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Yuki Minemasa is President of the Yoshinogawa saké brewery.



"The food saké that enriches the everyday."

That's how Yoshinogawa President Yuki Minemasa describes the brand, available in the U.S. through SakéOne, an American company whose portfolio includes its own craft saké as well as a handful of other imports. "Yoshinogawa has a roundness to it so that the flavor expands in your mouth as soon as it hits your tongue, but with a very clean and definitive finish," Minemasa says.

The oldest brewery in Niigata Prefecture, Yoshinogawa was founded in 1548 by the Kawakami family, who were samurai during Japan's Edo period. After moving there from Gunma roughly eight years earlier, they'd set up a small outpost in the Settaya area to ply their other trade: koji, a mold used to initiate the fermentation process in the production of soy sauce, miso, and saké. Following defeat in the Boshin War, the Japanese civil war of 1868–1869, the Kawakamis began brewing the rice-based beverage full time.

Today, the company melds tradition with modernity by combining age-old brewing techniques with mechanization. "For an old brewery, it is actually quite important to continuously take on new challenges," Minemasa says. Master brewer Masatsugu Fujino crafts a number of distinct offerings that make use of the soft subterranean water that lies underneath the Yoshinogawa facility, whose name, Tenkakanrousen, translates to "sweet water of heaven and earth." Winter Warrior Junmai Ginjo delivers tropical notes of honeydew and lychee, floral aromas, and a clean, refreshing style; Golden Horizon Echigo Junmai balances citrus and spice with savoriness and sweetness; Shogun Road Gensen Karakuchi mixes earthiness and fruit with a dry, crisp finish; Gokujo Ginjo displays notes of anise, peach, and fresh herbs along with a smooth mouthfeel; and the elegant Daiginjo combines complex aromas and flavors of white flower, strawberry, mint, green herbs, and ginger.

UPERONT



The Yoshinogawa facility in Nagaoka, a city in the Niigata Prefecture.

Minemasa points to a propensity among contemporary saké brewers to regard their product like wine. One current trend is a high-acid, sweet style with intensely fruity aromas that draws comparisons to white wines such as Riesling and Albariño: Yoshinogawa has a product for this category but primarily emphasizes terroir-driven expressions. "We mainly put our focus on bringing out the flavors and umami of the rice," he explains. "Japan is an elongated country stretching from north to south, and so depending on the region, the climate can be quite different."

In Minemasa's view, Americans have embraced saké due to their penchant for trying new things. Having realized that premium brands offer a much more enjoyable experience than cheap saké served warm, consumers are branching out and pairing them with other cuisines besides Japanese, including Spanish, French, and Latin American.

"Our saké is soft [and] mellow, and [it] pairs well with a variety of cuisines," Minemasa explains. He considers Yoshinogawa a surefire match for ovsters and shrimp, as its low iron content means that it won't draw out off-putting aromas in shellfish; he also likes ginjo and daiginjo with wellseasoned foods like fish meunière and cream-based chicken dishes. Delicate dishes like whitefish sashimi or ohitashi (a Japanese vegetable preparation with dashi dressing and bonito flakes) go

nicely alongside equally delicate saké, while stronger-flavored ones like yakitori chicken work with fuller-bodied, richer-flavored profiles.

But Minemasa believes the art of pairing saké goes beyond one-off suggestions to involve a more holistic approach. In Japanese cuisine, chefdriven creativity takes a backseat to the simplicity of fresh, high-quality ingredients, which are treated with reverence to showcase their flavors. And rather than serving a different saké with each course the way sommeliers would during a wine dinner, for example, it's typical for the Japanese to drink the



One Perfect Pairing

While naturally associated with Japanese cuisine, saké is versatile enough to pair with a wide range of foods thanks to its lack of tannins and lower acidity. Try Yoshinogawa Winter Warrior Junmai Ginjo with tangy barbeque ribs, spicy Mexican food, or a good old-fashioned burger with all the trimmings. Kanpai!

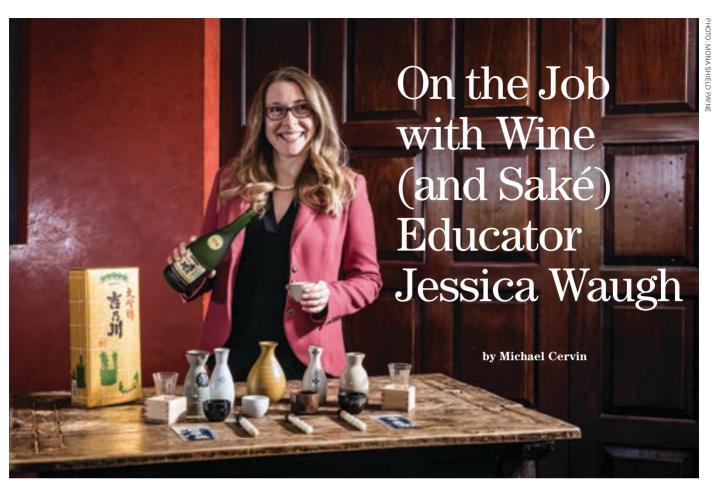
same thing all evening. A Japanese chef's job, then, is to make sure the food and the saké bring out the best in one another, according to Minemasa, who compares them to "two very good supporting cast [members]—neither upstages the other."

With the upcoming 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo comes a renewed interest in all things Japanese—culture, history, fashion, food and drinkespecially for those fortunate enough to travel there. "Hopefully people will get an experience of our worldrenowned hospitality, giving them a good impression regarding Japanese food and saké that lingers even after they return to their home countries," Minemasa remarks.

Following a recent adjustment to Yoshinogawa's labeling, the brand's U.S. bottles now sport a fireworks theme. Pyrotechnics are intrinsically linked to the area surrounding the brewery, which sponsors a huge fireworks show during the summer festival called Sanmyaku Dama. In Nagaoka, the town in which the company is located, fireworks have historically served as a way to memorialize the casualties and console the survivors of the World War II air raids; on the 70th anniversary of the war, Nagaoka and its sister city, Honolulu, both put on an impressive display to commemorate peace.

Since 2004, fireworks have taken on a new significance, symbolizing rebirth and reconstruction after the magnitude-7.0 Chuetsu earthquake. "So these three elements—memorial of the dead, rebuilding of community, and commemorating of peace—are the meaning behind the Nagaoka fireworks," Minemasa says. "[They're] a very meaningful and important way through which we connect with the people of Nagaoka."

The new label design is also a symbol of the brand's philosophy and mission since the 16th century, during which time Yoshinogawa has become an integral part of local culture. "We abide by the philosophy of 'You must change in order to stay the same,' Minemasa says. "We are beloved in our communities in Niigata as the go-to brand of saké they enjoy with their meals. [And] we take pride in being a presence that locals cannot do without."



Jessica Waugh is the Assistant Director of Wine Education for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of Nevada.

Jessica Waugh holds the impressive title of Assistant Director of Wine Education for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits (SGWS) of Nevada, but what exactly does her role entail? As a wine and saké educator, she conducts tastings for both the trade and the public, helps SGWS members with selections for their own tastings, manages sales for Hestan Vineyards, hosts quarterly trade classes in Reno and Lake Tahoe, and handles social media, which includes writing a monthly newsletter. "My biggest challenge is keeping a healthy work-life balance," she acknowledges. "I love my job and am someone who gives 200% to everything I do."

Originally trained in architecture, Waugh has worked as a sommelier in Las Vegas restaurants N9NE Steakhouse, Nove Italiano, Aureole, and Gordon Ramsay Steak. She became an Advanced Sake Professional in 2017 and created the SGWS Academy of Sake and Fine Service. Among her other accreditations is the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) Level 3 Award in Wine, and she's also certified as a WSET Wine Educator, Italian Wine Professional, French Wine Scholar, and Certified Beer Server.

While SGWS has educators nation-wide, Waugh says her position "is slightly different" due to her location. "Outside of Vegas you could find a similar position, but it's important that each educator adapts to the demands of their specific market," she explains, adding that the SGWS Beverage Academy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, offers both trade and public seminars for wine, saké, beer, and spirits. "Our students range from newbies wanting to learn to seasoned veterans in high-priority positions."

Waugh sees mentorship as one of the most important tools for making a personal impact on the industry, whether her students are pursuing paths through the Court of Master Sommeliers, WSET, the Wine Scholar Guild, or other organizations. "I have worked with amazing mentors, [which] inspires me to offer that mentorship to others," she says. "Education and self-determination are key to any position's success. Strive to be the best you can and you will attract positions meant for you."

With respect to saké, Waugh says the category is beginning to "trickle down to the everyday consumer." As she notes, "Even though producers in Japan are decreasing . . . production of premium styles of saké, the most commonly exported [styles] are on the rise; saké exporting volumes are almost double what they were ten years ago."

The time is right, then, for producers like Yoshinogawa to make a splash in the U.S. Specializing in clean, dry, and delicate styles of saké deemed classic in the Niigata Prefecture, it makes its products from the regional rice variety Gohyakumangoku and the aforementioned Tenkakanrousen water (a mix of spring water from Japan's largest river, Shinano, and snowmelt from the local mountains). With the industry trending toward premium brands that focus on purity, Yoshinogawa's motto—"saké that naturally makes you reach for the next sip"—should resonate.



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Silver Medal

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2019 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition





Double Gold Medal

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

Learning to Love Baijiu



What's the bestselling spirit in the world? I'll wager your answer is "vodka," right? Actually, wrong. It's baijiu, a unique distillate made in China and consumed in large quantity by many of the 1.5 billion people who live there.

Baijiu is made by an ancient process that harks back to the Ming Dynasty in the 14th century. Although it has been modernized to some extent, production remains basically the same. Most baijiu is made from sorghum, a grain that those who subscribe to the latest food fads will be happy to know is gluten free. Other usable grains include rice, wheat, corn, and millet, but sorghum is where the action is.

Baijiu, like wine, is aged to smooth and mellow its flavor. Relatively inexpensive entry-level baijiu may rest for as little as a few months, but the good stuff gets several years of aging; the best versions—Moutai for example—can cost several hundred dollars. Many of them come in colorful ceramic bottles. In addition, there are a number of styles, distinguished by their aromas. The four main classifications are light-aroma baijiu, strong-aroma baijiu, sauce-aroma baijiu, and rice-aroma baijiu.

So, you may ask, how did I become such an expert on the category? Well, frankly, I am not in the least—and what I have learned was not by choice. The first time I tasted baijiu a few years ago, I was horrified: To the Western palate, it is weird and funky. But over time, I began to appreciate its unusual qualities.

In June, the first annual Singapore World Spirits Competition was held. Over 90 baijius were entered and, just my luck, most of them landed on my panel. But after nearly an entire day of judging these entries, I had, probably out of selfpreservation, learned to like them—or at least appreciate them.

So there you have it. To broaden your understanding of the world of spirits, you need to try baijiu, but do it with a spit bucket and a glass of cold water handy: Most bottlings are around 100 proof. Then keep trying it—even if you don't like it at first, it's fascinating stuff.

To broaden your understanding of the world of spirits, you need to try baijiu."

REMASTERED

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Traverse City Whiskey Co. Opens Tasting Room in Detroit

raverse City Whiskey Co., also known as the "Whiskey of the North," has opened its first Detroit tasting room, named The Outpost. The brand's full portfolio of whiskeys will be available to taste and purchase on site, including Straight Bourbon XXX Whiskey, American Cherry Edition, North Coast Rye,



Port Barrel Finish, Barrel Proof Bourbon, and multiple exclusive releases. Food will also be available via a condensed menu from neighboring business Como's.

Traverse City Whiskey Co. is an independent and locally owned brand based in Traverse City, Michigan, that's dedicated to producing approachable premium and super-premium whiskey and bourbon. Sourcing all of its grains from the Midwest, the upstart company draws upon its family roots in the distilled-spirits industry dating back to the late 1800s. For more information, visit tcwhiskey.com.

Formula E Championship Comes to New York with Official Partner Heineken

eineken has teamed up with Formula E to serve as an official partner of the ABB FIA Formula E Championship. The fiveyear deal commenced in November 2018, with Heineken joining the electric-street-racing series as its official beer and cider



partner. The final two rounds of the championship brought the action to the streets of Brooklyn's Red Hook neighborhood on July 13-14, with circuit branding, widespread media outreach, PR activation, digital initiatives, and live fan experiences.

An important aspect of

the Formula E partnership will be to further embed Heineken's "Enjoy Responsibly" message; its award-winning campaign "When You Drive, Never Drink" communicates the dangers of drinking and driving. Launched stateside in January 2019, Heineken 0.0 provides a solution for those occasions when consumers want the taste of beer without the alcohol—making it a perfect fit for the Formula E brand.

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines Debuts New Packaging for the Acclaimed J. Lohr Vineyard Series

Lohr Vinevards & Wines has unveiled new packaging for its acclaimed J. Lohr Vineyard Series tier: a rich olive label for white wines and a plum label for red wines, each bearing elegantly stylized gold script and an easy-to-read appellation designation in whiteall balanced by the winery's iconic J. Lohr logo. This pressure-sensitive packaging appeared in select markets in August with the release of the 2017 J. Lohr Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon and will continue to roll out throughout 2019 and 2020.

J. Lohr launched the Vineyard Series tier in 1998 with the Arroyo Vista Vineyard Chardonnay and Hilltop Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon. Since then, it's grown to include Carol's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Tower Road Petite Sirah, October Night Chardonnay, Fog's Reach Pinot Noir, Highlands Bench Pinot Noir, and J. Lohr Late Harvest White Riesling. These limited-production wines showcase the highestcaliber fruit in J. Lohr's 4,000acre, certified-sustainable estate vineyard program. For more information, visit *jlohr.com*.

LET'S GET RIGHT to the POINTS...

Everybody likes to win.

We appreciate receiving high scores, flattering reviews and shiny medals.

But the most important opinion for us is yours; when you make us
the center of a celebration, savor us during an evening out
and allow us to be part of your everyday enjoyment of life.







Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi Partners with NFL Teams

 \bigwedge /oodbridge by Robert Mondavi, one of the top wine brands in the United States, recently announced a new partnership with three NFL teams: the Los Angeles Rams, the Chicago Bears, and the New York Giants. The new agreement commences with this year's season and is supported by a national and regional marketing plan.

Woodbridge is also promoting its new "From One for All" campaign during live sports games, with advertisements running on ESPN and NFL Network for the first time, as well as hosting a national consumer sweepstakes for an unforgettable fan experience during the 2020 NFL season. Another contest will offer chances to win tickets to a 2019 season home game.

To celebrate the partnerships, Woodbridge also debuted a limited-release 375-milliliter can format for its popular Cabernet Sauvignon at a suggested retail price of \$5.99 in the home markets of each team partner, including Southern California, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey. For consumers outside of these select markets, Woodbridge introduced a single-serve 500-milliliter format—also available for \$5.99—that provides consumers with a new way to enjoy Woodbridge Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, and Red Blend on the go.

Don Sebastiani & Sons Promotes Cynthia Gomez to Vice President of Marketing

on Sebastiani & Sons recently announced the promotion of Cynthia Gomez from Director of Marketing to Vice President of Marketing. Gomez previously worked in marketing roles for Trinchero Family Estates as well as Treasury Wine Estates before joining Don Sebastiani & Sons in April 2017.



Among Gomez's accomplishments to date are the rebranding and repositioning of the B Side brand to incorporate a new North Coast appellation and the addition of a Chardonnav and Pinot Noir. She has also been instrumental in the rebirth of Don Sebastiani & Sons brands Simple Life and The Crusher, which have seen doubledigit growth in the past 12 months.

Gomez is also leading the charge of building a robust private-label program by launching several successful wine brands in many top U.S. accounts. In addition to her efforts on the wine side, she's betting big on the company's spirits portfolio, including its high-end tequilas. For more information, visit donsebastianiandsons.com.



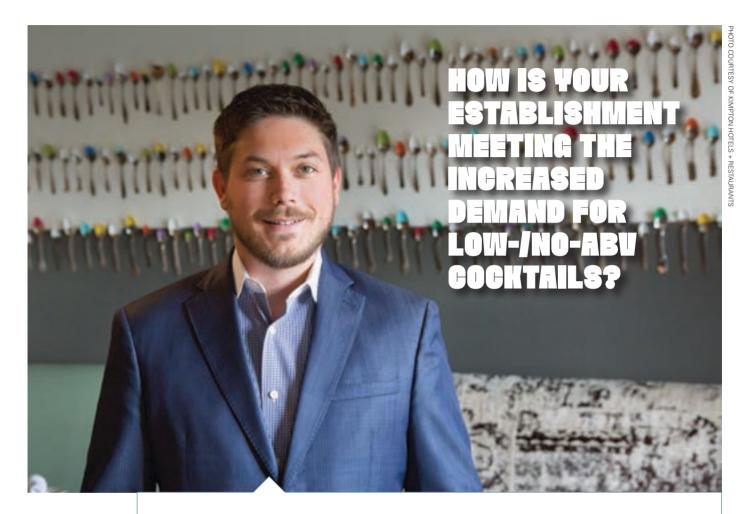
Round Pond Names Erin Robertson as Director of Marketing

liles and Ryan MacDonnell, owners of Round Pond Estate, have announced that Erin Robertson has joined the Rutherford, California-based winery as Director of Marketing. "I am honored to join this prestigious farm-to-tableinspired estate and to work with this impressive team and amazing portfolio of wines," she says.

A graduate of Virginia Tech, Robertson also holds an MBA from Sonoma State University. She has previously worked for Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Laird Family Estate, Grail Wine Selections, and The Robins Cellars in marketing and sales positions. For more information, visit roundpond.com. **11**

MAKE A 94 POINT MANHATTAN





TOMMY GIRRBACH

General Manager/Beverage Director, Bambara, Salt Lake City, UT

Drinking is a little different in Salt Lake than in the rest of the country. We have the strictest drunk-driving rules—.05 blood alcohol [versus] .08—and it's something we keep a close eye on. We want to offer great drinks without anybody becoming impaired. Lower-ABV cocktails have definitely picked up; [for instance], our Floral Ties has Aperol mixed with a little bit of tequila, agave nectar, and lime juice, topped with a low-ABV cider, because Utah also has strict rules when it comes to draft offerings—anything on tap has to be 4% alcohol or lower.

We've also geared a couple of cocktails specifically to non-alcohol drinkers. One that we have on the menu currently is Don't Give Up the Lip. We mix Seedlip Spice 94—which has nice cardamom and grapefruit-peel notes to it—with pomegranate juice, and, since Moscow Mules are popular, we top it with ginger beer. Then we add a sprig of thyme to pull out those citrusy, herbal notes. And we do a blackberry spritz, if you will: We make a blackberry puree, mix some thyme in with that, cook it down to a nice syrupy texture, and strain it. I like to pair it with Fever-Tree tonic for its aromatics, but other [bartenders] go with soda water, and we garnish with lemon zest.

I'm planning on expanding our no-alcohol cocktail selection to the banquet program so we can offer more exciting options than just soda.



akine Nusta

OLIVER SOVOL

Bar Manager, Saba, New Orleans, LA

Within the last year and a half, we've definitely noticed the trend toward lower alcohol; people still want to have a cocktail or two, but then they want to go about their day without feeling encumbered.

We offer three rotating housemade sodas with complex flavor profiles—we try to limit the sugar bombs. Currently we're doing a watermelon shrub, a cucumberlime soda, and a pineapple-eucalyptus soda, which has a menthol undertone that I like with the tropical fruit. This fall, we're going to bring back our housemade root beer, which contains burdock root, sarsaparilla, allspice, star anise, and black peppercorn. So it's not vanilla-heavy; it's spice-driven, almost like an amaro. We'll also do an apple-baharat soda, which is a nice introduction to a spice mix that we use in our cuisine, with cinnamon, nutmeg, black pepper, cardamom, and clove for an apple pie-like flavor.

And we always have at least one low-alcohol offering. Right now, it's the Palmer Park Swizzle. The base is an apéritif called Berto Bianco Vermouth, which has some herbal bitterness and a little bit of a vegetal quality; Lillet Rosé; housemade sage syrup for complexity; blood-orange bitters; and just a dash of lemon juice. The glass is rinsed with Batavia Arrack, which gives [the drink] an earthy, funky quality. It's swizzled with pellet ice and topped with a splash of sparkling wine and a bouquet of fresh mint.

Making low-alcohol cocktails can be a little more complex than making the high-alcohol classics. You don't have that safety net of familiar [spirits]. But I think we're going to have to expand the offerings for our fall list—I'm going to bring it up to two low-alcohol cocktails. I don't think the trend has hit its peak at all; it's getting more traction.



PATRICK NATOLA

General Manager, Town Tavern, Alameda, CA

There's a whole bunch of low-ABV cocktails that already exist, like the Aperol spritz, that we draw inspiration from; rather than try to reinvent the wheel, we take a traditional approach, utilizing fortified wines as bases. [For example,] we have a Martini-esque cocktail called the Fancy Free that's got great botanical flavors to it that you would find in a gin, with bianco vermouth, Cocchi Americano to bring in some drier herbal notes, lemon juice, and some raspberry syrup. Not only is it low-ABV, but because there's already some sugar in the alcohol, we don't have to use as much syrup, bringing down the sugar content for the health-conscious.

When it comes to non-alcoholic cocktails, we're utilizing shrubs. We're fortunate to be living and working in California; there's a farmers market just a block away from us, so we have access to these really fresh fruits and vegetables. Whether we're pureeing or muddling them, they just bring another element of complexity and a sense of freshness that you can't get any other way.

Recently we made a cantaloupe shrub with a little citrus juice, simple syrup, and mint, served on crushed ice and topped off with soda water to give it that effervescence. And because we use a lot of orange peel in cocktails but rarely use orange juice, we have an excess of spent oranges, so right now we're making a nice spiced orange shrub with orange juice, apple cider vinegar, and sugar. We throw in some toasted spices like cardamom, coriander, and allspice and let it sit for 24 hours, and it becomes the base for our Island Sunrise. The vinegar brings some tannin and the spice brings that depth to it, so it really mimics a cocktail.



WHAT DOES GOLF HAVE TO DO WITH MAKING GREAT CHARDONNAY?

Everything. Because at least a couple times a week, Patrick Headley, our Director of Viticulture, takes the narrow road up to Inspiration Point to drive a few golf balls toward our Deer Valley Vineyard. From this vantage point, he gets a clear sense of wind speeds and the temperature of breezes sweeping across our vineyards from Monterey Bay. Next time you visit, look up on the ridge, and you might see Patrick working on his long game.







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

Ryan Judson has been named South Florida Area Sales Manager at Riboli Family Wines. He had been South Florida Area Sales Manager at Frederick Wildman & Sons.

Lauren Ivey has been named Chief of Staff at Treaty Oak Distilling. She had been Executive Assistant at Whole Foods Market.

CAREER CORNER

BevFarce BUZZ:

How Wine and Spirits Companies Are Winning Over Top Talent

ForceBrands' recently released 2019 Talent Market Report, which surveyed more than 500 full-time decision-makers and leaders across the consumerpackaged-goods (CPG) industry, found that 56% of respondents offer customizable benefits packages as a means of appealing more widely to employees across generations. These packages allow individuals to ensure that the things that matter most—like paid leave, insurance coverage, and the ability to work outside of the traditional office space—are prioritized over offerings like gym memberships and summer hours.

The CPG sector that offers the most customizable benefits packages is the wine and spirits industry, which is the "result of several factors," according to Gary Schneidkraut, ForceBrands' Senior Client Strategist in Spirits, Wine, and Beer—predominantly "the influx of a younger workforce and the fact that many of these roles are very far from typical 9-to-5 jobs." He adds, "In the wine and spirits industry, it's incredibly important to have your 'feet on the street' and to be in front of your customers. Employees sometimes need to work remotely if they want to hit their goals—many of which entail client meetings that can involve extensive travel. And as more mature leaders retire, younger employees are entering the workforce with expectations of flexibility, rewards, and mentorship."

As the dynamics of the working world continue to change and younger generations set the tone for what future employee incentives will look like, employers should consider following the lead of the wine and spirits industry to offer customizable benefits. In a talent-driven market, attracting and keeping top talent is key to long-term growth and success.

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



A Recipe for Happy Holiday Pairing

THIS **CHERRY PIE** IS FILLED WITH PINOT NOIR

nly one grape is good enough for the Cherry Pie recipe: Pinot Noir. The brand produces four wines, including three single-vinevard designates—Huckleberry Snodgrass (the Russian River Valley), Stanly Ranch (Carneros), and Rodgers Creek (the Sonoma Coast)—as well as the aptly named Tri-County, a medley of California fruit from Carneros and Monterey and Santa Barbara counties. In each case, says Hilary Berkey, Marketing Director for Vintage Wine Estates, "what we are really focusing on is 100% Pinot Noir from the best vineyards in California."

Such careful sourcing ensures that every margue in the Cherry Pie portfolio is a wine of distinction. Berkey notes that the cherry-cola notes that winemaker Barbara Ignatowski coaxes from the Stanly Ranch vineyard are markedly different than the darkerfruit tones obtained from the warmer Huckleberry Snodgrass, while the Rodgers Creek wine showcases an elevated acidity.

Cherry Pie was born in 2008 out of founder Jayson Woodbridge's passion for Pinot Noir. Inspired by his grandmother's pastry prowess, he named the company in tribute. With their nowiconic labels bearing artist TR Colleta's illustration of the eponymous pie on a checkered tablecloth, the wines have come to represent a cheery fixture at family gatherings. As Berkey points out, that brand image along with Pinot Noir's food-friendliness makes Cherry Pie an obvious choice for Thanksgiving.

"The fact is, [it's] as American as cherry pie. It has this nostalgic feel to it. We live in some difficult times, and it's comforting—it has a huge, loyal following within our portfolio," she says, adding that for the Cherry Pie team, "it's just really nice to be a part of [people's] family."





Cherry Pie 2016 Pinot Noir. Rodaers Creek. Sonoma Coast (\$50)

On a low ridge in the Petaluma Gap, cool air flows from the Pacific and well-draining volcanic-ash soils show off the power of the Pommard and 777 clones that go into this wine; fermented in 500-liter French oak puncheons, it's punched down by hand and aged

in French oak (30% new). Following aromas of tomato leaf, dark chocolate. and brandied plum, heather and black pepper are complemented by textural depth, keeping things savory and brooding. 94 — Meridith May



Cherry Pie 2016 Pinot Noir. Huckleberry Snodgrass, Russian River Valley (\$50) Foggy mornings followed by sun are the M.O. of this AVA. Goldridge soil (loam and sand) allows for good drainage where roots reach deep. Fermented and aged in French oak, this wine yields aromas of underbrush and black-peppered cherries, leading

to a luxurious palate that washes in notes of blackberry and coffee. Dense, opulent, and juicy, it's dressed in formal wear, with rich, spicy notes on the finish. **95** —*M.M.*



Cherry Pie 2015 Pinot Noir. Stanly Ranch. Carneros (\$50) Stanly Ranch, the easternmost vinevard on the Napa Valley side of Carneros, has proven itself as ideal ground for Pinot Noir for more than 70 years. thanks to its well-drained clay-loam soils, gentle slopes, and cool San Pablo Bay breezes. This French oak-aged red offers cin-

namon- and nutmeg-spiced rose-petal aromatics and a hint of forest floor. Mocha-tinged soil and strawberry jam fill the mouth with flavor alongside generous notes of tomato leaf, cranberry, and tobacco. Pretty, feminine, and bright. **95** —*M.M.*



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The Ransom Note is a monthly column by Tasting Panel East Coast Editor David Ransom. Each month, David connects readers with some of the people, products, and events making news along the Eastern Seaboard.

