lively palate. Cinnamon and allspice lend savoriness as cherries in a field of wild flowers further boost the aromatics. **90**



**Parker Station 2018 Chardonnay, Edna Valley/Monterey County/Santa Barbara County (\$15)** Aged six months in 100% Burgundian French oak, this is a modern Chardonnay with clean, crisp lines and floral-fresh aromas and flavors (60% of the fruit hails from Edna Valley, with 30% and 10% hailing from Monterey and Santa Barbara counties, respectively). Pear, key lime, and white orange blossom seamlessly integrate with a light touch of oak and a hint of salinity. **91**



GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS



**Ménage à Trois 2017 Bourbon Barrel Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$15)** Sourcing Cabernet Sauvignon from Sonoma County's Alexander Valley, the Ménage à Trois team also blended in Merlot and Petite Sirah. Aged for three months in oak barrels once used to make six-year-old Kentucky bourbon, the resulting wine can be described as sumptuous. Mesmerizing aromas of blackberry and caramel carry onto the palate, where high-toned black fruit engages with spiced cocoa. With silky tannins, a round mouthfeel, and food-friendly acidity, it develops into a sensorial experience. **92**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



**Oak Ridge Winery 2017 Old Soul Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi (\$16)** Fermented on skins for seven days and aged in French and American oak, this Cab has a touch of Merlot blended in and a fairly low ABV of 13.7%. Its fruity core possesses a ripe approachability and bright acidity. Aromas of cranberry, Bing cherry, and cinnamon toast lead to a vivacious palate. Great value. **90**



**Hahn Family Wines 2017 SLH Estate Grown Chardonnay, Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County (\$22)** Chamomile, almond butter, and cookie dough create a complex nose for this exquisite white from Hahn's Lone Oak and Smith vineyards. The wine was aged for ten months in 35% new French and 65% neutral oak, and the resulting balance and elegance is readily apparent. The mouthfeel is sumptuous, but not necessarily creamy; the acidity, lean and tight, is threaded with a hint of minerality. Lemon oil and orange blossom appear mid-palate, leading to a graceful finish. **94**



**Bonterra 2018 Organic Vineyards Young Red, Mendocino County (\$16)**

Crafted from the hard press of Bonterra's celebrated rosé program, this lovely blend includes Mourvèdre, Malbec, Syrah, and Carignan. A rhubarb-hued, youthful beauty, it offers up a tart and sweet nose of peppered cranberry and rose petals. Spiced raspberries and fig coat a dry, lean core of minerality. The bright acidity and fresh red berries bear similarities to a Cru Beaujolais. **91**



FETZER VINEYARDS

# Publisher's PICKS



**Cono Sur Vineyards & Winery 2018 Reserva Especial Chardonnay, Casablanca Valley, Chile (\$17)** Matured in a combination of French oak and stainless steel, this coastal expression shows off Chile's ability to harness a style that's lean, focused, expressive, aromatic, and decidedly food-friendly. Sustainability is a mantra at Cono Sur, and you can smell and taste a purity of fruit here. Sweet and vivacious scents of lemon verbena and toasted vanilla exude from the glass as high-toned acidity sharpens the palate. Salted pears and Italian herbs make for a modern—almost edgy—flavor profile. **92**



FETZER VINEYARDS



**Château du Trignon 2018 Marsanne, Côtes du Rhône (\$17)** Made with grapes from 50-year-old vines grown on limestone cliffs, this small-production white offers an intriguingly creamy mouthfeel. Banana and mango interweave with threads of minerality before pear and anise-kissed lemon curd complete the journey. **91**

DAVID MILLIGAN SELECTIONS



**Sobon Estate 2017 Rocky Top Zinfandel, Amador County (\$18)** Vines on cobble loam in blocks planted before Prohibition create a memorable source for this delicious, dry-farmed red (95% Zinfandel/5% Petite Sirah). Aromas of boysenberry and bramble fill the air, paving the way for a hint of grilled meat as the palate expands with licorice, cedar, and baking spices. **90**



**Hahn Family Wines 2017 Hahn Estate Chardonnay, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$18)** Sunshine-filled notes of tangerine and high-toned acidity follow on the heels of brilliantly rich aromas of toast, buttered pears, and honey. Lithe, feminine notes of pineapple and vanilla define the creamy body. Fermented in 100% French oak and aged on the lees for ten months. **92**



**LangeTwins 2018 Chenin Blanc, Prince Vineyard, Clarksburg AVA (\$22)** Chenin Blanc was planted in nine separate blocks totaling 92 acres in this single vineyard on the Sacramento River. The maritime influence brings out a romance of aromas: lanolin, linen, honeysuckle, and white pear. These scents are mirrored on the palate, which is crisp and clean with a hint of minerality. Gorgeous. **92**



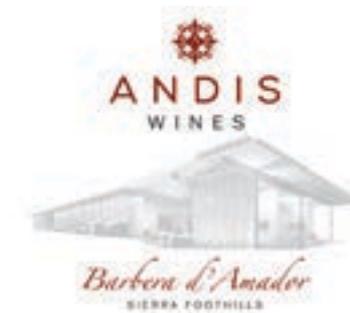
**Sobon Estate 2016 ReZerve Zinfandel, Paul's Vineyard, Amador County (\$24)** From an 84-year-old vineyard in the Sierra Foothills, this is an aromatic beauty with intense notes of blackberry compote and roasted coffee beans. Within the sturdy body, dynamic notes of bramble, spiced black tea, and tobacco take shape alongside white pepper in an earthy core. Savory black olives season the long finish. **92**



**San Simeon 2018 Grenache Rosé, Stefano Vineyard, Paso Robles (\$24)** If there's a special section dedicated to refreshing *and* sophisticated rosé on your wine list, it'd be a smart choice to offer this by the glass. Long, cold fermentation in stainless-steel tanks brings out delicate flavors and bright aromas of salted raspberry. Linen, rose petal, melon, and lively red berries enhance the palate. **92**



RIBOLI FAMILY WINES



## Award of Excellence



**Andis 2017 Barbera d'Amador, Sierra Foothills AVA (\$25)** Made with grapes that hail from the sandy clay-loam and decomposed granite soils of Hannah Vineyard on the Andis estate, this is probably the best domestic Barbera we've tasted. Aromas of coffee, blueberry, walnut, and tomato leaf precede white-peppered black cherry and Old World acidity on the palate, which offers up a sensational mouthfeel. Dark chocolate and brushy notes add depth to the finish. **94**



HAHN FAMILY  
— WINES —



## WHAT DOES SURFING HAVE TO DO WITH MAKING GREAT PINOT NOIR?

Everything. Because at least a couple times a month, Paul Clifton, our Director of Winemaking drives from his home in the Santa Lucia Highlands to the beaches of Big Sur where he catches a few good waves on the same coastal winds that uniquely influence our vineyards. There isn't a more beautiful place or perfect appellation in the world to create award-winning Pinot Noir. And it just happens to be close to some pretty great surfing.

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— HAHN —  
**S · L · H**  
SANTA LUCIA HIGHLANDS  
2017  
PINOT NOIR  
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# Publisher's PICKS



## Groth 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$24)

We've always been a fan of Groth Sauv Blanc, but this vintage is almost spiritual in nature, with hedonistic aromas of perfumed grapefruit, pineapple, and white flowers. Jasmine lilt on the palate before lifting off with a graceful minerality. A blend of 86% Sauvignon Blanc and 14% Sémillon, it was 75% barrel-fermented and aged three months sur lie. **93**



## Boutari 2017 Oropedio, Mantinia, Greece (\$24)

Made from Greece's indigenous Moschofilero grape, this light, crisp white is a palatable treasure, with scents of lemon, lime, and rose petal. The opulence and crispness are supercharged with fine acidity and minerality. **92**

TERLATO WINES



## Buty 2017 Sémillon, Sauvignon & Muscadelle, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$25)

This is a delicate, aromatic blend from winemaker Chris Dowsett. The Sémillon is sourced from two sites—an old block off the Wahluke Slope and the area's renowned Boushey Vineyard—and the Muscadelle and Sauvignon Blanc were grown on Lonesome Spring Ranch. Aged in concrete tanks after undergoing partial malolactic fermentation, the wine exudes aromas of orange zest and honeyed lemons. The light-footed palate carries notes of sweet fig, marzipan, and cookie dough. A flintiness edges in, accenting orange blossoms before surrendering to stone fruit on the finish. **92**



## Schug Winery 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Sonoma Coast (\$25)

Made with fruit sourced from cooler vineyards on the southern end of the coastal AVA, this exciting white—aged sur lie for three months in neutral casks and partially tank-fermented—shines with aromas of mandarin-orange taffy and honeysuckle. Personality rises out of the glass in the form of grapefruit peel, wet stone, high-toned acidity, and a clean mouthfeel. Green apple and bread dough pave the way for a spiced finish. **93**



## J. Lohr 2017 Fog's Reach Pinot Noir, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$35)

In Fog's Reach—Jerry Lohr's first estate vineyard—fog and wind join well-drained soils in influencing the character of the intensely flavored grapes. On the nose, this French oak-aged red blooms with a garden of lilac and lavender; and juicy notes of cherry and sweet tobacco waltz in on the elegant palate. A touch of mineral-driven soil melds with blue flowers on the finish. **94**



## Kenwood Vineyards 2013 Six Ridges Merlot, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County (\$26)

Named in honor of the mountain ranges that border Kenwood's vineyards, this six-year-old Merlot hails from a long and dry growing season. Dark berries and an intense concentration of dark chocolate and spice form the flavor profile of this serious red, which aged in American and French oak for 20 months. **92**



## Opaque 2014 Malbec, Paso Robles (\$32)

This meaty, chewy red, aged in French and American oak, is sourced from Irick Vineyard. Perfumed with deep cherry, roasted coffee, and iron, it has amazing depth, while high-toned acidity makes it a great pairing partner. Plum, spiced currant, and fennel meld with earth, sage, and broad-shouldered tannins on the palate. **94**

RIBOLI FAMILY WINES





**Alma de Cattleya 2017 Pinot Noir, Sonoma County (\$28)** Sourced from the Sonoma Coast, the fruit for this wine was fermented in stainless steel and went through 100% malolactic fermentation; it then aged for 16 months in 15% new French oak. Named for the national flower of winemaker Bibiana González Rave's home country, Colombia, it's subtly spiced with aromas of red berries. Roses and white pepper glide along a creamy path on gentle tannins, eventually arriving at a tart, cranberry-tinged finish. **92**



**Emeritus Vineyards 2016 Pinot Noir, Hallberg Ranch, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$44)** Fruit from 40 individual lots within this famed vineyard—which is planted to 11 different clones—went into this delectable wine. Juicy and vibrant with a streamlined texture, it aged ten months in 32% new French oak. Aromas of cinnamon toast and Bing cherry lead to flavors of spicy cherry and mocha before strawberry leans in with toasted almond. **94**



**Sutro 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Stuhlmuller Vineyard, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$28)** The grapes for this stunning white are sourced from low-yielding young vines in a small, gravelly block of Stuhlmuller Vineyard, located a half-mile up the Russian River from the Sutro home at Warnecke Ranch. An impressive effort, it wowed us with its aromatics of white grapefruit, lime zest, and white pepper. With each sip, its crisp juiciness elevates and cleanses the palate. **92**



**Domaine Fournier 2018 Sancerre Les Belles Vignes Rosé, Loire Valley, France (\$29)** The Fournier family has been making wine for 13 generations. Lean and mineral-driven, this 100% Pinot Noir has a perfumed salinity reminiscent of raspberry as well as high acidity and a dry, chalky mouthfeel. Also striking are its serious yet romantic nature and complex texture. **92**



DAVID MILLIGAN SELECTIONS



**J. Wilkes 2017 Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$30)** Wes Hagen's talent shines through this exciting red, which confidently exudes lithe and feminine aromas of tart cranberries and rose petals. On the palate, vanilla-kissed cherry and white pepper intertwine with a garden of spring flowers and lively acidity. The texture feels glossy on the tongue. **93**



MILLER FAMILY WINES



**Eberle 2017 Côtes-Du-Rhône, Paso Robles (\$30)** We love how the folks at Eberle describe this expression: "the charm of Old World wines without the funk." A blend of 64% Grenache, 24% Syrah, 8% Mourvèdre, and 4% Durif, it proves the southern Rhône is well interpreted on the Central Coast. Scents of spiced rhubarb and strawberry keep the California sunshine in the glass as plum and salinity chime in on the palate. The red fruit meets its match in cocoa and ultra-sleek acidity, making for an experience that's equal parts silky, juicy, and darn good. **93**



**Eberle 2017 Syrah, Steinbeck Vineyard, Paso Robles (\$30)** In the 1970s, Gary Eberle, one of the original producers of Rhône varieties in California, secured budwood from Maison M. Chapoutier's plantings in Tain-l'Hermitage; then, in 1978, he became one of the first winemakers in the U.S. to produce a 100% Syrah. The legacy continues in this expression, for which the variety was co-fermented with Viognier in stainless steel before aging in 50% French and 50% American oak for 18 months. With a nose of dark chocolate, coffee, and wet earth, it possesses exceptional texture and flavor. Black-tea tannins, walnut, and blackberry lean into a line of minerality as black pepper strikes a chord on the finish. **94**

# Publisher's PICKS



**Qupé 2015 Syrah, Bien Nacido Hillside Estate, Santa Maria Valley** (\$45) Clean, fresh aromas of blueberry and chocolate precede intense meaty notes melded with leather, iron, and white pepper. Blue fruit and a satiny mouthfeel keep it measured. **93**

VINTAGE WINE ESTATES



**Prelius 2015 Prile, Maremma Toscana DOC** (\$55) The vineyards sources of the Cabernet Sauvignon (40%), Sangiovese (40%), and Merlot (20%) that comprise this blend are located on a hilltop along the shores of a coastal lake, which lends this wine its name. Aromas of leather, graphite, and plum skin indicate its dark nature. Juicy with firm tannins, it offers a luxurious flavor profile of violets and cinnamon spice as well as a distinct mouthfeel. **94**

WILSON DANIELS



**Hard Row to Hoe Vineyards 2016 Burning Desire Cabernet Franc, Glacial Gravels Vineyard, Lake Chelan, Washington** (\$55) From north-central Washington State, this little-known region is a sub-AVA of the Columbia Valley and is known for its apples, pears, peaches, and cherries. Located on the north shore of Lake Chelan, the organically farmed vineyard sits at an elevation of 1,300 feet. Pleasant aromas of earth, animale, and raspberry jam stride out of the glass; on the palate, sensuous and rich hints of violets, blueberries, and plum liqueur are seasoned with a touch of umami. It's a big-boned red that finishes with dark chocolate and white pepper. **94**



**Chappellet 2017 Grower Collection Chardonnay, Sangiacomo Vineyard, Carneros, Sonoma County** (\$45) Chappellet's collection of small-production Sonoma County Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs string some of the region's best sites together, an accomplishment that's perhaps unexpected for a winery famed for its Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. The ability to work with the most respected growers allows winemaker Phillip Corallo-Titus to take these expressions to the next level. "These are not just vineyard designates," he insists. "They are made from our very favorite blocks." Sangiacomo Vineyard borders San Pablo Bay, whose influence brings out the fruit's acidity and intensity. Aromas of lemongrass and lime zest are accented by pineapple and apple pie, which reappear on the palate alongside chamomile, nectarine, and striking minerality. **93**



**Robert John Vineyards 2016 Bold Cabernet Sauvignon by RJV, Napa Valley** (\$55) Bursting with dark fruit and cedar aromas, this fittingly named Cab (with 3% Malbec and 2% Petit Verdot) embodies a broad-shouldered frame with rounded corners. Licorice, caramel, and new leather carry blackberry forward, as if on a mission. I suspect this will grow gentler with age, but it drinks well now. **91**



**Bonterra Organic Vineyards 2014 The Butler, Mendocino County** (\$55) It's a long and winding road up Mendocino's inland ridgeline to Bonterra's Butler Ranch estate vineyard, a Biodynamic site that sits at an elevation of more than 2,000 feet. This cuvée (81% Syrah, 14% Petite Sirah, 4% Grenache, and 1% Viognier) leads off with aromas of black-peppered plums, tobacco, and roasted coffee; savory notes take shape on the palate, where saddle leather, grilled meat, fennel, and violets are punctuated by spice, dark chocolate, and minerality. **94**

FETZER VINEYARDS



**Upchurch Vineyard 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Red Mountain AVA, Washington** (\$75) Aged in new French oak, this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (90%) and Merlot (10%) is decidedly Bordeaux-like in style. Aromas of leather, espresso, tart cherry, and earth lead to graphite and black cherry on the palate, where Old World acidity comes into play with a silky texture and an undeniable vibrance. Red Mountain is part of the Yakima Valley AVA. **96**



**Robert John Vineyards RJV 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley** (\$90) This elegant 100% Cabernet has a sweet twist: As pretty scents of cherry and tobacco settle, perfumed fruit continues its journey on the palate. Dusty notes of chocolate-covered cherry intensify on the mid-palate, where they're surrounded by grainy tannins in a lush, dense weight. Aged 26 months in new French oak barrels, this is a creamy, spice-rack red. **93**



**ANVIL by Forgeron Cellars 2016 Syrah, Boushey Vineyard, Yakima Valley, Washington (\$65)** This highly regarded site sits on fractured basalt, silt-loam soils, and windblown loess at elevations up to 1,400 feet. Aromas of black pepper, crushed lavender, and boysenberry make a striking impression, and the luxurious mouthfeel is spiced with cinnamon, cherries, and ripe plums. Espresso, soy sauce, and black pepper keep things energized alongside high-toned acidity, while licorice coats the tongue on the lengthy finish. **95**



**Trincheri Rosso/Sweet Vermouth, USA (\$24)** Grapes were sourced from the Trincheri family's California vineyards (the Barbera from Amador County and the Chardonnay from Napa Valley) to make this vermouth, which was infused with bitter plants like *Artemisia pontica* and cinchona bark as well as fruits, botanicals, and spices cold-macerated for more than a month. Sunny and sweet aromas of tart stone fruit and Italian herbs join flavors of vanilla and lime, which emerge on the palate with a creamy sensation. Pineapple links with spiced apple on the finish. **92**



**Familia Camarena Añejo Tequila, Mexico (\$30)** From its amber hue to its clean, precise nose, this graceful aged tequila is an elegant expression of purity. Profound aromas of just-squeezed lime, fresh agave, cocoa, and cedar are accented by a zesty saltiness that's markedly weighty on the palate, where it flavors notes of buttercream and saffra. Semi-sweet, nectar-like hints of orange, pear, peach, and pineapple usher in a wave of unexpected refreshment on the long finish. **95**



E. & J. GALLO



**J.J. Pfister Distilling Drakas Honey Spirit, USA (\$30)** Distilled from organic honey, this complex 90-proof expression is certainly in a category of its own. Housed in a slim 375-milliliter bottle, it makes an immediate impression with its multidimensional grappa-like qualities. Aromas of peaches, honeyed apples, walnuts, and orange blossoms reveal its layered nature before the round body engages a tickle of salinity in the back of the mouth. This "seasoning" opens up a seductive nectar of stone fruit while accenting a subdued thread of honey, which has a pleasant warming effect on the finish. **96**



**Redwood Empire Emerald Giant Rye Whiskey, USA (\$45)** This 90-proof whiskey from Sonoma County pays homage to the humungous trees that grow along California's northern coast. Sumptuous scents of salted orange peel give way to an impressive weightiness on the palate, where sea salt and bittersweet chocolate intertwine with nutmeg, exotic blue flowers, and caraway. Stone fruit makes a lovely entry on the finish. **97** ■■

PURPLE WINE + SPIRITS

## SPIRITS



**Rhum Barbancourt 5 Star Réserve Spéciale, Haiti (\$25)** Aged eight years, this 86-proof rum exudes aromas of rancio, molasses, and stone fruit. Flavors of peach, apple strudel, and golden honey streamline the silky palate; dotted with white pepper, notes of mango and magnolia are divine on the finish. **94**

Alex Guarachi, founder of Guarachi Wine Partners and Guarachi Family Wines.

*Forging His Own*

# DESTINY

CHILEAN-BORN IMPORTER AND INNOVATOR  
**ALEX GUARACHI**  
SHARES HIS STORY OF STRUGGLE AND SUCCESS



A cross-section of the Guarachi Wine Partners portfolio.

*story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball*

Being a market pioneer can have significant advantages, but it can also be a struggle. Alex Guarachi, who was honored with the title “Importer of the Year” by *Wine Enthusiast* in 2010, was one of the first to introduce the wines of South America to the United States in 1985. His importing company, Guarachi Wine Partners, has expanded significantly over the past three and a half decades, building a reputation as a global importer that specializes in the advancement of premium wines from Argentina and Chile. After helping to promote dozens of brands over the years, Guarachi launched his own label, Guarachi Family Wines, in 2008.

Yet the success he enjoys today would have been unimaginable to a young Guarachi. “I saw an opportunity, but I never thought that it would be what it is today—I never thought I’d be *here* when I was broke,” he says with a laugh as he recalls his early days in business.

## FROM CHILE TO CALIFORNIA

Born in Santiago, Chile, Guarachi attended San Jose State University on an athletic scholarship with dreams of becoming a professional soccer player. Those hopes were shattered when an injury placed him on the bench during his senior year in 1982, but after graduation, Guarachi’s interest in wine helped inform his next move: Realizing that Chilean brands had no presence in the U.S., and specifically in California, he considered his connections back home and thought he might be equipped to introduce these wines to Americans.



Guarachi Wine Partners imports acclaimed Chilean wine brand VIK.



At the time, the Chilean wine community was on the precipice of change, as a handful of leaders had begun to shift their focus from bulk production to fine wines. The timing seemed right for Guarachi to join the movement, so he started with Viña San Pedro in coordination with Aurelio Montes, one of the country's most influential winemakers. The men would soon work together again to promote and market Montes' own Viña Montes—arguably one of Chile's most recognized and respected brands today—followed by another Montes family project, Viña Kaiken. In 2005, Guarachi also brought on Bodega Norton—Argentina's most-awarded winery, owned by the Swarovski family—and has achieved great success with it, crossing the 250,000-case mark annually and earning an Impact "Hot Brand" award in the process.

"When you think about it, I took a big gamble: I was living in Northern California right next to wine country. People thought I was nuts!" Guarachi says, throwing his hands in the air. For a long time, it seemed as though he was: Who would dare peddle wines from an unknown region when they lived in the backyard of Napa and Sonoma?

What's more, he was a one-man show, operating Guarachi Wine Partners out of his garage for the better part of his first decade in business. "I did everything: selling, delivering, invoicing, point-of-sale materials," says Guarachi. To make an impression, he participated in every tasting event he could find, spoke with countless members of the press, and made

*"I saw an opportunity, but I never thought that it would be what it is today—I never thought I'd be here when I was broke." —Alex Guarachi*

appointments with restaurant buyers at all hours of the night in hopes of broadening his audience. Geography was a sticking point, and he faced erroneous inquiries like, "Where's Chile? In South Africa?"

Despite a stream of rejections, Guarachi toiled on for years, reading numerous financial and self-help books to fuel his persistence. "I needed to get stronger; I needed to believe in myself," he remembers. "Like they say, every no is closer to a yes, right?"