As the Seasons Shift, Must We Change What We Drink?



Provence Wine Group's Bob Gaudreau, Wine Media Guild members Michelle Kwan and Lisa Denning, and Victor Lebel, also of the Provence Wine Group, celebrate Château de Berne with Tasting Panel East Coast Editor and Wine Media Guild Chair David Ransom (center).



story and photos by David Ransom

all always tends to call for more structured wines, but that doesn't necessarily mean I abandon the pink parade altogether in favor of big Cali Cabs. In the past month, I've enjoyed both at a couple of events that made me question whether I still need to think seasonally when it comes to wine.

During a rosé-themed happy hour with some fellow Wine Media Guild members at the Mondrian Park Avenue Hotel's rooftop Rosé Terrace. I got to know the wines of Ultimate Provence and Château de Berne. Both wineries, along with two others, are part of the self-imported Provence Rosé Group; based in Côtes de Provence, it sponsored the terrace for the summer season. I tried four of the company's most recent releases—Romance (\$15), Inspiration (\$20), Up (\$22), and Château de Berne (\$30), all of which were delicious enough to compel me to keep sipping rosé into fall.

Another fun toast to summer's end was the 20th annual Citi Taste of Tennis, a charity fundraiser held each year before the US Open to give players and fans alike a chance to dress up and mingle over fine food and drink in support of the New York Junior Tennis & Learning program. As a former competitive player, I follow tennis almost as much as I follow the wine and spirits industry, and it's always a pleasure to find the two together in one place (just not on court).

This year's event, held at Cipriani 42nd Street, did not disappoint, with about two dozen participating restaurants and numerous beverage sponsors (Heineken included) all volleying for the crowd's attention. My favorite sips came courtesy of Daou Family Estates, which boasts Paso Robles' highest vineyards: 2,200 feet up on Daou Mountain in the Adelaida District. Family member Katherine Daou was on hand to pour a trio of wines including Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, and winemaker Philip Daou's specialty, Cabernet Sauvignon—which prompted me to think that I'll maybe focus on Cali Cabs this winter after all!



This is wine inspired by an era. When daring drinkers sipped wine on the sly and found a loophole allowing doctors to prescribe bourbon. This is a Bold Wine from a Rebellious Time. This is 1924. This is a taste of the American spirit.



Matt Crafton

WINEMAKER AT CHATEAU MONTELENA, CALISTOGA, CA

by Michelle Metter

att Crafton joined legendary Napa Valley estate Chateau Montelena in 2008 as an assistant winemaker and was promoted to his current post in 2014.

We often think of winemaking in romantic terms rather than in technological ones. How do you balance the enduring legacy of Chateau Montelena with advances that are helping to usher the winery into a new era?

I believe technology is a tool—a means to an end—that has to be applied in the context of what we're looking to accomplish. At Montelena, curiosity is certainly encouraged, and we fully respect our history and tradition by innovating rather than trying to relive them. We use technology in places where repeatability and consistency are paramount, and we draw on quantifiable data to help inform our thought process. That's a key point: For us, technology doesn't replace people or the art and creativity in winemaking. Instead, it expands our creative potential, enabling us to make better decisions more quickly, which is vital to a small brand in our world, where deliciousness and ageability in our wine drive decisionmaking in the vineyard and cellar.

What are some significant changes you've made at Chateau Montelena with respect to technology?

I tend to take an integrated approach rather than simply accumulating the latest and greatest toys. Our main goal is to be able to accurately measure stress in the vinevard and correlate that with what we taste, observe, and measure in the wine. We have a ways



to go, but the process has demonstrated potential with actionable results, which is exciting. A significant portion of that is due to our implementation of the right technology.

What do you foresee as the future of winemaking with respect to technology?

It's safe to say that a large-scale, 10-million-case grocery store brand is focused on incorporating technology in different ways [than] a 10,000-case ultra-premium brand. For some, automation, scalability, and efficiency drive the bottom line. For others, information and data can theoretically drive quality. And let's not forget the people who are very happy making wine the way they did in the 1970s. I don't think there's a universal right answer or path forward. But it will be fascinating to watch.

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

If the person has to be alive right now, I'd say Peter Thiel, as he's a brilliant leader, innovator, and builder. I share his optimism for the future and admire his drive and candor. We'd drink the 2015 Chateau Montelena Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, knowing that we could enjoy it again happily in 30 years (on our way to Mars).

SOMM CON

The Tasting Panel and The SOMM Journal are proud supporters of SommCon and its Young Leader Summit, Join world-class educators at SommCon San Diego November 13–15.



Washington State Proud #42

SPOKEN BARREL BESPEAKS BESPOKE QUALITY IN THE COLUMBIA VALLEY

Ashington was the 42nd state to join the USA—hence the number's tie-in on the label of Spoken Barrel Cabernet Sauvignon, proudly made in the Columbia Valley. Winemaker Megan Shofield brings her experience from such prestigious labels as Beringer, SIMI, and Robert Mondavi Winery to craft the brand's bold reds. But in her view, it's the diversity of the best sub-AVAs in the Columbia Valley—offering a multitude of elevations, microclimates, and soils—that allows her to achieve both power and finesse in her expressions. "I'm thrilled to work in one of the world's most unique winegrowing regions," she says. "Washington produces incredible grapes, and its climate means we can make bold, exceptional wines."

Shofield sources fruit from top sites in the three following sub-AVAs.

- (The Wahluke Slope showcases great acidity and balanced tannins thanks to cool nights and sunny days.
- **The Yakima Valley** enjoys long sun exposure despite its cooler climate, resulting in ideal ripening and fine acidity.
- Water from a natural warm artesian well connects to the Cascades in the remote region of Horse Heaven Hills, likewise known for its long sun exposure as well as high winds that keep temperatures moderate all year round. ■





Spoken Barrel 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon #42, Columbia Valley, Washington With an ABV of 13.5%, this red—nicknamed Bold and Complex—represents the 42nd state in our union. Aromas of spiced black beans, dark chocolate fudge, black plum, and baking spices back up the complexity on the nose, which mirrors the palate, with the addition of sweet cherry-pie flavors and spicy plum-skin tannins that are dry yet supple. A blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Syrah, and 3% Merlot, it aged in 60% stainless steel and 40% small French, other European, and American oak barrels. 92

Spoken Barrel 2016 Meritage, Columbia Valley, Washington This Bordeaux blend has an inky black-purple hue and a perfume of blueberry, lavender, and toasted oak. Dense notes of dark plum are accented by black pepper and orange peel. The tannins are round, the flavors are ripe, and the acidity is well balanced. A blend of 41% Malbec, 28% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, and 11% Petit Verdot; 70% aged in small French, other European, and American oak barrels while 30% aged in stainless steel. 91





Room for Adventure

CLEMENTINE IN SAN ANTONIO MAINTAINS AN ESOTERIC WINE LIST story and photo by Lori Moffatt

A utumn technically begins on September 23 this year, but in still-steamy San Antonio, Patrick Frasier will be less likely to reach for a light jacket than for something cool and refreshing to drink.

"To me, fall screams rosé from southern France," says Frasier, Manager and Wine Director at Clementine, where the sunny décor, New Orleans—inspired menu, and idiosyncratic wine list draw guests to the city's north side. "Here in Texas, fall means we can spend time outdoors again. I think of patio parties or fancy camping at the river with cold crab legs, goat cheese, and olives while a whole leg of lamb roasts over open coals—all killer combos with a chilled glass of Provence rosé."

But on Clementine's frequently changing lineup, that French rosé might share space with a sparkling, spicy pink wine from Argentina or a Basque Txakolina. As part of the culinary team led by chef-owners Elise and John Russ, Frasier says that "getting people out of their comfort zones" was a key goal for the wine program.

Here you can find such eclectic options as sparkling Torrontès, Grand Cru Champagne, and Spanish Cabernet Sauvignon as well as lesser-known varieties like Moschofilero and Picpoul Blanc. Interestingly, by allowing customers to bring in their favorites for a corkage fee, Frasier says he's freed up to present more unusual choices on the

wine list. "I get to tell my reps to bring in the fun stuff, the geeky stuff, the esoteric stuff, and we'll find a place for it," he says. "I also keep some bottles off the list, things we like to show to regulars or try off-menu."

Even the rotating house wines might surprise diners accustomed to pedestrian by-the-glass offerings. Current examples include Blanc de Blancs, a Sauvignon Blanc/Viognier blend, a Barbera del Monferrato, and a rosé of Negroamaro, which all find their place alongside such unusual dishes as spinach-and-duck salad, grilled rabbit, and bacon-and-chanterelle tart. "We asked our reps to bring us great wines we could sell at reasonable prices," Frasier says, "and we picked our favorites in the red, white, and bubbles category. We want our house wines to accurately reflect our palate, the best pairing with our food, and our style of service."





PASO ROBLES

Al Fresco into Autumn

BASKING IN SUMMER'S LAST DAYS WITH STEAMED SEAFOOD ON A SUNNY PATIO AND POLITICAL POTABLES ON A ROOF OVERLOOKING THE WHITE HOUSE

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

hen you've had enough of the incessant ringing of the slot machines on the casino floor of MGM National Harbor, there is no better respite than spending time on the expansive Potomac Plaza. Each summer, it becomes the site of a special patio menu at Fish by José Andrés, the world-renowned chef-slash-authorslash-humanitarian. (How does he even find the time for a pop-up?)

On a sunny July evening, my dining companion and I settled into lounge chairs and ordered a round of Andrés' famous Margaritas, which skip the salt rim in favor of a topping of foamy "salt air." (It turns out they pair just as well with freshly shucked oysters here as they do with grasshopper tacos at his Mexican restaurant Oyamel.) The menu serves as an ode to Mid-Atlantic seafood, from steamed Maryland crabs and peel-and-eat shrimp coated with the region's signature seasoning to a lobster boil—I took a cue from the shellfish-loving Galicians and relished it all with Albariño.

The biggest surprise came at the end of the evening, after we had picked all of the sweet lump meat off the last crustacean and deposited the carnage in the handy troughs set in the middle of each table. The restaurant's take on Atlantic Beach pie—North Carolina's answer to key lime pie—deconstructed the dessert by sprinkling a dollop of creamy, lemony custard with Ritz

Among POV's politically inspired cocktails is the Bi-Partisan with Ambrosia liqueur from D.C. distiller Don Ciccio & Figli.



The summer patio menu at Fish by José Andrés is an ode to Mid-Atlantic seafood, from steamed Maryland crabs to a lobster boil.



Thanks to a \$50-million renovation, rooftop bar POV now features floor-to-ceiling retractable glass for panoramic views of the city.

Cracker crumbs, blueberries, and whipped cream.

While Fish lies on the casual end of the spectrum, you can't help but feel fancy when you pass through the velvet rope and take the elevator up to rooftop bar POV at the W Hotel, where you can practically call out to the snipers standing guard on the roof of the White House. (We don't recommend trying that, though.) After a \$50-million renovation, the renowned lounge has reopened with floor-to-ceiling retractable glass so you can soak in the views year round.

The cocktail program, now led by Amsterdam-based hospitality agency Cocktail Professor, features politically inspired libations with tongue-in-cheek names: Take the bourbon-and-ginger beer tipple dubbed the Stormy Jack Daniels or the elegant Cognac sip named Make America Grape Again. But it's the Bi-Partisan—a French 75 variant with Ambrosia liqueur from local distiller Don Ciccio & Figli—that we all need right now. Deviled eggs topped with a precarious heap of crab meat are a worthy accompaniment, as is the crispy calamari with garlic sauce.

And I don't care if you're the most anti-selfie person in the world: You must, as my best friend and I did, grab your glass and pose with the towering Washington Monument in the background. From this point of view, the capital city is oh so pretty.

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



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GREAT VALUE

92

POINTS

tastingpanel

Aromas of dark fruit jam, chocolate and vanilla.

Blueberry pie, custard and mocha flavors meld with

spices from the Brandy barrel aging.



HOT PROPERTIES



The Atticus Hotel in McMinnville is in the heart of Oregon wine country.

An Homage to Craftmanship

THE ATTICUS HOTEL BRINGS LUXURY TO THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY'S WINE TRAIL

Deyond bringing luxury lodgings to the heart of Willamette Valley wine country, the Atticus Hotel has made a statement by showcasing the work of local artisans. The 36-room hotel is downtown McMinnville's focal point, where writers, artists, food purveyors, and more are celebrated for their cultural talents: Their books, paintings, furniture, and other crafted items accent the property's rooms and common areas.

General Manager Ben Perle oversees the busy establishment, which opened in early 2018 and sees a nonstop stream of seasonal guests from April through the end of October. "There are over 200 wineries nearby," he notes, "so there's lots of interest here for wine lovers and beverage professionals."



Ben Perle, General Manager of the Atticus Hotel in McMinnville, OR.

Some of the valley's finest dining spots—including the hotel's own eatery, Red Hills Kitchen—as well as 18 tasting rooms can be found within walking distance. "Owners Erin Stephenson and Brian Shea conceptualized the hotel and its amenities," Perle says. "The Atticus is their love letter to the community." —Meridith May

Birdie G's Takes Off

CHEE JEREMY FOX FLIES WITH THE SEASONS IN SANTA MONICA, CA

irdie G's is off to a soaring start in Santa Monica, California: Led by James Beardnominated chef Jeremy Fox, the much-hyped destination restaurant opened in June in a minimalist, airy space that previously housed an art museum.

The supper club-inspired menu offers a playful overview of European fare's evolution across the U.S over the past century. Runaway hits thus far have been the relish tray, beef-strawberry Bolognese on Texas toast,



The dining room at Birdie G's in Santa Monica, CA.

Sardinian gnocchi in walnut pesto, Persianspiced lamb, and rose-petal pie, according to Fox, who adds that he's looking forward to "filling the wood grill with persimmons, koginut squash, and sunchoke kabobs" this fall and winter, as well as to serving heavier meat-centric dishes like pork-and-sauerkraut iota and Belgian beef stew.

Wine and book lovers alike will be pleased with the novella-length wine list, which features recognizable labels from California, Oregon, and France alongside a more adventurous selection of natural wines that warrant a special visit in their own right.

Already at the forefront of the coastal city's teeming restaurant scene, Birdie G's is located along the Metro Exposition Line at the 26th Street/Bergamot station. If you want to reduce your carbon footprint while expanding your culinary horizons over kasha cakes and skin-contact white wine, just jump on the train. For more information, visit birdiegsla.com.

—Eric Marsh

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A Year in the Life of a

French Spirit

GUILLOTINE HERITAGE VODKA IS SOON TO BE ON EVERYONE'S LIPS—AND BACKBARS

story by Ruth Tobias / photos by Cal Bingham



At Ago in Los Angeles, the Antoinette cocktail combines Guillotine Heritage with fresh bloodorange juice, triple sec, and sweet-and-sour mix.

Pictured at left at Culina in The Four Seasons Los Angeles at Beverly Hills: Black Magic, made with Guillotine Heritage, Carpano Antica, and black-walnut bitters. At right is the Seventeen89, a blend of Guillotine Heritage, ginger beer, and lime juice garnished with rosemary and candied ginger.



n our year-long series of profiles on Los Angeles-area bartenders working with Guillotine Heritage vodka, we've seen it all. Porta Via in Pacific Palisades gave us a sprightly spin on an Old Fashioned, flavored with cherry and orange; Katana on the Sunset Strip offered a darker twist marked by amaro and black-walnut bitters. From Culina in the Four Seasons Los Angeles at Beverly Hills came the Seventeen89, a rosemary-scented update on the Moscow Mule; Ago on Melrose Boulevard, meanwhile, served its blood orange-splashed Antoinette cocktail with grilled octopus and potatoes alongside lemon-dressed cherry tomatoes. And then there was EP/LP's Sun King, featuring watermelon, Aperol, and pink peppercorns.

Singling out the latter as "sweet, spicy, a little tart, and very refreshing," Guillotine founder and CEO Paul Berkmann adds that "it's been really amazing to see the variety of specialty cocktails [these establishments] have created using Guillotine." No doubt it will be even more gratifying to see what bartenders across the country do with the French brand once it becomes available in key U.S. markets; Berkmann promises that day is coming soon. "In the grand sense, our goal is to introduce the world to the finest artisanal spirits, starting with [our] ultra-premium vodkas," he says. Like Guillotine Originale, the aforementioned Guillotine Heritage is made not from grain but from French grapes. As if that weren't enough of a surprise, it's also barrel-aged, deriving its rich, almost-mahogany hue from the time it spends in Limousin oak foudres—in other words. Cognac barrels.

Less surprising is the high quality apparent in both labels. "What's most important to us is that we produce a vodka of exemplary quality that represents a modern expression of traditional French savoir fare," explains Berkmann. "Our work has led us to using the finest Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes from Champagne to create spirits that are vegan and gluten free, [with] no coloring or flavoring agents, no glycerol, and no citric acid. We are 100% French, 100% natural, and 100% confident that our vodkas will exceed the expectations of discerning drinkers around the world."

But first they have to raise consumer awareness, Berkmann acknowledges. To that end, they recently completed their first creative campaign, which he describes as "a beautiful artistic series produced by a trio of superstars." They include renowned celebrity photographer Moshe Brakha of Brakhax2; Paris-based creative director Tho Van Tran of VanPlus: and wardrobe stylist Franck Chevalier, who has worked with everyone from Leonardo DiCaprio to Cher. Adds Berkmann cheekily, "You'll be seeing it soon . . . Coming to a billboard near you!"



A POIS ("TAD") DORDA IGNITED A SPARK THAT CHANGED THE CATEGORY ("TAD") DORDA IGNITED A SPARK THAT CHANGED THE CATEGORY by David Gadd

hen you name a vodka after Poland's most famous musician, vou had better know the score. Since 1992, when he launched Chopin as the world's first ultra-luxury vodka, Tadeusz ("Tad") Dorda has orchestrated a portfolio that now includes three single-ingredient expressions—Chopin Potato Vodka, Chopin Rye Vodka, and Chopin Wheat Vodka—as well as Chopin Family Reserve, rested in 50-year-old Polish oak barrels for two years. Small-batch, vintage-dated potato vodkas are also released periodically in the Chopin SINGLE range.

"Chopin was spawned from a high level of curiosity and slight disappointment," Dorda says. "Poland is the birthplace of vodka, and there are so many kinds, but I couldn't find one that truly excited me—so I decided to make my own. Building on a foundation of tradition, passion, determination, and a lot of hard work, we created Chopin, which ignited a spark. That spark turned into a fire, and Chopin changed the vodka category."

Crafted on a 17-acre, 18th-century Polish property, Chopin is a true estate spirit. Now a second-generation family business, it's one of the few vodka producers in the world that has ownership of its own distillery, making 100% of its alcohol from raw, hand-selected ingredients.

The Chopin Vodka portfolio consists of Chopin Potato Vodka, Chopin Rye Vodka, Chopin Wheat Vodka, Chopin Family Reserve, and vintage-dated potato vodka expressions in the Chopin SINGLE range.

"I believe that all agricultural products, especially those grown in the ground, have the flavor of the terroir," says Dorda. "If someone enjoys knowing the origins of the spirits they consume, I would say Chopin is the [vodka] for them." But terroir by itself, he adds, "is not a guarantee of a wonderful product; many other elements must be considered. We take great care with every step of the process [of] turning our raw ingredients to spirits. Combine that with the fact that we are at the mercy of Mother Nature, and you can imagine doing it properly is a lot of hard work."

Dorda is out to overturn preconceptions that vodka is "tasteless," for use only in cocktails. "It's a monumental task," he admits. "Much of my quest to change the perception of vodka centers around considering [it] as a sipping product... Curiosity and consideration are key." His single-ingredient expressions, he adds, are central to enhancing consumer awareness of vodka's diversity: "It isn't until consumers experience all three... that they can truly taste and appreciate the differences," Dorda notes.

Dorda eschews flavored vodkas because "generally, flavored vodkas require some artificial flavoring or chemicals. At Chopin, we do not want anything unnatural in our bottles. Flavored vodkas add a taste, and each Chopin expression already has a unique taste."

That doesn't mean he's finished composing the grand opus that is Chopin. "We are just scratching the surface of what we can do with potatoes," the maestro says. "Different varietals, when we harvest, how we distill, whether we age in barrels, the types of barrels—it all affects the taste, the aroma, and, in some instances, the color. It's a journey. We are constantly experimenting, making things, and having fun doing it."

For our full interview with Tad Dorda, visit tastingpanelmag.com.







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– Herman Melville's Moby Dick

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DOWN THE AISLE

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!

I TALKIE 😱

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

2 TALKIES 🔬 🚇

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

3 TALKIES Q Q Q

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

4TALKIES Q Q Q

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

5 TALKIES Q Q Q Q

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

Prepping for the Lolidaus

Not only will these wines look great on your shelves but they're all food-friendly enough to work with whatever your customers are preparing for the holiday season. We suggest you tell them to pair the Madeira with pecan pie and Planes, Trains, and Automobiles, because that's the best Thanksgiving movie there is. End of discussion.





Banfi 2014 Cuvée Aurora, Alta Langa, Italy (\$30) Ready to

drink now, this 100% Pinot Noir from Banfi's hilltop vineyards in the Alta Langa is made in the metodo classico. The 2014 vintage offers searingly bright raspberry and creamy Greek yogurt laced with dried roses. Ethereal yet deeply satisfying, it's a versatile sparkler that will work with nearly anything on the holiday menu.

BANFI WINES





Portolupi 2017 Barbera, Pauli Ranch, Mendocino County (\$45) Hailing from Pauli Ranch

on the border of Mendocino's Redwood Valley AVA, this formidable Barbera nods to its Asti roots via higher acid and distinct notes of anise, which combine with ripe strawberry and plum as well as clove and cigar box. Truly one of the better domestic examples of the northern Italian variety, it would serve quite well alongside red meat. Only 358 cases produced.



9996

Talley Vineyards 2017 Pinot Noir, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$42) Sharp and bright with a bit

of soft smoke in a medium-plus body. The palate is multifaceted, with flavors ranging from raspberry, cherry, cranberry cocktail, and earth to charred cherrywood and asphalt, plus a touch of purple flower.



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~ STEVE PECK

Director of Winemaking



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Gary Farrell 2017 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$35) This 100% Chardonnay, aged nine months in 30% new French oak, has all

the makings of a pie: yellow apple, brown butter, and shortcrust with a dry and pithy finish. A touch of chalk chimes in briefly on the palate.

VINTAGE POINT



Allegretto 2018 Rosé of Tannat, Allegretto Vineyards, Paso Robles (\$32) Ripe watermelon joins notes of cherry blossom, white cherry,

and lemon peel in a substantial, medium-plus-bodied, small-production wine (80 cases).



a a a a

Alloy Wine Works, Rosé Central Coast, California (\$7/375mL) This blend of 70% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre, 5% Chardonnay, and 5% Chenin Blanc packs a punch with

tons of citrus and the slightest suggestion of bright strawberry. Even if you don't have a koozie (and why would you ever drink out of can without a koozie?), there's still enough acid here to prevent it from getting flabby. An excellent canned option with clear, modern packaging and abundant notes of grapefruit, carnations, and spearmint. VINTAGE WINE ESTATES



Farmhouse 2018 Red Wine, California (\$15) This is a sustainably farmed crowd-pleaser with great packaging. The palate exudes boysen-

berry jam, milk chocolate, black pepper, and candied coconut—even the texture is a bit jelly-like.

CLINE CELLARS



Benessere Vineyards 2017 Sangiovese, Napa Valley (\$38) Offering dark, ripe cherry and plum tinged with almond skin, this full-bodied

wine finishes with plenty of acid. Part of the Napa Green Certified Land program, Benessere Vineyards also has a Fish Friendly Farming certification.



Miles 10-Year-Old Rich Madeira, Portugal (\$29)

Dried apricot, walnut, and honeycomb make a statement in this Tinta Negra-based Madeira. The fruit was fermented on the skins in temper-

ature-controlled stainless-steel tanks and aged in the traditional Canteiro method. VINEYARD BRANDS

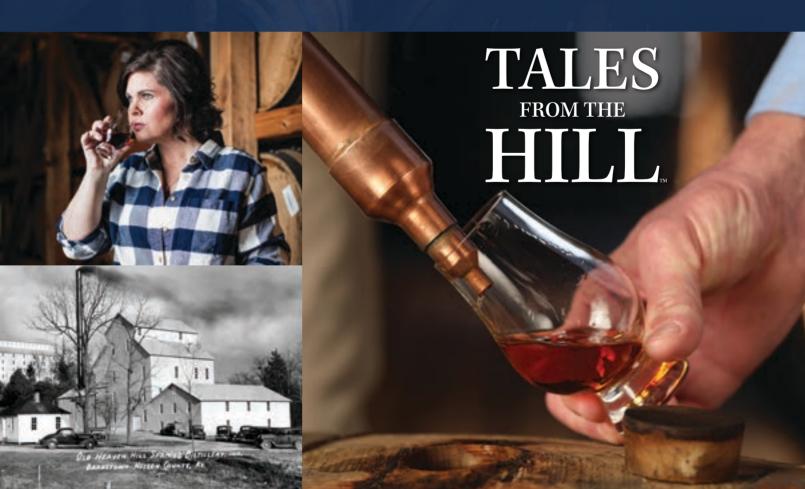




Introducing Our New Podcast

Heaven Hill Distillery has been distilling and patiently aging American Whiskey for more than eight decades. Now, it's time to share the stories behind those whiskeys and the people who make them on our new podcast, *Tales from the Hill*. From our early days after the end of Prohibition through today's Bourbon boom, our podcast dives deep into the heritage of Heaven Hill Distillery, told by the people who know it best. Grab your favorite whiskey and listen now wherever you get your podcasts.

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np and Provenance

SCOTLAND PROVES THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SELL A WHISKY

by Ian Buxton



ne of the great debates in marketing circles is whether or not a product can sell itself: Should one promote one's brand by emphasizing the roots and provenance of the product or with celebrity endorsements and tie-in licensing? That debate has come into sharp focus as two distilleries take contrasting but equally valid approaches to the launches of some very different products.