It wasn't until he moved to Southern California in the early 1990s that his luck changed. Los Angeles County was a vast melting pot of ethnic back-grounds where consumers had fewer allegiances to the industry up north, and they seemed more open to trying wines from new regions—especially South America. Guarachi's ambition, work ethic, and charismatic personality served him well in building relationships with the buyers he went out of his way to meet. "I learned from successful people that they never give up. They believe in themselves," he says. "And I knew this wasn't an 8-to-5 job—this was a 24/7 job."

## CRAFTING A LEGACY OF HIS OWN

For two decades, Guarachi helped establish numerous brands as he lent them his expertise in marketing, case production, and distribution. But by the mid-2000s, he knew it was time to focus on his own venture. He hired Paul Hobbs as his winemaker, and together they crafted the first vintages for Guarachi Family Wines: a 2007 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and a 2008 Pinot Noir from the Sonoma Coast. They started with fruit sourced from highly sought-after vineyards, including Beckstoffer's George III, Stage Coach, and Gap's Crown, knowing they'd eventually invest in estate properties. "That's the only way to own my own destiny, and I wanted to control yields and manage the vineyards to the best of my ability," explains Guarachi.

In 2013, he purchased Sun Chase Vineyard, which is located in Petaluma Gap, a new Sonoma County AVA

that's named for the passages in the coastal mountain range that allow cold marine air to funnel in and out of the region. The vineyard, too, is aptly named: Here, the rising sun chases the morning fog back toward the Pacific, giving the vines an optimal balance of sunshine and climate. Returning fog in the late afternoon cools the vines so the fruit retains its high acidity, resulting in Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays with vibrant character, power, savory nuance, and minerality. (Take the 2017 Pinot, which expresses sweet and savory aromas of fresh raspberry, orange peel, hibiscus, and candy-stripe beets before a layered, powerful palate, on which juicy flavors of wild strawberry are framed by dusty, clay-like minerality as well as hints of blood orange and sage that linger long after each sip.)

One year later, Guarachi acquired Meadowrock Vineyard, which soars over Napa Valley in the mountainous Atlas Peak District. Sitting above the fog line at 1,400–1,760 feet in elevation, the site receives full sun exposure throughout the day yet maintains temperatures cooler than those experienced on the valley floor. It gets its name from the soil, a "meadow of rocks" that provides ambient heat to the vines in the evenings for even ripening throughout the growing season.

The vineyard sits in good company among prominent neighbors, including Piero Antinori's Antica and the historic Stagecoach vineyards, as it produces dense, concentrated fruit with firm, rugged tannins. Even so, Meadowrock was considered a "fixer-upper," according to Guarachi, who has invested a small fortune in replanting two-thirds of the property's 30-plus planted acres. Because the vineyard was struggling with disease and outdated trellises, Guarachi says they "only kept the best vines," replacing the rest with high-quality rootstocks and clones while improving the trellising and irrigation systems. Made with fruit from the original blocks, the 2016 G by Alex Guarachi was released earlier this year; 2019 will mark the first vintage from the new plantings. "There is so much

potential in that area,” says Guarachi with a twinkle of excitement in his eyes. “It has all this red volcanic soil, so the fruit will really express the place. It’s just phenomenal.”

In 2016, Julian Gonzalez took the position of chief winemaker at Guarachi Family Wines. As an integral member of Hobbs’ consulting team, he’d worked closely with Guarachi’s program since its beginning; when he asked if he might be considered for a full-time job, Guarachi worried about the young winemaker’s relationship with Hobbs, but was quickly assured it’d be all right.

Not long after, Guarachi had a passionate phone conversation with Hobbs, who was clearly not fond of the idea. But he eventually had a change of heart, as Guarachi recalls, saying, “You know what, Alex, this boy has wings. I’ve got to let him fly.” Now the boutique label has a resident winemaker who boasts a phenomenal reputation—and who’s making the most of the opportunity to play a starring role with a brand that celebrates his craft.



Guarachi sees his limited-production passion project as a long-term endeavor, allowing him to channel his vast experience into making wine of the highest quality possible. His eponymous label means there’s even more pressure to perform, but he’s up for the challenge. “It’s who I am,” he insists. “After all, it’s my name that’s on the bottle.” With two college-age children about to enter the business, the Guarachi family is looking at a bright future in the wine world for generations to come. ■■

# Tasting Notes

by Meredith May

**Bodegas Baigorri de Garage 2014, DOCa Rioja, Spain (\$65)** A 100% Tempranillo produced from 70-year-old vines, this wine aged in new French oak for 18 months followed by six months in bottle. An homage to the Bordeaux *garagistes* who broke the rules to create a new style of wine, it offers up a nose of graphite and tar, with hints of balsamic and deep black plum. Tart, with tight, teeth-gripping tannins and plum skin, it becomes silkier with each sip. Old World acidity keeps it fresh, and the finish is tinged with fennel root, espresso, and raisins. **95**

**G by Guarachi 2016 Meadowrock Vineyard, Napa (\$75)** The first release from Alex Guarachi’s newest project hails from a site 1,450 feet up on Atlas Peak above the Napa Valley floor. Perfumed with jasmine, sandalwood, and leather-laced blackberry, this blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Syrah, and 12% Merlot makes a thrilling debut. Structured tannins join complex dark fruit, maintaining a combination of power and grace as dark chocolate melts to the finish. **98**

**Guarachi Family Wines 2017 Chardonnay, Sun Chase Vineyard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma Coast (\$60)** From an estate vineyard that sits 1,400 feet above the Pacific, this Chardonnay offers up creamy, weighty notes of tapioca and vanilla pudding. Notes of green and red apple are generous, combining with tangerine and caramel mid-palate. The finish is rich and savory with tarragon, chamomile, and a smack of minerality. **97**

**Guarachi Family Wines 2017 Pinot Noir, Sun Chase Vineyard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma Coast (\$75)** This world-class expression offers up a savory nose of shiitake mushroom, red licorice, and ripe strawberry. Full-bodied, with riveting acidity, it feels weighty with complexity. Blackstrap molasses is accented by cherry and sweet tobacco. **98**

**Guarachi Family Wines 2017 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$65)** Following scents of cherry, baked fig, and leather, structured shoulders carry notes of blackberry and fennel, along with brush and a bouquet of heather. High-toned acidity lifts up the savory notes of mushroom and black olive. Bing cherry livens the party on the finish. **95**

**tenshen 2018 Rosé, Central Coast (\$20)** This blend of Rhône varieties indulges the nose with tangerine, peach, and river-rock aromas. Flavors of persimmon and red apple merge with peach pith. It’s a great-value rosé with a serious side: Good acid and a pleasurable juicy finish keep the palate clean. **90**

**VIK 2013 Viña Red Blend, Millahue Valley, Chile (\$165)** VIK encompasses 11,000 acres of vineyard land dispersed across 12 valleys. This wine represents ten years of research, including more than 4,000 deep-soil studies, to find the right terroir; weather stations were installed to determine the best growing locations and the best exposures to wind and sun. The vines were planted in 2006, and the first release was the 2011 vintage. The 2013—a blend of 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cab Franc, 14% Carménère, and 2% Merlot—is an intense creature, with a satiny entry that exudes luxury. Intense aromatics of lavender and rhubarb are accented by alluringly spiced red tea. Generous and vivacious, this well-structured red has a freshness, a bountiful maturity springing forth, that you know will last for a decade or more. This is what Chile can deliver at its finest. **98**

WHISKEY

*Bourbon,*

# TEXAS. STYLE

BALCONES DISTILLING RELEASES ITS MOST  
APPROACHABLE SPIRIT: TEXAS POT STILL BOURBON

The Pot Still  
Bourbon joins  
a number of  
award-winning  
whiskies in  
the Balcones  
portfolio.





**Balcones Distilling's Pot Still Bourbon (\$30 retail) features a mash bill of four grains: Roasted Texas Blue Corn, Texas Wheat, Texas Rye, and Golden Promise Malted Barley from Scotland.**



full decade after Texas' much-decorated Balcones Distilling made its first small-batch whisky (to use the brand's preferred spelling) in a former welding shop in Waco, it released its first regularly available bourbon earlier this year. Balcones' Texas Pot Still Bourbon tastes of toasted grains, honey, and orchard fruits—and plays just as well in a Mint Julep as it does in a rocks glass.

As such, it serves as a friendly introduction for newcomers to the brand. And “for people who are far along on their nerdy whisky journey or are fans of our experimental expressions, this is going to be a lot more approachable than they're used to,” says Distillery Manager Thomas Mote.

Mote and Head Distiller Jared Himstedt, whom the Icons of Whisky America named Master Distiller and Master Blender of the Year for 2019, met years ago through their mutual interest in beer. Their experiments with mash bills, barrel aging, blending, and other variables have led to more than 350 national and international awards for Balcones' high-octane boutique whiskies and special releases; their flagship product, Balcones



**Balcones' rustic-chic tasting room.**



**"PEOPLE ASK US ALL THE TIME WHY WE USE A POT STILL: WE WANTED TO HONOR MALT TRADITION AS FAITHFULLY AS POSSIBLE. WE HAVEN'T LOOKED BACK, DUE TO THE INTENSITY OF FLAVOR AND THE TIGHT CONNECTION TO RAW MATERIAL."**

*—Thomas Mote, Balcones Distillery Manager*

The Balcones distillery occupies the former facilities of the Texas Fire Proof Storage Company in Waco, TX.

Texas Single Malt Whisky, has helped build the emerging category of American single malts.

Named for the geological fault zone that runs some 450 miles from south Texas to the Waco area, Balcones Distilling expanded in 2016 to its present location in the 1923 Texas Fire Proof Storage Company building. Throughout the four-story distillery, exposed bricks, antique signage, original tile floors, and gleaming copper pot stills made by fourth-generation craftsmen in Scotland create an atmosphere burnished by the hands of time. "For a few years we used the building only for warehousing," says Mote, "but in 2016, we started doing all the mashing, fermenting, and distilling here."

Even as they continued to win awards, the Balcones team knew they faced some natural barriers to expansion. Many of the distillery's small-batch expressions and special releases were acquired tastes that appealed to the whisky connoisseur but were priced beyond purchase for the backyard barbecue. There wasn't an affordable entry point to the brand.

"Price is not surprising as a barrier to entry," says Himstedt, acknowledging that the "list goes on and on" as to why a craft spirit usually costs more than a macro brand. But category was also at issue: "We didn't have a regular offering in America's biggest whisky category. Being mostly malt guys, we danced around the categories that

people usually lead with."

Because Balcones did have some existing bourbon stock—a wheated bourbon, a one-off high rye, experimental creations they'd laid down, and a solid inventory of its award-winning Texas Blue Corn Bourbon—Himstedt got busy in the blending room. Ultimately, he came up with a formula of four grains, with a significantly higher proportion of malted barley than most distillers use. He remembers saying, "Give me a few months and I'll see if I can get close to our house profile. But if we're going to make something more approachable and more affordable at a lower proof, I want it to be straight."

None of Balcones' products have



**Balcones Distillery Manager Thomas Mote and Head Distiller Jared Himstedt.**

any additives (a requirement for the “straight” designation), but aging whisky for two years in new American oak presents a challenge in Texas, where extreme temperature variations mean that whisky can be sufficiently influenced by tannin and color long before it has mellowed and matured. The team’s ability to overcome that challenge has been a point of pride. “That’s the irony of it,” Mote points out. “With age statements dropping all over the world and everybody trying

to get product out as quickly as possible, we’re trying to figure out how to make our whisky older.”

Bigger barrels (in this case containing 59 gallons) slow down the impact of wood, as does Balcones’ yard-aging program, which more closely resembles that of wine production than bourbon-making. “Most bourbon barrels are yard-aged six months, but we committed to three years,” Himstedt says. “That’s the time when the wood is cut and on a pallet, getting rained on, getting cold or hot. Time mellows the sappy, piney, green characteristics in the wood.”

In-depth tours of the distillery begin outside near the grain silos and end in the tasting room, where visitors can enjoy a flight or a cocktail made with one of approximately 20 expressions. Interestingly, Balcones runs two separate lines of production—one for American-style and another for Scottish-style whisky; each uses separate mills, stills, and cooking vessels. Inside, an aroma suggestive of corn tortillas and pecan pralines permeates

the cook room, where hot-water tanks and a mash tun repurposed from Scotland’s Speyburn distillery convert the starches to sugar for fermentation. After fermentation, the wash gets pumped to the stillhouse, where, in a tangle of ladders and pipes and copper vessels, Balcones begins its process of double-batch pot still distillation.

“People ask us all the time why we use a pot still,” Mote says. “Because we started out with the idea of making malt whisky, we bought the stills that were most traditional for making malt whisky. We wanted to honor malt tradition as faithfully as possible. We haven’t looked back, due to the intensity of flavor and the tight connection to raw material.”

“Can whisky have terroir?” Himstedt wonders out loud. “There are more questions than answers, and that’s what’s fun about making whisky and bourbon in nontraditional regions. In a lot of ways, it feels like a new golden age of distilling. It’s fun as a producer and fun as a consumer. The world is getting really interesting for a whisky drinker.” ■■



**Visitors to the Balcones distillery can sample flights and cocktails as well as single spirit pours.**

## *The Flavorful Future of*



# TEQUILA



**Naturally flavored tequilas like Dulce Vida Pineapple-Jalapeño make mixology foolproof.**

**DULCE VIDA MAKES LIFE EVEN SWEETER FOR BUSY BARTENDERS** by Matt Jackson

The cocktail revolution that began in the 2000s is responsible for putting craft spirits on the map, making a myriad of small-batch brands accessible to the everyday consumer. As the culture has evolved and the rising tide has lifted all boats, beverage companies across the country have begun to usher in a new era of elevated ready-to-drink and pre-batched cocktails.

One such trailblazer is Dulce Vida, whose roots are planted in tequila: The brand's 100-proof Dulce Vida Organic Blanco expression "was made with the belief that the agave should be the star," says Eric Dopkins, CEO and founder of Milestone Brands, which owns Dulce Vida. Made from organic piñas grown in the Jalisco highlands, the tequila stands on its own, in his view: "We offer an extremely high-quality product that consistently overdelivers."

But while Dopkins and his team happily preach to their choir of tequila lovers, they also are excited to create a following among loyalists to other labels or spirits. "We want the vodka drinker who is bored and wants to take a walk on the wild side," Dopkins says.



New to the Dulce Vida portfolio, the Sparkling Paloma, Margarita, and Watermelon Margarita cocktails come in 200-milliliter cans.

To bring newcomers to the category, the brand continues to diversify. Though 50% of its business comes from the Blanco, the three naturally flavored tequilas it recently added to its lineup have begun to give the original a run for its money. “While our focus has been on Dulce Vida Blanco, the infusions are growing rapidly, and short-term consumer trends are accelerating versus long term,” Dopkins explains, noting that the Grapefruit, Lime, and Pineapple-Jalapeño expressions also provide an alternative to artificial flavorings. “It all starts with a quality product and real ingredients. We want to show that you can make an amazing cocktail . . . without hiding behind sugar. All you need is Dulce Vida, lime juice, club soda, and ice.”

The portfolio grew even more this year with the release of three ready-to-drink cocktails in 200-milliliter cans. Incorporating the same natural ingredients as the tequilas with no additional sugars or malt alcohol, Dulce Vida Sparkling Paloma, Margarita, and

Watermelon Margarita are already flying off the shelves, according to Dopkins. “They taste amazing, and we can’t keep them in stock,” he says. “We will be increasing our production this year to meet demand and will continue to spread the word as we grow into 2020.”

Dopkins attributes the cocktails’ success—like those of his flavored expressions—to health consciousness, which is a focal point for the company: Just as “the infused tequilas allow either the mixologist or the bartender at home to make great-tasting drinks without adding sugary mixers,” he points out, so “the cocktails are approximately 66 calories per drink with only 2.6 carbs.” No wonder even those once wary of tequila are entering the fold. As Dopkins says, “We often are told, ‘I haven’t had tequila since the college days, and now I am back in the category thanks to Dulce Vida!’”

Dulce Vida’s dedication to quality spirits is enhanced by its appealing prices. While you can go all in for the five-year-old Extra Añejo at \$150, the



Blanco hovers at an impressive \$25. “Tequila prices are accelerating, and honestly, Dulce Vida is a diamond and a discovery,” Dopkins says. “We are proud of what we have developed, and our passion and price shows that to our customers.” ■■

# Anthony Dias

## BLUE *REVIEWS*

Presented by 

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:

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**85-89: VERY GOOD**

**90-94: OUTSTANDING**

**95-100: CLASSIC**

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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.

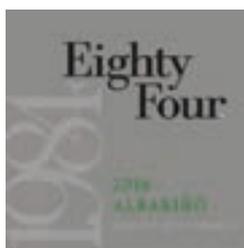
 The “twisty” icon indicates wines sealed with a screwcap closure.

For additional Blue Reviews, go to [bluelifestyle.com](http://bluelifestyle.com).

Prices are for 750-mL bottles unless otherwise noted.

### DOMESTIC

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**91** **Eighty Four 2018 Albariño, Carneros, Napa (\$28)**

Fresh, lively, and long, this is Shafer Vineyards' second label. It's equal parts crisp, bright, and tangy, with racy acidity and rich minerality.

**92** **Morgan Winery 2017 Twelve Clones Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$35)**

Bright peach nose with a smooth texture; juicy with tangy cherries and vivacious acidity; long, balanced, and totally delicious.

**94** **Testarossa Winery 2017 Doctor's Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$70)**

The soft cherry nose precedes a silky palate of bright cherry and raspberry anchored by a firm base of lively acidity. Another winner from this ambitious Santa Cruz winery.

**91** **Etrusca 2018 Natalia Rosé, Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast (\$27)**

A pale pink, dry, and smooth rosé from the Gamba folks; pristine and fresh with soft notes of strawberry and a long, bright finish.

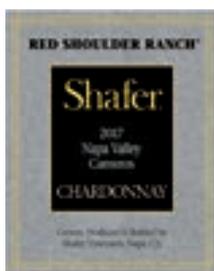


**92** Gamba Vineyards and Winery 2017 Old Vine Zinfandel, Starr Road Ranch, Russian River Valley (\$50) Fragrant, concentrated, and rich with ripe, juicy berry notes. Tangy, spicy, and lively with considerable length, this elevates Zin to a higher level.

**93** Gamba Vineyards and Winery 2017 Old Vine Estate Zinfandel, Russian River Valley (\$50) Lush, long, intense, and bursting with ripe blackberry and spice. Velvety, concentrated, and deep with layers of flavor and fruit, this represents its variety as it should be.

**92** Ridge Vineyards 2014 Lytton Estate Syrah, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County (\$46) Dark, lush nose; soft yet rich, with a concentrated, balanced, and juicy palate. A complex and generous reminder that Ridge always makes wines of quality.

**91** Sullivan Vineyards 2017 Estate Chardonnay, Rutherford, Napa (\$49) Silky and creamy with succulent notes of pear; lush and ripe, with minerality leading into a long finish.



**92** Shafer Vineyards 2017 Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa (\$52) Smooth with crisp, juicy citrus; mellow, balanced, and long. The complex palate is layered with vanilla, toast, and sweet hints of new oak.

**94** Mount Eden Vineyards 2015 Estate Bottled Chardonnay, Santa Cruz Mountains (\$60) From a storied winery that's been producing boutique wines since the mid-20th century. Lush, rich, and deep with a creamy texture and intensely bright fruit; crisp acidity frames the luscious flavors nicely.

**92** Midnight Cellars 2016 Nebula Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$55) Opaque ruby color with a smooth berry nose; plum, boysenberry, and chocolate flavor the silky texture. Rich and complex yet very approachable, this is a fine example of Paso Cabernet.

**93** Ledson Winery & Vineyards 2016 Old Vine Estate Barbera, Sonoma Valley (\$54) Deep crimson color with a lush berry nose. Berry notes carry over to the rich, velvety palate, where they're joined by toasty oak. A great, underrated variety made by a skilled winery.

**91** Portalupi Wines 2018 Arneis, Graziano Vineyard, Mendocino County (\$28) Tangy, crisp, and rounded with juicy fruit; fresh, lively, and long. Another adventurous choice from this winery that turned out successful.

**94** Oceano Wines 2017 Chardonnay, Spanish Springs Vineyard, San Luis Obispo County (\$38) Long and refreshing, this is a stunning wine with no malolactic fermentation. Bracingly crisp and pure with lively fruit, a silky texture, and bright acidity.

**93** Oceano Wines 2018 Pinot Noir, Spanish Springs Vineyard, San Luis Obispo County (\$45) Soft ruby color; silky and fresh, with bright pomegranate and cranberry, racy acidity, and lovely balance. Can I say "Burgundian" without getting in trouble?



**95** Merry Edwards 2017 Olivet Lane Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$68) Rich black cherry echoes on both the nose and palate. With a smooth texture and hints of toasty oak, this tribute to a justly famous vineyard is a typical Merry Edwards masterwork.

MAISONS MARQUES & DOMAINES

# BLUE REVIEWS



**98 Mod Sélection Rosé Champagne, France (\$400)** You probably haven't heard of this house, but it dates back to 1892. This wine is remarkable: beautifully colored, with an extremely fine mousse. Pure and elegant red fruit accompanies a bright acid structure and a long, balanced finish. It's certainly one of the loveliest rosés available on the market.

## IMPORTED

**92 Vitkin Winery 2016 Old Vines Petite Sirah, Samson, Israel (\$35)** Intense, dark ruby hue; juicy and smooth with rich texture and a rather pleasant presentation. Kosher.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

**91 Krohn 2002 Colheita Port, Mendoza, Argentina (\$28)** Rich, spicy nose, with a smooth and racy palate of toasty black cherry. Off-dry and crisp with a touch of rancio.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS



**98 Mod Sélection Réserve Champagne, France (\$300)** Yes, it's pricey, but this is a stunningly exceptional wine. Beautifully crisp and bracing with layers of flavor; it's elegant, complex, and long, with pristine balance and precision.

**93 Lorenzo Mattoni 2014 Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG, Italy (\$50)** Bright ruby color; silky and dense with a tangy, juicy style. Complex and bright with lovely flavors, fine structure, and depth. Wonderful now, but it'll be even better in five years or so.

**96 Gagliole 2015 Pecchia Colli della Toscana Centrale IGT, Italy (\$120)** Spicy nose; smooth, luscious, and concentrated with tangy fruit, cinnamon, plum, and violets. With a rich texture and amazing depth, it's a great wine from one of Chianti's gems.

VIAS IMPORTS

**95 Tenute Silvio Nardi 2012 Poggio Doria Brunello di Montalcino Riserva, Italy (\$115)** Fragrant and soft nose; silky and complex with racy acidity, notes of fresh raspberry, and an elegant style. A long and charming demonstration of why Brunello is one of the world's great wines.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**92 Peregrine 2016 Charcoal Creek Late Harvest Riesling, Central Otago, New Zealand (\$29)** Racy citrus nose; lively and sweet with a creamy texture and smooth bearing. There's a nice tension between the sugar and the tangy acidity. ☺

VINEYARD BRANDS



**94 Pascual Toso 2017 Alta Barrancas Vineyards Syrah, Maipú District, Argentina (\$50)** Deep and lush with intensity and balance; smooth, generous, spicy, and rich with layers of flavor. Who knew Argentina could produce world-class Syrah? Paul Hobbs, that's who.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

## VALUE

**90 Veuve Ambal Crémant de Bourgogne Grande Cuvée Brut, France (\$20)** Bright yeasty nose; clean, fresh, and smooth with notes of crisp apple and a lengthy finish. Balanced, charming, and elegant with surprising finesse and style.

USA WINE WEST

**90 Veuve Ambal Crémant de Bourgogne Grande Cuvée Brut Rosé, France (\$20)** A pale pink blend of Pinot Noir and Gamay with a touch of Chardonnay; refreshing and dense with hints of strawberries and apples.

USA WINE WEST

**90 Ultimate Provence 2018 AOP Côtes de Provence, France (\$22)** Silky and juicy, this blend of Cinsault, Syrah, and Grenache Noir is dry and lush with deep, rich flavors and good length.

PROVENCE ROSE GROUP



**90** **Maison les Alexandrins**  
**2016 Côtes du Rhone**  
**Les Terrasses de l'Eridan**  
**Rouge, France (\$18)** Rich ruby  
 color with a blackberry nose; tangy,  
 spicy, and dense with notes of ripe  
 berries. Succulent with good acid  
 structure and impressive length.

VINEYARD BRANDS

**91** **Matchbook 2017 The Arsonist Chardonnay,**  
**Dunnigan Hills (\$22)** Generous nose and golden color;  
 lush and shimmering with creamy texture and rich, toasty flavors. Ripe  
 pear rides in on juicy, bright acidity. A really good value.

**89** **Famille Perrin 2017 Côtes du Rhône Réserve Rouge,**  
**France (\$14)** Deep ruby color with an earthy nose; rich,  
 smooth, and tangy; with blackberry and plum showing on a lush palate  
 that gives way to a long finish. A wine of considerable value from the  
 Beaucastel folks. ☺

VINEYARD BRANDS

**91** **Poema Cava Brut Rosado, Spain (\$13)** Pale pink  
 color with a bright strawberry nose; fresh and juicy with lively  
 bubbles and a tangy, crisp style. This amazing value is 100% Trepat (a  
 Catalonian grape) made via the traditional method.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS



**91** **Teal Lake 2017 Shiraz,**  
**South Eastern**  
**Australia (\$13)** Deep ruby color;  
 smooth, bright, and luscious with  
 notes of vanilla and ripe berries. This  
 would still be a lovely wine at twice  
 the price—and it's kosher!

ROYAL WINE CORP.

# WINNER BEST OF SHOW



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# BLUE REVIEWS



**90** Don Rodolfo 2018 Art of the Andes Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$12) Deep color; fresh, juicy, and rich with bright blackberry notes; an amazing value with creaminess and length.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

**91** Smoking Loon 2018 Steelbird Rosé, California (\$10) Medium pink color with a strawberry nose and a silky texture; smooth flavors of rhubarb, strawberry, and bright watermelon. An astonishing value, so it's best to stock up. ☺

DON SEBASTIANI & SONS

**91** Martini & Rossi Riserva Speciale Ambrato, Vermouth di Torino, Italy (\$25) Concentrated amber hue with an intense herbal nose that carries onto the flavorful and spicy palate; rich, sweet, and silky. ☺

MARTINI & ROSSI

**91** Martini & Rossi Riserva Speciale Rubino, Vermouth di Torino, Italy (\$25) Medium ruby color; spicy and ripe with complex herbs and a smooth, textured style. ☺

MARTINI & ROSSI

**91** Cline Cellars 2017 Ancient Vines Zinfandel, Contra Costa County (\$20) Floral and lush with pretty, spicy flavors; aromatic, dense, and long, this expression hails from a consistently value-priced winery.

**92** Borgo Scopeto 2016 Borgonero, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$24) A dark and rich blend of Sangiovese, Syrah, Cabernet, and Merlot; juicy, tangy, and long.

VINEYARD BRANDS



**91** Charles Smith 2017 Boom Boom! Syrah, Washington (\$18) Fresh, smooth, and luscious with blackberry notes and tangy, balanced style. The winery describes it as "one of the biggest and boldest Syrahs of all time." ☺

**92** Alma Negra 2016 M Blend, Mendoza, Argentina (\$22) Smooth, ripe, and rich with lovely blackberry flavors; lush and juicy with length and balance.

VINEYARD BRANDS

**90** Mohua 2017 Pinot Noir, Central Otago, New Zealand (\$23) A soft, earthy nose leads into smooth hints of cherry, subtle earth, and savory notes; balanced and long. ☺

VINEYARD BRANDS



**91** Nobile Wines 2018 Icon Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$20) Refined, flavorful, and crisp with a clean and tangy palate; complex and layered with good structure. ☺

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

**92** Morgan Winery 2018 Double L Vineyard Dry Riesling, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$24) Soft peach nose; crisp, sleek, and juicy with notes of tangy citrus and green apple. Dry, refreshing, and racy with pure flavors and excellent balance.

**90** Flat Top Hills 2018 Chardonnay, California (\$14) Silky-smooth with a lush, generous style; ripe and balanced with toasty notes. A good value that's equal parts long and generous. ☺

C. MONDAVI & FAMILY



**90** Axel 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$19) Smooth and zesty with notes of soft herbs; balanced, long, and fresh.



**91 Spoken Barrel 2016 #42 Meritage Red Blend, Columbia Valley**

**(\$20)** Sumptuous color; stylish, lush, and balanced with rich blackberry, plum, spice, and toast; impressive with considerable depth.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

**94 Larressingle XO Armagnac, France (\$98)** Deep amber color with a soft, smooth nose. This silky, tannic, and complex 20-year-old spirit exudes chocolate complemented by nutty notes of almond and hazelnut.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**91 Bulldog London Dry Gin, U.K. (\$30)** Soft botanical nose; creamy, rich texture with lush style; rich, silky, deep, and broad with good length and fine balance.

CAMPARI AMERICA

**92 Martini & Rossi Riserva Speciale Bitter Liqueur, Italy (\$24)** Deep scarlet color with a bitter nose; smooth, sweet, and very reminiscent of that other red bitter. Crafted from the brand's original 1872 recipe, this would be fine in a Negroni.

BACARDI LIMITED

**94 Booker's Teresa's Batch 2019-01 Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$70)** Medium amber color with a charred oak nose. This may be cask strength (125.9 proof), but it's silky, elegant, and surprisingly mellow; watering brings out its toasty dried-fruit flavors.

BEAM SUNTORY

**93 Basil Hayden's Dark Rye, USA (\$40)** Nose of rich spice and dark fruit; creamy and deep with traditional rye spice softened by hints of sweet Port. A blend of Kentucky straight rye and Canadian rye, it's complex, silky, sweet, and long.

BEAM SUNTORY

**93 Woodford Reserve Master's Collection Kentucky Bourbon, USA (\$130)** Vivid amber color with a deep, toasted nose; nuanced and smooth with rich flavors and a charming sweetness from the oak.

BROWN-FORMAN

**95 Powers John's Lane Release Single Pot Still Aged 12 Years, Ireland (\$62)** Medium amber color with aromas of wood, toast, charcoal, and honey. Spice, vanilla, and dried stone fruits lead to a sweet, lengthy finish.

PERNOD RICARD

**92 Organika Vodka, Russia (\$32)** Smooth, rich, and lovely with vanilla; soft, creamy, and lush; mellow, velvety, and long.

HEALTH & ENERGY FOOD CORP.

**93 Organika Life Vodka, Russia (\$42)** Sumptuous and silky with vanilla and sweet, mellow flavors; creamy, balanced, and bright with finesse and lovely style.

HEALTH & ENERGY FOOD CORP.



**91 Speyburn Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky Aged 10 Years, Scotland (\$33)**

Pale amber color with a pleasant, toasty nose; mellow, nutty, and stylish with balance and a polished texture; clean, lush, and long. ■■

IBHL USA

## SPIRITS

**92 Larressingle VSOP Armagnac, France (\$60)** Medium amber color with a smooth, toasty nose; rich and creamy with elegant dried fruit and lovely toasted oak. A top producer of this great, underappreciated brandy.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

**93 Larressingle Napoleon Armagnac, France (\$70)** A lush nose gives way to a silky texture and rich, sweet dried fruits with notes of treacle and light toast; long and elegant, with a soft but lavish finish.

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

ON THE  
**ROAD**

NUE Vodka in a

# New Territory



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF **SOUTHWEST SPIRITS**  
**CALIFORNIA STATE MANAGER JON RAMOS**

story by Eric Marsh / photos by Devin Berko

Tony P's Manager  
Mark Sepulveda  
chats with Jon  
Ramos, California  
State Manager for  
Southwest Spirits,  
on the restaurant's  
waterfront deck,  
which overlooks  
Marina del Rey.



Ramos greets Israel Carlos Tayahua, an employee at Circus Liquor in North Hollywood, CA. Educating employees at accounts is imperative to seeing his brands move, Ramos says.

**O**n a typical workday, Southwest Spirits California State Manager Jon Ramos covers a lot of ground: He’s in charge of all the company’s accounts in Southern California. “It might take two hours just to arrive at my first account,” he said of starting his route from his home in Fullerton, which is close to the midpoint of the 232-mile stretch between Bakersfield and San Diego.

Within that area, Southwest Spirits has something in the ballpark of 10,000 on- and off-premise accounts, with the top 200 being Ramos’ primary focus. He let *The Tasting Panel* tag along while visiting three of them—all in Los Angeles, an expansive market in itself—to get at least a sliver of a taste of what his average day looks like.

Ramos is an imposing figure with an amiable, jovial disposition. A veteran in the beverage industry, he started out at Miller Brewing Company before moving to Heineken, where he worked for 12 years. In joining Southwest Spirits, he said, “I wanted to make the leap to craft spirits. I enjoy the challenge of it—of getting unknown and unproven brands into accounts.” A prime example is NUE Vodka, which Ramos was following up on for the duration of our ride-along.

Rooted in Dallas, Texas, Southwest is a “solution-based company” that distills, blends, and bottles spirits while overseeing marketing for 25 brands, eight of which it refers to as its “core brands.” One such brand is NUE Vodka, which also has its origins in Dallas; in the five years since its inception, NUE has branched out considerably, and can now be found in 35 states and counting.



NUE Vodka also offers grapefruit- and peach-flavored vodkas in addition to its original expression (pictured).



**Circus Liquor's 32-foot-tall sign of a clown with a drum has appeared in countless movies and television shows.**

"It's a corn-based spirit—gluten-free—distilled six times," Ramos informed me as he straightened out the display at our first stop, the iconic Circus Liquor in North Hollywood. The 60-year-old store, owned by the same family for three generations now, touts itself as "one of the most popular liquor stores in the world," with several other locations in greater Los Angeles. Ramos is grateful that he has distribution at them all. The flagship's façade has appeared in several films over the years, namely because of its sign: a towering 32-foot-tall clown with a mischievous grin that has become a neighborhood landmark. Inside, the aisles are divided by stacked spirits and wine cases, with the top case cut open at an angle to show the bottles. It's a striking showcase for NUE's sleek, minimalistic packaging; even more surprising is the price point, at less than \$10 per 750-milliliter bottle.

At our next stop, The Dresden Restaurant & Lounge, we were greeted with open arms (and drinks). The Dresden has been a staple in the Los Feliz neighborhood since Carl Ferraro opened it in 1954, and it became an international destination in the late 1990s after it was featured in the hit indie film *Swingers*. Ferraro's son Jim is now the owner-operator; his own son Mark took over as bar manager two years ago. Seeking to elevate the beverage program sans pretentiousness, Mark brought in more craft spirits, including NUE Vodka. On our visit, he

made two NUE-based cocktails, one of which—Kind of Blue—was a perfect summer quencher that also showcased elderflower liqueur, muddled blueberries, mint, and sparkling wine.

"It isn't easy to get a new spirit into a place like The Dresden," explained Ramos as he pointed to the well-curated backbar. "There is only so much real estate, and it's the type of place where people know what they want before they come in the door. If [The Dresden] switches out what they're used to with something new that they don't like, they might not come back." What's more, landing the account is only half the battle; getting the product to sell takes planning and "solid presentation" behind the bar, said Ramos.

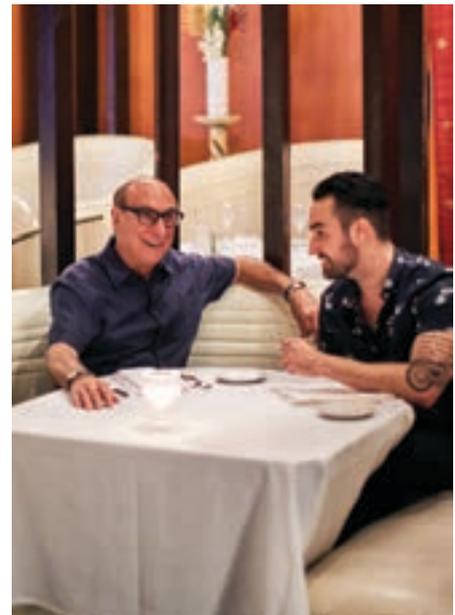
Tasting Mark's drinks in the soft light of vintage lamps against a backdrop of horseshoe booths and exposed stone walls, we could have settled in for the weekend—but alas, this was work. Outside, the sun was high and the blacktop on The Dresden's back parking lot was beginning to cook; discomfited, we jumped in our cars and headed westward in a torpid stream of traffic.

As we approached the door at Tony P's Dockside Grill in Marina del Rey, a crisp breeze blew in from the Pacific. Tony P's was established in 1997, making it the youngest of the day's destinations (though in restaurant years, two decades is something like two lifetimes). It was opened by Tony Palermo and Dan Ringwood, two old

friends who first met in Detroit as cooks before relocating to L.A. A fair chunk of real estate, the establishment is divided into three spaces: a formal dining room, a tavern, and a sprawling waterfront deck where you can watch sailboats dock as well as some epic sunsets. Given that Tony P's is open for breakfast and lunch as well as dinner, its Bloody Mary is naturally one of its most popular cocktails—which means NUE, as the house vodka, gets plenty of exposure here.

"One thing all these places have in common is that they were willing to pick up NUE Vodka right from the beginning, when we first started carrying it," Ramos recalled as we walked through the tavern on our way to meet Mark Sepulveda, the manager at Tony P's. Afterward, Ramos sat at the bar to chat with bartender Barbie Thierjung, who kindly concocted a Bloody Mary for us to taste.

Throughout the day, the undeniable theme was loyalty: The places we visited had all been established for decades, thanks to customers who'd remained faithful to their owners.



**The Dresden owner Jim Ferraro with his son Mark in their plush dining room.**

Those owners in turn seemed loyal to Ramos—who showed his own gratitude by bringing *The Tasting Panel* along to feature them in this story.

Not surprisingly, Ramos is also devoted to Southwest and to NUE, even on days when it feels like an uphill battle: "It's a big challenge. Despite the size of our company as

Ramos and The  
Dresden Bar Manager  
Mark Ferraro.



**Mark Ferraro puts the finishing touches on his Summertime Negroni, which uses NUE Vodka in place of gin (left). In the summery Kind of Blue (right), he melds NUE Vodka, elderflower liqueur, muddled blueberries, mint, and sparkling wine.**

we compete against large corporations and the saturation of the vodka category, NUE Vodka continues to grow.” Citing the label’s “consumer pull,” Ramos noted that the company’s distribution “in both the off and on-premise segments is rapidly expanding. Southwest’s tenacity has paid off, and revised vodka shelf sets

for NUE are scheduled at Albertson’s, Vons/Pavilions, and Publix. In fact, the All Star Liquor chain in Northern California is the largest single account on NUE in the country, so more people are believing in our brand.”

Even beyond the thrill of the sale, there are plenty of perks to the job. Last April, Southwest sent him to Coachella

to promote NUE by throwing a poolside bash for festival guests at The Ritz-Carlton, Rancho Mirage, where cocktails were served in stainless-steel mugs the size of fish bowls. And just the weekend prior to our ride-along, Ramos had promoted the brand during a party at Jamie Foxx’s house. All in a day’s work. ■■

SONOMA COUNTY

# The Evolution OF AN ICON

**HOW JOHN JORDAN  
HAS KEPT JORDAN  
WINERY IN THE  
FAMILY—AND IN  
THE SPOTLIGHT**

story by Kim Beto  
photos by Marcus Cano

Southern Glazer's  
Wine & Spirits VP  
of Key Accounts  
Kim Beto goes  
for a spin through  
the vineyards with  
Jordan Winery  
CEO John Jordan.

As VP of Key Accounts for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits and as someone who had visited the Jordan estate for many years under Tom Jordan's leadership, I was certainly curious about what would unfold when his son John took the reins of the Alexander Valley winery in 2005.

The passion one generation has for a family business is not always passed on to the next; although John knew that the winery would be a part of his future, he'd planned a different career path and was practicing law full time when his father asked him to take over the company. However, over the past decade, I have watched how the winery has actually been revitalized by his tenure and its reputation elevated.

There is now a hipness to the brand that shows in its vibrant social-media presence, thanks largely to the creative efforts of Marketing Director Lisa Mattson, and in the success of its epic, invitation-only Halloween bashes. But the winery's receiving renewed attention from the trade as well as consumers: I have been witness to several tastings with sommeliers who found that, tasted blind against top Bordeaux and white Burgundies, Jordan showed amazingly well, warranting its place on the world wine stage.

Recently, I was shuttled to the Healdsburg property in a super-cool bus that played promotional videos produced by John and his team for a dinner and an interview the following day. I woke to a morning that showed off the chateau-style grounds in a mag-



**John Jordan (right) tours his family's Healdsburg estate with author Kim Beto.**



**Signs of the times: Jordan Winery points the way toward its sustainability initiatives.**

nificent light; against the breathtakingly serene backdrop, the only sound I heard were crows, donkeys, and goats in the distance. John has created a refuge for these animals on his 1,200-acre sustainable estate, situating their abodes down by a vegetable garden, in keeping with his philosophy that Jordan must be a steward of the land. (It also has a spectacular culinary and hospitality program run by Executive Chef Todd Knoll and his wife, Director of Hospitality & Events Nitsa Knoll. Note to the trade: Book your visit well in advance.)

Having known John for decades, it came as no surprise to me that he has a tremendous amount of energy. In addition to his economics degree, he's earned a law degree and an MBA; he is a linguist, a TV commentator, and a pilot as well as an attorney and the winery's CEO and day-to-day general manager. What I didn't know until our interview, however, is that he also oversees The John Jordan Foundation for kids in need, which he funds with a large portion of the proceeds from Jordan Winery.

Yet, for all his achievements, John is a humble man. For that reason, he's quick to pivot conversations to key members of the Jordan staff. Take winegrower Rob Davis, who has been with Jordan since 1976, making him the longest-tenured winemaker in Sonoma County and probably the second-longest-tenured in California (see page 14 for more

on his career). "Jordan would not be the winery it is today without Rob," John said. "His attention to detail and his commitment to our house style of winemaking balance helped my parents build a strong and trusted brand."

But looking to the future as well as honoring the past is part of John's DNA as a small business owner, and in that regard he considers Rob a true artist: "Rob is naturally curious about how he can continue to improve on the wines. When he wanted to get better fruit sources from the Alexander Valley and change our regimen to all-French oak, I supported him 100 percent. We all see that the wines are better than ever." What's more, John added, "It has been exciting to watch him mentor younger winemakers in recent years, who are going to lead our winemaking into its next chapter. I always believe our best vintages lie ahead, because if you're not trying to get better, you're getting worse." (Though I, for one, wouldn't turn down a 1977 Jordan Cabernet in magnum—among my all-time favorites to this day—the new Jordan vintages are indeed exciting.)

John's mission is to produce wonderful Russian River Valley Chardonnay and Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and to offer a memorable hospitality program—the Estate Tour is truly remarkable—all while preserving the natural resources that have made Jordan Winery the landmark it is. I'm excited to see what he'll do next. ■■

# Fast Horses and Slow Whiskey

SAGAMORE SPIRIT BRINGS THE REVIVAL OF MARYLAND RYE TO SAN FRANCISCO

story by Deborah Parker Wong / photos by John Curley

It's not common knowledge that rye whiskey production originated in Pennsylvania and Maryland, where it reached its zenith in the late 19th century. Historically, each state produced a different style: Pennsylvania rye was spicy and bold, while Maryland rye traditionally presented more well-balanced flavors.

After Prohibition, rye whiskey almost disappeared altogether. The production of a few surviving brands moved to Kentucky, where an early-2000s revival largely favored the Pennsylvania style. But in 2013, trading on Maryland's distinct rye pedigree, Sagamore Spirit launched a renaissance of its own.



**Debora Fernandez serves as General Manager at San Francisco's KAIYŌ.**

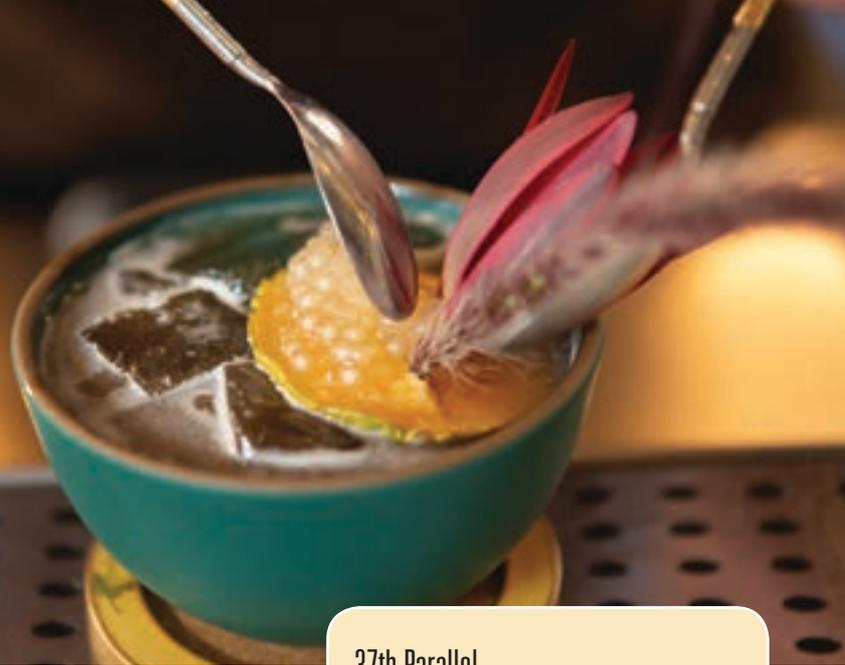
The name Sagamore—and the brand's three-diamond emblem—pay homage to Sagamore Farm, an active thoroughbred-racing and -training facility in northern Baltimore County once owned by the Vanderbilt family. The team uses spring-fed water from the farm's Spring House to proof every bottle of Sagamore at their waterfront distillery in Baltimore's Port Covington neighborhood.

Corn plays a supporting role to rye in the Maryland-style mash bill. According to company president Brian Treacy, Sagamore relies on two mash bills: One is "high rye," while the other is "low rye," a rye-dominant blend that includes corn. The whiskeys are aged separately, blended, and brought to proof with the aforementioned spring water.