Step forward, Bruichladdich. The Islay distillery has just released the Barley **Exploration Series**, which comes complete with a 12-page brochure that includes

meticulous detail on the different barley types used and the farms where they were grown. It also features a short essay on the brand's philosophical approach to production, which, in the distillery's words, stands in opposition to a "convenience culture" where "our supermarkets are filled with underpriced, overpackaged, out-of-season produce."



The series includes three whiskies: The Organic; Bere Barley (made from an archaic but historically and genetically important strain); and Islay Barley, sourced 100% from its namesake. All are between six and eight years of age, non-chill filtered, uncolored, and bottled at the distillery at 50% ABV. Malt mavens will want to try all three of these tasty expressions, whose provenance provides a jumpingoff point for an absorbing discussion on the cultural significance of Scotch whisky. Importer Remy Cointreau USA aims to distribute the Barley Exploration Series to select retailers with a suggested price point of roughly \$100 per bottle.

Contrast that release with the latest from Johnnie Walker, which claims to mark the enduring legacy of the Game of Thrones TV series. Introduced in collaboration with HBO, A Song of Ice and A Song of Fire are inspired by House Stark and House Targaryen, respectively. The press release asks us to believe that "together, the two new whiskies celebrate the dynamic relationship between the Houses, represented by their house sigils—the Direwolf and the Dragon—which fiercely adorn each bottle." Or they could, of course, simply be celebrating a licensing deal. In any case, at an SRP of \$36, they'll doubtless appeal to the show's legions of fans—but perhaps less so to whisky enthusiasts seeking the latest single malt.

Good thing Diageo, Johnnie Walker's parent company, has the connoisseurs covered too. Some details of the 2019 Special Release collection have just been revealed, though price and availability remain under wraps. This year, the series includes eight cask-strength single malts from Mortlach, Singleton Glen Ord, Cragganmore, Cardhu, Lagavulin, Talisker, Dalwhinnie, and the closed Pittyvaich distillery, all ranging between 12 and 30 years of age.

Some consumers will surely lament the exclusion of drams from Port Ellen and Brora, but both iconic distilleries are reserving their remaining stock for promotional purposes when they resume production in 2020-2021. It's a one-way wager that their marketing initiatives won't feature characters from a fantasy show!





NoMad's famous roast chicken is stuffed with foie gras and truffles.



Savoring Truffle Season All Year Round

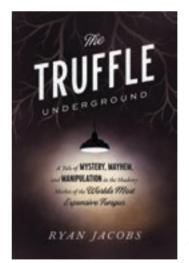
n a recent trip to the Yuba River in Northern California, a friend asked me about the book I'd brought along. "It's about mushrooms," I responded, only to be met with a look of confusion. While not your typical beach read, The Truffle Underground: A Tale of Mystery, Mayhem, and Manipulation in the Shadowy Market of the World's Most Expensive Fungus by investigative reporter Ryan Jacobs is a thrilling deep dive into the truffle industry. Beneath the delicate slivers of "black diamonds" that may garnish your pasta at a Michelin-starred restaurant lies robbery, murder, and other crimes—all over a fungus that remains mysterious despite decades of research.

As I spent hours in the sun devouring the book, I followed the adventures of truffle farmers while learning about everything from the difficulties of raising truffle-hunting dogs to the possible involvement of the mafia in truffle exports. The delicacy's popularby Jesse Hom-Dawson

ity has waxed and waned throughout the years, its reputation somewhat tarnished by inferior products like truffle salt and truffle oil drizzled on mac and cheese or fries. But tasting true, fresh truffles—shaved and scattered lightly across a plate of risotto, say, or stuffed with foie gras into NoMad's famous roast

chicken—is a wondrous experience, albeit one that often only the wealthy (or those who write about food for a living) can afford.

Indeed, the price of truffles can be exorbitant—around \$92 per ounce for the winter black variety and almost double that for the famed Italian tartufo bianco. But after you've read The Truffle Underground, the cost may



seem low given the work involved in growing and harvesting them. There's no exact science when it comes to cultivation. and it's still unknown why the fungal spores attach themselves to certain oak trees and how they can be deprived of essential nutrients by stronger fungi after germination. There are many, many things that must align

for a truffle to grow—and even when they do, humans can only get to them by training animals to sniff out where they're buried beneath the earth.

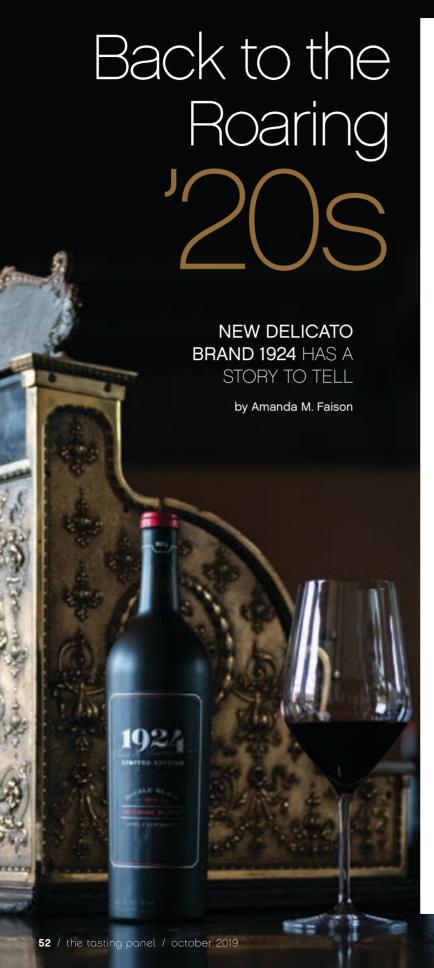
I found *The Truffle Hunter* the perfect summer read, as engrossing as any crime novel and as scandalous as any romance. Although the season has come to an end, the book should be a mustread for any foodie, all year round.



PUMPKIN SPICE

& everything nice





he year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the signing of the 18th Amendment into law. The Prohibition era, with its flappers and bathtub gin and secret passwords for backroom bars, has since transcended history to become a legend whose surreptitious theme forms the backbone of Delicato Family Wines' newest breakout brand: 1924.

Originally launched under the Gnarly Head umbrella as a deep, dark red blend, 1924 Double Black aimed to pay homage to the wine of choice at the era's speakeasies. Its dense aromas of blackberry and cocoa and dried-fig notes on the palate were a hit with consumers—so much so that this year, four years after its initial debut, 1924 was established as a standalone brand. (The name is a nod to the year the founders of Delicato Family Wines first planted grapes in California—a rebellious act in and of itself in the midst of Prohibition.)

Three expressions are offered, all made with Lodi grapes in what's become 1924's signature robust and inky style: the much-loved original red blend, a Cabernet Sauvignon, and a bourbon barrel-aged Cabernet Sauvignon. It's the latter that carries the Prohibition theme the furthest by playing off the little-known fact that doctors of the time sometimes prescribed their patients bourbon.

"That detail really resonated with us and fit our story well," says Andrew Blok, Portfolio Director for Delicato Family Wines, "especially considering that there's a trend of aging wines in barrels that were previously home to spirits." As Vice President of Brand Marketing Kathy Pyrce explains, "Spirit-aged wines continue to surge in popularity, growing 46% in the last year. Cabernet is king, making the 1924 Bourbon Barrel Aged Cabernet Sauvignon a perfect fit for our portfolio." Their version is a big, bold Cab with enough of bourbon's telltale caramel and spice to suggest there's a tantalizing backstory waiting to be told.

The brand's Prohibition motif toggles between overt and subtle, with a tagline—"Bold wine for a rebellious time"—that grabs the imagination. The bottles, meanwhile, are made of blacked-out, frosted glass that obscures the wine from view, recalling that consumption took place behind closed doors during the temperance movement.

The brand-awareness party Delicato held in New York City on September 26, however, was anything but hush-hush. The company took over Bathtub Gin in Chelsea and played up the speakeasy vibe, requiring a secret password for entry by guests dressed in Roaring '20s fashions. The success of the event echoed that of the wines themselves, inspiring consumers as well as partygoers to look both forward and back: With just one sip, 1924 offers a taste both of something new and of the enduring American spirit.







Music-festival activations are key to SVEDKA Rosé Vodka's marketing plan.

Pink Power svedka rosé adds a jolt of color to the vodka category

by Jess Lander

osé all day" is no longer just a wine drinker's rallying cry. Arriving fashionably late to the pink party, SVEDKA has hopped on the rosé train, and it's moving full speed ahead.

"Rosé wine consumption has really been on fire, and that growth has been pretty consistent . . . for a long time," says SVEDKA VP of Marketing Jaymie Schoenberg. "It's really sort of transcended a wine product and become a lifestyle. We saw an opportunity to take that lifestyle and bring it into the vodka category."

With 5% rosé wine blended into the base spirit, SVEDKA Rosé Vodka was designed to be enjoyed three

ways: solo, mixed, or incorporated into a frozen cocktail. The frosé, served

Served in a clear pouch with a straw, SVEDKA Rosé Vodka frosé proved a hit at launch and on-premise events across the country.

nationwide at a series of launch and onpremise events in a clear pouch with a straw, has been especially popular.

Because there are "a tremendous amount" of consumers seeking products across categories, Schoenberg says the SVEDKA team wanted the new expression "to taste like a vodka, but have that rosé style be prominent as well. It has aromas that are very fruit-forward, [as] you would expect from a wine, but then it's mouthwatering and bold in flavor, [as] you'd come to expect from SVEDKA products."

The Rosé Vodka launched on the heels of "Bring Your Own Spirit," SVEDKA's first national television campaign in years. "It's about celebrating your fearless, original, and unapologetic self and point of view," says Schoenberg, "When we launched the Rosé, we wanted to do so in the same spirit." SVEDKA came up with bold taglines—"Vodka with a Wine Fetish" and "Not Wine, Not Sorry"—in an effort to get people talking, and they did: The brand has seen a higher rate of engagement and organic reach on its digital and social-media platforms as a result.

Yet one of its largest and most successful marketing investments has been on

the ground, namely at music festivals. In July, SVEDKA set up a Rosé

> at Chicago's Pitchfork Music Festival; serving up a selection of cocktails, it was the event's number-onegrossing activation. After showing up at Electric Zoo in New York. SVEDKA will also bring the bar to All My Friends in Los Angeles this month.

"Since the launch of this new campaign, the growth of the business has accelerated, new consumers are coming

into the franchise at an increased rate, and current customers are purchasing more," says Schoenberg, adding that the brand has seen an uptick in sales for all its top flavors. It's up 6% for the year to date and is growing three times faster than the vodka category as a whole. As Schoenberg sums up, "The new awareness campaign on TV, complemented by these rosé activations, are really accelerating the momentum of the business like we haven't seen in years past."



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

Leigh Lacap

Bar Director at Campfire and Jeune et Jolie, Carlsbad, CA



You grew up in San Diego and have worked all over the city. How would you describe the bar scene there?

I think San Diego has finally settled into its own. We have shed the dressed-up formality of the Prohibition-style cocktail culture that I think started us off. What has taken over is the welcoming, laid-back vibe that you should get from a sunny city so close to the beach. Behind that veil, however, is a [passion for] local produce and culinary technique, with heavy doses of agave and tiki. The community is tight-knit and super supportive of one another. I adore it—wouldn't change a thing.

How would you describe your style or approach when it comes to creating

I'm fond of concepts and themes these days; it gives me borders and restraints. Rather than being excited about a new product (which still happens frequently) and using that as a basis for something new, I like to recall specific dishes I've eaten and places I've been. From there, I try to replicate what I've tasted, smelled, and seen.

What can patrons expect or look forward to when they come for drinks at Jeune et Jolie?

I hope to take everyone on a world tour on a French airline, so to speak. Expect lots of strange, hard-to-pronounce [ingredients] that yield subtle, easy-to-drink cocktails. Things might look absurd or scary on paper, but the drinks are good, I think. For the sake of anyone kind enough to order a cocktail, I'd never put a drink on a menu that I wouldn't drink three of.

Cesar Sandoval

Bar Manager at Il Dandy, San Diego, CA



You are a first-generation American and have strong roots in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Does your culture and heritage impact your bartending style?

I think it's influenced me to care for and respect people as much as what I put in the glass. The love factor is just as important as any other ingredient—it has also been the reason why I admire agave spirits so much. I already see a lot of cool things that Mexican bartenders are doing, but there is still much more to learn. I hope to be able to make a difference by teaching and learning with my fellow Mexicanos.

What was your approach to creating the bar program at Il Dandy?

The general approach was to [highlight] the simplicity and quality of ingredients, which is what Italian cuisine is all about. All of our cocktails were developed to please all types of moods and cravings. We are using the same scratch methods that chefs Antonio and Luca [Abbruzzino] use. For example, in our Running Wilde cocktail, we want flavor but not so much sugar, so we add rosemary, thyme, dill, a small amount of sugar, and water and sous vide it for two hours at 65 degrees Celsius. It ends up bringing the whole cocktail together and making it come alive.

What advice would you give to aspiring bartenders?

I would advise to take it slow and master every position that it takes to run a successful bar. In society today, where everything is about instant gratification, everyone always wants to skip steps. But to be a great bartender, you first have to be a great barback. I've been bartending for 11 years now and there is still room to grow. Take the initiative, learn why drinks work a certain way, read books, and ask questions.

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





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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 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.

The Buzz —

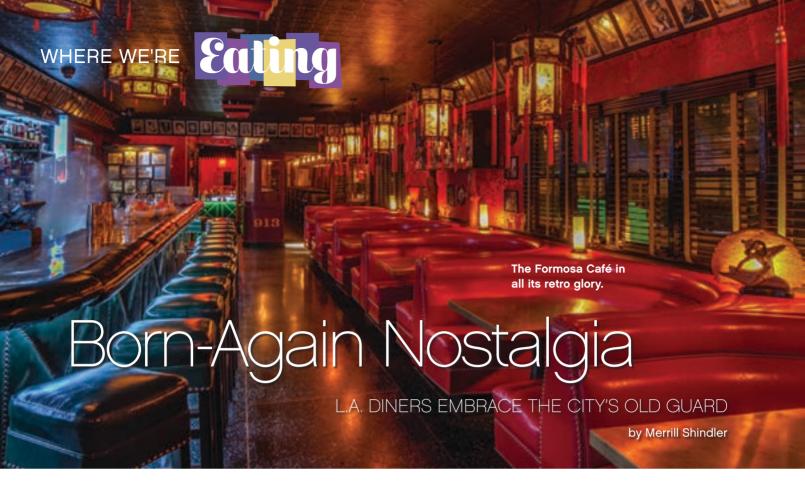
Medal winners receive immediate exposure to a buying audience; digital and print recognition; and promotional, license-free marketing assets with which to promote their award. Winners will receive:

- · 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
- A digital medallion for use on websites and in newsletters as well as print and digital advertisements
- 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

Concours d'Spirits Entries ————

Entries for the 2019 Concours d'Spirits cost \$695; none will be accepted after November 1. Each submission requires a separate registration and payment is due at the time of entry.





live in a city where restaurants serve, among other tasty pleasures, deepfried silkworms, uterus tacos, and salted and fermented bonito intestines. They're all great when you're in the mood for adventure, but every now and then, in these modern times, you just want comfort. That need is often satisfied by establishments that happily whisk you back to bygone days when the meals were square and the cocktails were strong, honest, and abundant.

And thus in Los Angeles, which may be as progressive a city as we have in America, an unexpected trend has dawned before us: a revival of oldschool restaurants, brought back from the dead by chefs who want to do it the way it was done before they were born.

The Formosa Café, which opened in West Hollywood in 1939, was a Tinseltown version of a Chinese restaurant: all red lacquer, chop suev, and chow mein, with a lively bar (the Yee Mee Loo) and a following among the celebrity set. You can still see their pictures on the wall—Frank Sinatra, John Wayne, Humphrey Bogart, Boris Karloff, and hundreds more—many of them autographed. The place was more Chinatown than Chinatown. (Forget it, Jake, it's Hollywood.)

And then, in 2016, it closed. It took

three years for The Formosa to be saved from the wrecking ball, but in 2019, it reopened after a team of Hollywood archivists (backed by hospitality outfit 1933 Group) set about restoring it. The egg rolls, orange chicken, and fried rice are all back, as are the pair of bars that serve Mai



Classic Cantonese chow fun at The Formosa Café.

Tais and Singapore Slings, Matadors and Blood & Sands—drinks the mostly young clientele are often trying for the first time and enjoying to the very edge of excess.

About 10 miles to the southwest in Culver City sits a fabled hot spot called Dear John's, which first opened in 1962. The interior is so dark that an escort at

the bar is tasked with guiding diners to their tables. Unlike The Formosa, it seems this restaurant won't survive the wrecking ball, as it's scheduled for demolition two years hence. But in the meantime, a pair of notable local chefs—Hans Rockenwagner and Josiah Citrin—have taken a flyer on the place,

> reconceptualizing it as a cocktail joint with a deeply retro menu after a temporary closure a few years ago. This is where you go for a perfect shaken Martini, served with a pair of olives.

> As for the food, take your pick between classics like Caesar salad—made on a rolling cart next to your table—or crab Louie; ovsters Rockefeller, sand dabs in lemon-caper butter, or lobster Thermidor; and creamed corn or spinach.

In a city where many are obsessed with healthy living, Dear John's may seem like an outlier, yet it's packed with celebs and locals who love pretending that JFK is still in the White House and Ozzie and Harriet are on the black-and-white. Being there soothes the soul—and the Martinis sure don't hurt.

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Hollywood Distillery founders and "partners in hooch" Ferris Wehbe, Larry Neuberg, and Jeff Zarrinnam.



A California Oasis: Hollywood Distillery





hen "partners in hooch" Ferris Wehbe, Jeff Zarrinnam, and Larry Neuberg established Hollywood Distillery Inc. in 2016, it was a show of personal commitment to its namesake: Zarrinnam and Neuberg were both born in the Los Angeles neighborhood, and Wehbe has been a resident for more than 35 years. The trio continues to strengthen that commitment today, Wehbe tells The Tasting Panel, calling their distillery "a labor of love among friends who want to share the art of making spirits with people through immersive tours and tastings."

It has also been a learning experience. "If there's one thing opening a distillery will teach you," Wehbe says, "it's patience. Making truly great spirits takes time." Perhaps proving his point, the distillery took home a double gold medal and Best in Class award for its Oasis Vodka at the 2019 San Francisco World Spirits Competition. Defining success as "when you come out with something even better than you imagined," Neuberg attributes Hollywood's achievements not only to the team's "dedication in creating a truly quality product, cutting

no corners," but also to "using a unique (and relatively expensive) fruit that [they] grew up loving to eat": dates.

Oasis Vodka is a one-of-a-kind, ultrapremium sipping vodka made from organic Medjool dates grown in the oldest date garden in the United States, established in 1912 in Coachella, California. The rich flavor and nutritional value of the dates add dimension, while the distillation process diminishes much of the "sting" that can be found in vodkas made from potatoes or grains. "The dates are handpicked and then macerated into a syrup, which is then mixed with water and a special yeast," Wehbe explains. "It is fermented for about seven days and then run through the stills."

The team plans to open a new brick-andmortar location in early 2020 as the first craft distillery in Hollywood—but their ambition isn't limited to a local audience. "While we are a Los Angeles-based craft distillery," Zarrinnam notes, "we know there is a global appetite for exceptionally crafted, greattasting premium spirits like Oasis Vodka!"

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOLLYWOOD DISTILLERY INC.



Hitting the Links

MEIOMI TEES UP WITH THE PROFESSIONAL GOLF ASSOCIATION

by Mark Stock



The Meiomi Wine Lounge kept PGA Tour Championship attendees cool and well hydrated.

ove over, Arnold Palmer: Professional golf has a new favorite beverage. In August, central California producer Meiomi became the official wine of the PGA Tour Championship, which drew talented players like Brooks Koepka, Rickie Fowler, and title winner Rory McIlroy to the East Lake Golf Course in Atlanta, Georgia. The five-day tournament marks the final pro competition of the annual PGA series, ranking among storied events like the Pebble Beach Pro-Am and the Masters.

Keen to offer an experience as much as build brand awareness, Meiomi established an immersive on-site lounge where visitors could sample flight trays featuring its Pinot Noir, Rosé, and Chardonnay as well as glasses of its Méthode Champenoise Sparkling Wine while watching a live stream of the tournament, cooled by water misters set up to combat the Georgia heat. They could also tour the succulent garden in their midst, offering a slice of the California coast in the middle of the Peach State, and access a pro shop to get their swag-golf towels and tags, Croakies, hats and visors—personally embroidered. In short, the lounge was designed "to give people a place not only to step out of the heat but [to enjoy] exclusive merchandise," says Jaymie Schoenberg, Vice President of Marketing at Meiomi.

Mementos like these tend to encourage the loyalty the brand depends on. "We wanted to find a way to connect with consumers [through] something they're really passionate about," Schoenberg explains, adding that the

> brand's goal was to "engage them not only in retail but outside of retail with an immersive experience that really brings the brand's sense of place to life."

Schoenberg calls the partnership with the PGA Tour a natural fit, as the golf and wine communities share similar lifestyles. Her team spent about six months studying the possibilities, drawn as they were to the unhurried pace, open-air atmosphere, and certain elegance of the sport. Much the same could be said about the trappings of wine.

Naturally, the ability to create activations was another draw for Meiomi. Setting up shop at one of professional golf's most prestigious tournaments provides a valuable opportunity to try the wines out on consumers. But it's not as simple as packing up some cases and boarding a plane; retailers must roll out big displays during the lead-up to the tournament as well as craft the narrative they plan to share.

Meiomi's story is clear-cut: It's known for its tri-appellation approach to winemaking. Sourcing from three distinctive coastal California growing regions—Sonoma, Monterey, and Santa Barbara—the winery looks to capitalize on the singular power of blending. Its new "Flavor Forward" campaign puts a spotlight on this process as an experiment in terroir that banks on what Schoenberg describes as the earthiness of Monterey, the fruit intensity of Sonoma, and the texture of Santa Barbara.

"We've found that when consumers know the wine is tri-appellated, they like . . . that additional layer and see it as social currency," she says. It inspires drinkers to dig a bit deeper into the many folds of terroir and gain an understanding for the significance of place in style and flavor.

Indeed, Meiomi has made quite the splash since its creation in 2006. Its name is borrowed from the Wappo, a tribe indigenous to California, and translates, quite fittingly, to "coastal." Founder Joe Wagner hails from a prominent Napa Valley wine family: His grandfather Charles established Caymus Vinevards in 1971.

Meiomi was sold to Constellation Brands in 2015, a New York–based company whose portfolio includes the likes of Ruffino, Robert Mondavi Winery, Kim Crawford, and more, as well as beer and spirits. Distribution has since brought the brand to most domestic markets: Meoimi's Pinot Noir, especially, has proven to be something of a game changer, bucking the variety's expensive reputation with a sub-\$20 price point to become the bestselling Pinot in the U.S.

Schoenberg says the wine is broadening horizons and making converts of the Cabernet crowd. "It's a very juicy, rich sort of experience, while also being easy drinking," she says. "To be elevating the role that Pinot Noir is playing [in the] red-wine category is really exciting."

And yet, she adds, "There are still so many customers that don't know about us." While crediting an avid following for Meiomi's success to date, she believes aligning with the biggest organization in golf will only expand its reach. "The partnership with the PGA Tour and our new ad campaign are here to really accelerate consumers' introduction to the brand," she says.



Flights of Meiomi's Chardonnay, Rosé, and Pinot Noir were a popular option among loungegoers.



Monogrammed golf towels were just some of the perks for guests of the Meiomi Wine Lounge.



Meiomi's new "Flavor Forward" campaign puts a spotlight on its tri-appellation approach to winemaking.

Views from the DE

MAKING THE ROUNDS AT THE 2019 FOOD & WINE CLASSIC IN ASPEN

by Jonathan Cristaldi

Pictured from left to right at the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, CO: Kosta Browne Director of Brand Engagement Regina Sanz and winemaker Nico Cueva; chefs Andrew Zimmern, Michelle Minori, and Brandon Rosen; Kosta Browne DTC Marketing Manager Brittney Clyde; chefs David Viana and Edmund Konrad; and Kosta Browne Hospitality and Events Manager Lauryn Mitrovich and Director of Hospitality Damon Wong.

aking an express chairlift 9,000 feet up Buttermilk
Mountain for the Kosta Browne Winery Peak Party at the
Cliffhouse Sundeck, I had 14 minutes of alone time to
contemplate the past 48 hours of the Food & Wine Classic in
Aspen, Colorado. For me, it had been a whirlwind.

The Classic attracts some of the nation's most powerful on- and off-premise buyers, who come for the VIP invites and sneak previews of new wine, spirit, and specialty-beverage releases. For them, it's kind of like adult-beverage Disneyland.



PHOTO: RICCARDO SAVI

Take, for instance, the high-energy event hosted by Grounded Wine Co. winemaker Josh Phelps. From the bar at Kemo Sabe on South Galena Street, quests sampled wines such as the Grounded Wine Co. 2016 Public Radio (\$25), a richly layered and enjoyable Grenache-dominant blend from Paso Robles, Jason Smith, Executive Wine Director for MGM Resorts and a seminar panelist, was also there: "The networking is great in Aspen," he said, "and it's an opportunity to taste fun stuff" like Phelps' "on-point" **Steady** State 2016 Napa Cabernet (\$65), which he carries. I even spotted Kirk Johnson, a buyer at Costco, enjoying a cocktail and a French dip.

From there, I bolted to the big tent in Wagner Park to catch up with Vintage Wine Estates Fine Wine Director Tim

day with a meal," she said. I sampled the Blueberry-Pomegranate Moscato (\$6), which offered ripe, just-picked blueberry notes.

Later, at the Hotel Jerome, I met three-time NBA champion Dwyane Wade to talk about Wade Cellars, his partnership with Pahlmever Wines—the result of an epic dinner at Valentino's in Los Angeles. "Wine brings a different energy, conversation, and swagger, and I enjoy it," Wade told me. Was there one bottle that flipped the switch for him, I wondered? Flowers Winery came to mind, but ultimately, he said, there were many bottles during many unforgettable nights (one in particular involved drinking 1985 Sassicaia and 1989 Pétrus with fellow NBA star Jimmy Butler and actor Mark Wahlberg).

and maintain sustainable systems" just as companies like Kosta Browne and Verlasso are doing. "Those products tell stories about companies committed through their practices," he continued, "not just in the land or on the water but in the boardroom, too. Verlasso wants to become the greenest and most sustainable fish company on planet Earth. That's a great goal. Kosta Browne makes wines; they're stewards of the land. We have to remind people that, without our biospheres and systems, we're not going to have delicious salmon and delicious wine." Zimmern doesn't ask for financial contributions to support sustainability. He says it's "a 'global-now' issue," and everyone needs to do their part.