**KAIYŌ's Luffy the Pirate King cocktail combines Sagamore Rye with Sherry, saké, and accents of mango and honey.**



**Joshua-Peter Smith (above) is the Bar Manager at Mourad in San Francisco. Featuring Sagamore Rye, Mourad's 37th Parallel cocktail (right) evokes a citrus- and spice-poached pear.**



There's nothing a bartender likes better than an authentic spirit with a storied past, and Joshua-Peter Smith, Creative Bar Director at Mourad in San Francisco, is no exception. Smith is a career bartender who helped reshape the bar scene in Colorado as a member of the opening teams at Justice Snow's in Aspen and Williams & Graham in Denver, among others. While at Denver's Twelve Restaurant, Smith created a different cocktail menu every week for more than two years; in the process, the once-aspiring actor realized that "the bar is the greatest stage on earth"—or so he quips as he strains a shaken Sagamore Rye cocktail to remove the ice crystals that would otherwise dilute the flavors. "The profile of Sagamore is more fruit-driven and has a moderate attack with a fresh ginger note, versus being overtly spice-forward and brawny," he says.

At Mourad, the ten-ingredient cocktail is alive and well. "The flavors that clients encounter in our cuisine are nothing less than exotic—the Moroccan ras el hanout spice blend has no fewer than 12 ingredients—and our cocktail menu mirrors the complex spices in the cuisine," says Smith. A good example from the fall list is the 37th Parallel, a Sagamore Rye-based cocktail that evokes a citrus- and spice-poached pear.

When creating a bespoke cocktail with Sagamore, Smith dares to push some emotional buttons. He'll ask customers three things: the meaning of their name, their favorite color, and a favorite vacation spot. Using those clues for inspiration, he creates a drink that's sure to surprise and delight, "playing off the characteristics that

make this rye so distinct by using tart, dark cherries, vanilla, and almond as well as orchard fruits and stone fruits," as he explains it. In so doing, he builds a flavor profile he describes as a "dormant orchard."

Rye's comeback can be attributed in part to an up-and-coming generation of bartenders whose love affair with brown spirits is no secret. Enter Debora Fernandez, General Manager at KAIYŌ in San Francisco, where she takes a refreshing, cross-cultural approach to cocktails.

A native of Lima, Peru, Fernandez worked at San Francisco's Forgery before joining restaurateur John Park and the opening team at KAIYŌ nine months ago. KAIYŌ specializes in Nikkei cuisine, which emerged when Japanese immigrants to Peru incorporated local ingredients. It's a brilliant combination of the best of both worlds: Yakitori becomes *anticuchos* (skewers from the grill, including classic beef heart), and poached butterfish in huacatay sauce is served side by side with sushi-style rolls, nigiri, and sashimi. On the backbar, Sagamore Rye takes up company with Peru's traditional spirit, pisco.

There's a whimsy to Nikkei cuisine that's evident in KAIYŌ's anime motif, which runs from the wallpaper to Fernandez's cocktail Luffy the Pirate King. Monkey D. Luffy, a character from the manga series *One Piece*, "is out to become the one true king of the pirates, so it's a nod to exploration, fun, and adventure," says Fernandez. "I'm looking for an elegant attack, and I like Sagamore here because it isn't spice-dominant, but it elevates all the components."

### 37th Parallel

*Created by Joshua-Peter Smith, Mourad, San Francisco*

- ▶ 1½ oz. Sagamore Rye Whiskey
  - ▶ ¾ oz. pear liqueur
  - ▶ ½ oz. Francisco Ruibarbo Fernet
  - ▶ 1 oz. fresh grapefruit juice
  - ▶ ¾ oz. lapsang souchong honey syrup
  - ▶ 2 squirts cardamom bitters
  - ▶ 2 squirts applewood-smoked anise tincture
- Shake and strain into a snifter or tulip glass. Garnish with a torched dehydrated grapefruit segment topped with pear-tapioca pearls and dusted with lemon-balm powder.

### Luffy the Pirate King

*Created by Debora Fernandez, KAIYŌ, San Francisco*

- ▶ 1¼ oz. Sagamore Rye Whiskey
  - ▶ ¾ oz. Koshino Sesshu junmai nigori saké
  - ▶ ½ oz. Lustau Amontillado Sherry
  - ▶ 1½ oz. honey mango puree
  - ▶ ¼ oz. honey syrup
  - ▶ ¼ oz. lemon
  - ▶ 3 full droppers pink-peppercorn tincture
  - ▶ 3 dashes Regan's Orange Bitters
- Shake all ingredients with ice and double-strain into a tulip glass. Fill with crushed ice and garnish with a mint bouquet, pink peppercorns, and powdered sugar.

Those components include a particularly dry nigori saké and a nutty Amontillado Sherry for a result that's tropical and fruit-forward, yet without the sweetness that can prevail in tiki-inspired cocktails. Like Nikkei cuisine, it merges several cultures into something that's truly of the moment. ■■

## TEQUILA

# A NOBLE Pursuit

CASA NOBLE TEQUILA GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND WITH AGAVE

by Matt Jackson

Once upon a time, we shared stories around the dinner table and the water cooler. Today, with heads down and ear buds in, the average person communicates via social-media posts and texts. Yet one thing has remained the same: People gravitate to the things that connect them with others while enhancing the human experience.

“Consumers are now more interested in a real story and [in the] real people behind the brands they choose,” says Jose “Pepe” Hermosillo, founder of Casa Noble Tequila. The brand, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2017,



**Hailing from a long line of tequila distillers, Jose “Pepe” Hermosillo founded Casa Noble more than 20 years ago.**

more than delivers with a rich history in the tequila industry. “My family has seven generations of tequila-making experience,” he explains. “Over those 200 years, we have worked on what we call our ‘noble pursuit’—to craft a tequila that is worth sharing while honoring the proven traditions.”

Many tequila brands on the market throw around terms like “estate grown” and “100% blue agave,” but few can



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASA NOBLE TEQUILA

**Casa Noble was the first tequila distillery to earn organic certification by the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF).**



truly claim to be organic. One of the first spirits to be certified as such, Casa Noble was also the first tequila in Latin America to earn organic certification by the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)—and the only brand to maintain that designation for ten years in a row. (It’s kosher-certified as well.) Beyond certification, though, it’s Casa Noble’s dedication to the full spectrum of sustainable practices—from composting to running its own water-treatment facility—that elevates it above the competition. “We believe in doing things the right way or not at all,” insists Hermosillo. “One of our most important brand values is sustainability. We were caring for the land and the surroundings that help us create our tequila before it was fashionable.”

Casa Noble’s current portfolio includes three core expressions—Crystal, Reposado, and Añejo—and three more-recent additions: Joven, Single Barrel Reposado, and Single Barrel Extra Añejo. In 2017, the company also released its limited-edition Selección del Fundador Volume II, which is a triple-distilled extra añejo made from estate-grown agave planted in 1997, the year Casa Noble was founded. This exceptionally complex and exclusive tequila is aged in brand-new Taransaud French white oak barrels; production was limited to 300 bottles.

Yet the brand’s reach extends far and wide, impacting consumers on a global

scale. “I was in Shanghai once and my bartender pretended he was angry with me,” Hermosillo recounts with a smile. “He shared that ‘although there are cheaper tequilas, I can only use yours. My clients notice the difference and will only drink Margaritas made with Casa Noble.’” Indeed, the intricacy of aromas and flavors within each bottle enhances cocktails in a way that is truly unique to the tequila category, Hermosillo believes: “With its complex notes of spices, herbs, nuts, fruits, and earth, Casa Noble offers so much to a mixologist who is creative and looking to create an interesting, versatile cocktail. We make sure our mixologists understand [our] history and can share the time and care put into each bottle.”

In its ability to light up an array of cuisines, Casa Noble shines equally bright. Clearly it’s a natural with

Mexican dishes, but it also stood out throughout a dinner the team hosted at Japanese restaurant Tetsu in New York City last year: “Chef Masa Takayama created some incredible pairings with the authentic Japanese flavors,” recalls Hermosillo, who is bullish on his brand’s ability to pair with after-dinner sweets as well. “There is no better dessert than dark chocolate with Casa Noble Añejo,” he assures.

In an industry all too often driven by profit-and-loss metrics, Casa Noble has founded an identity on one simple word: care. “You can implement tons of process controls, but at the end of the day, the values and dedication to quality that are embodied by the team are the most important factor in upholding the standards our customers expect,” says Hermosillo.

Similar care in engaging with its dedicated customer base is central to Casa Noble’s approach to growth. “I love to experience new and exciting things, places, food, and drinks, so I hope Casa Noble creates that experience for our consumers as well,” Hermosillo explains.

But growth is inevitable for Casa Noble in any case, given the ever-forward mindset of its founder. “Be better each day. Our goal is always to improve, even if it is just a small thing each day,” he says. “We are always striving to make each batch more complex, more balanced, or one note stronger, and as a brand we try to give as much back to the earth as we take from it when creating our tequila.” It’s the company’s dedication to these principles that make it a truly noble house. ■■

**Casa Noble Joven Tequila**

**(\$50)** A 102-proof tequila that sings with aromas of peach and earthy agave. The palate wakes up with black pepper and caramel, mango and Italian herbs. **93**

—Meridith May

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



**Casa Noble Añejo Tequila (\$60)**

A warm and inviting amber-hued tequila with exquisite scents of caramelized orange peel and a sleek, cinnamon-kissed agave note that shines through. The glide on the palate is nectar-like, with flavors of apricot, brown sugar, and white-peppered sweet tobacco. **95** —M.M.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

# A Stronger Shochu Makes Strides

WITH THE HELP OF LEADING BARTENDERS, **IICHIKO SAITEN** CONTINUES TO MAKE ITS PRESENCE KNOWN IN COCKTAIL BARS FROM COAST TO COAST

## Broken Shaker, L.A.

From New York City to San Diego, bartenders have begun to embrace a unique new spirit: iichiko Saiten, a cocktail-ready, higher-proof barley shochu created by Japan's leading barley-shochu producer with mixologists in mind. On its crystalline palate are notes of green tea, watermelon rind, and nectarine, followed by a mineral, saline finish—and at 43% ABV, it reveals those qualities in cocktails far more readily than most shochus, which tend to hover closer to 25% ABV and are mostly intended for pairing with food. In short, iichiko Saiten is a versatile expression that mixes nicely in everything from Vespers to Blood and Sands.

Surrounded by the skyscrapers and cranes that define downtown Los Angeles' ever-vertically expanding skyline, Broken Shaker—a rooftop bar atop the Freehand LA hotel—caters to an after-work crowd as well as the hotel guests who lounge by the pool. Bar Director Christine Wiseman has been a fixture here since the venue opened two years ago. Despite a line to get in most nights, she says, "Everyone's welcome—whether they're wearing board shorts or a suit. It's chill and hospitable, [with] a backyard or house-party vibe."

As the diverse crowd mingles in ways they might not in more homogenous parts of town, Wiseman curates a cocktail list that she hopes will entice guests to try new ingredients as well as meet new people. She does this by melding the esoteric with the familiar.

"I love using iichiko because of its umami quality and the full body that it provides for a cocktail," says Wiseman. For instance, it serves as the base in one of her top sellers, the Poolside Crusher, which also includes such approachable elements as peach puree, lemon, and iced tea, as well as the slightly tannic Lillet Rouge. But it's the Saiten's umami note that unifies all the flavors—fruity, acidic, bitter, herbaceous—to tantalize every part of the palate.

Much like L.A.'s burgeoning downtown, the cocktail scene from coast to coast continues to flourish, and bartenders are constantly on the lookout for new and unusual spirits—a category that iichiko Saiten fits right into. —*Eric Marsh*

PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO



Christine Wiseman is the Bar Director at Broken Shaker in L.A.

PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO



### Poolside Crusher

- ▶ 1 oz. iichiko Saiten
- ▶ ½ oz. Lillet Rouge
- ▶ ½ oz. Lustau Palo Cortado
- ▶ ½ oz. fresh lemon juice
- ▶ ½ oz. white peach puree
- ▶ ½ oz. Nya Juni and Juli tea cordial
- ▶ 2 oz. soda water

Combine all ingredients except for the soda water and shake with large ice cubes. Pour into a wine glass and add soda. Garnish with a dehydrated grapefruit wheel and edible flowers.

# The Aviary, Chicago



Presented in a Porthole, The Aviary's L.A.M.B. cocktail is an artful showcase for iichiko Saiten.

## L.A.M.B. Serves 2

- ▶ 1¼ oz. iichiko Saiten
- ▶ 1½ oz. verjus blanc
- ▶ ½ oz. Cocchi Americano
- ▶ ½ oz. Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao
- ▶ ½ oz. simple syrup (1:1)
- ▶ ½ oz. Mizu Green Tea Shochu
- ▶ ½ oz. Mizu Lemongrass Shochu
- ▶ ¼ oz. Rhine Hall Oak Aged Plum Brandy
- ▶ 2 oz. water
- ▶ 0.4 g. citric acid
- ▶ 6 g. Rare Tea Cellar Emperor's Lemongrass
- ▶ 2 g. Rare Tea Cellar Pomegranate Green Dream
- ▶ 4 g. hibiscus
- ▶ 2–3 dried white nectarines
- ▶ 1 stalk Vietnamese coriander
- ▶ 2 split Thai bird chilies
- ▶ 1 compressed lemongrass stalk  
(see recipe below)

### Compressed lemongrass stalk

- ▶ 500 g. simple syrup
  - ▶ 20 g. bias-cut lemongrass
- Cold-steep overnight or sous vide for 1 hour in a 50-degree bath. Add 0.4 grams of salt.

### To assemble:

Combine all ingredients together in a large-format vessel. The longer it sits, the better: The cocktail is meant to be enjoyed over a period of time to taste its evolution.

If there's anything The Aviary in Chicago's West Loop is known for, it's innovation. So it should come as no surprise that the bar's staff is inspired by products that push the boundaries of cocktail culture. One such spirit is, of course, iichiko Saiten: "It's rich in texture but heavily aromatic," says Bar Director Alexis Tinoco. "You can almost smell the texture of the grain." Though some might compare it to saké, Tinoco says iichiko Saiten brings to mind something like genever, albeit with slight hints of honeydew melon.

Currently, iichiko Saiten stars in The Aviary's L.A.M.B. (an allusion to Gwen Stefani's 2004 album *Love. Angel. Music. Baby.*). The cocktail, which balances green tea, lemongrass, and orange curaçao against the shochu, is itself a work of art. It is presented to guests in a Porthole—a windowed large-format vessel custom-designed by Martin Kastner of Chicago's Crucial Detail design studio. "[iichiko Saiten] has a backbone," Assistant Bar Director Jarmel Doss says of what drew her to the spirit. "As soon as I tasted it, I wanted to play with green tea and lemongrass."

More like wine than most cocktails, the L.A.M.B. is meant to be consumed slowly, enabling the drinker to take note of how it changes over time. "How do you create a new taste every time a guest takes a sip?" asks Tinoco. "Pour a small amount in your glass, drink all of that, then pour a little more. It's an adventure: The cocktail changes in color, flavor, and aroma." Tinoco and Doss say the drink is often a guest's first experience with shochu. No doubt it will make a lasting impression. —Amanda M. Faison ■■



The Aviary Bar Director Alexis Tinoco with Assistant Bar Director Jarmel Doss.

PHOTO: REBECCA PEPLINSKI

PHOTO: REBECCA PEPLINSKI

# *Heading into*

# OVERTIME

Marking his namesake winery's 40th anniversary, Gary Eberle toasts alongside a furry friend.



## PASO ROBLES ICON **GARY EBERLE** CELEBRATES 40 VINTAGES WITH AWARDS, NEW WINES, AND PLANS FOR A NEW VIP EXPERIENCE

**story by Jonathan Cristaldi / photos by John Curley**

**THIS YEAR,** Gary Eberle, who is practically synonymous with Paso Robles, is turning 75 years old as his namesake winery hits 40. Named the Paso Robles Wine Industry Person of the Year in 1997, he is the recipient of the 2019 Robert Mondavi Wine and Food Award—of which the only other honorees have been Robert Mondavi himself and powerhouse husband-and-wife duo Gina Gallo and Jean-Charles Boisset.

But Eberle, a bit bashful, says he'd rather not bask in the spotlight. "I'm embarrassed by this whole '40' thing," he assures us, adding that his belief in humility goes back to his time playing football for Penn State head coach Joe Paterno: "If you made a tackle or scored a touchdown, you tossed the ball to the ref and you went to the huddle." Dancing in the end zone isn't Eberle's style.

Still, despite his best efforts to ignore all the praise, the celebrations go on. To commemorate the four-decade milestone, Eberle's wife Marcy spearheaded the creation of a one-time-only bottling of Eberle 2017 Legacy Cabernet Sauvignon, produced with 50% estate grapes and 50% Still Waters Vineyard and Winery fruit from owners and longtime friends Paul and Patty Hoover. Winemaker Chris Eberle (who, believe it or not, is not related to Gary and Marcy) blended and bottled it in magnum, releasing just 300 to retail for \$200 a pop.

It's a fitting monument to one of the leading authorities on Paso Robles wine, although quite different from the soft, juicy, easy-drinking "cocktail Cabernets" that Eberle popularized: Pricing them to pour by the glass while keeping his ledgers in the black proved "a steep climb" over the years, he admits.

## MILESTONES



Currently at 17,000 square feet, Eberle's caves will soon undergo an expansion.



Visitors to the winery are often greeted by Eberle himself, whether they know it or not. (Author Jonathan Cristaldi, pictured at right, definitely knows.)

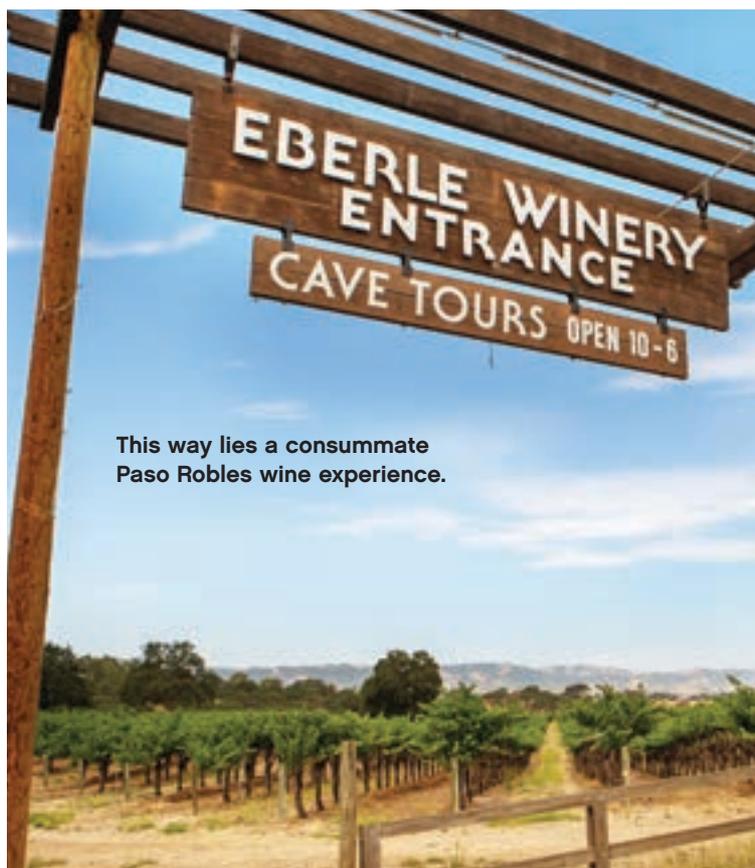
When Eberle co-founded Estrella River Winery in 1973, he says he “started with \$1.98,” adding, “I built a lot of sweat equity at Estrella, and when I left, we were successful.” But he didn’t ask for a cash payout: Instead, he got paid in grapes. Having flown all over the U.S. to sell Estrella in his small private plane, he had amassed a slew of contacts, to whom he sold the first Eberle wine he made in 1979 at \$60 per case wholesale. His total out-of-pocket costs were around \$18 per case—or about 70% profit. “That’s how I raised the money to put my share up to have one-third ownership” in what would become Eberle Winery, he says, “and how I now have 83% ownership.”

He continues to fly too, clocking in more than 7,000 hours in the air as of July 2019. One of his most memorable flights took him to Key West in the early 1980s; sitting at a waterfront cafe, he encountered some “curious folks” at a nearby table. They happened to be music legends Jimmy Buffet, Eric Clapton, and Peter Tork of The Monkees, plus actor Peter Fonda. “We sat and drank for eight hours together,” Eberle says.

Little wonder—Gary Eberle is a charismatic man who likes to emulate his famous mentor, Robert Mondavi, by sitting outside his winery most days and greeting guests as they enter. Some folks smile and pass by, unsure of who he is. Others park a seat next to him while he holds court for hours. This year, to accommodate a growing number of visitors and wine-club members, he is adding a second-story deck with special key-card access for VIPs to the estate and plans to expand its 17,000-square-foot caves.

Eberle is extremely proud of his roots in Paso's east side, crediting University of California, Davis, legend Dr. Harold Olmo for helping him make the decision to plant there. He was instrumental in helping establish Paso Robles as the sixth AVA in the U.S. and made sure to follow Napa's standards of conjunctive labeling, which ensures that "Paso Robles" ends up on any sub-appellation label, just as "Napa Valley" would for an Oakville-designate bottling.

As for the future of Eberle Winery, he knows it's in good hands with Marcy and his two stepdaughters. Thinking about it, he pauses, searching for the right words. "I don't know what I don't believe in, but I hope someone toasts to me when that last bottle gets drunk," he says. Then he switches on a smile to greet two new guests. ■■



**This way lies a consummate Paso Robles wine experience.**

## TASTING NOTES

### **Eberle 2017 Legacy Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles Bold**

black-fruited aromas segue to palate-coating flavors of blackberry, blueberry compote, and a hint of graphite and licorice laced with fine French oak. Gorgeously balanced with svelte tannins and juicy acidity.



### **Eberle 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles**

Cedar, graphite, black olives, and blackberry jam with wild dried herbs. Loads of black cherry and raspberry preserves supported by sweet, finely grained cedar tannins.



### **Eberle Full Boar Red, Paso Robles A**

multi-vintage blend showing blackberry and blueberry alongside powerful oak aromas. Robust, mouth-drying tannins meet cranberry preserves, cedar spices, clove, a hint of white pepper, and crushed wild herbs.

### **Eberle 2018 Côtes-du-Rôbles Blanc, Paso Robles**

Super-tropical: mango and bananas with vanilla and baking spices. Creamy and round on entry with kiwi fruit, dried banana, a pineapple core, and a long finish marked by ripe honeydew melon.

### **Eberle 2017 Viognier Mill Road Vineyard, Paso Robles**

Honeysuckle aromas with notes of tropical fruit and zesty minerality. Focused, with refreshing layers of ripe orchard fruit and candied pineapple plus baking spices and mouthwatering acidity.

### **Eberle 1980 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles**

Marcy brought this mint-condition bottling up from the Eberles' personal cellar. We tasted it beside the 2016 release. At 13.8% ABV, it delivered red currant, graphite, marvelous red-berry spices, and pops of cinnamon through a soft mouthfeel with tea-like tannins, tobacco, and earth. Sporting the same iconic label as the current release, a few bottles are still available.

# A Spirited Discussion



The Deconstructing Spirits panelists, clockwise from bottom left: spirits expert Megan Barnes; Karthik Sudhir, founder and CEO, Phenomenal Spirits; moderator Bill Brandel, VP of Sales & Marketing, *The Tasting Panel*; Mike Howard, President, Southwest Spirits; Steven Walkercicz, VP of Sales, Conecuh Brands; Brian Treacy, President, Sagamore Spirit; Dan McKee, Master Distiller, Michter's Distillery; and (center) Master Sommelier Eric Entekin, Brand Ambassador, Germain-Roman.

BETWEEN WINE SEMINARS, SOMMCON D.C. ATTENDEES CARVED OUT SOME TIME IN THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

story by Courtney Schiessl / photos by Nick Klein

The job of a sommelier doesn't revolve around wine alone. Good somms and wine buyers must be well-versed on every beverage-related topic, including beer and spirits. It's not an easy task: The realm of the latter is particularly complex, with base materials, distillation techniques, blending and aging regimens, and even terroir working together in different permutations to create distinct styles, even within a single category.

That's why the attendees of SommCon D.C., held at the Westin Georgetown June 23–25, took some time away from the subject of wine to explore a lineup of top brands at the Deconstructing Spirits panel. Sponsored by *The SOMM Journal* and *The Tasting Panel* and moderated by Bill Brandel, Vice President of Sales & Marketing for both publications, the seminar featured a panel of experts representing each brand, many of whom picked one another's brains about production styles and category innovation throughout the convivial session. Though each panelist had a different perspective on the industry, all could agree on one thing: To start understanding spirits, it's best to dive right in.





Southwest Spirits President Mike Howard.

# Calamity Gin

The third-largest distiller in Texas dubs its craft spirit “Texas Dry Gin” as a twist on the classic London Dry style. Whereas Old World gins—including London Dry—hinge on flavors of juniper berry, citrus peel, and herbal (often medicinal) botanicals, New World gins are more experimental, incorporating ingredients like grapefruit, cucumber, flowers, and even sugar.

“We wanted to bridge Old World and New World,” said Mike Howard, President of Southwest Spirits, which makes Calamity Gin. Though the spirit features traditional botanicals like juniper, cardamom, and lemon, it also includes some that are wholly reminiscent of Texas, such as wild bluebonnets sourced locally from Waterboy Farms. Rose, lavender, grapefruit, and other ingredients bring the total of botanicals to 11.

The result jumps out of the glass with sun-soaked aromatics. It’s immediately recognizable as gin, with fragrant notes of pine, mint, and other fresh herbs, but there’s a floral softness to it, and that ripe Texas citrus pops. “I want you to get that juniper on first taste,” Howard said. “Then you should get some florals, which elongate the taste, and at the end I want citrus.” The gin snaps to a crisp finish, striking a fantastic balance that makes it suitable for sipping neat, mixing with tonic or soda, or using as a cocktail base year-round.

But while the folks at Southwest Spirits work to create a premium-quality product, they’re also determined to protect and preserve the environment from which it springs. “We are big believers in sustainability,” said Howard. Calamity Gin regularly partners with the Seed Project Foundation to raise money for the organization through charity dinners and other events. After all, without Texas botanicals, there would be no Texas Dry style.



## Ron Izalco 10-Year Rum

“Rum is fun!” began Karthik Sudhir, the founder and CEO of Phenomenal Spirits. That’s always true, but the Ron Izalco 10-Year isn’t your standard, everyday rum; this super-premium spirit is full of character and a sense of place. Even the name speaks to the spirit’s origins, starting with the word *ron*, which refers to a Spanish-style spirit made from molasses, typically in Latin America. (*Rum*, by contrast, generally refers to an English-style spirit made from molasses, while *rhum* comes from the French-colonized Caribbean, where it must be made from sugarcane.) “Izalco,” for its part, is the name of a volcano in El Salvador.

Ron Izalco, then, is a blend of Central American rums originating in the area’s rich volcanic soil. Aged in ex-bourbon barrels at their respective distilleries for ten years, it’s fruity, rich, and generous on the nose, with notes of caramelized banana, candied orange, brown sugar, and vanilla bean. The palate packs a punch at 43% ABV, but it does so with a fist gloved in velvet, landing in soft layers of flavor.

Currently Ron Izalco is available in the U.K., France, Denmark, and Poland. As the brand launches in the U.S. later this year, Sudhir has plans to release a cask-strength 15 Year Ron Izalco by allocation only. The goal is to raise the bar on quality for rum—or, should we say, ron.



Eric Entrekin, MS, discussed California brandy.

## Germain-Robin California Premium Brandy

“I bet you’re wondering why a Master Sommelier is talking about brandy,” joked Germain-Robin Brand Ambassador Eric Entrekin. “Well, it is made from grapes.” Based in Ukiah, California, Germain-Robin was founded in 1982 by Hubert Germain-Robin, who came from a family of Cognac producers, and Ansley J. Coale, who had happened to pick up Hubert while he was hitchhiking. This chance meeting would turn the two men into pioneers of the California brandy industry—a category that definitely is not an oxymoron.

“California brandy sits on the same level as some of the greatest Cognacs,” said Entrekin as he unveiled Germain-Robin California Premium Brandy. Because brandy is an extremely transparent spirit in which the distillate translates on the palate, grape quality makes a huge difference. With hundreds of world-class wine grapes at its disposal, Germain-Robin uses traditional pot stills and artisanal production methods to create benchmark American brandies. In this new release, Pinot Noir combines with a base of aged Colombard for an incredibly expressive bottling; the floral, fruity nose leads to a robust palate laden with notes of honey, oranges, raisins, and cinnamon, followed by a toasty, caramel-like finish.



# Sagamore Spirit Rye

Most craft spirits drinkers wouldn't list Maryland as an industry powerhouse, but Baltimore-based Sagamore Spirit is ready to change their minds.

Maryland has a long history of distillation; from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, it was one of the country's largest whiskey producers. The state even had a signature style: Maryland-style rye is known for being sweeter and more approachable than the standard. But the twin events of Prohibition and World War II hampered Maryland's industry, as distillers converted their production to ethanol in support of war efforts and never really went back.

After a half-century, however, Maryland-style rye is finally undergoing a revival—and Sagamore Spirit is at its forefront (for more on the brand, see page 98). "Maryland rye has always had its own unique identity," said Sagamore President Brian Treacy. To showcase that identity, the Sagamore team distills a combination of rye grain and corn, giving the whiskey a rounder, sweeter flavor profile than most other ryes, which often use a higher percentage of rye. The spirit is then proofed using naturally filtered spring water from Sagamore Farm, which comes from a limestone aquifer. Trucking the water from the farm north of Baltimore to the distillery may seem excessive, but Treacy swears that it's an essential component of Sagamore Spirit whiskeys—that Maryland terroir is everything.

The result is a rye that's both intriguing and friendly at the same time. The nose leads with spice—cloves, nutmeg, and a hint of curry—and rounds out with fragrant, peach-like fruit. A sugar-and-spice combination on the palate threads caramel in with a slight burn of pepper, mellowing out to a soft, lingering finish.

Sagamore Spirit is only in its second year of operation, but given the quality it's already showing (and the recognition it's already receiving), it's safe to say that the Maryland rye revival is only just beginning.



PHOTO: STEPHANIE PATTERSON

**Sagamore Spirit President  
Brian Treacy.**



## Clyde May's Cask Strength Alabama Style Whiskey 10 Year

"I'd like to introduce you to a real moonshiner: Clyde May," announced Steven Walkerwicz, Vice President of Sales, Eastern Region, for Conecuh Brands. A World War II veteran who returned to Alabama with a Purple Heart, Clyde May wasn't your average moonshiner. He was committed to quality when it came to his (then-illegal) small-batch spirits, aging the moonshine in oak and adding baked apple to the barrels to create his signature Alabama-style whiskey. His efforts made him one of the most sought-after distillers around, even after—or, perhaps, especially after—he spent time in a federal penitentiary for them in the 1970s.

Clyde's legacy was solidified when his whiskey became the official state spirit of Alabama in 2004. (Ironically, commercial distilling was still illegal in the state at that time!) SommCon D.C. attendees sampled the 114 Proof Cask Strength Alabama Style Whiskey, made from a mash bill of corn, rye, and malted barley and aged in #4 char American oak barrels for ten years. The whiskey is finished, of course, with a hint of natural apple essence, creating a round spirit redolent of peach, spice, and oak as well as apple. An exclusive release of only a few thousand bottles, this is a whiskey that would surely make Clyde proud.



## Michter's US\*1 Kentucky Bourbon

At this icon of Kentucky whiskey, quality is valued above all else. "We have a 'cost-be-damned' approach," said Dan McKee, the newly inaugurated Master Distiller of Michter's. "It may not be cost-effective, but it's better."

Every step of the Michter's production process is closely monitored, from the creation and treatment of custom barrels—which are dried for 18–60 months and toasted before charring—to a regime of aging the spirits at a lower proof, which necessitates the use of more barrels but better integrates the wood sugars and flavors into the spirit. Michter's also practices heat cycling for the aging barrels, increasing flavor absorption even when it means losing more whiskey to the angel's share.

All of Michter's bourbons and ryes are either single-barrel or small-batch—a maximum of 20 full barrels—including the US\*1 Kentucky Bourbon, distilled primarily from high-quality corn. The spirit is an emblematic bourbon, with notes of apple pie, toasted vanilla, and brown sugar on the nose. Round and spicy on the palate, it's broad and mouth-filling, warming the chest in the way that any classic, high-quality Kentucky bourbon should.



# Bozal Mezcal

Mezcal is on an upward trajectory in the U.S., as Megan Barnes, formerly the beverage director of Espita Mezcaleria, knows well. “When we opened four years ago, no one knew mezcal,” she said, “and now we are seeing mezcal on menus across the U.S.”

Bozal, which means “wild” or “untamed,” utilizes some of the many wild species of agave grown in Mexico’s Oaxaca and Guerrero states to make small-batch mezcals. Many of these are single maguery—that is, made from a single variety of agave—to highlight the intricacies and eccentricities of mezcal production. The company works with family-run distilleries that use traditional methods, such as cooking the agave piñas in earthen pits and mashing them with a *tahona*, or horse-turned stone wheel; the juice then ferments with indigenous yeast before undergoing double distillation.

Packaged in tall, opaque bottles, two Bozal expressions showcased just how complex mezcal can be. The Tobasiche Single Maguery hails from Oaxaca and is made from the namesake Tobasiche maguery, a wild agave that takes 12–13 years to fully mature—a long time, especially when you consider the current demand for mezcal. It tends to have an herbal character, and indeed, the Bozal Tobasiche does offer notes of roasted herbs on the palate. But the nose exudes a combination of smoky and sweet aromas, the freshness of citrus cutting through rustic smoke. The finish is long and sweet, with notes of ripe fruit.

In contrast, the Sacatoro Single Maguery hails from the state of Guerrero, where forests abound. The Sacatoro variety takes eight to 12 years to mature fully before it’s harvested from the hillsides. Unlike any other spirit, the Bozal Sacatoro is quite savory on the nose, with notes of olive brine, roasted pepper, and hints of almond. That salty quality carries through to the palate, where it’s met with smoky notes of bacon and charred meat, leading to a clean, dry finish.

Though the U.S. fervor for mezcal is in full swing, tasting these two maguery spirits from Bozal makes one thing abundantly clear: Americans haven’t even begun to discover the depths of the category yet. ■■



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# The Finishing TOUCH

LIQUEURS AND MIXERS BRING NEW  
FLAVOR TO FALL COCKTAILS

Bring on the baking spices and dried fruits, chai and cocoa, honey and ginger. As late summer turns to autumn, bartenders will make their own turn toward darker, warmer, richer flavors and textures. Along with brown and aged spirits, they're sure to rely on liqueurs and mixers that lend their cocktails an element of fireside comfort or holiday cheer (or both). The following pages offer some compelling examples—though rest assured these brands will work for you year-round.



## The Bright Side:

### ST. ELDER PAMPLEMOUSSE ARTISANAL LIQUEUR AND ST. ELDER BLOOD ORANGE ARTISANAL LIQUEUR

Recently added to the St. Elder portfolio, St. Elder Pamplemousse Artisanal Liqueur and St. Elder Blood Orange Artisanal Liqueur are designed to pair beautifully with a wide variety of spirits, wines, and malt beverages. The blood-orange expression offers bittersweet layers of citrus that add a twist to classics like the Old Fashioned, while the pink-grapefruit version's fruit-forward palate with a touch of sweetness makes for a perfect Paloma.

These new releases join the brand's popular flagship expression, St. Elder Natural Elderflower Liqueur, which earned a 94-point review from *Tasting Panel* Publisher Meridith May. The base for this spirit is made from the flowers of the American elder tree, which blooms in late spring across eastern North America.

Since Roman times, people have been making cordials out of elder trees' tiny white petals, using them to cure common illnesses like the cold and the flu. Picked before full bloom when it turns bitter, the flower is turned into a fresh extract that's added to the base liqueur, imparting hints of pineapple, lychee, and caramel into this small-batch spirit. —Emily Coleman

**St. Elder Pamplemousse Pink Grapefruit Liqueur** is a summery shade of cotton-candy pink. The perfume of tart ruby-red grapefruit and flowers leads to a flavor profile that matches your ideal for a mouth-puckering, refreshing 40-proof experience. **90** —Meridith May

**St. Elder Blood Orange Liqueur** zings on the nose, with a straight-to-the point note of orange zest. Orange peel and spiced fennel root meld with vanilla on the palate. It's sure to spark a desire for a creamsicle cocktail. **90** —M.M.



## A Reason to Celebrate: SOMRUS CHAI

As if making its one-of-a-kind Chai Cream Liqueur weren't enough, Somrus founded National Chai Day in the U.S. last year and will observe it officially on September 21. The brand has good reason to celebrate: In the five years since its inception, Somrus Chai (formerly Somrus Original) has amassed a substantial list of accolades that include a double gold medal from the San Francisco World Spirits Competition in 2017 and an award from the New York International Spirits Competition for Cream Liqueur of the Year in 2014.

The gluten-free artisanal liqueur—a blend of Eastern spices and nuts (including cardamom, saffron, rose, pistachio, and almond); real Wisconsin dairy cream; and Caribbean rum—contains no preservatives or artificial ingredients. The recipe was created in the brand founders' home kitchen with ingredients imported from their home country of India; as they state on their website, "We have channeled the best of our nation in the hopes of sharing the heritage, vivacity, and mysteries of India with the world."

Raise a toast on September 21 for National Chai Day with a Hard Chai, Somrus Chai-tini, or Iced Dirty Chai Latte (recipe on right). And keep an eye out this holiday season for Somrus gift packs, which will include four golden metal straws—so you can sip those creamy cocktails with chic, eco-friendly ease. For more information on Somrus and National Chai Day, visit [somrus.com](http://somrus.com) and [nationalchaiday.org](http://nationalchaiday.org).



**Somrus Chai Cream Liqueur (\$25)** This liqueur has the chai notes locked up, but it's the accompanying aromas and flavors that make the 27-proofer a standout. On the nose, oranges are perfumed with a light scent of spiced tea latte. Floral tones ensue on the palate, where nutmeg-kissed gardenia is exotic and heady. Never cloying, the cream sails along on a cashew-and-sassafras finish. **93** —*M.M.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOMRUS

### Somrus Iced Dirty Chai Latte

- ▶ 1 part Somrus Chai Cream Liqueur
  - ▶ 3 parts cold-brew coffee
- Combine ingredients over ice, stir, and enjoy!



**RumChata's football sleeve.**

## A Ten-Year Touchdown: RUMCHATA

A few years after retiring from Jim Beam, RumChata founder Tom Maas set out to create a cream-based liqueur inspired by horchata, a Mexican rice drink. After countless attempts, he perfected the recipe by spiking vanilla- and cinnamon-spiced, sugar-sweetened cream with five-time-distilled Caribbean rum, and in 2009, RumChata was launched.

Now, ten years later, the thriving brand produces some 500,000 cases annually; in fact, since its inception, the cream-liqueur industry as a whole has undergone a revolution due in part to RumChata's success. Notes Maas, "We are tremendously proud of the vitality we have brought to the cream category. Ten years ago, all the category had was dark-brown bottles filled with Irish cream; now there are 20–30 new entries in a wide variety of flavors. The category has grown dramatically due to our innovation, creating excitement and encouraging new development."

The brand has branched out too. Upon its release, RumChata was widely consumed by younger consumers of legal drinking age as a shot. But it didn't take long to discover that the liqueur was also a superlative coffee creamer, and so the brand came up with individually packaged creamers called MiniChatas. Soon to follow was the FrappaChata, a ready-to-drink blend of RumChata and coffee. The product will soon be made with cold-brew coffee, says Maas, which "adds a rich, bold coffee flavor. The updated formula will hit shelves by the new year."

In the meantime, RumChata-loving football fans will be pleased to learn about a special-edition bottle encased in a reusable sleeve resembling a football. The festive packaging is certain to score an extra point at every game-day party up until the Super Bowl. "We know that when customers bring a bottle of RumChata to a tailgate, the fun starts," says Maas. "Now the fans can dress up in their favorite jersey, and RumChata can dress up too."

# Getting the FAIR. Treatment:



## FAIR. KUMQUAT LIQUEUR

Naming your brand for a virtue like fairness is a bold strategy: While you immediately conjure an impression of a company that has its customers' best interests at heart, you risk losing your legitimacy if your business practices don't actually live up to your image.

Fortunately, as the world's first spirits brand certified by Fairtrade—an organization that sets stringent economic, social, and environmental standards for the global farming industry—FAIR. not only guarantees that the people who farm its ingredients are earning a fair wage but also that its products are as sustainable as they are high-quality.

Best known for its Quinoa Vodka, FAIR. also produces a line of "superfood" liqueurs in hard-to-find flavors, among them its Kumquat expression. Rich in antioxidants and vitamin C—and said to symbolize good luck in some Asian countries—the fruit is sourced from co-ops in Southeast Asia before it's shipped to the Cognac region of France, where FAIR.'s parent company, Ethical Wine & Spirits, is based. After the kumquats' essence is infused via a maceration process, the liquid undergoes a slow reduction in which Fairtrade sugar, natural triple sec flavor, and demineralized water are added.

Both vegan and gluten-free at 22% ABV, the award-winning FAIR. Kumquat Liqueur can serve as a high-end alternative to brands like Combier and Cointreau. With a nose abundant in notes of blood orange and fresh-squeezed orange juice, a smooth and balanced palate of mandarin orange and orange blossom, and a slightly spicy finish, the liqueur offers an unconventional update to the traditional Margarita. It's plain to see that this ethically conscious brand has earned its accolades fair and square, affirming its mission while elevating its products on the world stage. For more information, visit [fair-drinks.com](http://fair-drinks.com). —Kate Newton



### Kumquat Margarita

- ▶ 60 mL tequila
- ▶ 30 mL FAIR. Kumquat Liqueur
- ▶ 30 mL fresh lime juice
- ▶ 1 barspoon agave syrup
- ▶ 3 drops lavender bitters (optional)

Combine ingredients, shake, and strain into a coupette with a salt rim.

# A Real Mouthful:

## BLUMENPFLÜCKER

The name may not exactly roll off the tongue, but Blumenpflücker itself is on a roll. Developed by Southwest Spirits for release in its home base of Texas last February, this German-inspired liqueur has quickly expanded to Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Oklahoma,

translates as “flower picker”).

Indeed, the company is already having a ball with promotional initiatives such as the limited-offer T-shirts it’s compressing onto bottles for sale in Dallas and Houston. Designed to “educate our Flock of Pflückers on how to Pflücker Up properly,” according to Southwest Spirits’ VP of Marketing Ronna Feifarek, they’re emblazoned with the cheeky slogan “Wanna Pflucker?”

For buyers and consumers alike, of course, the answer to that question depends more on what’s in the bottle than on it. (Although it should be noted that the packaging itself is cool, with design elements that reference old German folklore on the one hand and the entry stamps that early German immigrants to America received on the other.) Blumenpflücker is a fruitier, friendlier version of Germany’s well-known herbal liqueurs, laced with notes of rose, pimento leaf, chamomile, juniper berry, and more to deliver what Southwest Spirits President Mike Howard calls “a crisp finish instead of a syrupy feel.” As such, it’s got wider appeal for both pro and home bartenders than most brands in the category, shining in tiki-style concoctions as well as riffs on Old Fashioneds per the recipes below. —Ruth Tobias



**Blumenpflücker Herbal Liqueur** is a 70-proof spirit with a cinnamon and fennel-fig nose that jumps right out of the gate to engage you. On the silky, opulent palate, candied licorice is complemented by flavors of sassafras, apricot, and tangerine that luxuriously coat the mouth. It finishes with an ideal balance of spice and acidity. **93** —M.M.



**Retailers in Dallas and Houston are selling bottles of Blumenpflücker with compressed T-shirts that double as a statement on “Pflückering up.”**

South Carolina, and New Jersey and is expected to reach additional U.S. markets soon. Wherever it goes, its entry into both on- and off-premise spaces is sure to elicit as much merriment as its pronunciation (for the record, it’s *bloom-en-flooker*, which



### Pflücker Fashioned

- ▶ 2 parts Title No. 21 Rye Whiskey
- ▶ ½ part Blumenpflücker
- ▶ ½ part maple syrup
- ▶ 2 dashes Angostura bitters

Stir all ingredients over ice and strain into a lowball glass filled with fresh ice. Garnish with a Luxardo cherry and an orange twist.

### Tiki Spice

- ▶ 1½ parts Blumenpflücker
- ▶ 1½ parts coconut rum
- ▶ 1 part fresh pineapple juice
- ▶ ½ part fresh lime juice
- ▶ ½ part simple syrup

Shake all ingredients over ice and pour into a rocks glass. Garnish with toasted coconut and a cocktail cherry.

# Pure Decadence:

## DORDA LIQUEURS

Decadent caramel and chocolate rank among the most unifying flavors known to the human palate, and the family behind Dorda Liqueurs aims to capture them in their full glory: Their two award-winning expressions, Sea Salt Caramel and Double Chocolate, are handcrafted solely using “pure and pronounceable ingredients,” in the words of founder and CEO Tadeusz “Tad” Dorda.

Also the founder of Polish vodka brand Chopin, which debuted in 1992 and revolutionized the luxury-vodka category, Dorda says his labels have “always been in pursuit of superior spirits and extracting the best flavor” from his raw materials. “I couldn’t find a great-tasting liqueur—so I decided to make my own,” he adds. “When sourcing ingredients, we strive to work with brands with the same ethos as Chopin: family-owned and made in traditional, artisanal ways, without chemicals or pesticides.”

To make his various vodka expressions, Dorda works with farmers located within 18 miles of his distillery; while he casts a bit of a wider net for his liqueurs, a similar standard is applied to their production. Both feature Chopin Rye Vodka as a base, with the Sea Salt Caramel seeing the addition of homemade caramel, vanilla extract, milk, and a touch of Maldon sea salt flakes “for the perfect balance of sweet and spice,” Dorda says.

The recipe for the Double Chocolate, meanwhile, comprises high-quality dark chocolate that’s slowly melted before it’s blended with milk and the vodka. “It took nearly a year to find the right recipe balance . . . [and] blend it the precise way,” Dorda says. “We even pour twice as much chocolate as vodka to ensure a rich, liquid-smooth experience.”