As I stood on the mountaintop taking in the view of Maroon Bells with a glass



Certified personal trainer Katie Zaslove poured at the GAZE booth.



Dwyane Wade in the tent with his 2018 Three By Wade California Rosé.

Bushey, who led me through a tasting of new releases, including the BR Cohn 2018 Sauvignon Blanc (\$18), which was bright and citrusy with pops of guava and lemongrass as well as crisp acidity. The Qupé 2015 Syrah Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley (\$50) offered grippy, fine-grained cedar tannins with pure black- and blue-fruit preserves and a touch of savory spice, while the Laetitia 2017 Reserve du **Domaine Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande** Valley (\$45) delivered juicy dark cherry up front, gliding into savory cedar spices atop a creamy, rich mouthfeel.

Wandering through the tent, I was enchanted by Katie Zaslove, a certified personal trainer who was pouring GAZE, a low-calorie wine cocktail in an aluminum bottle. "[It's] perfect for summertime or for enjoying during the Made by Jonathan Keyes (Sine Qua Non, Outpost, Mark Herold), the Wade Cellars portfolio includes the Wade 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley, which is firm-structured with rich, dark fruits, and the yacht-friendly and refreshingly zippy Three By Wade 2018 California Rosé (\$15).

As I reflected on all this, my chairlift neared the summit. I'd recently seen Kosta Browne's mini-documentary Shore to Shore, which shines a light on foraging and sustainability; the film had also caught the attention of chef Andrew Zimmern, who partnered with the winery to present the "Future of Food: Aquaculture Plated" event in Aspen.

"We have abandoned sustainability in so many areas of our world," Zimmern said, adding that it was his and everyone's duty to "create, honor,

of Kosta Browne 2016 Gap's Crown

Pinot Noir in hand, I bumped into Ray Isle, Executive Wine Editor at Food & Wine magazine, and Regina Sanz, Kosta Browne's Director of Brand Engagement. Sanz introduced us to *Top Chef* Season 16 contestants Brandon Rosen, David Viana, Michelle Minori, and Edmund Konrad, each of whom had devised a pairing with a focus on sustainability. The conversations were high-minded and important, but another event called.

As I joined Isle in heading back down the mountain, it started to rain. We somehow managed to grab garbage bags from the kitchen, which we donned to keep us dry on the chairlift. I'll never forget talking to Isle with a black bag over my head: Like most things at the Food & Wine Classic, that can only happen in Aspen.



story by David Gadd/photos by Beth Baugher

he tiny town of Plymouth. California—population 1,005 at last count—is hot and sleepy on a Monday afternoon in August, but the friendly and surprisingly hip local gathering spot, Amador Vintage Market, is doing a brisk business in sandwiches, soda pop, and cold-brew coffee. Less than an hour east of Sacramento, Plymouth lies on Gold Country's main thoroughfare, Route 49, which leads to Sutter Creek to the south and, 40 minutes north, to Coloma; gold was discovered there at Sutter's Mill in 1849, setting off one of the largest mass migrations in U.S. history.

But it's not gold we're after. Since John Sutter's day, this land has become much better known for an entirely different commodity: wine. Plymouth forms the southwestern point of a roughly triangular-shaped appellation called the California Shenandoah Valley, which became an official sub-AVA within the vast, 2.6-million-acre Sierra Foothills AVA in January 1983. (The word "California" had to be appended to distinguish the appellation from the Shenandoah Valley AVA in Virginia and West Virginia.)

Following the valley, Shenandoah Road leads northby-northeast out of Plymouth to become a wine trail lined with slow-moving tractors and dotted with wineries—some familiar, some as yet undiscovered. Three and a half miles from town, a strikingly contemporary building appears on the crest of a knoll, bright red pennants fluttering in the warm breeze. This is the home of Andis Wines, which since its inception just a decade ago has become one of the Sierra Foothills' most innovative producers.

Grown from the Land

Andis is the creation (and the portmanteau namesake) of Andrew "Andy" Friedlander and his wife, Janis Akuna. Friedlander, a Marine Corps veteran, spent 50 years in Hawaii, where he built the state's largest commercial real-estate firm. Akuna, who holds an MBA, is a financial advisor with a prominent Wall Street firm. While Friedlander is still actively involved in real estate in the Aloha State, Akuna became so entrenched in the winery project that she enrolled in the Executive Wine Program at the University of California, Davis.

Completed in 2010, the 22,000-square-foot winery was intended to appear as if it had "grown from the land" by Sacramento design firm Sage Architecture, which eschewed European models to emphasize functionality. One striking feature of the state-of-the-art facility is the exterior accent screen, made of whitewashed used barrel staves, that covers the north side of the building. A new private-events pavilion, currently under construction on the south side, will be used for weddings and other functions.

Bordeaux-born legend Philippe Melka's consulting company, Atelier Melka, was brought on in 2016 to supercharge the winemaking program here. Melka is noted for



The Andis management team on the crush pad: winemaker Mark Fowler (with his Boston terrier, Hugo); Chief Operating Officer/partner Jenae Plasse; and National Sales Manager/ partner Besmir "Lorenzo" Muslia.



A concrete egg is used to ferment the Andis Cabernet Franc, preserving the flavors that come from a high-elevation volcanic site in El Dorado County.



Painted Fields is Andis Wines' blend tier, which includes the classic Sierra Foothills Old Vine Zinfandel from multiple sites, the white Bordeaux-inspired Cuvée Blanc, and the Red Blend incorporating Barbera and Primitivo. See Meridith May's review of the Old Vine Zinfandel on page 84.

A Closer Look at Andis Wines Whites

"Painted Fields is our blend tier," explains National Sales Manager Besmir "Lorenzo" Muslia as he pours the Painted Fields 2018 Cuvée Blanc (\$22) from Sierra Foothills—a mediumbodied, white Bordeaux-inspired blend of 50% Sémillon, 30% Sauvignon Blanc, 10% Chardonnay, and 10% Arinto, a citrusy Portuguese variety that adds a deft touch of acidity. "It's a blend with a sense of region," says winemaker Mark Fowler of this wine, which paints a panoramic picture of the potential for Sierra Foothills whites.

The Andis 2018 Amador Sauvignon Blanc (\$22), also from Sierra Foothills, is a complete surprise. Fermented in stainless steel and aged six to eight weeks on the lees, it's the winery's most-sold SKU—with good reason. A 100% Sauvignon Blanc from various clones (including the aromatic Musqué clone) grown in several different dry-farmed, low-vield vineyards some with 40-plus-year-old vines—it delivers opulent tropical fruit on a lingering finish. "It's got some grassiness, some minerality," says Fowler, "and it walks a beautiful balance between the two." If you don't often think of whites from the Sierra Foothills, this wine is reason to reconsider.

The Andis 2018 Old Vine Sémillon (\$25) hails from Bill Dillian Vineyard in Amador County, a sandy, 10-acre head-trained site that grower Bill Dillian planted in the 1970s. Unable to sell the fruit, Dillian was going to rip out the vines, Plasse recalls: "We took the fruit as a blending grape for Sauvignon Blanc but thought it was an amazing wine on its own." Andis has taken the entire crop ever since. Boasting luscious white fruit interwoven with rich floral notes, this wine earned a spot on a top-ten list by Master Sommelier Peter Neptune as a "hidden gem of California." It would make an authoritative but not overpowering complement to rich seafood dishes.

working only with small-lot, handcrafted wines, and his input helped Andis achieve maximum quality from the Sierra Foothills terroir. Earlier this year, Friedlander and Akuna hired winemaker Mark Fowler, a local with more than 15 years of experience in the region. He works with the Melka team to shape the couple's 14-SKU portfolio of red, white, and rosé wines.

While roughly a third of their fruit comes from notable vineyards in the region, grown according to their specifications, the other two-thirds is sourced from the 25-acre Andis estate. It was planted to Zinfandel by the original owners in the 1970s, and the grapes were sold to well-known wineries such as Bogle Vineyards. Today, many of the 22 planted acres are still devoted to own-rooted, head-trained old-vine Zin—a variety that has been the calling card of the Sierra Foothills since the gold rush days. The secret to dealing with these old vines, Fowler says, is to listen to them: "The vines read the season; they know how much fruit to set. The clones have mutated and created their own identity over time. There's a great concentration and character with those vineyards." Andis also grows Sauvignon Blanc, Barbera, Syrah, Grenache, Petite Sirah, and some just-planted Cinsault.

Although the estate lies in the California Shenandoah Valley sub-AVA, National Sales Manager Besmir "Lorenzo" Muslia made the decision, beginning with the 2017 vintage, to label all the Andis wines with the Sierra Foothills AVA—the

Newly planted Cinsault grows on a plot just outside the winery. The 25-acre Andis estate also boasts Sauvignon Blanc, Barbera, Syrah, Grenache, and Petite Sirah in addition to several blocks of Amador County's famed old-vine Zinfandel.



"mother appellation," as he calls it—while providing more precise information about the source of the grapes on the back labels. The decision builds brand consistency while also allowing the winemakers greater flexibility in sourcing fruit. "Changing to the Sierra Foothills appellation is opening us up to finding the best fruit in the entire area." explains Fowler. "There are so many different soil types, elevations, aspects—so much more to be explored."

Muslia, who grew up in Albania and Italy before immigrating to California, describes the Andis house style as "a hybrid—a bridge between the New World and the Old, achieved through technology in the winery and attention in the vineyard." Harvesting at lower Brix is key; the goal, Fowler says, is to "express the character of the vineyard while exercising restraint to keep freshness and vitality in the wine."

Keeping prices reasonable is also part of the game plan. "Our goal is to deliver wine that people can afford," says Muslia, Andis is currently available in 23 states; Muslia, who is on the road 180 days a year, reports that sales are particularly strong in Georgia, Texas, and North Carolina (with an astounding 300 accounts) as well as in the Great Lakes states. Under Chief Operating Officer Jenae Plasse—whose family has been in Amador County since 1850—the winery team is friendly and accommodating, making Andis a rewarding destination on the Shenandoah Valley wine route.





Andis' reds include a varietally correct Petite Sirah, a Loireworthy Cabernet Franc, and the playfully named Barbera d'Amador, the winery's answer to the Barberas of Piedmont.

Reds

Like its white sibling, the Painted Fields 2017 Red Blend (\$25) from Sierra Foothills draws on several grape varieties for complexity, including Barbera and Primitivo. This is an utterly delicious wine with a touch of tobacco on the nose and a joyous mouthful of red-fruit flavors—a by-the-glass winner for any restaurant.

"The Sierra Foothills is not a monovarietal region," comments Fowler upon introducing the outlier Andis 2017 Barbera d'Amador (\$30). Barbera has actually thrived in Amador County since the gold rush, and the name is intended to recall its Piedmontese equivalents. Drawn 50% from the Andis estate and 50% from

another venerable Amador vineyard, it's full of feisty red fruit and the acid-laced vibrancy that makes Barbera a nonpareil food wine.

It was an Andis Cabernet Franc that shaped Muslia's career path: "I had it in a restaurant, looked at the label, and asked, 'Where the hell is Amador?' I basically camped out here until they gave me a job in the tasting room." The Andis 2017 Hawk Creek Vineyard Cabernet Franc (\$40) comes from a high-elevation volcanic site in El Dorado County, where the long growing season allows for full flavor development. Fermented in a concrete egg, it's a red that any Loire winemaker would be proud of, showing suave notes of plum, sage, and black pepper on the beautifully structured. medium-weight palate.

The Andis 2017 Petite Sirah (\$30) is an assemblage that Muslia calls "an exercise in varietal correctness." This sometimes unjustly maligned grape is a natural in the rugged terroir of the Sierra Foothills, and the Andis version is exemplary. Sourced from Calaveras County and Fiddletown, it's loaded with gob-smacking notes of blackberry and blueberry, a plus-sized yet supple body, and enough length to last through sundown.

Those to whom Amador means Zinfandel will relish every sip of the Andis Original Grandpère Vineyard Old Vine Zinfandel (\$40), the patriarch among the three Zins made at the winery. Planted in 1869, the property is just up the road from the winery and is one of the oldest documented Zinfandel vineyards in America. Owner Terri Harvey—only the fourth family proprietor in Grandpère's 150-year history—works the site by herself and sells her coveted grapes to just four lucky wineries, Andis among



them. Production is limited to 200 cases ("unless we start squeezing the roots," jokes Muslia), and winemaking is restrained, letting the vineyard speak. "We're not a big oak house," says Fowler. "We focus on the vineyard, not the cooperage." This is a stunning wine, deep and powerful, with a presence and authority that command complete attention if not a humble silence—and it's among the best red-wine values on the market.

Artfully | Artfully | Example 1 | Example 2 | Example

BOB DYLAN-BACKET WHISKEY BRAND HEAVEN'S DOOR PREPARES TO DEBUT ITS LIMITED-EDITION BOOTLEG SERIES

story by Christy Fuhrman / photos by Azuree Wiitala

Heaven's Door makes four expressions, including the Double Barrel Whiskey, Straight Rye Whiskey Finished in Vosges Oak Barrels, and Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey.











Marc Bushala (pictured left) is CEO of Heaven's Door Spirits. His fellow co-founder, COO Ryan Perry (right), also serves as the brand's Master Blender.



are constantly bombarded by advertising: Everywhere you look, someone—often a celebrity—is trying to sell you something. To what extent is the celebrity involved? Is it a passion project or a paycheck? Most likely the latter—but not always. Take Bob Dylan: When one of the world's most legendary musicians waits 50 years to come out at long last with a line of whiskeys, you pay attention.

The story of Heaven's Door starts with Marc Bushala, the former CEO of Angel's Envy Bourbon, which Bacardi purchased in 2015. During his time overseeing the brand, he met Ryan Perry, who was working for Diageo as part of its American whiskey team, sitting on its Global Cask Council and devising sales strategies for North American whiskey. In addition to selling it, though, he was also scouring the market for unique barrels of it to buy and hold, knowing that he wanted to create his own whiskey line someday.

STAR BRANDS

When Bushala and Perry were considering their first project together, they read in an industry publication that Dylan had registered the name Bootleg Whiskey with plans to launch his own brand. So began their mission to connect with the music icon and share their ideas for helping him to realize his vision. Dylan loved their unique perspective and passion for whiskey, so he partnered with them to create Heaven's Door Spirits.

The name comes, of course, from Dylan's iconic song "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," which was written in 1973 for the soundtrack of the movie Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid. It's also an allusion to Dylan's ironwork, an image of which appears on each bottle: as Bushala said when we had a recent opportunity to sit down together at Chicago's Untitled Supper Club, "This is Bob Dylan, and this is his whiskey, and this is a piece of his metal gates." Added Perry, "He was very involved and had a lot of opinions about how [the product] looked."

It took approximately two years to get the project up and running, with Perry curating a portfolio of aged American whiskeys that he loved with a view toward blending and finishing them. Today there are four Heaven's Door expressions on the market: Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$50), Double Barrel Whiskey (\$50), Straight Rye Whiskey Finished in Vosges Oak Barrels (\$80), and a limited-edition 10 Year Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$130). The basic rules for bourbon production are as follows: It must be made in the United States. distilled from a minimum of 51% corn, and aged in new charred oak casks; if it's labeled as a "straight" whiskey, it must be aged for a minimum of two years and contain no added coloring or flavoring.

The Heaven's Door team, however, takes things a step further, aging their Tennessee Straight Bourbon (which features a high-rye mash bill) for eight years. Even more interesting, unlike many other Tennessee bourbons, it does not undergo the charcoal mellowing known as the Lincoln County process.

Rve production follows the same rules as that of bourbon, except that the spirit must be distilled from a minimum of 51% rye. The Straight Rye Whiskey



Finished in Vosges Oak Barrels ages in wood sourced from the Vosges forest near Lorraine, France; distinguished by their shape, these cigar barrels are larger and more tapered than standard vessels. This means that more of the whiskey inside them is in contact with the oak, which ultimately amplifies notes of vanilla and baking spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg. The Double Barrel expression, meanwhile, blends three different whiskeys that spend time in two different sets of oak barrels, imparting added complexity as well as heightened flavors of spice and caramel. Finally, production for

the 10 Year Straight Bourbon Whiskey departs from that of the others in that it's mellowed by the Lincoln County process for extra smoothness.

Heaven's Door's next move is to release the first whiskey from its Bootleg series in time for the holiday season. Each expression in this limited, higher-priced line (\$500) will feature a different blend or finish. Bringing the name Dylan originally registered into play, Bootleg will also showcase more of his artwork—in this case, his paintings.

In the next year, the team will open a distillery in Nashville, Tennessee,

though the descriptor doesn't do the ambitious project justice: It will also be a restaurant, a live-music venue, and a museum and arts center showcasing Dylan's works. Of course. Nashville is the perfect place for Heaven's Door to set up shop; it may not be as famous for whiskey as Kentucky is, but it has its own Bourbon Trail, and Dylan's

connection to Music City is undeniable. (In 1969, he even named an album after it, Nashville Skyline.)

Granted, when you pick up a bottle of Heaven's Door and look at the neck tag, you'll see a picture of Dylan not wielding a guitar but in a welding mask, working on his art. In what has become a highly competitive market

for bourbon brands, each product has to speak for itself. Its connection to a celebrity may influence some people to buy it once, but that doesn't mean they'll ever do so again. Heaven's Door. for its part, is no mere novelty for Dylan fans but a line of whiskeys for whiskey drinkers, made with art, heart, and soul.

When one of the world's most legendary musicians waits 50 years to come out at long last with a line of whiskeys, you pay attention.



Marc Bushala and Ryan Perry are the co-founders of Heaven's Door Spirits with partner Bob Dylan.

Anthony Dias BLUE REVIEWS

Presented by BLUE LIFESTYLE

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

85-89: VERY GOOD

90-94: OUTSTANDING

95-100: CLASSIC

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

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

For additional Blue Reviews, go to bluelifestyle.com.

Prices are for 750-mL bottles unless otherwise noted.

DOMESTIC

Daileyana 2017 Firepeak Chardonnay, Paragon Vineyard, Edna Valley (\$28) Smooth, crisp, and juicy with tangy, fresh flavors of bright pear and a soft vanilla undertone; balanced, long, and delicious.

90 Benessere 2016 Collins Holystone Vineyard Zinfandel,

Napa Valley (\$38) Refined and rich with blackberry and excellent acid structure; toasty with just a hint of earthiness.

93^{C.L.} Butaud 2017 Tempranillo,

Texas High Plains (\$48) Wow, Tempranillo from Texas! Silky, bright, and elegant with lovely acid structure and lush flavors; tangy and impressive.

Cuth I She

Clos de la Tech
2014 Domaine du Docteur
Rodgers Pinot Noir, San Francisco
Bay (\$130) This is the jewel of the Rodgers' lot, with a deep ruby color, a complex mint nose, and a lush, silken texture. A deep, elegant expression reminescent of Burgundy, with subtle, sweet oak and a long, rich finish.





9Simi Winery 2015 **1** Landslide Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$41) The velvety and lush palate expresses blackberry and plum with rich, dense style; a super-premium wine at a very reasonable price.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

Oclos de la Tech 2014 Domaine O Lois Louise Twisty Ridge Pinot Noir, Santa Cruz Mountains (\$65) From the Rodgers' highest vineyard, this is well worth searching out. Rich and long, with a nose of lush red fruit and soft tannins; smooth and elegant, with purity defining the palate.

9Flora Springs 2017 All Hallows' Eve Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley (\$60) Lush nose of plum and toast; polished and long with notes of berry and spice and firm acid structure. Another lovely effort from this exceptional family-owned winery.

Flora Springs 2017 Ghost Winery Malbec, Napa Valley (\$60) Long and balanced, this wine hails from one of the few wineries in California that takes Malbec seriously. Rich, toasty nose; smooth and deep with plum, berries, and spice.

Highwayman 2017 Reserve Trailblazer, Sonoma County (\$35) Mostly Zinfandel, with Petite Sirah blended in; tangy, supple, and spicy with juicy plum and pomegranate. Complex and silky with a lengthy finish, it's the perfect wine to pair with grilled meats.

HIGHWAY 12 WINERY



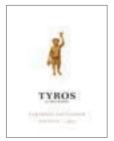
La Crema 2016 Kelli Ann 🚄 Vineyard Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$55) Golden color with a smooth fruit nose and lush, rich texture. Ripe but nicely structured with bright acidity and balance.



9La Crema 2016 Shell Ridge Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$60) Smooth, savory, and complex; unctuous, dense, and rich. Elegant and balanced with length and depth, this is another winner from a reliable producer.

Pellet Estate 2016 Henry's Reserve, Pellet Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$150) Spice and earth also appear on the mineral-tinged nose; juicy, focused, and graceful, with a velvety texture. A complex, tangy, and stylish blend of 86% Cabernet Sauvignon and 14% Merlot—and another stunner from this under-the-radar winery.

Ponzi Vineyards 2016 Reserve Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$65) Deep ruby color; fresh, juicy, and balanced, with notes of bright cherry and racy acidity.



Silenus Winerv 2015 Tyros Cabernet Sauvignon. Napa Valley (\$32) Soft, herbal nose; smooth, lush, and tangy with

plum and berry notes. Mellow, rich, and long, it's the little brother of Silenus' muchpricier traditional and reserve Cabs.

IMPORTED

9 Buscado Vivo o Muerto 2015 el Manzano Los Chacayes, Mendoza, Argentina (\$54) Deep, dark color with a rich berry nose and velvety texture; intense, long, and luscious with good balance.

VINEYARD BRANDS



Tnet Sauvignon, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$125) Soft toasty nose; silky and racy with lush plum and berry notes; fine acid structure; and hints of mocha, spice, and toasted oak. Lovely, long, and balanced, but give it time.

BLUE REVIEWS

Château La Nerthe 2016 Cuvée des Cadettes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, France (\$180) This a stunning GSM blend with depth and

subtle nuances of spice, leather, and chocolate. It's a baby, but its pedigree is showing even now: It's elegant, complex, and long, with beautiful finesse and style.

KOBRAND



August Kesseler 2018 Pinot Noir Rosé, Rheingau, Germany (\$27) Bright hue of light pink; crisp and silky with radiant raspberry and tangy, slightly sweet, and refined flavors.

VINEYARD BRANDS

Marichal 2015 Grand Reserve Tannat, Canelones, Uruguay (\$65) Lovely ruby color; smooth, bright, and balanced, with edgy acidity and fresh berry notes. Complex and layered, it makes for quite an excellent expression of Uruguay's prime red variety.

GLOBAL VINEYARD IMPORTERS

Principe Corsini 2015 Villa le Corti Don Tommaso Gran Selezione, Chianti Classico, Italy (\$33) A smooth, clean, and dense blend of 80% Sangiovese and 20% Merlot with tangy style and a deep crimson color. Juicy, rich, and long; balanced and softly tannic.

Tinto Negro 2016 1955 Vine-**Z**yard Malbec, La Consulta, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$99) Rich, silky texture, with balance and length. The juicy, dense, and ripe palate is abundant in flavors of blackberry, boysenberry, raspberry, and chocolate.

VINEYARD BRANDS

9Trinity Hill 2018 Gimblett Gravels Syrah, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand (\$40) Dark ruby hue; smooth and spicy with luscious notes of blackberry; deep, rich, and juicy with a persistent finish.

MT BEAUTIFUL USA

VALUE



Ánimal Natural Vineyards **U**2016 Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$23) Silky and bright with tangy berry notes; juicy and fresh with a long finish. This label from Ernesto Catena Vineyards is made with organic grapes.

VINFYARD BRANDS

C.L. Butaud 2018 Farmhouse Vineyards Rosé, Texas (\$25) The color blends orange with pink. Dry, crisp, and racy with bright, tangy flavors of apple and raspberry.

C.L. Butaud 2018 Pa Pa Fren-Chy Rosé, Texas (\$12) Deep pink color; dry, tangy, and bursting with juicy apple and plum. Silky and long, this blend of Cinsault, Grenache, Picpoul Blanc, and Rolle is an amazing value.



Carneros Highway 2018 Nueva Chardonnay, Carneros (\$17) Creamy, lush, and bright with succulent, clean citrus and pear. Fresh, long, and balanced, this is another remarkable value.



Angels & Cowboys 2017 Proprietary Red, Sonoma (\$23) Succulent, fresh, and balanced with crisp acidity; generous, rich fruit; and a smooth texture.

SHARE A SPLASH WINE CO.

Domaine de Bernier 2018 Pinot Noir, Loire Valley, France (\$16) Smooth texture and notes of bright cherry; racy, bright, and thin yet silky, it possesses balance and length.

VINEYARD BRANDS

Duck Hunter 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$20) Silky and fresh with crisp, racy, and tangy acid structure; long with bright flavors of citrus.

STRATUS WINES & SPIRITS

Gundlach Bundschu 2018 Es-∠ tate Gewürztraminer, Sonoma

Coast (\$25) Rose petal nose; crisp, dry, and spicy with a silky texture and an elegant style. So delightfully fresh and lovely that it raises the question of why this charming variety is made by so few producers.

OGundlach Bundschu 2017 O Mountain Cuvée, Sonoma County (\$20) Deep ruby color; smooth and luscious with all five Bordeaux varieties (mainly Merlot) blended seamlessly. Rich.

deep, and juicy with balance and complexity.

Kirkland Signature 2014 Signature Series Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$7) Rich crimson hue; smooth, clean, and luscious with a base of tangy acidity. Crisp with bright raspberry and good depth—what a value! Available at Costco.



91 Highway 12 2017 Sonoma Red Blend, Sonoma County (\$20) Refined, charming, and ripe with juicy plum and a fine, rich texture; tangy yet lush and deep, with long, balanced flavors.

Les Dauphins 2017 Côtes du Rhône Réserve Blanc, France (\$9) A luscious and balanced blend of 65% Grenache, 15% Marsanne, 10% Clairette, and 10% Viognier. Refreshing, smooth, and mellow with depth and a core of crisp acidity.

MONSIEUR TOUTON SELECTION, LTD. AND PLUME RIDGE WINE IMPORT & WHOLESALE

Martini & Rossi NV Sparkling Rosé, Piedmont (\$15) Bright salmon pink; dry, juicy, and fresh with tangy strawberry and peach flavors; a racy and lively charmer with balance and style. MARTINI & ROSSI

Martini & Rossi Asti, Asti DOCG. Italy (\$13) Golden color, with a sweet, floral, and spicy nose. The smooth and tangy palate is also sweet, but not clovingly so—it's creamy and floral with typical Moscato flavors. Juicy and long with grace and finesse.

MARTINI & ROSSI

Martini & Rossi Prosecco, UItaly (\$15) You would expect a Prosecco from this famed producer to be good—and, well, it is. Smooth, dry, and guite elegant with ripe, rich fruit; lush and complex but restrained and balanced, with abundant length and charm. Use it in your Aperol spritz.