In terms of application, the liqueurs defy categorization: While Dorda personally favors sipping them on the rocks, he also recommends mixing them into cocktails or coffee, pouring them over ice cream, or incorporating them into baked goods. “Dorda Liqueurs are perfect for any season or occasion—the variations are endless,” he adds. “Whether you want to drink your dessert or bake with Dorda, there’s something for everyone.” —*Kate Newton*



### Caramel Apple

- ▶ 1½ parts Dorda Sea Salt Caramel Liqueur
  - ▶ 4 parts apple cider (or apple juice)
- Shake ingredients together on ice and strain into a glass. Garnish with a cinnamon stick.

### Dorda Popsicles

- ▶ 1 part Dorda Double Chocolate Liqueur
  - ▶ 3 parts almond milk
  - ▶ 1 part chocolate hazelnut spread
- Blend ingredients and transfer the mixture to popsicle forms for freezing. Dip in melted chocolate and sprinkle with sea salt if desired.

#### Dorda Sea Salt Caramel Liqueur

**(\$24)** This extremely authentic, perfumed, and flavorful liqueur conjures priceless childhood memories of caramel and nougat melting on the tongue: It has everything except the stick-to-your-teeth aspect. The creamy sensation on the nose is as exquisite as the taste, and the palate is texturally unique—no syrupy, cloying mouthfeel, but instead a silky dream of a subtly salted caress of caramel. **95** —*M.M.*

#### Dorda Double Chocolate Liqueur

**(\$24)** Aromas of milk chocolate waver out of the glass. Rich and heady, the lingering mouthfeel expands to a darker chocolate with each pass, joining ever-so-slight tinges of strawberry. At 36 proof, it never overplays its hand, capturing the true nature of cocoa powder—turned—liquid hedonism. **95** —*M.M.*



# Sailing Past the Competition:

## REGATTA CRAFT MIXERS

The phrase “canned cocktail mixer” was once synonymous with overly sweet, artificial-tasting products for undiscerning drinkers. But with the craft cocktail revival came a renaissance in mixers as well, bringing the category in line with modern tastes. Regatta Craft Mixers is the embodiment of the new generation of premium mixers: free of artificial flavors and sweeteners, gluten, and GMOs for a clean, tasty product even the most discriminating bartender would be happy to use.

In 2006, beverage-industry veteran and sailor Stan Rottell started Regatta with the quintessential mixer: ginger beer. He retired and sold the business to Affinity Beverages LLC in 2016. According to new company CEO Sam Zarou, “Our Classic Bermuda Stone Ginger Beer differed from the peppery, Jamaican-style ginger beer at the time, instead bringing a more balanced, citrus- and ginger-forward mixer.” It was an instant hit, creating an industry standard for what a premium mixer should taste like. Regatta went on to craft a light version for the calorie-conscious consumer, and this year it expanded its portfolio further with Dry Citrus Sparkling Tonic, Royal Oak Ginger Ale, and Pacific Sea Salt Club Soda (\$6/4-pack; \$7/6-pack). Available on- and off-premise, each is versatile enough to work with a myriad of spirits.

Rottell chose a nautical theme for Regatta to convey an active, breezy, social lifestyle. As an aspirational brand, Zarou says, it’s “the perfect choice for those who seek products that share their values”: Regatta consumers tend to be educated and conscious about using American products made with natural ingredients. As canned products become more popular with young, savvy drinkers, Regatta is poised to stay ahead of the pack with expressions that yield quality cocktails. Promises Zarou, “The company is totally committed to innovation [while remaining] true to our core product line . . . It’s what our bartenders and consumers want.” —*Jesse Hom-Dawson*

### Regatta Classic Bermuda Stone Ginger

**Beer** captures brisk, appetizing aromas of ginger and lemon-lime that suggest a sweeter, more approachable style for the category. On the palate, the zing of ginger is subdued, and the purity of just-squeezed tangerine and lemon offers a pleasant sensation. The mouthfeel is a focal point of the product’s balanced character. **92** —*M.M.*

### Regatta Dry Citrus Sparkling Tonic

reaches new heights in perfume with its exotic notes of mango, pineapple, and lime zest. An echo of bitterness on the palate is seductively woven in, making this a tonic with gravitas. Though it’s sensational when mixed, I drink it on its own with ice and a slice of orange. **92** —*M.M.*

### Regatta Royal Oak Ginger Ale

is a focused sparkler with base notes that aren’t sweet but rather dry and generous on both the nose and palate. I imagine that this authentic ginger flavor—reined in but with just enough zing—would beautifully enhance a brown spirit. **91** —*M.M.*



# Sweet Temptation:

## BÄRENJÄGER HONEY LIQUEUR

In 18th-century Germany, fur trappers used a honey liqueur called *Bärenfang*, or “bear trap,” to tempt bears to leave their dens. It turned out to have an equally strong attraction for the trappers themselves, and it has stood the test of time.

Using the same formula, Bärenjäger Honey Liqueur now aims to mesmerize modern drinkers around the world. Showcasing the nectar that rests inside, the bottle features a new design complete with a beehive top and a nod to the liqueur’s intriguing history on the label. The brand sweetens the pot even further by supporting worthy causes: A portion of the proceeds from every bottle sold is donated to Brothers in Bees, which educates U.S. veterans about beekeeping and the importance of healthy honeybee populations. —*Emily Coleman*



**Bärenjäger Honey Liqueur** emits its stone-fruit and honey aromas as soon as its beehive-shaped cap is twisted open. The nectar glides over the tongue, coating it with the sweet, salty, and slightly spicy flavor of honeyed peach. At 70 proof, the streamlined liquid expresses flirtatious notes of oatmeal and chamomile flower. **94** —*M.M.*

NICHE IMPORT CO.

# True to Tradition:

## BEPI TOSOLINI

In the midst of World War II, Bepi Tosolini opened a distillery in the Friuli region of northeast Italy, weathering the turmoil so that he and his wife, Giovanna, might one day give the business to their eldest son, Giovanni. Managed now by their grandchildren, Giuseppe, Bruno, and Lisa, the distillery continues to produce first-class liqueurs, brandies, grappas, and amarettos using the same techniques its founder employed.

Take Bepi Tosolini Amaro Liquore d’Erbe: Made with 15 Mediterranean herbs and roots, it rests in ash barrels for four months before it’s blended with MOST Acquavite and water from the Alps. Fragola Wild Miniature Strawberry Liqueur, meanwhile, is infused with wild strawberries—both in the distillery and right in the package, as semi-candied mini-berries are added to every bottle by hand. As for the Saliza Amaretto Veneziano, it’s both infused and distilled with Italian almonds to yield layers of honey, apricot, chocolate, and nuts as well as a rich, silky mouthfeel. —*Emily Coleman*

**Bepi Tosolini Fragola Wild Miniature Strawberry Liqueur** contains the cutest mini-candied strawberries; seeing them circle the liquid is appealing. The ripe fruit sends out a signal of sweetness, while the 48-proof spirit is gifted with added notes of cinnamon and rooibos tea. **92** —*M.M.*



**Bepi Tosolini Saliza Amaretto Veneziano** captures the scent of marzipan so succinctly, it’s akin to walking into a bakery in the early-morning hours when the pastries are still cooling. With indulgent flavors of peach and persimmon added to the almond pungency, this 56-proofer is one of the richest liqueurs of its kind, though balanced by acidity. **93** —*M.M.*

**Bepi Tosolini Amaro** transports you to a woody mountain home with its scents of fireplace smoke, sassafras candles, and dark chocolate emanating from the kitchen. These notes merge on the palate with depth and finesse. Devil’s food cake and nutmeg represent just two of this 60-proof amaro’s many layers. **95** —*M.M.* ■■



NICHE IMPORT CO.

# Back to the

# FUTURE

TENUTA CASADEI UNVEILS A NEW AMPHORA-FOCUSED WINERY IN TUSCANY **by David Ransom**

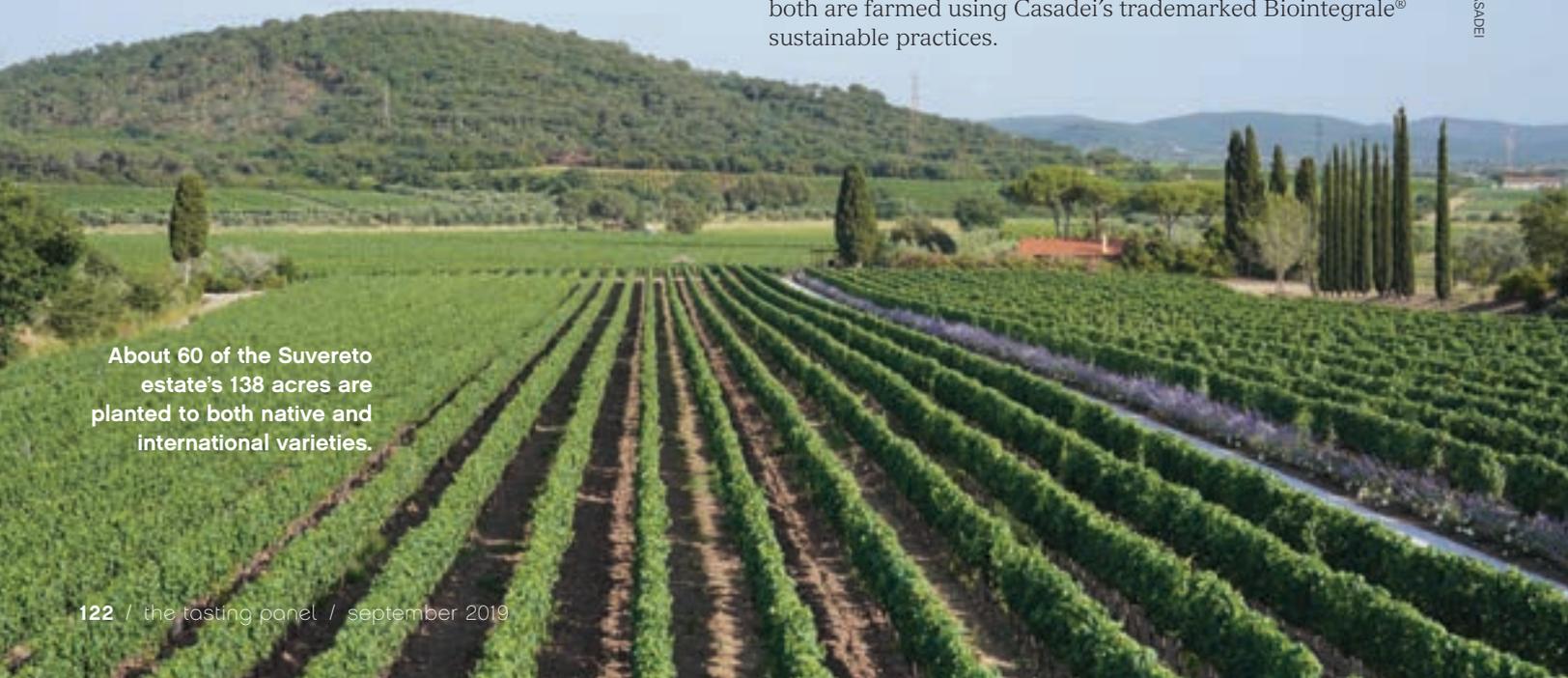


**Fred Cline and Stefano Casadei of new venture Tenuta Casadei, based in Maremma, Tuscany.**

Ushering in a new era of sorts for Tuscany's long tradition of winemaking, Tenuta Casadei opened the doors this summer to its new winery in the Maremma. Seven years in the making, Tenuta Casadei is the culmination of a joint partnership between Tuscan vintners Stefano and Anna Casadei and Fred and Nancy Cline of Sonoma, California.

Both families are well known in the wine world. Cline Cellars is one of California's most visible brands, and Fred is one of the original "Rhône Rangers"; Stefano owns the historic Castello di Trebbio winery in Chianti Rufina as well as the Olianas winery on the island of Sardinia, and he also runs one of Italy's most successful vineyard-management companies, with clients worldwide.

The Casadei estate, located in the Alta Maremma town of Suvereto, consists of 138 acres, just over 60 of which are devoted to vines both indigenous and international; another vineyard in nearby Vetulonia grows an additional 27 acres. Both were originally planted by the Casadeis in 1997 during a time of growth for the Maremma region, which saw major investment by a number of prominent Italian producers, and both are farmed using Casadei's trademarked Biointegrale® sustainable practices.



About 60 of the Suvereto estate's 138 acres are planted to both native and international varieties.



The winery's rooftop gardens grow flowers for the resident bee population and vegetables for the resident human population.

Yet the winery itself represents a chapter of the Casadei story that almost didn't get written. "We were actually in the process of selling the property, as our focus was elsewhere," says Stefano. "But then we met Fred and Nancy in 2012 and everything changed." The Clines, longtime vacationers to and devotees of Tuscany, had been looking for a local property in which to invest

that would embody their shared vision. Tenuta Casadei is a showplace for an ancient winemaking technique that is currently very much in vogue: amphora wine production.

From the outside, it looks like any modern winery, and in many respects it's just that. It's built into the side of a hill, with beautifully manicured gardens and great views from almost any vantage point. But dig a little deeper, and it begins to reveal its owners' true mission: creating minimal-intervention wines fit for the most discerning consumer.

First, let's talk about Casadei's Biointegrale® system: It's established on the philosophy of using every means possible to ensure that the vineyards are handled with the utmost respect and with minimal impact to the land they inhabit. To that end, the vines are farmed organically, without tractors, and fertilized with natural compost from the resident horses, donkeys, chickens, and geese; they're even pollinated by bees from the property's own hives.

Head from the vineyards back to the winery, and the ethos of sustainability shows even more. The roof is covered in gardens that grow flowers for the bees and vegetables for the owners; solar panels provide electricity; and—because

all but one side of it is underground—the building remains naturally cool, even when the blistering heat of the Tuscan summer is in full swing.

Indoors, the facility is a study in contrasts. Fully contemporary in design, its production area is sleek and efficient, but look around and one thing strikes you: There are only a few steel tanks. It's designed to make wine predominantly from custom-made concrete tanks and French barriques as well as large clay amphorae.

Some of Casadei's amphorae were imported from Georgia and buried in the floor per Georgian tradition, while others were crafted by a local ceramicist. But all of its wines spend time in the vessels (while every red and some of the whites also spend time in barrel). Though the results are by no means "natural" in the textbook definition, these are somewhat earthy, delicious wines of considerable quality and stability.

Available in the U.S. through Cline Sisters Imports, they're also small-production. "Tenuta Casadei is not intended to be a place where we make lots of wine," says Fred. "Here, we want to create a conversation—and show that, even now, the historic way of farming and making wine still has relevancy." And, it seems, a future. ■■



Some of Casadei's clay amphorae were imported from Georgia; others were crafted by a Tuscan ceramicist.

and were led to Casadei. "We knew after talking with Stefano and Anna that we spoke the same language," recalls Fred, "as we were all adamant about sustainability, organic farming, and preserving the land."

Instead of transferring ownership of the vineyards, then, the Casadeis and the Clines decided to start a winery



From left to right at the Bartender of the Year championships on Half Mile Farm in Highlands, NC: BOTY 2019 finalists Kabir Akbani, C. Parker Luthman, and Keifer Gilbert; judge Joaquín Símo; Heaven Hill Brands National Brand Educator Lynn House; finalist Katie Renshaw; BOTY 2019 Justin Ware; judge and BOTY 2018 Harrison Ginsberg; finalists Alison Kwan, Vay Su, and Kevin King; and judge Jeffrey Morgenthaler.

# Third Time's a **Charm**

by Ruth Tobias

**HEAVEN HILL BRANDS NAMES JUSTIN WARE ITS 2019 BARTENDER OF THE YEAR**

On June 20, Heaven Hill Brands and Liquor.com announced the results of the months-long search for their 2019 Bartender of the Year (see our July/August issue). If the champion's name rang a bell to anyone familiar with the competition, it should have: Justin Ware has been a semifinalist for three out of the past four years.

His predecessor, 2018 BOTY Harrison Ginsberg, was on hand to pass the long-awaited torch—and to recount the lessons he's taken to heart since his win. The event itself “challenged me in ways I like to be challenged,” he recalls, namely by encouraging “creative thinking about my personal story to [deliver] the message of a cocktail; I was able to think about my family, what they've meant to me, and connect that to Heaven Hill and how they've grown as a family.” The victory, meanwhile, gave Ginsberg “the confidence to step out” of his former gig at The Dead Rabbit and into the position of Head Bartender at New York City hot spot Crown Shy and its soon-to-open sibling Saga. And finally, serving as a judge this year enhanced his appreciation

of “just how creative people in this industry are,” he says. “Somebody brewed a beer just for the competition. Somebody else made a soda with all these different essential oils and acids.”

The latter just so happened to be Ware. The GM and bartender at Johnny’s Gold Brick in Houston wowed the judges at the finals—held on Half Mile Farm in Highlands, North Carolina—with his cocktails, including his not-so-simple simple serve: a Domaine de Canton Highball called International Anthem. Because “it could only have three ingredients, I had to think outside the box,” he explains, “so I built my own LaCroix, more or less,” featuring five flavors “representing different cultures” in H-Town: guava, grapefruit, lime, almond, and lemongrass. The result, he adds, was “up there with my favorite cocktails I’ve ever made—and also with the most laborious.”

All that effort paid off, literally, in the form of a \$15,000 prize to add to the funds Ware and his consulting firm Not Too Sweet are raising to open their own establishment, Night Shift. But as rewards go, Ware concurs with Ginsberg that money’s secondary to experience: BOTY, he says, “gave me an opportunity to be myself and figure out what’s really important to me, what I want to do in my own bar. People are so bent out of shape about



winning and losing, but [competitions] grow you as a person.”

They also enlarge your community, according to both gentlemen. “Being able to have a drink with the Master Distillers from Lunazul and Heaven Hill Distillery and ask nerdy questions [whose answers] you don’t get from a book or from your reps” was a big plus for Ware, who admits, “I’ve learned more about cocktail history through this competition than from [researching] it on my own.” BOTY in particular, agrees Ginsberg, “is very relaxed—you get to hang out with these incredible bartenders from all over the country, and there’s a lot of time to play bocce and talk about life. That’s the coolest part—you grow this little family in one authentic weekend.” ■■

**Justin Ware’s seemingly simple Domaine de Canton Highball, International Anthem, contained a soda crafted from water, citric and malic acids, and five different rock-candy flavorings.**

## What Do I Desire

- ▶ 1 nectarine or peach
- ▶ 1½ oz. Sacred Bond Brandy
- ▶ ½ oz. PAMA Pomegranate Liqueur
- ▶ ½ oz. fresh lemon juice
- ▶ ¾ oz. Turbo Syrup

Slice the nectarine or peach in half and cut one of the halves into small pieces. Muddle to create a paste. Add all remaining ingredients to a shaker and shake well. Fine strain into a 12-oz. footed glass over fresh pebble or crushed ice.

Make a nectarine or peach fan with the remaining half; garnish with the fan, fresh mint, and pomegranate seeds or a blackberry, all dusted with powdered sugar.



**Ware’s What Do I Desire cocktail featured two Heaven Hill brands, Sacred Bond and PAMA.**



House presents Ware with the grand prize of \$15,000.

# ERVE UP K



Kim Crawford is making a strong on-the-ground showing at top tennis tournaments around the country, including this year's Miami Open.

# Game, Set, *Smash*

KIM CRAWFORD WINES "MAKES IT AMAZING" AS THE OFFICIAL WINE OF THE US OPEN

by Ruth Tobias



As part of its "Make It Amazing" campaign, Kim Crawford Wines has released three new TV spots directed by Malik Sayeed to celebrate women.

Kim Crawford is already the top-seeded player in more than one division of the U.S. wine market: It's the number-one New Zealand brand in the country with the number one-selling Sauvignon Blanc (including in the on-premise segment by sales). But like any world champ, it's not content to rest on its laurels. Instead, Kim Crawford—which, not coincidentally, also became the most-advertised wine brand in 2018—is serving up a new marketing campaign that celebrates the very consumers who made it so popular in the first place, encouraging them to seize each day and "Make It Amazing." It's a slogan that's sure to resound at the upcoming US Open,

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KIM CRAWFORD WINES

of which Kim Crawford will be the official wine thanks to a newly announced multiyear partnership with the three top tennis tournaments in the United States.

Discovering through extensive research that brand loyalty is higher among Kim Crawford drinkers than among consumers of any of the label's competitors, the marketing team set out to understand the driving forces behind the devotion. "We had always had a hunch that they had an emotional connection with the brand," says Julie Rossman, Vice President of Marketing

room at a birthday party, making a grand entrance into a restaurant, and hanging out at home over a bottle of Kim Crawford; though of diverse backgrounds, they all share a self-assured, fun-loving demeanor.

The spots were directed by Malik Sayeed, who shot both the visual accompaniment to Beyoncé's album *Lemonade* and Bumble's 2019 Super Bowl advertisement featuring Serena Williams. In Rossman's view, he was a perfect fit for the brand: "We fell in love with his impressive body of

be upwards of a million attendees (the 2018 US Open saw nearly 829,000).

In the lead-up to the event, the team is activating displays at brick-and-mortar retailers nationwide and hosting a sweepstakes whose winner will receive an all-expenses-paid VIP experience at the 2020 US Open—as well, of course, as updating their social-media accounts with the hashtag #ServeUpKim.

Though most wine companies could only dream of attaining the level of visibility and loyalty Kim Crawford enjoys, Rossman says there's always



**Co-branded US Open advertising is key to Kim Crawford's partnership with the United States Tennis Association.**



for Kim Crawford Wines. "They talk about Kim Crawford as if it's a friend of theirs." Indeed, just as they "rely on their friendships to gain confidence" in life, so they rely on the brand for confidence in wine purchasing, according to Rossman: "It's an easy choice. It's so versatile, it's got this distinctive taste, and it overdelivers for the price."

With a clear portrait of their primary consumer emerging, Rossman and her colleagues "learned we really have an opportunity to resonate with women in a broad age group." To that end, she explains, "We're taking an integrated, 360-degree approach to build awareness" with the "Make It Amazing" campaign, from digital and social-media advertising to influencer initiatives to in-store promotions. But the linchpin of the endeavor is a number of new TV commercials that depict various women lighting up the

work that celebrates women," she says. "We loved that he was able to capture women's confidence with such authenticity and bring to life the relatable quality that our devoted drinkers share with our wines in this inclusive, effortless way."

Sponsorship of not only the US Open but also the Miami Open and the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, California, makes sense for similar reasons, says Rossman, whose research showed that "Kim Crawford consumers really over-index for watching tennis: It's a sport that supports strong female athletes." When the US Open begins at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center on August 26, she adds, "we'll have a permanent presence on the ground," pouring their signature Ace Frosé cocktails (see recipe at right) as well as Kim Crawford wines to what could

more work to be done in terms of brand recognition. It seems her team won't rest until the whole world has gotten into the swing of savoring this iconic label. ■■

## Kim Crawford Ace Frosé

Serves 8

- ▶ 1 bottle Kim Crawford Rosé
- ▶ 6 Tbsp. sugar
- ▶ 6 Tbsp. water
- ▶ ½ bottle sparkling wine
- ▶ 8 rosemary sprigs

In a small saucepan, bring sugar and water to a boil. Simmer 5 minutes until dissolved. Cool and stir in Kim Crawford Rosé. Freeze mixture in a loaf pan, breaking up occasionally, until frozen. Blend in a food processor until smooth, then freeze again until firm. Scoop into glasses and pour sparkling wine on top. Garnish with rosemary and serve immediately.