MARTINI & ROSSI



Cannonball 2017 Merlot, California (\$16) A huge value, this wine proves Merlot is back: It's equal parts smooth, rich, and juicy, with a luscious, ripe, and beautifully balanced palate. Deep and neatly structured with nice hints of sweet berries.

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SINCE 1987

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BLUE REVIEWS



Meiomi 2017 Chardonnay, Monterey/Sonoma/Santa Barbara
Counties (\$11) Golden color, with a soft, toasty nose; creamy and nicely structured with depth and lovely balance; long, elegant, and fresh

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

91 Matchbook 2017 Estate
Bottled Cabernet Sauvignon,
Dunnigan Hills (\$15) Dark ruby color;
smooth, earthy nose; lush, juicy plum and

sweet oak notes. Supple, rich, and layered, it's a remarkable wine at any price.

Pascual Toso 2019
Estate Chardonnay,
Mendoza, Argentina (\$14)
Lush, round, and ripe; succulent
and refreshing with a creamy
texture. Balanced and long, it's a
great value wine made by Paul
Hobbs.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

90Royal Tokaji Wine Company 2016 The Oddity Dry Furmint,

Tokaj, Hungary (\$17) Aromatic and concentrated with tangy acidity; crisp, long, and ripe. This delightful dry white variety deserves more attention.

WILSON DANIELS

OThree Henrys 2017
Pinot Noir, Pays
d'Oc, France (\$17) Smooth,
fresh, and juicy; charming, lush,
and tangy with spice, crisp
acidity, and great balance. A
surprising Pinot at a ridiculously
low price.

USA WINE WEST LLC

OThree Henrys 2018 Rosé, IGP Méditerranée, France (\$17) Sleek, dry, and succulent with lushness and balance; tangy and bright with refreshingly rich flavors of apple and citrus. Unlike many rosés, it's loaded with flavor. 45% Grenache, 20% Caladoc, 20% Merlot, and 15% Rolle.

USA WINE WEST LLC



NOT NO

92Svöl Danish-Style Aquavit, USA (\$35) Citrus nose; silky body with caraway, angelica, and lemon notes. Dry, elegant, and lush with a long, spicy finish, it's a remarkably authentic domestic product.

NEW YORK DISTILLING COMPANY

93Svöl Swedish-Style Aquavit, USA (\$38) Nose of citrus and fennel; smooth texture with floral flavors and hints of caraway and more fennel. Elegant and long, it highlights the fascinating contrast between the Danish and Swedish styles of this spirit.

NEW YORK DISTILLING COMPANY

Michter's 10
Year Kentucky
Straight Rye Whiskey,
USA (\$160) Deep amber
color. Intense rye flavors
show balance and depth.
Toasty, deep, and spicy with
richness and length, this is
a standout among the ryes
that have come out recently.



SPIRITS

Denizen Vatted Dark Rum, West Indies (\$30) Dark amber color, with a spicy nose of orange peel; smooth and toasty with sweet, smoky flavors of molasses and brown sugar.

Tinkerman's 4.2 Citrus Supreme Limited Release Gin, USA (\$30) Smooth in texture, with notes of orange rind and tangy citrus; long and spicy with subtle botanicals.

Vida de Louie Tequila Blanco, Mexico (\$35) Earthy agave nose that carries over to the creamy palate with peppery and spicy flavors. Clean, smooth, and authentic with a long, balanced finish—exceptional.





Penelope Bourbon Limited Release Barrel Strength **Bourbon Whis**key, USA (\$50) Four grain types are combined in this powerful barrel-strength product with a reddish amber hue. When watered, it's silky and toasty with depth and seductive spice.



Organika Life Vodka No 73863 Unique Vodka From Russia (\$42) Lush and silky with sweet, mellow flavors of vanilla; creamy and bright with finesse and lovely style. Long, balanced, and organic. HEALTH & ENERGY FOOD CORP.

Milagro Silver Te-**J**quila, Mexico (\$37) Soft agave nose; silky and elegant with fresh agave earthiness and finesse. This is a refined, highstyle blanco, with nuanced hints of vanilla and soft spice. It's both long and beautifully balanced. WILLIAM GRANT & SONS, INC

Ableforth's Bathtub **Gin, U.K.** (\$35) Very faint amber color, with a fresh citron nose; elegant, creamy, and expressive, with flavors of pure lemon and bright botanicals. Try this wheat-based gin in a Martini.

PARK STREET IMPORTS

DBlade and Bow Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey,

USA (\$50) Smoky nose followed by a fleshy, earthy, and rich palate with gobs of toasty oak and a lovely smooth texture. Lush and dense with considerable balance.

1 La Historia de O Nosotros Tequila Blanco, Mexico (\$40) Smooth, clean, and rich with a spicy nose, hint of mint, and lush, elegant texture, this tequila still has plenty of classic agave funk. Silky and balanced with a long, earthy finish.

9Barton 1792 Distillery Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey Aged 12 Years, USA

(\$50) Classic bourbon flavors of toasty oak, rich honey, and spice; smooth, stylish, and somewhat tannic, with length, elegance, and warmth.

NOSOTROS

KWestland Garryana Native Oak Series American Single Malt Whiskey Edition 4|1, USA (\$150) Lovely nose of sweet oak; silky-smooth and toasty with graceful notes of oak, honey, dried fruit, and soft spice; balanced and long. Very impressive.



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

Publisher's



WINES

Farmhouse 2018 White,

California (\$13) Unctuous with minerality and hints of grapefruit zest, this stainless steel-fermented white (sans malolactic) is lightly filtered, crisp, and vibrant; led by 44% Pinot Gris, 19% Muscat Canelli, and 12% Palomino, the blend also incorporates more than six other varieties. Its weightiness and fine acidity make it a food-worthy pairing. 90



CLINE FAMILY CELLARS



Worthy of a smooch.



French-style double bizou.



Wildly infatuated.



Seriously smitten.



Head over heels in love.



Montgras 2018 Reserva Sauvignon Blanc, Valle de Levda, Chile (\$14) Sweet grass and lime create an intriguing herbal perfume. On the palate, the sensation of juiciness keeps the fruit fresh, the citrus tart, and the acidity perky as an echo of peppermint lingers. 90 GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS



Best Value



Pata Negra 2016 Toro Roble, Toro. Spain (\$10) Aged three months in French oak, this Tinta de Toro comes from an extreme continental climate at an elevation of more than 2.000 feet above sea level. With a bewitching nose of smoked chocolate, roasted coffee bean. and deep plum, it shows Spain's great capacity for value



while revealing depth of character. Earth, cocoa dust, plum skin, and currants characterize the regional variety's powerhouse concentration, which is more extracted than most Tempranillos. Minerality runs deep thanks to the rocky, calcareous soil, and the finish is tinged with dark berry and a chalky toastiness. 91

I. GARCÍA CARRIÓN



Bodega Norton 2018 Barrel Select by Romero Britto Malbec, Luján de Cuvo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$15) Equipped with a standout label design by pop artist Romero Britto. this expressive red performs magnificently at a value price, thanks to the talent of upand-coming winemaker David

Bonomi. Delivering aromas of blueberry, plum, and grilled meat, it aged 12 months in French oak and comes in at a low ABV of 13.4%. Silky tannins surround a bold mid-palate of plum as peppered chocolate slips in sumptuous sweetness before the spicy, cinnamon-laden finish. 92

GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS



Cline Family Cellars Estate Chardonnay,

Sonoma Coast (\$15) Floral aromas guided by honeysuckle, gardenia, and lemon blossom are unearthed in this lovely, pristine white. Similarly floral notes are dotted with white pepper, tangerine tartness, and a hint of sage on the sleek and flinty palate. 92





Avissi Prosecco, Veneto, Italy (\$16) Honeysuckle and gardenia make for sweet and delicate scents. The melting bubbles land gracefully, accentuating flavors of linen and orange cream. White rice and Asian pear dot the mid-palate, leading to a finish redolent of green apple. The liquid is as unique as the memorable packaging. 92

TRINCHERO FAMILY WINES





Bonterra Organic Vinevards 2018 Young

Red, Mendocino County (\$16) This youthful, rhubarbhued beauty offers up a tartly sweet nose of peppered cranberry and rose petal. Spiced raspberries and fig coat a dry, lean mineral core as bright acidity and red berries lend a lovely accent similar to a cru Beaujolais. Featured varieties include Mourvèdre and Malbec with additional red grapes like Syrah and Carignan. 91

FETZER VINEYARDS



Blazon 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi (\$16) Blended with some Petite Sirah. this red is a bold extrovert with a sweet side. Strawberry jam fills the nose before a backdrop of mocha. On the palate, bright acidity engages with dark plum and a nectar of dates and figs. A fine value! 90

OAK RIDGE WINERY





Château de Lascaux 2018 Carra Rosé, Pic Saint Loup AOC, Languedoc, France (\$16) This salmon-pink beauty is a blend of 60% Syrah and 40% Grenache, with pure aromas of ripe summer peach and melon. On the palate, chalky minerality soothes the juicy fruit, intertwining with herbs and earth. 91

ARTISAN WINE SELECTIONS





Summerland 2017 **Central Coast Collection**

Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$16) Relaunched through new parent company Summerland Wine Brands, this marks a beautiful start for this label, which originated in Santa Barbara County. Aromas of oregano and lemon verbena whisper with savoriness as a clean, fine acidity is sparked

by lemon blossom. The mouthwatering tanginess harbors flavors of salted pear and tarragon before a butterscotch finish. 92



Old Soul 2017 Pinot Noir, California

(\$16) Freshness is apparent on the nose through ripe notes of plums and cherries. The light and airy palate leans floral, with earth-laden roses, cinnamon, and cranberries. The well-balanced acidity finishes tart and clean. 91

OAK RIDGE WINERY



Cono Sur Sparkling Brut,

Bío Bío Valley DO, Chile (\$17) Unique scents of green apple, oregano, and lime exude from this cool-climate Pinot Noir/Chardonnay sparkler grown on red-clay soils and aged four months in stainless steel. Grassiness emerges with white-peppered kiwi before a floral note sweetens things up on the mid-palate. 90



FETZER VINEYARDS



Paul Dolan Vineyards 2017 Chardonnay, Mendocino

County (\$17) Alluring aromatics of crisp pear, apple, and key lime pave the way for a palate rich with vibrant acidity. Expressive notes of vanilla and mango interplay with white flowers. There's a charming saltiness on the finish. 90

MENDOCINO WINE CO.





Bacon 2016 Red, Central

Coast (\$20) Boasting a rich nose luxuriously filled with notes of dark chocolate, espresso, and grilled meat, this blend of Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Merlot, and Petite Sirah is equally gratifying on the palate. Ripe, jammy notes of blackberry, currant, strawberry, and cassis delve deeply. White pepper charms the juicy fruit and engages a fine acidity. 91



GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS



Mettler Family Vineyards 2018 Estate Albariño,

Lodi (\$20) The Mokelumne River sub-appellation is known for its soil, classified as Tokay fine sandy loam, and its cool evenings. The wine is coldfermented in stainless steel, with clean, sweet aromatics of stone fruit. On the palate, notes of tarragon and salted, honeyed apricot meld with crisp minerality. 90



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Skyside 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, North Coast (\$23) Made by winemaker Anne Dempsey, this new brand from Moët Hennessy Estates & Wines originally hails from the Newton Vineyard estate. Blended with 15% Merlot, 6% Syrah, and 3% Petite Sirah from five counties across the North Coast, it displays dry tannins and Old World acidity. It's earthy, with notes of graphite, violets,





miller



LangeTwins 2016 Miller Vinevard Cabernet Franc.

9990

Clarksburg (\$32) This site is located in the Clarksburg AVA along the Sacramento River, not far from LangeTwins' home base in Lodi; according to the winery folks, it's special because the vines

must "combat fierce Delta winds," resulting in thick-skinned Cab Franc that performs well. We agree: This is certainly an expressive, opulent red. Heather, brush undergrowth, and plum skin form a piquant bouquet, and on the palate, lavender-dotted plum and nutmeg form the base. White pepper spices the tongue as sweet basil keeps a savory quality in motion before an underlying juiciness leads to a delectable finish of chocolate and spice. 93



Silverado Vinevards 2018 Miller Ranch Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$25) Located south of Yountville, this land was first planted to vines in the 1870s. Silty, cool, and deep soils helped bring out the aromatics in this Sauvignon Blanc with 5% Sémillon, among them glorious hints of honeysuckle and white pear. The palate's fruit expres-

sions are tropical with a squeeze of lime, and an earthy bite lingers on the finish, rounding out the character of this demure but tangy white. 92



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Andis Wines 2017 Painted Fields Old Vine Zinfandel.

Sierra Foothills, Amador County (\$25) Andis set out to produce a Zin blend similar to the style produced in this area back in the late 1800s. The resulting small-production blend of 50% Primitivo, 40% Zinfandel, 5% Petite Sirah, and

5% Barbera with an ABV of 15% offers concentrated aromas of black pepper, plum, and coffee bean. Its luxe mouthfeel is a focused study of black fruit and licorice enveloped in round, supple tannins. 92



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Double Canyon 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Horse Heaven Hills, Washington (\$25) Thanks to the diurnal shifts and the moderating temperatures of the Columbia River, which serves as its water source, one of Washington State's warmest appellations is a brilliant location to grow expressive Cabernet Sauvignon. What impressed us about this wine beyond its value were its numerous layers of aromas and flavors. Roasted coffee, cedar, and blackberry are distinctive on the nose, and on the palate, tobacco, underbrush, and grainy tannins keep the mouth dry with chalky, teeth-gripping texture. It's structured and clean, with a sweet, toasty finish. 93

CRIMSON WINE GROUP



Au Contraire 2018 Rosé, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$30) This is a truly special cherry-pink rosé of Pinot Noir, with lively aromas of candied watermelon and salted raspberry. Minerality keeps a firm hold on the palate. Bright and pretty, the mouthfeel and flavors work harmoniously with an underlying hint of

earthy tangerine zest. 92



TAUB FAMILY WINES

E-William



J. Wilkes 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Highland District, Paso Robles (\$30) Ripeness on the nose frames a bowl of blackberry jam, brownsugared plums, and a hint of mocha-espresso. The bright palate displays lifted notes of violets and cassis heightened by a fine acidity; aged 14 months and blended with 5% Lagrein,

this would pair wonderfully with smoky meats. 92



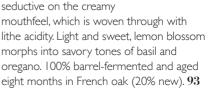
Sutro Wine Co. Warnecke Ranch

Merlot, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$35) Pretty scents of wild cherry and white-peppered red flowers open up immediately. Dry tannins mark the palate with strawberry, rhubarb, and a dash of chocolate as high-toned acidity and a sumptuous, stylized body offer up a just-right ripeness. 93



Silverado 2017 Estate Grown Chardonnay,

Carneros (\$35) Made with fruit from two vineyard sites with soils that range from sandy gravel to steep 50-degree slopes of sandstone and shale, this impressive white leads with classic aromas but elevates to a luxury level. Butterscotch and apple pie are remarkably seductive on the creamy







Umani Ronchi 2016 Plenio, Castelli di Jesi Verdicchio Riserva DOCG Classico. Marche, Italy (\$38) Fermented in both stainless steel and oak, this edgy, perfumed white aged at least 12 months in 5,000-liter oak casks followed by six months in bottle; the fruit was grown in high-altitude vineyards. Cashew, lemon, and white pepper come off racy, clean, and crisp in the weighty body, making for quite a complex stunner. 92



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Simi 2015 Landslide Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$41) The 170-acre Landslide Vineyard is so diverse in terroir that it's farmed as three different blocks. Aromas of cherry and cedar lead to espresso, earth, and graphite. Cabernet Franc (10%) is blended in to offer up some spice, joining Merlot (5%) along with small percentages of Petit Verdot, Malbec, and Tannat. Red fruits dominate their blue counterparts, and a tart, salty freshness ensues. The supple tannins lend a curvature of texture to the finish of cherry, chocolate, and toasty oak. 93



CONSTELLATION BRANDS



Pellet Estate 2017 Unoaked Sunchase Vineyard Chardonnay, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$42) Aromas of vanilla cream and white grapefruit sync up, despite being so different in character, before the mouthfeel melds a texture of subtle creaminess with an orange-blossom sweetness. This charming style of Chardonnay is trippingly light yet possesses enough body to seduce the palate. 94





Bien Nacido Estate 2017 Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley (\$45) Aromas of lanolin and vanilla wafers reach out and hold you, urging you onto a tightrope of edgy acidity that stretches across the mouth. Crisp and vibrant flavors of dried sage, cashew, and lime arise as brioche notes lengthen the finish. 94







Umani Ronchi 2015 Centovie, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Italy (\$45) This 100% Montepulciano, made with organically farmed grapes grown on clay loam at an elevation of over 650 feet, defines balance of power. Malolactic unfolded in steel tanks before the wine aged in oak for 12-14 months (it rested in bottle for an additional six to eight

months). Enticing aromas of subtly spiced dark fruit are bright and earthy, and the palate shows both chalkiness and high acidity, making this a wonderful wine to pair with food. When it's served with salmon or red sauces, its texture morphs, and it becomes more fruit-forward. 93

VINEYARD BRANDS





western edge of the Oakville bench that's under the purview of UC Davis. Aged 16.5 months in French, Hungarian, and American oak, it displays serious tannins that build to eventually express reined-in power. Flavors of jammy blackberry are lengthened by graphite and bittersweet dark chocolate; vibrant and textural underbrush enters on the finish. 94



00000 Casadei 2016 Filare

18 Cabernet Franc. Tuscany, Italy (\$50) Sensational, restrained, and elegant from start to finish, with dried violets, blackberry, and blueberry offering an array of startling aromatics.

Vibrancy comes in droves: Dry tannins are wrapped in minerality, and desiccated flowers and spiced blue fruit are texturally luscious. 95

CLINE SISTERS IMPORTS LLC



Auros 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon,

Napa Valley (\$48) Aged 18 months in French oak, this wine was made with fruit (including some Petit Verdot and Malbec) sourced from three of Napa Valley's sub-appellations: Oak Knoll, Oakville, and the Stags Leap District, with 15 different soil types among them. Aromas of fresh blackberry and plum combine with a hint of mocha on the inspired nose as grainy tannins, a rich mouthfeel, and balanced fruit and acid make this red work to its optimal ability. Leather and fennel come in for a savory finish. 93



THE WINE GROUP



Elvio Cogno 2016 Bordini,

Barbaresco DOCG, Italy (\$60) Named for the cru in the village of Neive where the grapes are grown on 30-year-old vines, this 100% Nebbiolo da Barbaresco fermented in stainless steel with indigenous yeast before it was aged for 15 months in Slavonian oak barrels and aged for six months in bottle. Aromas of stewed tomato, tobacco, and earth lead to flavors of cinnamon, cherry, orange rind, and salted blueberry. It's youthful but so food-friendly. 92

WILSON DANIELS



Napa Valley (\$50) Depicted by the crosshairs symbol on the bottle, Deadeye refers to the level of precision employed in Provenance's winemaking. This blend of 76% Cabernet Sauvignon and 12% Petite Sirah with small percentages of Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec aged 18 months in French,

American, and Hungarian oak; on the nose, blackberry and licorice draw you in deeply as lavender and graphite settle the score. The wine is a textural dream: creamy with melting fruit and sumptuous notes of violets and blueberry pudding. White pepper spices the upper palate, sparking an exciting final burst of flavor, 94

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



Ancient Peaks 2016 Oyster Ridge, Santa Margarita Ranch, Paso Robles (\$60) We look forward to each vintage of this Bordeaux blend, made with grapes grown in the southernmost vineyards of Paso Robles on the Ancient Peaks home ranch. With 51% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Merlot, and smaller

ripe, and the texture luxurious. 94

percentages of Petit Verdot, Cab Franc, and Malbec, the powerfully demonstrative red radiates charm through its intense floral aromatics of violets and jasmine. Broad strokes of white-peppered plum lick a chalky core as plums and their skins show up with serious but supple tannins. 93



0000 **Davies Vineyards 2017 Ferrington Vineyards** Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley (\$70) From the family behind Schramsberg Vineyards, the eighth vintage of this Pinot Noir is stunning. A nose of sweet cherry and rose petal leads to a delicate mouthfeel that whispers clues of sweet tobacco and salted strawberry jam. The finish of tilled soil shows balance and depth. 94



WILSON DANIELS

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Elvio Cogno 2013 Barolo Cascina Nuova, Barolo DOCG, Italy (\$70) The Nebbiolo featured in this wine was grown on the Elvio Cogno estate; the juice fermented in 100% stainless steel before aging in large oak barrels for two years, followed by one year in bottle. Bright and sassy on the nose, ripe cherry and rhubarb turn spicy on the palate. Long and lean flavors of wild strawberry, tilled soil, and sweet herbs

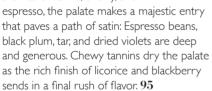
WILSON DANIELS

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Guarachi Family Wines 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon,

are prevalent throughout. 93

Napa Valley (\$90) Sourced from two special sites— Broken Rock (80%) at the foot of Atlas Peak and Las Piedras (20%), a Beckstoffer Heritage vineyard—this upright and broad-shouldered Cab aged 18 months in 100% French oak. Following gorgeous aromas of vanilla, cherry, and





Allegretto Vineyards 2014 **Ayres Family Reserve** Cabernet Sauvignon,

Willow Creek District. Paso Robles (\$100) Hotelier Doug Ayres has built a magnificent hotel and spa in Paso Robles, and his wines are as reflective of his passion for the grape as his property is of his belief in spiritual retreat. Aromas of boysenberry and

cedar begin the luxurious journey, leading to an elegant mouthfeel with flavors of dark chocolate melted into espresso. Supple tannins gracefully surge with blue fruit toward a juicy finish. 95

SPIRITS

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J.J. Pfister Distilling Company Navy Strength Rum, USA (\$35) A luminous hue of amber-gold, this rum exudes a heady perfume of dried flowers and bittersweet orange peel. The palate is composed, elegant, and silky; at 114 proof, it won't knock you over, opting instead to be crisp and defined. Stone



fruit weaves through vanilla extract, dark honey, and dried figs before oak, apricot, and dark chocolate arise on the finish. 95

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Lyre's Non-Alcoholic Coffee Liqueur,

Australia (\$36) Aromas of dark roast coffee compel alongside hints of dates, dark chocolate, and a perfumed note of blueberry. The intense nose gives way to a leaner palate, with streamlined acidity and savory notes of peppered figs and mocha. Delicious! 93



Remus Volstead Reserve Bourbon.

USA (\$200) Available next month, this limited-release bottledin-bond bourbon from MGP's renowned Lawrenceburg distillery is named for the Volstead/National

of heavenly caramel. 97





Pasote Tequila Extra Añejo.

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Mexico (\$190) Packaged in an elegant box, this labor-intensive teguila is made with agave that's been baked, crushed, and then fermented with native yeast in copper pot stills. Aged 48 months in



ex-bourbon oak, it features an exquisite nose of salted mango, caramel, orange oil, and roasted agave. The intense perfume persists on the palate with flavors of jasmine, white-peppered Tahitian vanilla, and tropical fruit. The vibrant, lithe mouthfeel is almost weightless; oak is just an echo, and the orange-creamsicle finish is heady and long. 97

3 BADGE BEVERAGE



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Duke Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA

(\$42) This 88-proofer is aged for a minimum of five years. The aromatics are out-of-this-world expressive, with notes of caramelized peach, marshmallow, mandarin orange, and a defined, euphoric hint of Hawaiian plumeria. The succulent palate mirrors the nose, with brown-sugared bananas Foster, cedar, and coconut. Cherry and vanilla mark the final flavors present in this liquid gold. 96

DUKE SPIRITS









































Kauller Vineyards SH

































Wednesday, November 13

Registration Desk Open 8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Seminars: 9:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Bourgogne Wines: The First Step to the Notion of Terroir

Southern California Versus Italy: A Blind Comparison of Six Italian Varieties from Two Wildly Different Regions

Roger Bohmrich, MW

11:15 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

The Mystery of the Climats de Bourgogne

Albarino & Somms: A Focused Tasting from Rias Baixas

Bob Bath, MS, Culinary Institute of America

2:00 p.m. - 3:45 p.m

Village Appellations: The Heart of the Range

Global vs. Domestic: Is the World Wine Stage Getting Smaller?

Bob Bath, MS, Culinary Institute of America

Thursday, November 14

Registration Desk Open

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

Seminars:

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Discover Lugana, the Graceful, Unique White Wine of Lake Garda Laura Donadoni, LA Com Wine Agency

Spirits of Japanese Craftmanship: Whiskey & Shochu Toshio Ueno, MSS, Sake School of America

Syrah Smackdown

Thomas Price, MS, Jackson Family Fine Wines

Varied Aging Vessels' Impact on Wine Flavor and Style Bree Stock, MW, Constant Crush Advisors

Winning at Beverage Programs! Part 1: Revenue Erik Segelbaum, SOMLYAY LLC

Gretchen Thomas, CSW, CMS, WSET, Del Frisco's Restaurant Group Eugenio lardim, Wines of Portugal

Geoff Labitzke, MW, Kistler Vineyards Constantin Alexander, US Hakkasan Group

Haley Moore, Town Hall, Salt House, Anchor & Hope

Tasting Break hosted by WhyNot

10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. WSET Fireside Chat: Enter the Z 10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Seminars:

11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

All Cognac is Brandy, but Not All Brandy is Cognac!

Christian Esser, Wineschool

Bordeaux and Germany's Best Kept Secrets

Lindsay Pomeroy, MW, Wine Smartie

Deconstructing Spirits
Bill Brandel, The SOMM Journal & Tasting Panel

New & Pending Pacific Northwest AVAs & Trends

David Glancy, MS, San Francisco Wine Schoo

The Genius of Pinot Noir

Charles Curtis MW WineAlpha

Charles Curtis, MW, WineAlpha

Winning at Beverage Programs! Part 2: Expenses

Erik Segelbaum, SOMLYAY LLC

Gretchen Thomas, CSW, CMS, WSET, Del Frisco's Restaurant Group

Eugenio Jardim, Wines of Portugal

Geoff Labitzke, MW, Kistler Vineyards

Constantin Alexander, US Hakkasan Group

Haley Moore, Town Hall, Salt House, Anchor & Hope

Lunch hosted by DO Cava *Additional fee to attend. Limited space available!

Seminars: 2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

California Terroirists: Rethinking Assumptions from Paso to Lodi, Napa to Sonoma David Glancy, MS, San Francisco Wine School

Oxygen Management & Wine Evolution Through Wine Closures
Mary Gorman-McAdams, MW, International Wine Center

Portugal, A Modern Day Classic! Eugenio Jardim, Wines of Portugal

Savory & Saline: It's Not a Flavor...It's a Feeling Nick Hetzel, MS, Jackson Family Wines Larry O'Brien, MS, Jackson Family Wines Thomas Price, MS, Jackson Family Fine Wines

The Value of Single Blind Tasting
Eric Entrikin, MS, E & J Gallo & Germain Robin
Trentodoc's Timeless Passion: A Study of Ferrari's Traditional Method Sparkling

Wines from the Italian Alps

Laura Donadoni, LA Com Wine Agency

Tasting Break hosted by WhyNot, Black Stallion Estate, and Bodegas Ramon Bilbao

WSET Fireside Chat: WSET's New Look

Seminars:

4:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

It's Willamette Damnit! A Deep Dive Into Oregon's Willamette Valley

Mead: What is all the Buzz About?