# Toasting to *Excellence*

**WENTE FAMILY  
ESTATES** RECOGNIZES  
DISTRIBUTION PARTNER  
**SOUTHERN GLAZER'S  
WINE & SPIRITS** WITH  
THE THIRD ANNUAL  
RISE AWARDS

“**R**ISE is the acronym we use for our core values at Wente Family Estates: respect, integrity, sustainability, and excellence,” says Tyson Overton, Executive Vice President and Chief Sales Officer at the venerable California wine company. For decades, Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits has shared those tenets, inspiring Wente to create an annual awards program that would honor its longtime distribution partner for its efforts in growing and promoting the Wente portfolio. Now in its third year, the RISE Awards, “which [are] exclusive for Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits,” Overton explains, “recognize the markets and leaders that champion [Wente’s] values in the process of delivering results.”

Ray Lombard, Southern Glazer’s Executive Vice President of Supplier Management, is equally inspired by their work together. “It’s an honor to be partners with the Wente family,” he says. “We are proud to have the opportunity to represent brands from real families that thrive because of their relentless commitment to excellence. The SGWS family congratulates the Wente family on a trailblazing 136 years and is excited about our partnership for the next generations to come!”



PHOTO: LIBBY VOLGYES

**Front row, left to right: SGWS VP of Wine Mike Aitken, SGWS Director of Wine Trade Development Mark McGee, and Mark Halpern, owner of Brittany Sales Company. Back row, left to right: Bobby Goodman, Wente Family Estates VP of Sales–Southeast; SGWS VP of Commercial Operations Greg Astle; SGWS Executive VP/General Manager Patrick Cassidy; and Bob Baranski, managing partner, Brittany Sales Company.**

## **East Region RISE Award Winner: FLORIDA**

“Congrats to SGWS Florida for delivering a successful 2018 and being awarded the Wente RISE Award. Team Florida managed our Wente Estates label to another year of double-digit growth at 12% and grew both Murrieta’s Well and Hayes Ranch 24% versus the prior year. Along with the case growth came expanded on- and off-premise points of distribution and a chain division that saw sustainable growth for the sixth year in a row at 12%. This is a team that loves to win, and you can expect them to be up for the challenge of another great year in 2019. Thank you, SGWS team Florida.”

—*Bobby Goodman, Wente Family Estates, Vice President of Sales–Southeast Division*

*"We are proud to have the opportunity to represent brands from real families that thrive because of their relentless commitment to excellence. The SGWS family congratulates the Wente family on a trailblazing 136 years and is excited about our partnership for the next generations to come!"*

*—Ray Lombard, Southern Glazer's Executive Vice President of Supplier Management*

PHOTO: JASON KINDIG



**Seated:** SGWS VP of Trade Development Ben Rowell (left) and Director of Trade Development Bill Sample. **Standing,** left to right: Jennifer Price, Wente Family Estates Director of Sales—Southwest Region; SGWS Executive VP/General Manager Matt Metz; SGWS Trade Development Manager Brooke Anderson; SGWS VP On Premise Jamey Bellan; and SGWS Director of Business Development Jerry Liebke.

**Central Region RISE Award Winner: TEXAS**

"Congratulations to the SGWS TX team for winning the 2018 RISE Award for the second time! We expanded our footprint in both on- and off-premise channels and set ourselves up for a successful repeat. We remain focused on striving for excellence and delivering a 2019 win!"

*—Jennifer Price, Wente Family Estates, Director of Sales—Southwest Region*

PHOTO: JOHN VALLS



**SGWS Vice President/General Manager Michael Jeffrey, Vice President of On Premise Kim McClaskey, and Vice President of Retail Sales Justin Geddes with Michael Provencio, Regional Sales Manager of Mountain/Pacific Northwest Regions for Wente Family Estates.**

**West Region RISE Award Winner: OREGON**

"Michael Jeffrey and the Oregon team delivered a great year for Wente Family Estates in 2018. As a first-time RISE Award winner, the Oregon team has been passionate about succeeding with our portfolio while driving sales toward our focused Wente initiatives. Both the on-premise and off-premise channels were up in 2018, led by Single Vineyards (+4%) and Murrieta's Well (+22%)! We are looking forward to breaking new records in 2019 with a banner-year performance once again!" ■■

*—Michael Provencio, Wente Family Estates, Regional Sales Manager—Mountain/Pacific Northwest Regions*

Visionary chef José Andrés conceived Mercado Little Spain at Hudson Yards as a place where New Yorkers could truly eat like Spaniards.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MERCADO LITTLE SPAIN

# A GASTRO-GIANT GETS ITS DUE

COULD A BASEMENT  
IN MANHATTAN'S  
HUDSON YARDS  
DEVELOPMENT  
REPRESENT A  
NEW WAVE IN  
SPANISH CUISINE?

BY DAVID ROSENGARTEN

Is New York City's approach to Spanish food about to evolve? And could Mercado Little Spain, located in the basement of a glamorous new shopping mall at Hudson Yards on Manhattan's West Side, mark the turning point?

As Madrid-born and -raised Nicolas Lopez, the executive chef of this *muy delicioso* collection of 15 food stands and four sit-down restaurants, recently told me: "Though North America was always bombarded by immigrants who crossed an ocean to get here, Spaniards, historically, by and large opted for the *other* America: South America. And that's why New York, though it has a great tradition of Italian restaurants, French restaurants, Chinese restaurants . . . did not develop as a Spanish-restaurant city." Perhaps would-be Spanish restaurateurs were also impeded by New Yorkers' tendency to confuse their cuisine with those of Spanish-speaking peoples from the New World (for example, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic), which, though rooted in part in Spanish food, have little in common with it now.

Well, The Shops and Restaurants at Hudson Yards, located at 30 Hudson Yards (the centerpiece of seven gleaming new towers built for business and residential purposes) is out to change all that—not that you would know it if you took the elevator up to the floors where upscale restaurants from such gastronomic giants as Thomas Keller await you. But if you glide down two escalators, the surroundings become increasingly Spanish, with maps, photographs, and displays about the country's seductive dishes and wines. Finally, you arrive at the sprawling stands in the basement to encounter the sights, sounds, aromas, and foods of Spain, a gastro-giant long undervalued by Americans.

What we have here, finally, is something like the Eataly of Spain; walking through it, said Mercado Beverage Director A.J. Ojeda-Pons, "is like walking through La Boqueria in Barcelona," the famous market in that remarkable Spanish city.

During its development, there was talk of making Mercado a sit-down Spanish restaurant only—but according to Ojeda-Pons, the visionary behind the project, world-renowned chef José Andrés, "insisted that's not how Spaniards eat! We wanted to get Americans into the proper rhythm . . . and Andrés wanted this place to be game-changing from the beginning: a museum of Spanish food."

The team envisioned a level of Spanish authenticity and quality that had never before been reached in the U.S.: "We are making no accommodations to 'American taste,'" said Lopez. To that end, they recruited the best of the best in Spain—11 artisans famous for their specialties—to come to New York and teach the Mercado crew how to make their dishes; still others supplied their recipes from overseas. A good example is the *cardenal*, a scrumptious dessert little known to Americans but recently described in a newsletter from the Culinary Institute of America as "both light and rich, sandwiching pastry cream between discs of sponge



**Native Madrileño Nicolas Lopez is the executive chef of Mercado Little Spain.**

cake and meringue." (Lopez imports all he can from Spain, though he uses many homegrown ingredients as well, such as shellfish from the East Coast and produce from the West Coast. "Also," admitted Lopez, "the American beef culture is wonderful.")

Meanwhile, Ojeda-Pons has been busy creating a wonderfully diverse list of more than 200 Spanish wines that patrons can take with them by the glass or bottle as they go from stand to stand, tapas-style. A great place to start is *Viño*, the wine bar at the entrance, just to the right of the escalators. Here, you can get almost 40 wines by the glass, including unusual options like the Bodegas y Vinedos Ponce 2017 Buena Pinta Manchuela—a bouncy, lively, and food-friendly red without overbearing fruit. Ojeda-Pons also recommends the Barbadillo Manzanilla, one among an excellent group of 15 Sherries, for all-purpose pairing duty. And then there's the classic Spanish *porron*, a kind of pitcher with a spout designed to help you pour wine directly into your mouth (few *porron* parties end with everyone standing).

I was glad to discover that Mercado offers sangria too: It's right in the spirit of the place, and I hoped they wouldn't be too snobby to leave it out. "Are you kidding?" said Ojeda-Pons. "We have sangria available at every stand, either by the pitcher or by the glass! It is Spain's greatest contribution to the cocktail world." ■■

SAKÉ

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAKÉONE

# SAKÉ WINS



# A WHIRLWIND TASTING THROUGH SELECTS FROM SAKÉONE'S PORTFOLIO

BY JESSIE BIRSCHBACH AND MERIDITH MAY

SakéOne isn't unique for being a saké brewery in America (specifically in Forest Grove, Oregon). It's unique for being the first—and the most award-winning.

Now under the leadership of Brewmaster Takumi Kuwabara, SakéOne has become known as the country's premier craft producer in its category: The top-notch company, which is also an importer, has been making its namesake products with pristine water from the Willamette Valley for over two decades. Its three house brands represent both innovation and respect for tradition, from the fun and spirited Momokawa line to the infused Moonstone bottlings and the more serious G Saké.

The "G" in G Saké stands for *genshu*, meaning "cask-strength" in Japanese. As fermented beverages go, saké boasts one of the highest (if not *the* highest) naturally occurring ABVs. In fact, it can effortlessly ferment up to about 19–20% alcohol; most *tojis* (brewmasters) will then dilute the saké with water on the belief that it tastes better at 15–16% alcohol. Genshu saké, including G Saké, is undiluted to offer bigger, bolder flavor.

Read on for detailed tasting notes of not only that brand but also selections from SakéOne's Moonstone, Momokawa, and imported lines.

## TASTING NOTES

**Moonstone Cucumber Mint, Forest Grove, Oregon** A quality base of 58% milled *junmai ginjo* saké is infused with natural cucumber and mint at an ABV of 12%. Scents of jasmine and honeyed cucumber are delicate, while flavors of freshly picked mint leaves offer freshness on the palate. **94** —Meridith May



**Momokawa Diamond, Forest Grove, Oregon** A super-premium *junmai ginjo* saké with rice polished to 58% and no added alcohol. Scents of jasmine and fresh linen are ethereal. The palate is medium-dry, with verbena and woody notes followed by crisp apple and honeydew. It finishes with a hint of salted lime. **94** —M.M.



**Momokawa Organic Nigori Junmai Ginjo, Forest Grove, Oregon** Coarsely filtered and cloudy in appearance, the sediment in this saké actually enhances its aromatics. Notes of lemon ice, honeysuckle, and coconut lead to even more tropical notes on the palate: Lychee, gardenia, and ripe pineapple are opulent in a delicate body. ABV is 16%. **94** —M.M.



**Hakutsuru Sayuri Nigori, Hyōgo Prefecture** Sayuri, meaning "little lily" in Japanese, is a coarsely filtered nigori that combines notes of watermelon rind, Rainier cherry, celery salt, and rice pudding with a lush, creamy mouthfeel. **89** —Jessie Birschbach



**Murai Family Nigori Genshu, Aomori Prefecture** A medium-sweet saké with an ABV of 19.8%. Scents of sweet vanilla and crème brûlée engage the senses. Cloudy and velvety in texture, with notes of dried magnolia and heather; salted rice and coconut linger on the finish. **90** —M.M.



**SakéMoto Junmai, Hyōgo Prefecture** Brewed by Hakutsuru of Japan on behalf of SakéOne, this off-dry saké is ripe honeydew in a grassy meadow peppered with white flowers. Both the water and rice are sourced from the Nada region for a lighter, super-approachable *junmai*. **90** —J.B.



**Yoshinogawa Winter Warrior Junmai Ginjo, Niigata Prefecture** Made by Yoshinogawa brewery, one of the oldest saké breweries in Japan (established in 1548), this medium-dry *junmai ginjo* offers marshmallow, lychee, and an interesting celery note plus a smooth, rounded texture. It's named in honor of the *kurabito*, brewery workers who continue to make saké during the height of winter. **90** —J.B.



**Hakutsuru Nishiki Junmai Daiginjo, Hyōgo Prefecture** After eight years of research and development, the Hakutsuru brewery cultivated the Hakutsuru Nishiki rice grain, a cross of the Yamadaho and Tankan-Wataribune strains. The proprietary crossbreed is used to make this very special *junmai daiginjo*. Refreshing, pretty, and delicate, it offers intriguing complexity: Rainwater, sweet cashew nuts, and white flowers are among the most prominent notes. **96** —J.B.



**G Joy, Forest Grove, Oregon** This *junmai ginjo genshu* saké has an ABV of 18%. Genshu, with no added water, is undiluted; hence the higher ABV. Milled at 58%, it possesses a rich, earthy nose with a backdrop of forest trees and wood bark. The body is slightly weighty—actually creamy—and dotted with white pepper, white cherry, peppermint, lanolin, and toasted marshmallow. **93** —M.M. ■■



Guests attending the tasting seminar were greeted with a refreshing welcome cocktail. A play on the classic Gin and Tonic, the P&T featured “young white” Pineau des Charentes Blanc, thyme, and Fever-Tree tonic with a grapefruit-peel garnish.



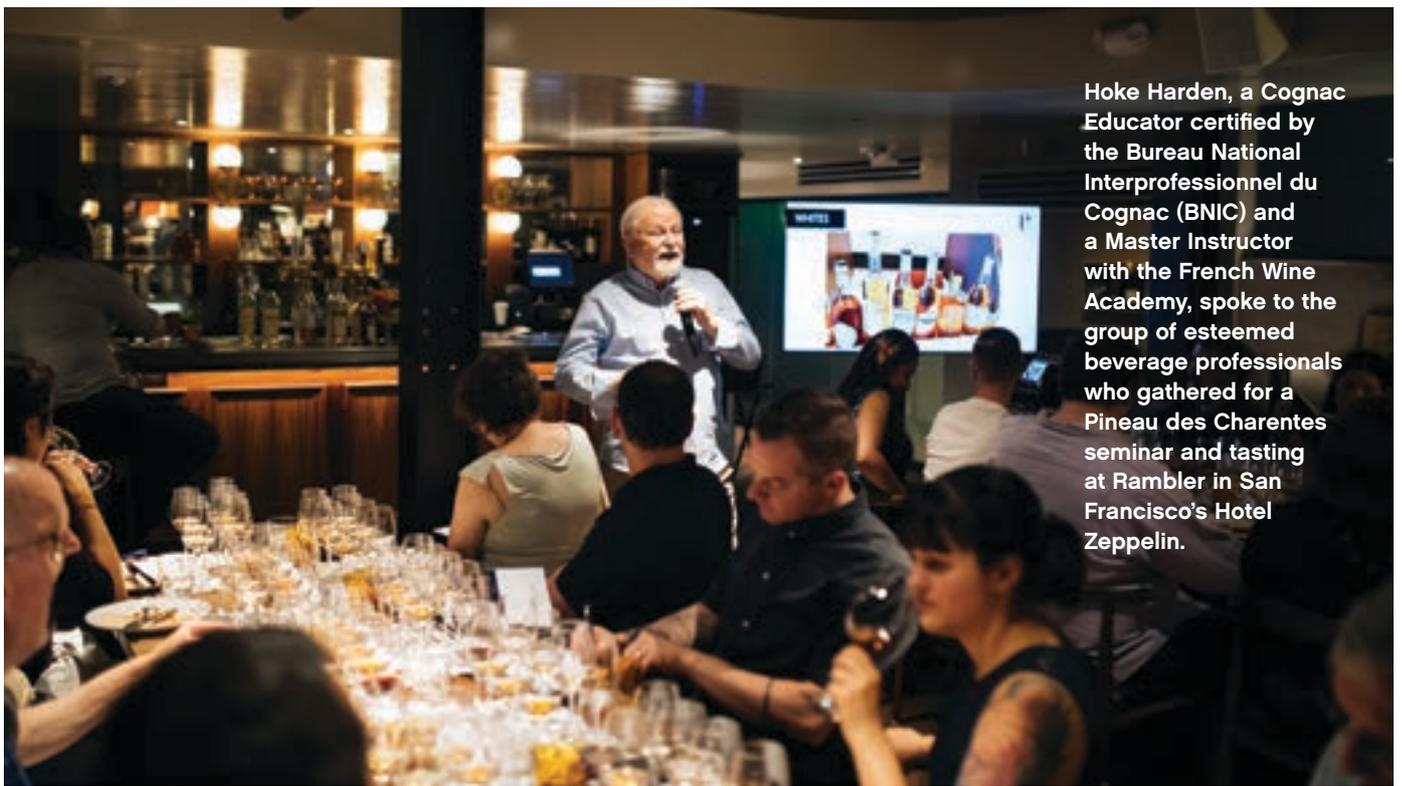
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FORTIFIED FRENCH WINE  
**PINEAU DES CHARENTES** IS RIPE  
FOR STATESIDE DISCOVERY

story by Richard Carleton Hacker / photos by Alexander Rubin

Among the expressions tasted was ten-year-plus Bache Gabrielsen, back on the market after a complete sellout.





**Hoke Harden, a Cognac Educator certified by the Bureau National Interprofessionnel du Cognac (BNIC) and a Master Instructor with the French Wine Academy, spoke to the group of esteemed beverage professionals who gathered for a Pineau des Charentes seminar and tasting at Rambler in San Francisco's Hotel Zeppelin.**

**H**ere's an enigma even Batman's nemesis The Riddler might find puzzling: When is a Pinot not a Pinot?

The answer: When it's a Pineau des Charentes, a popular apéritif and digestif that up to now has been little known outside of France. That's because, as the people in its area of origin—the Charente and Charente-Maritime departments of Cognac—are fond of saying, “We export Cognac, but we drink Pineau des Charentes.”

A few months ago, 35 top mixologists, sommeliers, and wine and spirits buyers braved an unseasonably hot, sultry San Francisco day to gather at Rambler in Union Square's Hotel Zeppelin, where they got to discover the secrets of this elusive wine.

Upon entering the luxuriously rustic restaurant, the attendees were greeted with two cocktails that showcased the mixological potential of Pineau des Charentes. Riffing on a classic, the P&T featured a “young white” (aged five years or fewer) Pineau des Charentes with Fever-Tree tonic, thyme, and a fresh grapefruit-rind garnish, which was served in a Highball glass stacked with ice. By contrast, the slightly sweeter La Petite Mort combined the same Pineau with fresh lemon juice, a dash of Suze liqueur, a mini-dose of mild saline solution, and a lemon peel;

topped with Champagne, it was served chilled and straight up.

Overseeing the gathering was SWE Certified Spirits Educator Hoke Harden, one of only two Certified Pineau des Charentes Ambassadors in the country (the other being Franky Marshall, who handles the East Coast, while Harden handles the West). Over a buffet of roasted carrot-quinoa salad, smoked-salmon toasts, and housemade ravioli, Harden held a master class and tasting that revealed what Pineau des Charentes is and how versatile it can be in cocktails as well as with the food we enjoyed.

Simply put, Pineau des Charentes is a fortified, barrel-aged vin de liqueur made with two-thirds unfermented French grape juice or fermented must to one-third Cognac. By law, it must be made at the estate that produced the Cognac it contains; consequently, anyone who makes it must also be a distiller. It comes in three styles: Blanc; Rouge or Rosé (the terms are interchangeable); and Vieux and Très Vieux. Blanc is made from the same grapes as Cognac—Ugni Blanc, Colombard, and Folle Blanche—while Rouge/Rosé is primarily made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc.

Pineau des Charentes ranges from 17% to 21% ABV, which makes it ideal for use in low-alcohol cocktails. It can also be sipped chilled or served over ice, and like vermouth it can last three

months or more in the refrigerator once opened. Harden led the group through eight of the 30 different brands currently being imported into the United States, including the tangy four-year-old Paul Marie & Fils Jép #01 Blanc (\$46) and the five-year-old Château de Beaulon Rouge (\$30), which offered notes of burnt cherries and milk chocolate.

Given such a broad spectrum of flavors, it's no wonder bartenders are as intrigued by Pineau des Charentes as somms are. At Bar Luciole in Cognac, cocktail maestro Tony Conigliaro serves a gin-based Martini des Charentes, while The Dorsey at The Venetian in Las Vegas offers the Dauphine, made with barrel-aged gin and Green and Yellow Chartreuse as well as Pineau; also in Vegas, MGM Resorts International Corporate Mixologist Craig Schoettler has created The Devil Is in the Details, featuring single-barrel Cruzan rum, Pineau, spiced demerara syrup, coconut water, and Angostura bitters, for the MGM Grand's new Italian restaurant, Ambra. And at least one of the mixologists in Harden's audience is already in the Pineau vanguard: Ben Jeffers of ABV in San Francisco's Mission District makes a PDC Highball.

Whether or not you speak French, Pineau des Charentes is a great way to start a conversation. (Just don't confuse it with Pinot.) ■■

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Gillian Ballance, MS, will lead an exclusive “Techniques of Tasting” session.

PHOTO: REBECCA PEPLINSKI



### THIS COULD BE YOU!

Three Luxicon scholarship winners are pictured with Master Sommeliers Emily Wines (second from left) and Gillian Ballance (center): Andy Lock, Sommelier at Cask & Ale in Madison, WI; Elizabeth Kowal, Assistant Wine Buyer at Geneva Wine Cellars; and Ryan Baldwin, Head Sommelier at the Waldorf Astoria Chicago.

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Bottles make their way down the production line at Heineken's Zoeterwoude brewery outside Amsterdam. All Heineken 0.0 imported to the U.S. is produced in the Netherlands.



# Zero's New Hero

HEINEKEN EXPANDS ITS GLOBAL FOOTPRINT AS ITS NON-ALCOHOLIC BREW, **HEINEKEN 0.0**, BOOSTS SALES

by Kate Newton

Just a few years ago, a trend that's now poised to potentially upend the global beer industry started playing out on a much smaller scale at Heineken's Zoeterwoude brewery near Amsterdam. On tabletops during lunch, the customary glasses of milk favored by many employees were increasingly being replaced with Heineken's iconic green bottle, inside of which awaited a—quite literally—sobering twist.

Though the bottles closely resembled the brand's flagship product, they in fact contained Heineken 0.0, a non-alcoholic expression that debuted in Europe in 2017. The beverage, which has 69 calories per bottle, was thus already battle-tested by the time it hit shelves in January in the U.S., where the non-alcoholic-beer segment is still nascent: It now makes up roughly 5% of Heineken sales in the U.K., 7% in Spain, and a whopping 20% in Russia, as Heineken USA Chief Marketing Officer Jonnie Cahill told CNN earlier this year.

The stateside launch is a savvy move, given how factors like health and wellness as well as the drinking

habits of millennials are broadening their impact on the alcohol industry at large; buzzwords like “moderation” and “balance” are frequently used to describe younger consumers' penchants for imbibing less or abstaining altogether (for more on this trend, see our story on Lyre's alcohol alternatives on page 64). While the lofty potential of innovations like Heineken 0.0 have been whispered about behind brewery walls for the past decade or more, it seems the prophecy is finally coming to fruition; according to Nielsen data, in the first three months of this year, sales of non-alcoholic beer were up 6.6% over the same period in 2018.