.....

Gillian Balance, MS, Treasury Wine Estates Traci Dutton, CIA Peter Bakulic, American Meadmakers Association Board Ash Fishbein, Sap House Meadery

Study Tips for Advanced to Master Level Candidates

Lindsay Pomeroy, MW, Wine Smarties Peter Neptune, MS, Neptune School of Wine Erik Segelbaum, SOMLYAY LLC

Tempranillo Master Class

Nicole Andrus, Trinchero Family Estates Eugenio Jardim, Wines of Portugal

Wines of Israel: Unknown Side of the Mediterranean

Sandy Block, MW, Legal Sea Foods Medi-Tasting with Maisons & Domaines Henriot Charles Curtis, MW, Wine Alpha Natalie Bell, Mindful Wellness

Tasting: 5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Concours d'Spirits Tasting *Trade Only*

Friday, November 15

Registration Desk Open 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

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

Seminars: 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Champagne Lees Aging: Parameters, Conditions, & Effects Diego Meraviglia, North American Sommelier Association

aviglia, North

New Horizon of Asian Wines

Toshio Ueno, MSS, Sake School of America Tommy Lam, Asian Wine Institute

New Zealand Chardonnay: A Regional Overview and Tasting Cameron Douglas, MS, AUT University

Vintage California Cabernet Christopher Hoel, Harper's Club

Women in Wine Panel Discussion

Courtney Quinn, Women's Wine Alliance Lisa Redwine, Regal Wine Co.

Va Va Voom for Valpolicella

Tasting Break hosted by WhyNot & Diniz Cellars

WSET Fireside Chat: Under the Influence?

Seminars: 11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Alto Adige: A World Apart

Tim Gaiser MS Autho

Career Prospects in Today's Wine Industry

Jann Cotter, Jackson Family Wines Ira Norof, Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits

Faith Fulginit, Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse

How to Really do a Deductive Tasting: Like for Real, for Real Will Costello, MS, Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills Estates

Heroic Harvests: Extreme Viticulture in Challenging Spanish Sites

Joseph Spellman, MS, JUSTIN & Landmark Vineyards

Master Class on Tasting Whiskey for Quality

David Rudman, WSET Americas

The World's Many Styles of Chenin Blanc Geoff Labitzke, MW, Kistler Vineyards Brian Lynch, Kermit Lynch

Networking Lunch 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Seminars: 2:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m

Blind Taste with the Masters
Will Costello, MS, Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills Estates
Joseph Spellman, MS, JUSTIN Vineyards & Landmark Vineyards
David Glancy, MS, San Francisco Wine School
Geoff Labitzke, MW, Kistler Vineyards

Franciacorta: The Region, The Method, The Wine Michelle Williams, WSET Advanced, Forbes

From Peasant to Artisan: Probing into Wild Agave Used in Mezcal Maurice DiMarino, Cohn Restaurant Group

Master Class on Natural Wine

Patrick Ballow. Vino Carta

Not Since Lunch: Unconfusing Barolo and Brunello

Viewing Wines Through the Lens of Diversity Lia Jones, Diversity in Wine and Spirits

Tasting Break hosted by WhyNot

WSET Fireside Chat: Top Talent Attract, Train and Retain

3:30 p.m. - 4: 15 p.m

Tasting: 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Grand Decant Tasting *Trade Only*

Grand Decant Tasting

chedule Glance

Produced by: FAST FORWARD





story by Amanda M. Faison photos by Jason Kindig

The best catchphrases invoke an element of mystery. Take the unofficial tagline of Dallas-based Southwest Spirits, which proudly announces that it's one of the largest Texas spirits producers no one has ever heard of. With a portfolio that includes more than 25 brands centered around a solid core of products in which it's invested—NUE Vodka, Calamity Gin, Title No. 21 Whiskey, Henderson Whiskey, Knockmore Irish Whiskey, Blumenpflücker, and J.R. Ewing Bourbon (see page 121)—its market share is quickly growing for reasons that are themselves no mystery.

Setting a Solid Foundation

In just three years, Southwest has gone from "selling less than 100,000 cases to selling 400,000 cases of alcohol in every shape and size in over 35 states," says Mark Martinson, managing partner of Orox Capital Management, a Dallas-based private equity firm that infused the company with cash in 2016 and has helped fund its development of custom product lines like the aforementioned Blumenpflücker, a German herbal liqueur. All of this growth means that Southwest's 103,000-square-foot operation—which includes three high-speed bottling lines, multiple tank farms, a large bonded warehouse, and areas for dry-goods storage—is very nearly bursting at the seams, so within the next 18 months, the distillery will move into an even larger facility. In the meantime, says Mike Howard, President of Southwest Spirits and a 30-year veteran of the spirits industry, "We'll use secondary storage for either dry goods or finished goods. And we're looking at running hybrid-production shifts or going to a full second shift."



Master Distiller John Fortman is in his element as he narrows down his selection of whiskeys for the next run of Title No. 21.



O'Malley Hayes, partner of Orox, notes that Southwest is considering building a tasting room at the new facility. This may seem like a nobrainer, as most distilleries open with expensive, eye-popping spaces to draw in the public, but Southwest has taken a different tack thus far: Instead of focusing on colorful billboards and fancy hospitality centers, it has quietly and diligently built a firm foundation on production. This, of course, has contributed to its anonym-



This holiday season, NUE Vodka is being packaged with gift tags that allow consumers to add a personalized video message.

ity despite its success. "We've been to distilleries with expensive tasting rooms that have a bottling line that only runs twice a month," Hayes says. (Southwest's three lines run five days a week.) "We've done the exact opposite and built a solid brand and portfolio. But now's the time."

The time is especially right for NUE Vodka, which Ronna Feifarek, Southwest's Vice President of Marketing, refers to as the company's "bread-and-butter brand." Ironically, the label got off to a slow start; with Tito's and Deep Eddy already dominating the Texas vodka market, no one initially thought there was room for another. "People asked, how are you going to compete? And why would you want to? Why would I buy NUE?" Martinson recalls. Fortunately, he was always prepared with an answer: "Mike's understanding of the alcohol market and consumer preferences," a reference to Howard's keen awareness of his rival products' niches. Tito's business model centers around selling original vodka, while Deep Eddy's is committed to selling flavored vodkabut Southwest Spirits does both at an even better price. The key strategy here is to offer the marketplace something it

Employees add holiday gift tags to bottles of NUE Vodka on one of Southwest's three bottling lines.

already wants for less than it expects. "We wanted to be \$19.99," says Howard (by comparison, Tito's usually sells for \$22-\$25). "We felt like in order to get the awareness and trial, we needed to be at a more popular price point. Then we'd overdeliver on the juice."

And NUE, an 80-proof, cornderived, gluten-free vodka, does just that. Howard, along with Master Distiller John Fortman, believes that NUE's signature smooth finish makes it more approachable and mixable than that of its competitors. Its

distinctiveness comes from Fortman's process—one that relies on multiple distillations in individual batches (there's no continuous flow). "We use an advanced column process and filtration to give clear finish without stripping flavor," Fortman says. "You're not going to find a vodka of that quality at that price elsewhere."

Howard points to NUE's other selling point: its sleek and minimalist label. "There was an opportunity to have a Texas vodka with a more cosmopolitan feel," he says. "Everyone [else] has gone with a longhorn or a lake scene or something Western-looking. Dallas is very dynamic and cosmopolitan, and there was an opportunity to be different." Indeed, the label's Texas references are more nuances than explicit details. In any case, the brand

followed NUE's lead by establishing itself as a quality blended whiskey that can go up against such old-school names as Kentucky Deluxe, 7 Crown, and Kessler. "These whiskeys haven't changed since post-World War II, and they're all in plastic [bottles]," savs Howard. "We felt there was an opportunity to have great packaging and good juice at \$18.99 for 1.75 liters." Southwest designed a strong label, put it on an upscale glass bottle, and filled it with a blend containing ten-year-old whiskey. "This is for the crowd that says 'I like my whiskey and Coke or my 7 and 7, and I don't want to spend \$70 to make a cocktail," Howard says.

Southwest is also making a run at more premium whiskeys with J.R. Ewing, a blend of eight-year-old barrelaged bourbons, and Title No. 21, which offers three expressions—American



John Fortman educates the Republic National Distributing Company's North Texas sales force on the nuances of Title No. 21.

is selling well: "Our Nielsen is off the charts," Howard says. "We're up 160% on our depletions. In a couple of states, our depletion pull is such that we're not even keeping 30 days' inventory."

Improving the Wheel

All of this goes to suggest that a distillery needn't reinvent the wheel to succeed, just improve on it. This is something Martinson likes to say while referencing NUE's ability to pave the way for securing additional market share. "NUE opens the possibility to cross-sell to those customers, distributors, and retailers with our portfolio," he points out. One good example is Henderson Whiskey, which has

whiskey, rye, and bourbon—and is fittingly named for the amendment that repealed Prohibition. (That backstory comes into play with the company's design for a nifty new label, bearing the slogan "Let Justice Flow Free.") The distillery makes some of its whiskey but also buys some of it young, then ages it all—some 500 barrels at a time—in barrels at the facility. Its rickhouse is neither heated nor air-conditioned so that Fortman can take advantage of Texas' wild temperature swings: As the Dallas heat comes and goes, the alcohol inside each barrel expands and contracts, all the while picking up the deep flavors of the wood. With 60-70% of flavor coming from the



Title No. 21's new 2020 label alludes to the repeal of Prohibition, with Lady Justice tipping scales in our favor to drink freely again.

aging process, he says, "you want some seasons in there to get the alcohol in and out of wood. The public gets hung up on age, but it's just not that simple."

Not surprisingly, the barrels at the edge of the warehouse experience more temperature fluctuation than those in the center. When it's time to blend a batch, Fortman tastes the liquid in each one, looking for specific notes. "I do not assume anything when blending," he says. "For example, if a formula calls for a four-year-old bourbon, I do not simply tell our blender operators to go pull a four-year-old. I will pull a lot of samples from barrels to test and may end up with several four years and five years and possibly even [an] eight-year-old."

Fortman reiterates that distilling is "more of a science while blending is more of an art"—and perhaps that balance describes Southwest Spirits as a whole. It's Fortman's fine touch, coupled with Howard's deep creativity and astute business sense, that has yielded success. Southwest is a dynamic, multifaceted company that drew significant investment because of its many-pronged potential; when Orox first considered investing, they liked that the distillery already had several streams of revenue, including multiple brands and co-packing ability, in place. "[It] wasn't pinning all its hopes on being the next Tito's," Hayes says. Now that it has blossomed into the third-largest spirits producer in Texas, Martinson adds, "There's no higher compliment than . . . to say [our investment] was a no-brainer." Southwest's smart approach to growth has proven it to be just that.

PHOTOS: JEREMY BALL

Day Tripping in Santa Margarita

EXPLORING A HIDDEN WINE-COUNTRY DESTINATION ALONG CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST by Michelle Ball

Oyster Ridge Barn (pictured

above) is named for the fossilized oysters in Margarita Vineyard. Containing thousands of oyster fossils (inset), ancient sea beds form just one of the five soil types found within the vineyard.

ust 10 miles north of San Luis Obispo along Highway 101, majestic oak trees guard the exit to one of California's historic hidden gems: Santa Margarita. Long ago, this region was central to trade between the Chumash and Salinan tribes and later served as a way station for Franciscan priests traveling between Mission San Luis Obispo and Mission San Miguel. Following a decades-long post-Depression lull, it has seen a resurgence in energy: Local artisans have embraced the community's rich history, offering visitors exceptional gastronomic and recreational experiences against a well-preserved backdrop that evokes the old Wild West.

The tiny town of Santa Margarita is located in the heart of the namesake Santa Margarita Ranch AVA—much of whose 17,000 acres of open space also comprise one of the longest-operating cattle ranches in California. As the southernmost sub-appellation in the broader Paso Robles AVA, it's one of the coolest, situated only 14 miles from the ocean (though the Santa Lucia Mountain range provides some protection). Robert Mondavi was the first to see the area's immense potential for grape growing; in 1999, he signed a long-term lease with the three families who own the ranch to establish Margarita Vineyard—planting 800 acres of vines using the most progressive and sustainable methods of the time.

IA PRODUCTIONS

The charming town of Santa Margarita, CA, awaits just north of San Luis Obispo.

When Robert Mondavi Winery changed hands, the Filipponi, Rossi, and Wittstrom families reclaimed the lease and recruited the talents of winemaker Mike Sinor to launch Ancient Peaks Winery. Because of the diverse terroir in its rolling hills which boast five distinct soil types and dozens of individual microclimates—the now-1,000-acre Margarita Vineyard has proven capable of growing everything from Pinot Noir to Cabernet Sauvignon.

Here's our suggested itinerary for an ideal day trip among the vines.

This limited-

style blend is

block.

edition Bordeaux-

11:30 a.m. Once you're back in town, head across the street to Ancient Peaks' rustic-chic tasting room to recharge. Sample an extensive selection of wines made from the vines that stood below your feet moments before: Balanced and complex, the lineup is as refined yet approachable as its surroundings while overdelivering for the price.

sourced from **Ancient Peaks' Oyster Ridge**

> 12:30 p.m. For lunch, Rosalina should not be missed. Imagine an old saloon transformed into a scene from Quentin Tarantino's imagination via red pleather, church pews, and Día de los Muertosinspired artwork. True to the restaurant's tagline ("Home of Barrio Soul Food"), the menu offers a fresh take on traditional Mexican cantina fare with dishes such as yellowfin tuna nachos, housemade escabeche. and three-cheese fonduta with blistered peppers. Rosalina also takes creative license via thirst-quenching Micheladas



Wild West saloon meets contemporary Mexican art gallery at Rosalina.

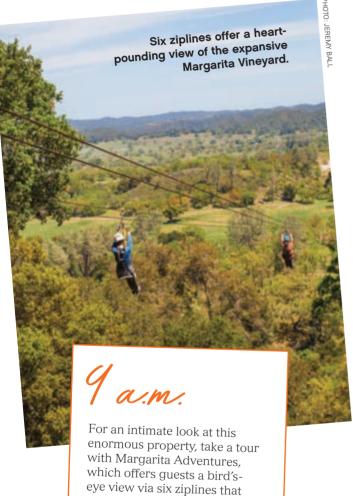
and other cocktails made with fresh juices and saké-based spirits.

2 p.m. Dusty clapboard buildings, a neon-turquoise hangar, and rusty antique pickups in the middle of a golden field provide just a few of many prime backdrops for selfies here, proving that this town was made for Instagram (or vice versa). It's also worth noting that Santa Margarita is the gateway to the Carrizo Plains, where winter rains paint the surrounding hills in the colors of gorgeous super blooms each spring.

For shoppers, HOME Santa Margarita sells handcrafted home decor in contemporary farmhouse style. If treasure hunting is more your thing, there are a number of discoveries to be made at antique store The Barn, which features a wide collection of old books, local memorabilia, collectibles, and locally made crafts.

6:30 p.m. Thanks to the area's diurnal temperature swings, even the warmest days give way to cooler evening temperatures ideal for al fresco dining. Across the street from Rosalina, "The Range" is scrawled beneath barbed wire across an eggshell-colored Art Deco building. The steakhouse's dining room is a quiet snapshot of a bygone time complete with old framed records and photos, while the patio is an eclectic and boisterous space where locals and tourists alike gather to share an unforgettable meal.

This cash-only restaurant is known across the county for its elevated comfort food, including mouthwatering steaks. End the day with the coffee-crusted Angus beef rib-eye smothered in a Wild Turkey-peppercorn cream sauce and a bottle of Ancient Peaks Sauvignon Blanc. Yes, this is Cabernet country, but there's nothing like a crisp white zinger to cleanse the palate.



soar over the vineyard. On the 15-minute shuttle ride from

downtown Santa Margarita, quests receive an extensive overview of the ranch and its

complex history as well as an

ample view of the landscape,

passing families of deer, wild

before they arrive at the first

stop to gear up. The initial step

off the zipline platform is daunt-

ing, yet the ride is long enough

to soothe any jitters as you glide

smoothly over the scores of

vines below.

turkeys, and other wildlife

october 2019 / the tasting panel / 95



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STORY BY MICHELLE BALL PHOTOS BY JEREMY BALL

ecessity has long been considered the mother of invention. Yet in a global economy, where there's a product to fulfill nearly every want and need, curiosity might be "necessity 2.0"—prompting novel ideas that challenge the status quo. California-based company Winc is testing that theory by dramatically changing how we shop for wine via a tech-enabled platform that showcases a diverse portfolio of brands made for the next generation of consumers (visit trade.winc.com for details).

Winc's team leverages a two-way conversation with consumers to launch, validate, and optimize products; with proof of concept, select brands are then scaled more broadly in premium retailers and restaurants nationwide. Winc wines are now available at more than 3,100 on- and off-premise accounts in 48 states—including Whole Foods, The Hoxton, and The Bungalow—and the company's unique ability to build and scale brands through a data-driven, omni-channel approach has decidedly set it apart.

But what started as a curated online wine-subscription service in 2011 has since evolved into a full-scale modern winery with a direct connection to the consumer. Marking its transition to proprietary products, Winc hired Ryan Zotovich as Director of Winemaking in 2015. Zotovich embodies the modern jack-of-all-trades persona, complete with a stylish Ron Swanson mustache (which he says his wife adores). His creative spirit and scientific mind are crucial to the job of managing more



Growing up, Ryan Zotovich helped his family cultivate their own vegetables and orchids and raise chickens. Zotovich and his wife, Brittany, continue this tradition and have recently added beekeeping to their duties.

"FOR THERE IS NO FOLLY OF THE BEAST OF THE EARTH THAT IS NOT INFINITELY OUTDONE BY THE MADNESS OF MEN."

~HFRMAN MFLVILLE MORY DICK

than 100 proprietary wines annually. Many of Winc's offerings are crafted from grapes sourced throughout the Central Coast, including the popular Folly of the Beast—a fresh, fruit-forward, sub-\$20 Pinot Noir that's actually true to the variety. Considering that Zotovich cut his teeth on Pinot Noir at Sea Smoke and Zotovich Cellars in Santa Barbara County's renowned Sta. Rita Hills AVA, which is nearly synonymous with the grape, it's not surprising that the wine has seen such success.

Learning from the Best

Zotovich's path to the industry stemmed from a few chance encounters. His dad was a wine aficionado and always had a bottle at the table, but it didn't capture his son's interest growing up. That all changed when his uncle brought a bottle of 1983 Caymus Cabernet Sauvignon to dinner from a vintage that just so happened to be his nephew's birth year. "It opened up a world for me that I didn't really know about," recalls Zotovich, who spoke with his dad soon after that moment about being a winemaker.

His father then introduced him to Dr. Keith Patterson, the highly respected professor who ran the viticulture program at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, before his death in 2013. Zotovich remembers Patterson saying, "Okay, meet me at Firestone. We'll have a cocktail and discuss your future." At the end of the meeting, Patterson explained that enrollment for the program was already at capacity, but he had taken a liking to Zotovich and told him, "I'm going to pull some strings and get you in."

Patterson was a passionate teacher who had a profound influence on his students. He stressed the importance of grape-growing knowledge to winemaking, prompting Zotovich to focus on viticulture as well as enology. "I knew that I wanted to be in the cellar more than the vineyards," says Zotovich, "but I knew I also needed a solid understanding of viticulture so I could go out and have a conversation with my farmers on a level where they would respect me."

For example, low yields are often assumed to be essential to high-quality wine grapes, yet Patterson reinforced the idea that every vineyard has an optimal load based on climate, variety, rootstock, desired ripeness, the soil's nutrient availability, and more. When looking for a source for Winc's Summer Water (a light, dry, and crisp rosé that has developed a cult following), Zotovich spoke with a grower in the Santa Ynez Valley who typically sells his Grenache at a premium but agreed to a lower price in exchange for higher-

"IF YOU'RE
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FROM THE
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RIGHT TIME,
YOU DON'T
NEED ALL
THAT OTHER
STUFF."
~WINC DIRECTOR OF
WINEMAKING RYAN ZOTOVICH



vielding fruit with a lower sugar level, around 21 Brix. If the grapes were to be used for red wine, the vines would struggle to achieve even ripeness at that Brix, but for a rosé, explains Zotovich, the result was perfect: "The grower made a little more money [and] I got a way better product . . . as the result of all of us having a conversation." The ability to convince farmers to adjust to his needs is part of what makes him such a talented winemaker.

After graduation, Zotovich planned on moving to Napa Valley, where he already had a guaranteed position. Yet after meeting Steve Clifton, winemaker and owner of Palmina Wines, at a party, that plan changed. Clifton invited him to work a day of harvest, and after they finished, crews representing the whole industrial block of wineries in Lompoc met at Sea Smoke for a lunch that the producers typically take turns hosting. An all-star cast of personalities attended—among them Kris Curran, Bruno D'Alfonso, and Victor Gallegos and Zotovich was so impressed by the camaraderie he witnessed that he asked to stay on as an unpaid intern at Palmina. He soon became Clifton's assistant winemaker, working with nearly a dozen Italian varieties for more than 20 bottlings. This experience, and those that followed at Sea Smoke and Zotovich Cellars, gave him the confidence and flexibility required to manage a large portfolio of wines.

Though Zotovich crafts Winc's domestic wines from grape to bottle, the company's portfolio is global, with wines from Chile, New Zealand, France, South Africa, and beyond. As a result, Zotovich has cultivated relationships with specific partners who execute the international offerings to his specifications. After harvest, Zotovich meets with the producers to taste the wines, fine-tune the lots, and decide on the final blends. He bottles the results in California to reduce the company's carbon footprint and ensure control over final sulfur adjustments.

Knowing that its customers are keen on minimal intervention, Winc has adopted the European organic wine standard for sulfur additions and treats each wine as thoughtfully as if it were a small lot. "If you're picking the right thing from the right place at the right time, you don't need all that other stuff," asserts Zotovich, referring to the fillers and additives sometimes used in large-scale production.



Folly of the Beast

"It's kind of a passion project bordering on insanity," says Zotovich when introducing one of Winc's most soughtafter wines, Folly of the Beast. The name comes from a famous line in Herman Melville's Moby Dick that captures Captain Ahab's maniacal pursuit of the elusive white whale: "For there is no folly of the beast of the earth that is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men." Pinot Noir is notorious for being difficult to grow; consistently producing a high-quality varietal wine at an affordable price is much like chasing Melville's white whale (albeit with happier results). "We wanted a \$19 Pinot Noir that drank like a \$25 Pinot Noir, and we knew we could make one better than what was out there in that same category," explains Zotovich, alluding to comparably priced wines that rely on blending varieties and residual sugar.

By contrast, Zotovich treats each lot of Pinot separately before bringing them together for the final result. He says it's all about rethinking the use of small-production techniques for larger-scale wines. "I'm basically taking the same approach I did at Zotovich [Cellars] and scaling it up. It turns out, yeah, it can be done," he says, adding, "It's Pinot Noir, and it should taste like Pinot Noir."



WESTERN SON DISTILLERY LEVERAGES ITS TALENTED TEAM TO MAKE A SPLASH IN THE PREMIUM **VODKA MARKET**

STORY BY KATE NEWTON PHOTOS BY JASON KINDIG

It's exactly the sort of sweltering day you'd expect to encounter in Texas in August, with temperatures hovering near the triple digits and the humidity following not far behind. Inside the production area of Western Son Distillery, tucked back about a mile from the sleepy highway that winds its way past Pilot Point (population 4,400), things aren't much better.

"I've been here four years, so this isn't my first go-round in the summer," says distiller Vinny Messina, raising his voice to be heard over a massive fan firing on all cylinders and the sound of clinking glass whirling its way down the busy bottling line in the adjacent room. Sweat may be beading on his brow, but his wide grin reveals just how at ease he really is.

Western Son Distillery tends to have that effect on people, whether they're seasoned employees or residents stopping by to support their favorite local brand. Established in 2011 in a 3,000-squarefoot space in Carrollton, a northern suburb of the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex, this relatively young craft distillery has already seen explosive growth that continues to surprise the very people whose ambition is driving it.



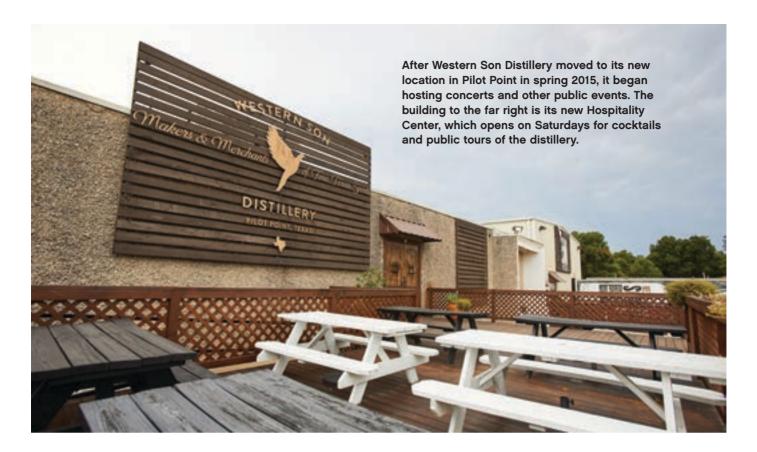
Western Son Distillery's garden, which employees volunteer to help maintain, provides fresh herbs and vegetables for use in cocktails served at the Hospitality Center.



The award-winning Original Vodka, pictured here alongside Western Son Distillery's signature Western Sunset cocktail, remains the brand's flagship product. It's supplemented by eight flavored expressions as well as two gins, ginger beer, and a lineup of canned cocktails.

Humble roots, big dreams: It's a tale as old as time in the Lone Star State, and in the burgeoning business of Texas vodka, loyalty runs deep. "This is our home—this is where we started and where we want to continue to grow throughout the nation," says Brand Manager Matt Krocheski, who joined the company in February 2018 as it made a push to broaden its distribution footprint nationwide. Beyond its core Original expression, which remains its top seller by a considerable margin, Western Son Distillery is best known for its expansive line of award-winning flavored vodkas: Blueberry, Lime, Watermelon, Prickly Pear, Cucumber, Peach, Grapefruit, and the newly launched Raspberry.

The company also produces two gins, one of



which is barrel-aged, as well as canned cocktails, ginger beer, and limited releases like a single-barrel bourbon. That said, the team is perfectly content with being viewed more or less exclusively as a premium vodka brand. "The good thing in the vodka category right now is premium vodkas are growing and domestic vodkas are growing, so we are in the sweet spot there," says founder/CEO John Straits. "Texas vodkas have done well as a subset of the domestic category—there's been good growth from several different brands. I always tell people Texas travels, and I think it's because of the quality products being produced. So maybe what Kentucky is to bourbon, Texas is to vodka."

Making Moves

Western Son Distillery's products can now be found in 45 states, but no matter how far they venture from home, they're all made under the same roof and adhere to the same rigid set of standards: Each offering is crafted in small batches with natural ingredients and distilled ten times in a 20-foot column still. Made with 100% American yellow corn, the gluten-free Original expression is infused with natural fruit extract to yield dynamic flavors inspired by—what else?—their home state.

"Texas is one of those states where you get very unique landscapes—you have forests, you have mountains, you have deserts . . . It's an amazing state to produce flavor profiles [from]," says Krocheski. "When we're making these flavors, we want to make sure they're inspired by the ripe fruits of Texas so consumers can really feel the presence of what the state has to offer."

Messina, whom Krocheski describes as "a perfectionist" when it comes to his craft, hails from a family full of professionals in the beverage industry, though he's the first to venture into distilling after holding several roles in retail and distribution. His father once worked with Straits at a distributor in Messina's hometown, so by the time Western Son Distillery was seeking a new distiller, the brand was already on his radar. He started in November 2015, six months after it moved to Pilot Point. "It was an easy decision for me, because Carlos [Guillem, Western Son Distillery's COO] and John had both been in the industry forever, and [yet] they both had that youthful energysomething relatable," Messina says, adding that he immediately "felt more at home" than he had in his previous distilling job.

At the old building in Carrollton, the single bottling line was operated with a

foot pedal. Now, Messina found himself in a "barren and empty" room that had been added on to the main building (once a women's undergarment factory). The space was essentially a clean slate, considering it was occupied by nothing but a fermenter, a pot still, and a column still. "That was already my number-one selling point, the space—that was how I was sold instantly," he says.

In addition to distilling, Messina and a crew of fewer than a dozen employees had to run the bottling line, load trucks, and perform every other task required to get the product out the door. After adding a mash tun and two more fermenters (the trio are now, in true Texas fashion, named for Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, and Kris Kristofferson), they began ramping up production; as he watched the cases pile up and the workflow fall into a rhythm, Messina knew he'd made the right call. "It's something I look back on, and I'm in awe. I don't feel as stressed as I was, but I still have the gray hairs," he says with a laugh.

Western Son Distillery's products have been ten-times distilled from the beginning, a standard Messina says has served as the "signature" that helps set the brand apart from competitors. Equipped with ten interior copper plates, the column still is programmed

at 170 degrees Fahrenheit, and as the spirit nears its boiling point with each distillation, the still is "cooking out all of those oils and all of the impurities—the stuff that really affects you the morning after," Messina says. "As it's rising through that column, it's refining it and making it as pure as possible." If you were to taste vodkas that had undergone a single, a triple, or even a six-times distillation side by side, the difference would be readily apparent: You might detect an oiliness or a lack of nuance that a superior product would immediately expose. A full ten distillations, meanwhile, enables what Messina calls "that corn sweetness [to] really come through." "It gives us that uniqueness," he adds.

Courtesy of new packaging, Western Son Distillery's products now have a streamlined look that matches their mouthfeel. "We wanted to enhance the premium aspect of the brand with the gold emblem of the distillery logo, the cleaner background on the updated logo topography, and [a] capsule match[ing] the flavor," says Krocheski. "It really helps it stand out on the shelf, but at the same time, it's a very clean look."

"A Means of Escape"

As spacious as it once seemed, Western Son Distillery maintains a consistently bustling pace that now extends through the weekends, thanks to its new Hospitality Center and a schedule of public tours, which Messina leads every Saturday. Currently the thirdlargest employer in Pilot Point, the distillery embraced the local community from the moment it arrived; not long after it opened, a stage was constructed outside to host concerts that quickly attracted a following. The Hospitality Center, meanwhile, has added a bar-like environment where people can simply stop by for a drink or hang out before they embark on a tour through the production area.

While many guests are repeat customers, a map in the distillery's retail space replete with pins placed by visitors shows that people are coming not only from across the state but from around the nation—and the world. (Messina recalls one woman who had recently visited from Eastern Europe; because they couldn't communicate verbally, they just kept giving each other a thumb's up as she tasted the vodkas.) "Coming up to Pilot Point, it's

a destination distillery," Messina says. "We're just outside of DFW, but you're not seeing skyscrapers and highways, you're seeing farms and ranchland . . . It's just homey, in a sense, like Anytown, USA, but we've got some power behind us." Adds Krocheski, "We're not that far for a lot of people, but we're still a means of escape." It's a trip complete with its own souvenirs: Tour participants essentially make their own bottle by venturing into the production area, combining fruit juice with vodka, and adding a label in the packaging area that Messina then signs. It's been a "big hit," Guillem says, attracting several hundred people each week.



Western Son Distillery's products are ten-times distilled in a 20-foot column still. The process, which distiller Vinny Messina (pictured) calls the brand's "signature," ensures that the finished product tastes "as pure as possible."

Those visitors as well as the growing production crew will have even more space to mill about once Western Son Distillery finishes building its new 35,000-square-foot distribution center in nearby Denton. The expansion will also allow for the addition of another bottling line, which, given the brand's trajectory, is sorely needed. When the distillery moved to Pilot Point, its annual production was roughly 50,000 units; now, just four and a half years later, the number has skyrocketed to 400,000.

That level of growth would prompt many brands to lose sight of their original vision in favor of what they see as loftier aspirations, but the Western

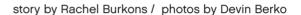
Son Distillery team has taken measures to ensure they don't get too big for their proverbial boots. For Straits, that means focusing on quality above all. "That's our biggest driver not only for the growth we've had but [for] continued growth," he says. "We'll never compromise that."

Selling that commitment to quality in person is a mission that even Messina has helped take on—a role that's rare for a distiller. He and the sales team will travel to different markets like Indiana. Ohio, and Arizona, witnessing firsthand the importance of building relationships with on-premise accounts, retailers, and distributors alike. And while the Original expression attracts fans wherever it goes. Messina says it's been interesting to see how certain areas either "gravitate to the most different flavors" or stick to what they're known for (Prickly Pear is a hit in the Southwest, and New Jersey covets the flavor of its official state fruit: Blueberry).

"That's the best part, is the versatility and diversity all of the flavors offer. Everyone has their preference, but [we] have a little niche for everything," Messina says. A purist, he prefers to savor the vodkas on the rocks, but both he and Krocheski have seemingly endless suggestions for enjoying the portfolio: the Blueberry with lemonade, the Raspberry with a splash of lemonlime soda, any of the flavors with ginger beer, and so on. In addition to working with bartenders and mixologists to create signature cocktails, the brand features a rotating list of recipes on its website that are inspired by the seasons (yes, in Texas, "tailgating" qualifies as such).

While the team is open to eventually adding more flavors to its lineup, it ranks low on their list of priorities: "Some people are known for their flavors more than their original, and that's where you start to see a shift—you become a one-trick pony, in a sense," says Messina. But this small-town workhorse has proven time and time again that its capacity for evolution makes it one of the most exciting vodka brands on the market today. "It's that youthful energy that always keeps us looking for the next step and the next curve and an entry to the next level," he adds. "You don't get to meet a lot of companies with this culture. We were so young when I joined that it was, 'Come as you are.' It still is—but now we're a lot bigger."

Who Brought the





Weed Cellars co-founders Victoria Toplansky and Jim Moeller inside the brand's headquarters in West Hollywood, CA.

hether you dated them in high school, roomed with them in college, or bring them along to your friends' dinner fêtes, we all know that person who walks into a party and says, "I brought the weed!" But these days, they may not be referring to cannabis: A new winery on the block is banking on the growth of the legal market without ever touching the plant itself.

Meet Weed Cellars, a new lifestyle brand that's tapping into canna-culture with a clever name, an inclusive marketing strategy, and ambitious plans to introduce its products worldwide. According to co-founder Jim Moeller, a 36-year veteran in the wine and spirits industry, he and fellow co-founder Victoria Toplansky have drawn inspiration from the melting pot that is Southern California to assemble an eclectic team of fellow visionaries to invest in the company—among them country musicians, hockey players, and seasoned business veterans. In addition to appearing in advertisements, they'll attend bottle signings and events on behalf of the brand, with the musicians promoting Weed at their own concerts. "Weed Cellars is a company celebrating the individual in all of us, and this year, we're enjoying supporting [the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, a watershed moment in LGBTQ rights] with the release of our rainbow label," Moeller explains.

While Weed Cellars has kicked off its plans for global domination with four wines—Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon—the company has trademarked the name "Weed" in 76 countries and also has plans to expand its line to beer, whiskey, tequila, clothing, and accessories. "We're not really a cannabis brand," admits Moeller. "We want people to smile. If you bring a bottle of whatever grocery-store wine to a party, it's just, 'Thanks for another bottle.' But if you show up with a bottle of Weed, it becomes a tongue-in-cheek thing, a fun thing—if you're a 22-year-old, would you rather show up with a six-pack of Bud or a six-pack of Weed?"

But a clever name will only go so far, so the Weed



In addition to its wines, Weed Cellars makes branded apparel and accessories. The company also plans to expand its portfolio to beer, whiskey, and tequila.

Cellars team is intent on building a brand with longevity by prioritizing quality products and key partnerships. "We knew that people would try the product at a party, maybe, but if they didn't like what was in the bottle, they wouldn't buy it again," Moeller says. "So we are focused on sourcing from the best wineries on the Central Coast. and the wines way overdeliver for their price point." In addition to its core portfolio, Weed Cellars is currently working on a Chenin Blanc-Viognier blend, a rosé, a Prosecco, and a high-end, super-small-batch release called Smoke made with grapes from the Stags Leap District AVA in Napa Valley.

Despite being on the market for less than a year, Weed Cellars has already seen its share of successes, including placement with such hospitality fran-



Victoria Toplansky and Jim Moeller toast to their successful new brand outside Weed Cellars' West Hollywood office.

chises as Eddie V's, Dick's Last Resort. and Lettuce Entertain You; interested retailers include Meijer, Walmart, and BevMo!. An upcoming partnership with MGM, meanwhile, will see Weed Cellars wines sold in both cans and kegs at participating concert venues. "We see this as a million-case brand in three years," says Moeller, whose confidence lies in part in the ability of Weed Cellars' clever branding to appeal to a wide consumer audience.

He also trusts in the strength of his cohorts, including Josh King as well as Toplansky. Paired with King's key connections in big-box retail and Toplansky's youthful marketing focus and social-media savvy, Moeller's extensive industry experience positions Weed Cellars at the crux of a consumer trend with the ability to put its money

where its mouth is.

Based in the heart of West Hollywood, California, the brand plans to open a tasting lounge in the back of its office space replete with the special-edition rainbow bottles and Instagram-friendly features to welcome Weed consumers. "This is our big 'gold rush' moment," says Toplansky. "This company started on the back of a napkin and we've only had a product in the bottle for four months, but people are excited about it. Everyone knows someone who either drinks wine or smokes weed, so we are able to reach a lot of different types of people."

So whether you're a canna-consumer, a wine drinker, or a professional looking to introduce your guests to a playful new brand, try a little Weed to liven things up—don't worry, it's legal!



California-based lifestyle brand Weed Cellars, which debuted earlier this year, currently offers Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc made with grapes sourced from the Central Coast. Additional expressions are in the works.

A TASTE FOR WEED

Tasting Panel Publisher Meridith May is always up for trying something new—even a little Weed! Here are her tasting notes for the current Weed Cellars releases.

Weed Cellars 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Central Coast Lovely scents of lemon blossom and pineapple complement juicy, bright, and alluring flavors of lime and kiwi. 90

Weed Cellars 2018 Chardonnay, Central Coast A nose of brioche and baked apple gives way to flavors of apple pie and brandied peach. High-toned acidity lifts up this expression alongside dots of white pepper and spiced melon. 90

Weed Cellars 2017 Pinot Noir, Central Coast Earthy aromas of tobacco leaf pave the way for a savory palate of ripe cherry, tomato leaf, and cinnamon, 90

Weed Cellars 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Central Coast Ripe strawberry and zingy boysenberry match up on the nose as spiced cedar and nutmeg accent dark fruit on the palate. It's juicy, with supple tannins and a finish of coffee and chocolate. 90

Russian

REMASSAME

Winemaker Theresa
Heredia has instituted
new techniques at
Gary Farrell Vineyards
& Winery that have
enhanced both the
textural richness and the
site-specificity of these
quintessential Russian
River Valley wines.

THERESA HEREDIA
BRINGS THE GLEAM
TO THE JEWEL THAT
IS GARY FARRELL
VINEYARDS & WINERY

story by David Gadd/photos by Alexander Rubin



Theresa Heredia brings a Burgundian perspective gained during her time at Domaine de Montille in Volnav.

Classic notes of Bing cherry and other red fruit on the nose signal the Gary Farrell 2017 Russian River Selection Pinot Noir (\$45). The rich, Burgundian-inspired palate explores forest floor, wild mushrooms, and cola laced with white pepper and baking spices. The generous mouthfeel is balanced by plenty of controlled acidity, keeping the wine fresh throughout the lengthy finish.



he cool, lush, idyllic Russian River Valley is one of California's most celebrated appellations for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, but it wasn't always that way. Winemaker Gary Farrell was among the pioneers responsible for the area's rise to prominence, working in the 1970s alongside contemporaries such as Davis Bynum, Joe Rochioli, Tom Dehlinger, Robert Stemmler, and Joseph Swan to showcase the valley's potential for world-class wines.

Farrell launched his own label in 1982 and quickly achieved wide acclaim as a small-lot Russian River Valley producer. In 2000, he built a hilltop winery on Westside Road in the heart of the valley, only to put it up for sale four years later. He remained as winemaker until 2006, but after his departure the brand began to lose focus under a succession of owners.

Today, however, Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery is rehoning its legacy as a jewel of the Russian River Valley under the proprietorship of Bill Price—managing partner of Kistler Vineyards, creator of Three Sticks Wines, and owner of the Durell and Gap's Crown vineyards—and his partners. In 2011, newly rehired General Manager Nancy Bailey, who had worked with Farrell previously, began to conduct what she calls "an extensive search" for a new winemaker, with several criteria in mind. "First, I wanted someone who understood the Gary Farrell style and who was going to be thoughtful about its evolution, not someone who would rip it up and start from scratch," says Bailey. "Second, I wanted someone who was keeping up with technology and could use it to make beautiful, elegant, balanced wines. And third, I was looking for someone eloquent, who could present our wines articulately to the public."

TAKING THE REINS

Enter Theresa Heredia, whom Bailey hired in 2012. A former Ph.D. candidate in chemistry at the University of California, Davis, with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, Heredia was lured away from academia by both the romance and the science of wine. "I looked at the enology students and saw that they were doing with grapes what I was doing with peptides," she recalls.

After switching her emphasis to viticulture and enology, she left school entirely to pursue hands-on winemaking—first as harvest enologist at Saintsbury and later as a research enologist at Joseph Phelps, where she crafted the first Freestone wines in 2002. In 2007, she went to the Sonoma Coast to open Phelps'



The Gary Farrell 2017 Russian River Selection Chardonnay (\$35) shows stunning balance and bright acidity, even from this exceptionally warm vintage. It opens with an opulent floral nose laced with zesty citrus overtones. The silky, refined palate delivers complex notes of lemon and spicy herbs and finishes with a lingering touch of almond.

"THE RUSSIAN **RIVER SELECTION IS NOT A SECOND** TIER FOR US, AND

IT'S NOT MADE TO A FORMULA."

-NANCY BAILEY, GENERAL **MANAGER OF GARY FARRELL UINEYARDS & WINERY** new Freestone winery. Furthering her bona fides, Heredia also gained some Burgundian perspective by putting in time at Domaine de Montille in Volnay.

Since joining Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery, Heredia has fulfilled Bailey's qualifications, adding textural richness to the wines and deepening the expressive qualities of the superlative fruit obtained from growers in the Russian River Valley and beyond. Thanks to her prowess, the winery currently produces around 27,000 cases per year in a facility that will top out at 30,000. "We're not looking to grow." says Bailey, who notes that the Gary Farrell portfolio is kept fresh not by expansion but by source variation in both its blends and its singlevineyard releases. The emphasis here is on quality, not quantity.

Heredia has instituted new methods for articulating the winery's staple Chardonnay and Pinot Noir offerings as well as its limited-production Zinfandel. Her innovations include harvesting at lower sugar levels; introducing a press program tailored to specific vineyards and cluster types; undertaking partial whole-cluster fermentation; working with new cooperages, all French, that emphasize light toast; using 500-liter puncheons for controlled oak integration; and doing native fermentations as well as saignée (the bleed-off of juice) when possible to achieve concentration. These techniques have enhanced both the textural richness and site-specificity of the wines; over the years, they've become increasingly complex while still maintaining their signature restrained style which is no easy feat.

A BLEND APART

Each year, Heredia draws on 60–70 different components—not just vineyard lots but also single-block lots and lots from individual clonal selections—to create the winery's two signature cuvées: the Gary Farrell Russian River Selection Chardonnay and the Gary Farrell Russian River Selection Pinot Noir. These are quintessential Russian River Valley wines, blended from three dozen or more prime vineyards in the appellation to yield around 15,000 cases per year—more than half the winery's current production. Although the exact composition changes with the vintage, says Heredia, "something from each of our vinevard sources goes into each blend." This truly makes the winery's most widely distributed offerings drinkable portraits of the Russian River Valley AVA.

So central are the Russian River Selection Chardonnay and Pinot Noir to the Gary Farrell portfolio, in fact, that Heredia crafts them first, creating the vineyard designates from remaining lots. "The Russian River Selection is not a second tier for us," insists Bailey, "and it's not made to a formula." The two important cuvées are given all the winery's—and the winemaker's—devotion and attention, and Heredia is given free rein to structure them as she deems fit. "We don't tell Theresa, 'You can't use this or that fruit because it's too expensive,'" says Bailey. Heredia also notes that the winery has "a massive bulk-out budget" to sell off lots that may fall short of its standards each year.

A WHO'S WHO OF THE RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

"If the Russian River Selection blends are the orchestra, the single-vineyard wines are the soloists," says Bailey. Gary Farrell Winery has long-standing relationships with the growers behind the majority of the Russian River Valley's most iconic vineyards, including such standouts as Rochioli, Allen, Bacigalupi, Ritchie, Olivet Lane, Hop Kiln, Martaella, Westside Farms, Martinelli, Hallberg, and McDonald Mountain (a personal favorite of Heredia's). Sourcing outside the AVA, the team also looks southward to classic vineyards such as Sanford & Benedict, La Rinconada, and Bien Nacido. "A lot of people want to work with us," notes Bailev.

While Heredia does have a vineyard liaison, Laurence Donald, to facilitate grower relations, the winery trusts these veterans to produce and deliver the best fruit possible year after year. "We don't tell them how to farm," says Bailey. "You don't tell Joe Rochioli how to grow grapes. You say, 'Thank you for your fruit.'"

With unrivaled fruit sources and a winemaker who's equal parts passionate, precise, and "project-oriented" (in Heredia's words), Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery continues to be the standard-bearer for the greatness that is the Russian River Valley.

GARY FARRELL'S

Grower Retations

Heredia stands in Gary Farrell's old-vine Chardonnay block within Olivet Lane Vinevard.



The Gary Farrell team maintains close relationships with their grape suppliers, many of whom hail from families that have been farming in California for generations, providing the winery with fruit since the beginning. Now in her eighth vintage with the winery, winemaker Theresa Heredia has earned the respect of these growers.

Kirk Lokka, co-owner and Vineyard Manager of the rustic McDonald Mountain Vineyard in Sebastopol Hills, jokingly calls himself "an ornery old grape grower," but he has a special affection for Heredia. Gary Farrell General Manager Nancy Bailey recalls that when she first introduced them in the vineyard, Lokka "drew himself up to his full stature—and he's not a small guy—and looked down at Theresa and said, 'She's not gonna tell me how to grow my grapes, is she?'"

Despite the initial wariness, Heredia and Lokka soon developed what he now calls "a heck of a relationship"—one of mutual admiration. "Theresa has a very focused palate that she uses to bring out the finest parts of a vineyard," says Lokka. "Having worked with her for several years, I can point her to areas of our vineyards that I believe show off the best parts of the property. Because she has the same mindset of 'place' that I do, she is an absolute pleasure to work with." Lokka also co-owns and manages Hallberg Vineyard in the Green Valley sub-appellation, which enjoys a cool, ocean-chilled hilltop location that makes for distinctive, darker-blue fruit flavors than those found in the heart of the Russian River Vallev.

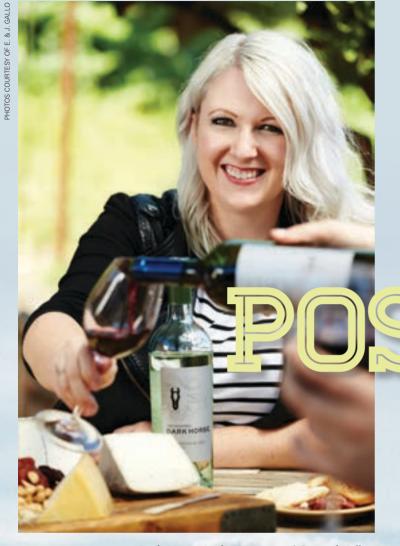
At the celebrated Olivet Lane Vinevard planted by the Pellegrini family in 1975, when there were only 500 acres of Chardonnay in the entire state—Heredia draws from specific rows and blocks for 20 tons of coveted old-vine Wente selection Chardonnay each year (plus an occasional small lot of Pinot Noir). "Theresa is an incredibly easy personality to work with," says General Manager Alexia Pellegrini, who also admires Heredia's technical know-how. "We love it when someone schedules their picks at lower Brix, as Theresa does. That way, we can get them the better fruit, avoiding the stress of sunburn and botrytis. Working with her and her team is a joy-they actually complement the fruit."



Offering vibrant color and superb varietal expression, the Gary Farrell 2015 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$55) is grown in the Green Valley sub-appellation, which benefits from a strong marine influence.



Heredia deftly exploits the exceptional fruit from one of the Russian River Valley's most prized vineyards for the Gary Farrell 2015 Olivet Lane Chardonnay (\$45), a complex, beautifully structured gem that continues to reveal layer after layer of enticing flavors, from shortbread to apricots, minerals to Meyer lemon and beyond.



JOCKEYING FOR

SITION

WINEMAKER BETH LISTON LEADS

DARK HORSE INTO THE LIGHT

by Meridith May

Beth Liston is the Director of Central Valley Winemaking for E. & J. Gallo Winery.



he dark horse in the race is the one you don't believe can win but, unexpectedly, does. Winemaker Beth Liston took this concept as a challenge, setting out to create an \$8 wine that would emerge to prominence by delivering the taste and quality expected of a \$20 expression. Although the suggested retail price has since raised to \$10, the proof remains clear that Dark Horse has achieved status as a successful by-the-glass restaurant pour that also moves quickly and easily from off-premise shelves.

Liston is the Director of Central Valley Winemaking for E. & J. Gallo Winery. She also runs the impressive Livingston Cellars, a central California-based operation that may be the largest facility of its kind. "I have an incredible team of winemakers working with me, coming from diverse backgrounds," she says. In addition to the helping hands, 200plus vineyards from all over California (although Lodi is a primary region) serve as her network of sources for the vast array of varieties that comprise the Dark Horse stable.

But it's the experiments that Liston conducts in her Gallo research facility—up to 50 for a given harvest—that truly make Dark Horse her passion project. Working on a 30,000-gallon scale, she has the ability to play without jeopardizing production; she'll work with various yeast strains, oak regimens, and uncommon varieties and blends, and if the outcome is good, she can scale up.

"We always have to challenge ourselves," Liston told The Tasting Panel during a recent visit to the magazine office. "Offering a higher value for a surprise of a price, well, every winemaker wants to do that. We've had nine years now to evolve as a brand, and the wine industry has evolved alongside us. To remain relevant, we must strive to continue to improve quality."

There are no *neigh*sayers here. We found the wines to be outstanding, offering everything they promised on value while overdelivering on quality.

COLOR COMMENTARY



Dark Horse 2018 Sauvignon Blanc. California Picked a few Brix less ripe, this energetic wine possesses daring

acidity. Crisp pears and honeysuckle are intense on the perfumed nose. Its style, more New Zealand than California, brings out passion fruit and tropical greens—in fact, Liston sent a winemaker to New Zealand to learn about fermentation methods and temperature management. 92



Dark Horse 2017 Pinot Noir, California

This Pinot is co-crushed with Gewürztraminer in the fermenter. The

freshly aromatic nose exudes earth, pepper, and tobacco leaf, which are echoed on the palate. High-toned notes of cranberry and cherry stay true to the variety as complexity and delicacy bring out a lovely combination of rose and violet. Interestingly, even the 375-mL canned version mirrors its personality. 91



Dark Horse 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, California This expression offers up an intense nose of rhubarb, plum, and graphite. A dollop of Petit

Verdot brings in a violet character, and chewy, mouth-filling tannins lend a wonderful textural experience touched with espresso and white-peppered chocolate. "Extended maceration is a game-changer here," notes Liston. "Normally, reds stay on the skin for six days, but we find that 30-35 days is our sweet spot." 91



Dark Horse Non-Vintage Big Red Blend #33.1, California This blend of Tempranillo, Malbec, and Shiraz sees the addition of some Alicante

Bouschet, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Zinfandel. The ripe nose, showing Old World aromas of grilled meat and cherry, suggests a cross between Tannat and Sangiovese, with high acidity on a refreshing yet big-shouldered and broad palate that leads to a finish of molasses and blackberry. 90



Dark Horse Non-Vintage Double Down, California A nod to Liston's commitment to Tannat, one of her favorite blending grapes, this hearty

red is mixed with Teroldego, Petit Verdot, and Petite Sirah. Despite its inky black hue, it has a sunny profile on the nose. Expressive, bittersweet dark chocolate and dry tannins frame a picture of spring heather facing a storm cloud. 90



Dark Horse Brut Bubbles, California This Chardonnaybased Charmat-method sparkler in a 375-mL can gives off yeasty, toasty aromas that lead to lively fruit on the

palate. Notes of white jasmine, neroli, apple, and citrus are clean and pure, and the bubbles are airy and light. 89



DON SEBASTIANI & SONS GETS INTO THE SPIRIT OF AGAVE WITH CONTIGO AND EL MACHO

by Matt Jackson

harmacist John Stith Pemberton invented the syrup that became Coca-Cola. Henry Wells drove a stagecoach before founding American Express and, later, Wells Fargo. Lee Byung-chul started Samsung as a grocery store. And Donny Sebastiani, fourth-generation winemaker at Don Sebastiani & Sons, can now also boast an enhanced role in his own family's business: tequila producer.

"There is such a craft involved in making tequila. We identify with [its] heritage methods . . . as there are many similarities to wine," he says, adding that the spirit's rapid market growth aligned with the Sonoma Valley–based company's vision to broaden its portfolio: "Developing a craft tequila seemed a natural fit."

The long-standing legacy of Don Sebastiani & Sons set the stage for a brilliant partnership with Casa Maestri, a likewise family-owned and fourth generation—operated distillery. "The Maestri family has a great reputation of upholding standards of quality and consistency in their products," Sebastiani explains. "We are excited to offer tequilas made with these standards in mind."



As a leader in wine production, Sebastiani applied his experience and those of generations of winemakers before him to the project. In that effort, he ensured they were sourcing the best agave available for the two expressions Casa Maestri crafts for Don & Sons using traditional methods: Contigo Plata and El Macho Añejo. "Both tequilas are made from estategrown and sustainably harvested Blue Weber agave," Sebastiani explains. Some of the plants come from the highlands of Jalisco, which yields larger, sweeter agave, while others come from the lowlands, where volcanic soils contribute earthy, herbal notes. Both are distilled in copper pot stills and rested for 59 days in stainless steel; El Macho is then finished in re-charred American oak for 14 months, making it a true añejo.

On the nose, Contigo exudes aromas of finger lime and herbal hints of sage and lemongrass; on the palate, flavors of ripe citrus, especially grapefruit, give way to peppery notes. The amber-hued El Macho offers aromas of baking spices and honey followed by flavors of star anise and vanilla bean. Each is food-friendly in its own way: Contigo's burst of white pepper complements seafood dishes, in particular ceviche, while El Macho, in Sebastiani's words, "was designed to be very oak-forward and therefore pairs well with smoked meats and saucy dishes."

Both expressions also shine behind the bar. Sebastiani says his premium products "appeal to cocktail drinkers as well as connoisseurs because of their smooth finish and depth in flavor." For an example of how bartenders incorporate Contigo into their creations, see the sidebar; as for El Macho, Sebastiani notes, it's "great as a sipping tequila but can also be used as a substitute to whiskey in classic cocktails such as the Old Fashioned, showing off the tequila category to new audiences."

"The Maestri family has a great reputation of upholding standards of quality and consistency in their products. We are excited to offer tequilas made with these standards in mind." —Donny Sebastiani



In a saturated market, packaging is more important than ever, so plenty of emphasis was placed on package design to catch the wandering eye of the off-premise customer. Contigo exudes elegance in its tall, crystal-clear bottle with a black-and-white label, while El Macho's unusually shaped vessel—somewhat resembling that of a fine Cognac—suggests power and decadence. The overall effect is "modern, clean, and sophisticated, and the quality is premium," Sebastiani asserts. "We are targeting all who seek small-batch craft spirits delivered in a stylish package."

He adds that interest in Contigo and El Macho is no doubt rooted in the reputation of Don Sebastiani & Sons itself, which "carries years of equity." By producing spirits of the same quality as their wines, the family continues to extend its reach throughout the beverage world; the same goes for their recently released AQUAKOLA, a line of naturally flavored, caffeinated sparkling waters that can be added to cocktails featuring El Macho or Contigo. In short, for consumers planning a weekend outing or an evening in with friends, Don Sebastiani & Sons is becoming an essential one-stop shop.



Derek McDermott, lead bartender at Agave Taco Bar in Denver, CO, shares his Blue Jean Baby Russian Sage Margarita featuring Contigo Blanco.

Contigo Goes to Colorado

Don Sebastiani & Sons' tequilas have recently made a splash at Agave Taco Bar in Denver, Colorado. "Don & Sons has a dedication to their craft, and it shows in their production—Contigo is an amazing tequila," says lead bartender Derek McDermott. "It's come out as the winner in Margaritas nine times out of ten in our bar." Specifically, it stars in McDermott's popular Blue Jean Baby Russian Sage Margarita; the namesake herb, which grows wild in Colorado, boasts notes of pepper and citrus.

"We do our best to provide an eclectic selection of spirits and various techniques to provide a customized, enjoyable experience," McDermott says of Agave. But for guests who prefer a sipping tequila to a cocktail, he can't recommend El Macho highly enough. "El Macho is my favorite añejo," McDermott asserts. "[With] its strong vanilla and hazelnut aspects and the oaky, smooth char flavor . . . it's like whiskey and tequila had a love child, and it's the sweetest little thing you've ever met!"

Blue Jean Baby Russian Sage Margarita

- ▶ 2 oz. Contigo Blanco
- ▶ ½ oz. fresh lemon juice
- ▶ ½ oz. fresh lime juice
- ▶ 3 sprigs Blue Jean Baby Russian Sage, stripped
- 1 dash agave syrup Combine ingredients into a shaker with cube ice and shake. Strain into a Collins glass with fresh ice, then garnish with a sage sprig and lemon wheel.

BANDITOS, BASQUES,

THE MILLER FAMILY'S FRENCH CAMP VINEYARD EMBODIES THE FRONTIER SPIRIT OF PASO ROBLES

AND PIONEERS

by David Gadd

oday, California's Central Coast is resplendent with grape vines. But tourists who flock to the region for its wines—or perhaps to witness the super bloom of California poppies and other wildflowers that surround the vineyards yearly—may have little idea that in the 19th century, this seemingly idyllic landscape had a sketchier reputation. Ruthless banditos lurked in its remote hills, preying on travelers and threatening the French Basque shepherds who settled here after the gold rush. Only after the outlaws were ousted in classic Western-vigilante style would it become some of California's most beautiful and productive wine country.

The Central Coast's colorful history is, however, well known to the Miller family, who had been farming there for four generations—and had already established the Bien Nacido Vineyard

in Santa Barbara County—when they set their sights on a piece of land in Paso Robles in 1973. Originally part of the Camatta cattle ranch, the site was named French Camp Vineyard after the shepherds of yore. (Another Miller family property further south in the Santa Maria Valley, Solomon Hills, would later be named for famous bandito Salomon Pico, the inspiration for the legendary character Zorro.)

"French Camp lies 30 miles due east of Morro Bay," explains Marshall Miller, who heads up operations for the Miller Family Wine Company. "The soil types are diverse, with a strong limestone component, and this feature, combined with the extreme temperature swings, provides grapes with the perfect growing environment."

Brothers Bob and Steve Miller, representing the company's fourth

generation, initially planted just 100 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay at French Camp as a test. As another 20 varieties were added, the vineyard swelled in size to its present 1,400 planted acres. "Cab is still king in Paso," says Miller, "but Italian varieties like Barbera and Lagrein, along with Petite Sirah and Zinfandel, also do exceptionally well here."

Because they are among the premier growers on the Central Coast, the Millers have long-standing relationships with vintners they sell fruit to, and grapes from French Camp are used in many a \$50-plus bottle of Paso Robles wine. "We have numerous long-term customers," says Nicholas Miller, who heads up sales and marketing. "Even before we created our own wines, French Camp was always known as the premier vineyard in Paso

The Miller family's certified-organic and -sustainable French Camp Vineyard in the Paso Robles Highlands District AVA lies at the highest elevation in Paso Robles and experiences the largest diurnal temperature shift in California.



PHOTOS: PHILIP PYRC



In the Central Coast, the wildflower blooms are as colorful as the local history.

Robles. Our focus on sustainability and organic farming have kept long-term producers working with our vineyard."

Many of the Miller family's own wines are also sourced from French Camp, including J. Wilkes Cabernet Sauvignon and Viognier, Barrel Burner Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, and Smashberry. From time to time, Ballard Lane—a label that sports a Central Coast appellation—also includes French Camp fruit.

At approximately 614,000 acres, the vast Paso Robles AVA is nearly three times the size of Napa Valley; its partitioning in 2014 into 11 smaller sub-AVAs means that French Camp now lies within the Paso Robles Highlands District AVA (it's one of just three vineyards currently located there). This sub-AVA has the highest altitude in Paso Robles and enjoys the largest diurnal temperature shift in California, resulting in world-class wines of depth, structure, and power. Sustainably

farmed and SIP-certified, French Camp is also one of the largest certified-organic vineyards in California.

Vineyard Manager Greg O'Quest is a Paso Robles native who grew up not far from the vineyard and knows French Camp and the surrounding area inside and out. Despite its increasing renown for upscale wines, Paso Robles still enjoys its storied Wild West vibe—treasuring its past while remaining confident in its future, according to O'Quest, who calls it "a lifestyle: laid-back, with a little cowboy. Back in the day, it was more remote than Santa Barbara, and that frontier spirit still exists today."

The frontier spirit still has a grasp on the Miller family, too. "We are always interested in developing our vineyards and wines," says Marshall. "We are leaders in sustainability, and the next step for us is building on this proposition to continue to be good stewards of the environment."

Five Generations of Farming

After William Richard Broome and his wife, Frances, made the trek from Yorkshire, England, to the western coast of California in 1871, they purchased a Spanish land grant in southern Ventura County, Rancho Guadalasca, and as successful farmers later built a large home in Santa Barbara called The Oaks.

The Broomes' son, Thornhill, eventually married Chicago native Caryl Spoor, while their daughter, Elizabeth "Betty" Broome, was married to U.S. Naval Academy graduate Captain Robert Nicholas Miller (known as "Cap") in 1942. Betty and Cap were blessed with four children, two of whom, Bob and Steve Miller, are responsible for the incredible expansion of the company under its umbrella name, Thornhill Companies—which became a fifth-generation business when Steve's sons Nicholas and Marshall came on board.

In 2018, Thornhill Companies' 50th anniversary, the family took yet another step to ensure the continuance of their rich legacy by creating the Miller Family Wine Company. The new entity was designed to consolidate many of the family's wine businesses under a new roof, including the management of French Camp Vineyard and the acclaimed national wine brands J. Wilkes. Ballard Lane, Barrel Burner, and Smashberry. Control-label brands for prominent U.S. retailers and both the Santa Maria and Paso Robles wineries also now fall under the Miller Family Wine Company, for which Nicholas and Marshall oversee marketing and operations, respectively.

Meanwhile, ever bound to the land, the family still farms lemons, avocados, and blueberries under their Thornhill Ranches division. For more information, visit thornhillcompanies.com.





Cava Cachet

Overlooking the vineyards of Jaume Serra. Its parent company, J. García Carrión, produces wines in ten Spanish DOs.

J. GARCÍA CARRIÓN VENTURES INTO MIXOLOGY WITH ITS NEW JAUME SERRA ICE CAVA BRUT AND CAVA BRUT ROSÉ by Kate Newton

espite its 129-year history and its status as the third-largest wine producer in the world, J. García Carrión is oddly accustomed to embracing the role of the underdog: Though Cava is one of the portfolio's crown jewels and sparkling wine has long been ascending in popularity in the U.S., Spain's iconic representative of the category is still seen as somewhat of a cult item sought by consumers in the know.

Now, in an effort to bolster Cava's stateside following, the family-owned J. García Carrión is promoting the wine's sweet side by launching two new products, Jaume Serra Ice Cava and Jaume Serra Ice Cava Rosé, nationwide this fall. Like Jaume Serra Cristalino's Brut, Extra Dry, and Rosé expressions, both are made in the traditional method, aged for a minimum of 12 months, and fermented in bottle, but they see the addition of a slightly sweeter liquid during dosage; as a

result, they drink more like a semi-seco, lessening the level of acidity typically experienced with most sparkling wines while imparting a creamy mouthfeel. "The beauty of it is that it makes [them]

much easier to drink," says
Tom Bernth, National Sales
Manager for J. Garcia
Carrión-CIV USA, adding
that this accessibility makes
Jaume Serra Ice "a great
entry point into betterquality sparkling wines and
a great introduction to
Cava in general."

Nailing that desired level of sweetness without venturing into cloying territory is a thin line to walk, even for producers focusing on the U.S. market. Bernth says sweeter profiles are undeniably more popular here than in Europe—hence

the overwhelming success of Prosecco, which ascended from fewer than 500,000 cases sold in the U.S.to roughly 5.3 million in the ten-year span from 2007 to 2017.

"We're hoping to capitalize on the trend of what Prosecco has seen," says

Bernth, adding that the reception of the Ice expressions at this year's Aspen Food & Wine Classic as "smash hits" affirmed that the wines' refreshed flavor profiles stick the landing in terms of avoiding overt sweetness.

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J. García Carrión aims to venture into Cava-based mixology through its new Jaume Serra Ice Cava and Jaume Serra Ice Cava Rosé expressions, both of which are made in the traditional method.



With a price tag of under \$10 a bottle, Jaume Serra Cristalino is responsible for introducing many American consumers to the Cava category.

"Out of all of the items we had on our table, without a doubt the Jaume Serra Ice had phenomenal appeal with everyone who came up to our table. You're still getting the bubbles and understand that you're drinking a sparkling, but it doesn't have an overly acidic taste to it like some heavier Cavas have."

A blend of Xarel-lo, Macabeo, and Parellada with a floral nose and structured palate, the Jaume Serra Ice Cava Brut is well suited to serve as an apéritif or as a pairing with desserts; the Brut Rosé, meanwhile, is made with Trepat (80%) and Pinot Noir (20%) to yield a wine with aromas of red berries and pomegranate as well as a palate dominated by fine bubbles and elegant, fruity flavors. Available in 750-milliliter bottles, both are recommended to serve over ice.

Those familiar with Jaume Serra Cristalino, a fixture on the sparklingwine market for over two decades, are drawn to the brand because it offers high quality at an accessible price of under \$10 a bottle—notably lower than most Proseccos despite the lengthier aging process and prestige attributed to the traditional method, the same process in which Champagne is made. "Our biggest challenge is trying to educate the American consumer from a quality standpoint that Cava is every bit as good as Champagne, but for a half or a third of the price at retail," Bernth says. "Champagne has capitalized on that aura and that story, but we're taking a lead in filling that void from an education standpoint to bring some cachet to Cava and also preach that it's made in the same process."

Writing Cava's own story, then, requires deviating from the norm. Sparkling wine has long been relegated to celebratory occasions rather than seen as an everyday item, and Jaume Serra Ice's simple, clean packaging with foil sleeves in tones of light pink and blue undoubtedly primes both wines to appear as the guests of honor not only at baby showers and genderreveal parties but also at weddings and other formal gatherings. That said, J. García Carrión has seen a lot of similar products from competitors come and go during its lengthy history, according to Bernth, so in its effort to showcase the wines' on-premise potential as well as their versatility, the winery is venturing into uncharted territory: mixology centered around Cava.

"From a marketing standpoint, we have a huge opportunity with Cava cocktails, because nobody has really done that yet," says Bernth, adding that J. García Carrión and partner-

ing mixologists plan to curate "a full slate of drink recipes highlighting the universal appeal of Cava"—several of which have already been featured on the TV program A Taste of New York. "It's really been the history of sparkling wine over the years that the American consumer just saw it as more of a celebration-type item," adds Bernth, adding that younger consumers are resisting that sense of restriction. "They'll drink anything any given night, and that's what we want."

Those who are intrigued by J. García Carrión's respect for tradition and quality but are seeking options beyond sparkling still have plenty to choose from: The winery—which has already won more than 400 awards in 2019 to date—also produces a robust portfolio of still wines with grapes from ten Spanish DOs, including the Tempranillo-based Toro Roble and the Gran Reserva from its distinguished Pata Negra label.



In addition to its Cava expressions, J. García Carrión makes an expansive line of still wines that includes Pata Negra Rioja and Pata Negra Toro.

Paving the Way for Cava Cocktails

Intent on proving Jaume Serra Ice has all the makings of a dynamic cocktail ingredient, Tom Bernth, National Sales Manager for J. Garcia Carrión-CIV USA, already has one ringing endorsement: from his wife, Kim. She's been making her own drinks with the wines, riffing on classics like Cosmopolitans, Margaritas, and Mimosas to create simple but inspired libations that are easy to recreate at home (see recipes on right). "Even if it's just an everyday cocktail, throwing a dash of Cava on top adds a really nice flavor profile . . . and some elegance to a typical drink," says Bernth.

Cavacosmo

- 2 oz. vodka
- ▶ 2 oz. triple sec
- 1 oz. fresh cranberry juice
- ▶ 1 oz. fresh lime juice Combine ingredients and add a splash of Jaume Serra Ice Cava

Cavarita

- ▶ 2 oz. tequila
- ▶ 1 oz. triple sec
- ▶ ½ oz. fresh lime juice
- ▶ ½ oz. (or to taste) agave or simple syrup Combine ingredients and add a splash of Jaume Serra Ice Cava.

Ocean Punch

- ▶ 1 oz. rum
- ▶ 1 oz. amaretto Shake ingredients, pour over ice, and top with Jaume Serra Ice Cava Rosé. Garnish with a lemon slice and cherry.

REPORT BROWN STATE BOURBON, RYE, AND RUM TO TRY THIS FALL

Now that the days are growing shorter and the weather cooler, vodka and gin are taking their annual bow, ceding the spotlight to darker, richer brown spirits. We've compiled a number of selections to give your backbar all the coziness of a fireplace and your cocktails all the glowing warmth, smoke, and oak of its log-licking flames.

As American as Baseball: COOPERSTOWN DISTILLERY

Best known as the home of the Baseball Hall of Fame, the idyllic village of Cooperstown, New York, also harbors another must-see destination: the awardwinning Cooperstown Distillery. Rural, mountainous central New York is blessed with generous rainfall, and its microclimate is perfect for cultivating heirloom rye, wheat, corn, and barley—all of which make their way into the mash bill of this rising star's acclaimed whiskey portfolio: Cooper's Legacy Bourbon, Cooper's Ransom Rye, and Cooper's Classic Whiskey.

For Cooperstown's newest product, Cane High Spiced Rum, a blend of exotic and chai spices macerates for several weeks in non-GMO sugarcane rum, which then finishes in used bourbon barrels to yield an 86-proof spirit with a hint of sweetness as well as subtle Indian flavors. It's a rare spiced rum that knocks it out of the park—no wonder owner/distiller Eugene Marra likes to say his brand represents "the spirit of baseball." —Jesse Hom-Dawson

Cooperstown Cane High Spiced Rum shows pale old gold in the glass while delivering warming, generous aromas of French vanilla, cinnamon, butterscotch, and banana. Light in body, it nonetheless manages to support an abundance of tropical fruit on the palate that's deftly balanced by its wood character and seasoned with a dash of black pepper and clove. 92



a Song of Trish Tradition: REDBREAST

Single pot still whiskey is unique to Ireland. Regarded as the quintessential Irish whiskey, the style has been safeguarded and nurtured by Midleton Distillery for almost 200 years.

Redbreast is its definitive expression as the bestselling single pot still Irish whiskey in the world. In 1903, Jameson entered into an agreement to supply Gilbey's with new-make spirit from its Bow Street Distillery; the brand dates back to 1912, when Gilbey's began selling Redbreast J.J. Liqueur Whiskey 12 Years Old, describing it as one of its "famous" spirits. It was named, of course, for the European robin, likely by the then-chairman of Gilbey's, who was an avid bird fancier.

Single pot still Irish whiskey is made from a mash of malted and unmalted barley and triple-distilled in traditional copper pot stills. It's characterized by full, complex flavors and a silky mouthfeel, and the Redbreast 12 Years Old (\$60) is an exemplar of the style. The distinctive Redbreast Lustau Edition, meanwhile, is matured in a combination of seasoned bourbon and Sherry casks, then finished in Dry Oloroso Sherry butts from Bodegas Lustau. With a spicy and fruity aroma complemented by notes of toasted wood, it delivers a harmonious balance on the palate between spicy, creamy, fruity, sherried, and toasted flavors as well as a satisfyingly long finish.

Dallas' Biggest Star: J.R. EWING BOURBON WHISKEY **PRIVATE RESERVE**



If you owned a television between 1980 and 1990, you saw at least one episode of Dallas. And if you saw Dallas, you recall the Machiavellian escapades of the main character, J.R. Ewing. Billed as "the man you love to hate," J.R. was the primary reason for the show's status as TV's mostwatched in its heyday: As portrayed by Larry Hagman, he was an unscrupulous, conniving oil tycoon with few, if any, redeeming qualities. But he did have love in his heart—for bourbon, which he drank almost straight in an austere drink called the Bourbon and Branch. He also had opulent taste; after all, he was rich enough to buy the good stuff. A bourbon named after him, then, had better be superlative.

Aptly enough, J.R. Ewing Bourbon Whiskey is "labeled as a Private Reserve," says Ronna Feifarek, Vice President of Marketing at Southwest Spirits. "The brand represents a top-shelf profile, with high-quality bourbon and packaging that J.R. Ewing himself would be proud of. We believe that he would even reserve this bourbon for his own private stash."

The product is a mix of whiskeys

aged right in Dallas, Texas—which is, as you may know, rather warm. "Although we lose a little more than usual to the angels' share" during the aging process due to the heat, Feifarek explains, "the expansion and contraction of the liquid bring out great characteristics from the wood." The amber spirit has a snappy crispness to it that's rounded by an oaky sweetness tinged with the essence of orange zest; hints of black pepper and honey appear on the finish.

Housed in a wooden box that's won design awards, it's certainly giftworthy for that Dallas- and bourbon-loving someone. This holiday season, the brand is launching a sweepstakes campaign titled "Live It Up like J.R.": The grand prize is a two-night stay in Dallas complete with dinner, a show, and a tour of Southfork Ranch, where much of the TV series was set. "Many millennials may not know who J.R. is," Feifarek acknowledges, "but all can relate to living it up large in Texas."

If bourbon with a splash of water—the aforementioned Bourbon and Branch—isn't your thing, try the J.R. Ewing Sour, adorned with ironic hearts made of bitters. —Eric Marsh

J.R. EWING SOUR

- ▶ 2 parts J.R. Ewing Bourbon
- ▶ ¾ part fresh lemon juice
- ₱ ¾ part simple syrup
- ▶ 1 medium free-range egg white

Shake all ingredients vigorously with ice and fine-strain them back into the shaker. Drv-shake for at least 20 seconds and strain into a coupe glass. Garnish with dots of Angostura bitters in a circular pattern, then slice through each with a paring knife to create hearts.



French Elegance Meets MARYLAND RYE

Finishing exceptionally good whiskey in used Cognac barrels might seem a sensible enterprise, but it's no easy feat, as the team at Sagamore Spirit discovered while seeking out the vessels. "It was hard to find transparency with brokers as far as who made the barrel, where it came from, how old it was," says Sagamore Director of Operations Ryan Norwood. (There's not exactly a Carfax for casks.) But after a few years of searching, they found a broker that could provide proof of pedigree, allowing them to finally purchase authentic French Cognac barrels.

Then they faced a secondary obstacle: As it turns out, 20- to 30-vear-old barrels can become a little rickety during their voyage across the Atlantic. Of just the last shipment, Norwood says with a laugh, "there were three that wouldn't even hold liquid. As we started to fill them, we had whiskey shooting out in every direction."

But fortunately, most of them did hold, and the end result is Sagamore Spirit Cognac Finish Rye Whiskey, a blend made even more complex by the imprint of Limousin oak. Norwood says that, as you might imagine, "vanilla does stand out," along with toffee notes that "balance really well with the spice of our rye, which is something we aim for—we want there to be some flavor from the finishing barrel. but we want [it] to complement our Maryland-style rye." Norwood and his team tasted the aging whiskey regularly for eight months until they believed the flavor imparted from the Cognac barrels balanced perfectly with the character of their whiskey, which is first aged for four and a half years in new American white oak.

Leaky barrels aside, all's well at Sagamore these days—in fact, its momentum is explosive: The brand debuted just three years ago, but its whiskeys can now be



Sagamore Spirit Cognac Finish Rye Whiskey.

found in 32 markets in the States as well as in Japan. They've won 70 awards along the way, including a double gold medal at the Denver International Spirits Competition for the Cognac Finish expression.

So it would seem to hold true that, with great risk—not to mention a little patience and perseverance—comes great reward. In the case of Sagamore Spirit's Cognac Finish Rye, that means great whiskey. -Eric Marsh

SAGAMORE COGNAC FINISH RYE SIDECAR

- ▶ 1½ oz. Sagamore Spirit Cognac Finish
- ▶ ¾ oz. triple sec
- ▶ ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice Combine all ingredients in a shaker, add ice, and shake for 30 seconds. Strain into a chilled, sugar-rimmed coupe glass.



Sagamore Spirit Cognac Finish A blend of straight rye whiskeys with

a nose that captures the elegance of the French spirit itself: Piquant scents of toffee and Brazil nuts are amplified by vanilla cream. This 101-proof liquid is slightly fiery at first but then mellows to a gentle warmth on the palate. The fruit concentration is remarkable: peaches, apricots, and tangerine with a compelling hint of jasmine. Brown sugar coats the mouth on the finish alongside a lingering whisper of minerality. 98 —Meridith May



Continuing to capture the attention of top tastemakers in the spirits industry, Rabbit Hole recently launched Heigold Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, a new super-premium high-rye bourbon.

Heigold's distinctive mash bill was developed by Rabbit Hole founder/distiller Kaveh Zamanian, who aims to blaze a trail in the bourbon business by marrying heritage techniques with an innovative approach to blending ingredients. Putting the distillery's spin on America's native spirit, Heigold features a high concentration of malted grains to amplify its flavor. Made with a proprietary cooking process and distilled at Rabbit Hole's urban facility in Louisville, it ages in new #3 American oak barrels, which impart caramelized notes into the whiskey. The expression is not chill-filtered, retaining its natural flavor and texture for a true high-rye bourbon experience at 47.5% ABV.

That uncompromising approach to production unifies Zamanian's entire collection of premium

whiskeys. Made in small batches of fewer than 15 barrels each, all of Rabbit Hole's products boast a robust malted-grain configuration that delivers unconventional flavor profiles, and all of its barrels are hand-selected before they're wood-

fired, toasted, and charred to allow for deeper complexity in the finished spirit.

"We challenge the conventions of American whiskey by focusing every step of our process on flavor. And while other companies are focused on blending, our focus is on creating our own recipes that result in truly unique spirits," says Zamanian.

"Heigold is a testament to this: We created a mash bill with a high rye content that yields a striking and complex whiskey unlike any other. I'm proud to share it with bourbon lovers across the country."

The launch marks another important milestone for Rabbit Hole by debuting the distillery's enhanced branding. "Given the

rapid growth of Rabbit Hole, my team and I decided to give each of our products a distinctive name that reflects famous Louisvillians who went down their own 'rabbit holes' and inspired me as I built the brand," Zamanian explains. Despite



the new labels, all of the whiskeys' mash bills remain completely unchanged.

As the newest member of the Kentucky Bourbon Trail, Rabbit