It just so happens that 2018 was a banner year for the Heineken brand. According to Brand Finance's Beer 25 rankings, its valuation was up 11% over 2017, and the company also reported that sales grew 7.7% by volume—its best numbers in more than a decade. It's a result the brewer partially attributes to the expanding reach of Heineken 0.0, which is joining other members of its burgeoning category in shaking things up far beyond



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEINEKEN

**As Heineken's Global Master Brewer, Willem van Waesberghe helped spearhead the research process that led to the creation of Heineken 0.0.**

the confines of the Zoeterwoude lunchroom: Per a recent report from *Bon Appétit*, sales of bottled low- and no-alcohol beverages are expected to grow roughly 32% in the U.S. between 2018 and 2022, tripling the rate of growth seen over the five years prior. A report from data-analytics company GlobalData, meanwhile, found that non-alcoholic beer is the beer market's fastest-growing segment.

“With strong growth in the non-alcohol segment expected to continue, Heineken 0.0 gives drinkers a choice for all of their occasions while offering a game-changing brew that will bring new drinkers to the category,” says Thomas Hunt, Corporate Communications and Brand PR Manager for Heineken USA.

### A Global Experiment Unfolds

A recent visit to Zoeterwoude yielded a surprisingly tranquil scene considering that the brewery is the largest facility of its kind in Europe, producing roughly 10 million hectoliters of product annually. Because much of its operations are controlled remotely, employees on the floor are few and far between—making the constant rhythmic whirl of bottles, cans, and branded packaging that much more impressive (and, in a way, rather hypnotic).

With more than 350 brands under its umbrella, Heineken represents “quite a complex world,” in the words of Global Master Brewer Willem van Waesberghe, and a similar complexity lies at the root of Heineken 0.0’s conception. Van Waesberghe and his fellow Heineken brewmasters conducted about 15 years of research on every aspect of the original Heineken expression, detailing its flavor profile, its aromas, and the evolution it undergoes during the production process.

Their goal, according to Hunt, was to ensure that “every Heineken beer has the same perfectly balanced taste the world over, whether you are in New York or New Delhi,” with van Waesberghe training his colleagues on the importance of scaling consistency within their respective markets. After all, while Heineken’s recipe is simple—comprising water, barley malt, hop extract, and the brand’s proprietary A-Yeast—it’s ultimately dependent on equipment, and guaranteeing that beer bottled in locales thousands of miles apart tastes the same is a standard met through rigorous testing.

Room was also made for creativity among the analytics: Rather than simply opting to remove the alcohol from Heineken Original to produce Heineken 0.0, the company “wanted to push the boundaries, so we gave our Master Brewers a blank sheet of paper and challenged them to brew



**Released in the U.S. earlier this year after making a splash in Europe and other global markets, Heineken 0.0 marks Heineken’s entry into the burgeoning category of low- and no-alcohol products.**

a perfectly balanced non-alcoholic lager from scratch, using just natural ingredients and a special process to protect the natural flavor,” Hunt says. “Removing alcohol from regular Heineken would have been easy, but it wouldn’t deliver the best-tasting non-alcoholic beer.”

### Preserving Flavor

Though my own exploration of non-alcoholic beer is admittedly limited, it’s not an overstatement to say that Heineken 0.0 tastes uncannily like its sister label. Only when tasted side by side do the nuances become easily detectable; after sipping 0.0 uninterrupted for even just a minute or two, nosing the original beer yields a surprisingly strong scent of grain alcohol, a sensation that fascinated our tour group (much as when a home-grown science experiment takes an unexpected turn).

While Heineken 0.0’s soft, malty body makes a good first impression on its own, it’s the “characteristic fruity notes” that Hunt says definitively link the new release with the original beer. While the brewing process itself is proprietary, van Waesberghe aimed to summarize it in his own words: “When you remove the alcohol, you remove flavor, and you need to know which flavors to add back.” To address these concerns, the brand developed another process that



**At the Heineken Experience in Amsterdam, one of the city’s biggest tourist attractions, Heineken 0.0 is poured alongside other Heineken products in the building’s downstairs tasting room.**

blends the non-alcoholic brew with other natural ingredients, restoring those “missing” flavors and aromas.

Now available in more than 50 markets around the world, Heineken 0.0 is set to gradually expand its footprint. “The pace of global rollout has picked up given how strong consumer response has been,” says Hunt, adding that consumers can expect to see the label showcased “in Heineken brand activations, from premier sports partnerships to music festivals and more.” Its U.S. launch was bolstered by a \$50-million marketing campaign, #NowYouCan; featuring Heineken 0.0 bravely venturing into alcohol-free spaces like boardrooms and gyms, it aims to position the product “as a fun, go-to non-alcoholic choice for traditionally non-beer moments,” Hunt explains.

Roughly 25 miles northeast of Zoeterwoude at Heineken’s decommissioned Amsterdam brewery—which now serves as a museum and all-around major tourism destination dubbed the Heineken Experience—glasses of Heineken 0.0 grace the bar tops of the building’s downstairs tasting room, blending in seamlessly alongside their alcoholic counterparts. Unless they were prompted to sniff each glass in close succession, perhaps even the brand’s most diehard loyalists would be hard-pressed to tell the difference. ■■

## COOPERAGE

JACK DANIEL'S IS THE ONLY MAJOR SPIRITS BRAND THAT PROCURES ITS OWN LOGS, CUTS ITS OWN STAVES, AND BUILDS ITS OWN BARRELS

# DECONSTRUCTING THE BARREL, *part 2*

story by Eric Marsh / photos by Jason Myers



Skilled barrel raisers like Devin Jones can raise a barrel in under a minute.



**Jones reaches for a temporary hoop to place around a barrel.**

**W**hile the oak barrel is an archaic technology that predates most major religions, its virtues have secured its place in the modern wine and spirits industry. For nearly two centuries, it was the most commonly used container for the transport of liquids, and over time people realized that wood imparted a great deal of flavor to its respective contents.

It can now be said that the oak barrel represents “a key ingredient in the whiskey-making process,” in the words of Howard Burcham, Mill Manager at the Brown-Forman Stevenson Stave Mill in Stevenson, Alabama: The vessel is directly responsible for the spirit’s color and more than half of its flavor.

In 2012, Jack Daniel’s became the only major spirits brand to operate its own stave mill and cooperage and make its own barrels. The company now owns two cooperages: the Jack Daniel Cooperage in Trinity, Alabama, and the Brown-Forman Cooperage in Louisville, Kentucky. (Brown-Forman is the parent company of Jack Daniel’s.) What’s more, the brand procures its own American white oak logs—commencing the enterprise Burcham calls “log to bottle”—from

within a six-state radius around Alabama. The stave mill then processes the logs down to staves—that is, the planks of wood that form the barrel—before shipping them to the brand’s cooperages. (For more on this process, see “Deconstructing the Barrel, Part 1” in our July/August issue.)

The Jack Daniel Cooperage in Trinity was “the first cooperage built [in the U.S.] in over 40 years,” says its director, Darrell Davis. “At the time, it was the most technologically advanced cooperage in the industry.” The 170,000-square-foot facility employs 161 workers, who collectively churn out some 1,200 barrels a day; Davis calls them “some of the hardest-working people I have ever been blessed to work with.”

Once the staves arrive at the cooperage from the mill, they’re “seasoned” for six to nine months in a process that “allows the moisture content of the wood to naturally dry, versus rapidly drying the wood through a kiln process,” according to Devin Jones, a barrel raiser at the cooperage. “The duration the wood is seasoned is determined by the coloration of the wood and the moisture content.”

After the staves are seasoned, they’re ready to be used for barrels. “All jointed staves are profiled with a curve that makes the staves fit together when forming a barrel,” Jones says, explaining how he plucks staves from a pallet stacked chest high before deftly aligning them on a pneumatic raising station “that secures the staves until a final stave can be hammered into place.” It generally takes 31–33 staves to make a barrel, and a skilled barrel raiser like Jones can complete the task in 50 seconds. After a cable is pulled around the top of the barrel to tighten it, a temporary hoop can be placed around it; Jones then rolls the barrel to a conveyor belt that carries it to a station designated for toasting and charring.

“The slow heat from our toasting process pulls the sugars to the surface of the wood, which adds specific characteristics to the taste of the whiskey,” says Davis. “Toasting is simply slowly heating the wood versus actually catching the wood on fire [as we do] during our char process.” The barrel is toasted for around 17 minutes, whereas charring—a process that places the interior of open-ended barrels over natural gas burners that reach temperatures of 1,500 degrees

Fahrenheit—is far more ephemeral, lasting 19–22 seconds.

“Charring helps to open the wood and . . . acts as a filter that the whiskey can pass through during the maturation process,” says Davis. The high heat also serves to caramelize the sugars in the wood, creating the characteristic notes of brown sugar, vanilla, toffee, and smoke that can be found in Jack Daniel’s whiskeys.

After charring, a bunghole—used for filling and emptying the barrel—is drilled and the top and bottom pieces are put in place, sealing the container shut. The barrel is then filled with water to check for leaks, a critical phase given that even the smallest opening could result in a major loss of spirit. During the aging process, roughly 3–5 gallons of the liquid in a 53-gallon container are naturally lost to evaporation and absorption—occurrences respectively referred to as the angels’ share and the devil’s cut. If leaks are detected, they’re promptly repaired by skilled coopers. “Our coopers use a material called flagging and cedar wedges to plug leaks,” Davis explains.

After permanent hoops are placed around the barrels, the vessels are shipped to the Jack Daniel Distillery in Lynchburg, Tennessee, where they’re filled with the clear, nascent spirit that—once matured—will become one



**The char on a barrel’s interior works as a filter while imparting flavor into the whiskey.**

of the brand’s myriad Tennessee whiskey expressions. As for his personal favorite, Davis names Jack Daniel’s Tennessee Rye Whiskey “mixed or straight,” adding proudly: “My opinion is also shared [with] the experts, as Jack Daniel’s Tennessee Rye recently won a gold medal in the San Francisco World Spirits Competition.” Considering all of the attention to detail and hard work they represent—from log to bottle and from stave mill to cooperage—such accolades are much deserved. ■■



WINE & SPIRITS  
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# Results of the 2019 Wine & Spirits Competition at WSWA

Every year, retailers, distributors, imports, and brands from around the world converge at the annual Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America Convention & Exposition. Held this year in Orlando, Florida, the 75th annual event featured wine and spirits competitions that assembled 40 of the nation's top wine and spirits industry experts. After collectively tasting through 268 wines and 407 spirits, the judges awarded 42 Best in Show awards and a number of double gold, gold, and silver medals across a myriad of categories.

We are listing the double gold and gold medals here. Suggested retail prices are provided when supplied by entrants. For a full listing of the awards, visit [wswaconvention.org](http://wswaconvention.org).



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- Eric Hawkins**, AGM, Sommelier, and Wine Purchaser, CRÚ Food & Wine Bar; Atlanta, GA
- Frank Horak**, Wine Director and Sommelier, Stephan Pyles Flora Street Café, Dallas, TX
- Ganna Fedorova**, National Beverage Director, City Winery, New York, NY
- Gary Russell**, Wine Director, The Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes, FL
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- Jonathan Eichholz**, co-founder and Director, No Ceilings Pop-Up, New York, NY
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- Dominic Petrucci**, Beverage Director, The Savoy, Kansas City, MO
- Elizabeth Sammuri**, Wine & Beverage Director, Flagstaff House, Boulder, CO
- Eric Tecosky**, U.S. Brand Ambassador, Jack Daniel's, Los Angeles, CA
- Greg Richie**, Executive Chef/Partner, Soco Restaurant, Orlando, FL
- Jillian Ulanski**, Mixologist, The Dawson, Chicago, IL
- Ken Freeman**, Beverage & Operations Manager, Sixty Vines, Dallas, TX
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**Scotto Family Cellars 2018 Dry Sangiovese Rosé, Mohr-Fry Ranch, Lodi, USA (\$14)** SCOTTO CELLARS

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**Shottys Gelatin Shots Strawberry, USA** (\$10) SHOTTYS

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**Kaiyo Japanese Mizunara Oak Whisky Cask Strength, Japan** (\$90) EGOBEV (KAIYO WHISKY & KELT COGNAC)

**BEST MEZCAL**  
**India Bella Anejo Cristalino Espadín Mezcal, Mexico** (\$60) CASA MAESTRI

**BEST MOONSHINE**  
**Copperheads Southern Shine Original, USA** (\$32) COPPERHEAD'S SOUTHERN DISTILLERY

**SCOTTO CELLARS**

SILVER WHOLESALEERS OF GOLD

DOUBLE GOLD

WINE & SPIRITS WHOLESALEERS OF GOLD

WSWA 76 CONVENTION & EXPOSITION

DOUBLE GOLD: Scotto Family Cellars 2018 Lodi Dry Sangiovese Rosé  
GOLD: J. McClelland 2015 Napa Valley Merlot, Rare Blend NV CA Red Wine, Scotto Family Cellars 2016 Lodi Reserve Zinfandel

SCOTTOCELLARS.COM



## BEST PISCO

**Vinas de Oro Acholado Pisco, Peru** (\$37)  
PREISS IMPORTS

## BEST PREMIXED WINE COCKTAIL

**BuzzTallz Horchata, USA** (\$5) SOUTHERN  
CHAMPION / BUZZBALLZ LLC

## BEST REPOSADO TEQUILA

**Lunazul Reposado Tequila, Mexico** (\$20)  
HEAVEN HILL BRANDS

## BEST RHUM AGRICOLE

**Clement VSOP, Martinique** (\$40)  
SPIRIBAM

## BEST RTD COCKTAIL

**Blue Marble Cocktails Bloody Mary,  
USA** (\$4) BLUE MARBLE COCKTAILS

## BEST RYE WHISKEY

**Rittenhouse 4 Year Straight Rye Whiskey  
Bottled-in-Bond USA** (\$28) HEAVEN HILL  
BRANDS

## BEST SINGLE MALT IRISH WHISKEY

**IrishAmerican Single Malt Irish Whiskey  
10 Years, Ireland** (\$58) IRISHAMERICAN  
TRADING CO

## BEST SMALL-BATCH BOURBON

**Elijah Craig Barrel Proof 12 Years, USA**  
(\$60) HEAVEN HILL BRANDS

## BEST VODKA

**Belaruska Wheat Vodka, Belarus** (\$11)  
VIPRODUCTUSA

## BEST WHITE RUM

**Club Caribe Silver Rum 1 Year, Puerto  
Rico** (\$12) FLORIDA CARIBBEAN DISTILLERS

## DOUBLE GOLD

**Milky Mule, USA** CREAMY CREATION  
**Drake's Organic Premium Vodka, USA**  
(\$20) DRAKE'S ORGANIC SPIRITS, LLC  
**Eau Claire Distillery ParLOUR Gin, Canada**  
(\$38) EAU CLAIRE DISTILLERY  
**Tequila Comisario Ultra Premium  
Reposado, Mexico** (\$55) ELITE BEVERAGE  
INTERNATIONAL  
**Cava De Oro Extra Añejo Tequila,  
Mexico** (\$88) GILDARDO PARTIDA LLC  
**Adictivo Añejo Tequila 2 Years, Mexico**  
(\$50) GILDARDO PARTIDA LLC  
**Sacred Bond Bottled-in-Bond Brandy,  
USA** (\$18) HEAVEN HILL BRANDS  
**Burnetts Vodka 80 Proof, USA** (\$9)  
HEAVEN HILL BRANDS  
**Maya Egnog, USA** (\$11) MINHAS MICRO  
DISTILLERY AND WINERY  
**Joia Spirit Sparkling Greyhound, USA**  
(\$3) PRESTIGE BEVERAGE GROUP  
**Recipe 21 Orange Vodka, USA** (\$8) ROC  
HOUSE BRANDS

**Cask & Crew Orange Roasted Whiskey 3  
Years, USA** (\$25) ROC HOUSE BRANDS  
**Don Q Double Aged Vermouth Cask  
Finish 5-8 Years, Puerto Rico** (\$45) RUMS  
OF PUERTO RICO

**Sagamore Spirit Reserve Port Finish 4+  
Years, USA** (\$70) SAGAMORE SPIRIT  
**James T. Kirk Single Barrell Whisky, 12  
Years, USA** (\$60) SILVER SCREEN BOTTLING  
**1615 Puro Quebranta, Peru** (\$23) TRADE  
COMMISSION OF PERU  
**J. Mossman Platinum Crown 15 Years,  
Scotland** (\$70) TU-BE GLOBAL SPIRITS  
**Rock Rose Gin, Scotland** (\$48) VISION  
WINE & SPIRITS

## GOLD

**Meiyo Single Grain Whiskey 17 Years,  
Japan** (\$299) AIKO IMPORTERS, INC  
**Bandero Tequila, Mexico** (\$35) BOGART'S  
/ BANDERO TEQUILA  
**India Bella Añejo Espadín Mezcal,  
Mexico** (\$50) CASA MAESTRI  
**Round Trip Raicilla Mezcal, Mexico** (\$30)  
CASA MAESTRI  
**21 Seeds Grapefruit Hibiscus Tequila,  
Mexico** (\$35) CASA MAESTRI  
**KUJIRA Single Grain Whisky 20 Years,  
Japan** (\$350) CNS IMPORTS  
**The Shinobu Blended Whisky, Japan**  
(\$50) CNS IMPORTS  
**Basil Gin Cream, USA** CREAMY CREATION  
**Carribbean Crush, USA** CREAMY CREATION  
**Cinnamon Cereal Milk, USA** CREAMY  
CREATION  
**Dano's Dangerous Pineapple &  
Jalapeno Tequila, Mexico** (\$38) DANO'S  
DANGEROUS TEQUILA, INC.  
**Jan Stephenson Pineapple Rum, USA**  
(\$33) DENTED BRICK DISTILLERY  
**Drake's Organic White Rum, USA** (\$20)  
DRAKE'S ORGANIC SPIRITS, LLC  
**Kaiyo Japanese Mizunara Oak Whisky  
The Peated (2nd Edition), Japan** (\$90)  
EGOBV (KAIYO WHISKY & KELT COGNAC)  
**Alto Grande Rum 5 Years, Puerto Rico**  
(\$25) FLORIDA CARIBBEAN DISTILLERS  
**Adictivo Extra Añejo Tequila, Mexico**  
(\$85) GILDARDO PARTIDA LLC  
**Don Cayo Extra Añejo Tequila, Mexico**  
(\$88) GILDARDO PARTIDA LLC  
**Tierra Sagrada Extra Añejo Tequila,  
Mexico** (\$85) GILDARDO PARTIDA LLC  
**Cava De Oro Añejo Tequila, Mexico** (\$60)  
GILDARDO PARTIDA LLC  
**Tierra Sagrada Añejo Tequila, Mexico**  
(\$50) GILDARDO PARTIDA LLC  
**Leaf Alaskan Vodka, USA** (\$14) GLOBAL  
SPIRITS USA  
**Elijah Craig Small Batch Bourbon, USA**  
(\$30) HEAVEN HILL BRANDS  
**Pike Creek Canadian Whisky 10 Years,  
Canada** (\$30) HOTALING & CO.

**IrishAmerican Classic Blended, Ireland**  
(\$39) IRISHAMERICAN TRADING CO  
**Islamorada Gin, USA** (\$28) ISLAMORADA  
DISTILLING  
**Islamorada Hibiscus Gin, USA** (\$28)  
ISLAMORADA DISTILLING  
**Koloa Kaua'i Gold Rum, USA** (\$33) KOLOA  
RUM COMPANY  
**Mermaid Vodka, USA** (\$20) MERMAID  
VODKA (MERMAID MAFIA)  
**Over The Barrel Bourbon, USA** (\$20)  
MINHAS MICRO DISTILLERY AND WINERY  
**Gnarly Oak Barrel Manhattan, USA** (\$20)  
MINHAS MICRO DISTILLERY AND WINERY  
**Olde Imperial MYSTIC Hemp Flavored  
Vodka, USA** (\$25) NOW-BRANDS,LLC  
**Original Jel Shot Co NV Peach Bum,  
Taiwan** (\$4) ORIGINAL JEL SHOT, CO  
**La Fee Absinthe Parisienne, France** (\$71)  
PREISS IMPORTS  
**Puerto Bello Blanco Tequila, Mexico**  
(\$35) PUERTO BELLO TEQUILA  
**Quiereme Mucho Young Mezcal -  
Tepextate, Mexico** (\$95) QM SPIRITS LLC  
(BEVERAGE MARKETING ASSOCIATES)  
**Auténtico Nativo Over Proof Rum,  
Panama** (\$33) ROC HOUSE BRANDS  
**Cask & Crew Ginger Spice Whiskey, 3  
Years, USA** (\$25) ROC HOUSE BRANDS  
**Cask & Crew Walnut Toffee Whiskey, 3  
Years, USA** (\$25) ROC HOUSE BRANDS  
**The Choya Single Year, Japan** (\$18)  
SANTA MARIA IMPORTS LLC  
**Shabo X.O Lukuridze Family Reserve , 10  
Years, Ukraine** (\$8) SHABO  
**Shabo V.S.O.P Grande Reserve, 5 Years,  
Ukraine** (\$2) SHABO  
**Shottys Gelatin Shots Cherry, USA** (\$10)  
SHOTTYS  
**Crooked Fox Burborn Whiskey, USA** (\$28)  
SOUTHERN CHAMPION / BUZZBALLZ LLC.  
**Clement 10 Yr. Grande Reserve,  
Martinique** (\$73) SPIRIBAM  
**Chairman's Spiced Rum, Saint Lucia** (\$28)  
SPIRIBAM  
**Tanduary Rum Dark, Philippines** (\$13)  
TANDUAY DISTILLERS INC./MIDWAY  
TRADING  
**Tanduary Double Rum, 16 and 5 Years,  
Philippines** (\$40) TANDUAY DISTILLERS  
INC./MIDWAY TRADING  
**Tanduary Rum White, Philippines** (\$12)  
TANDUAY DISTILLERS INC./MIDWAY TRADING  
**Tequila Hacienda Sahuayo Blanco Suave,  
Mexico** (\$30) TEQUILA HACIENDA SAHUAYO  
**Ouro 1 Cachaça, Brazil** (\$15) THE BLEND  
SPIRITS  
**Ouro 1 Prata Cachaça, Brazil** (\$15) THE  
BLEND SPIRITS  
**Tom's Town Botanical Gin, USA** (\$30)  
TOM'S TOWN DISTILLING CO  
**Calumet Single Rack Black Kentucky  
Bourbon Whiskey, 12 Years, USA** (\$100)  
WESTERN SPIRITS BEVERAGE COMPANY ■■



*The Man Behind the Brands*



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*Organic*



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# BOURBON'S OLDER BROTHER



Rye whiskey was distilled by America's original risk-takers and history-makers. The bold spirit of choice for patriots and pioneers was made by the barrel-full in colonial Maryland. Our team at Sagamore Spirit is reviving and revolutionizing Maryland-Style Rye. Smooth, approachable and full of flavor. Try it for yourself.

Join our quest to tell the full story of American Whiskey. Share what you know. We'll share it with the world.

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Sagamore Spirit® Straight Rye Whiskey, bottled at 41.5% ABV (83 Proof).



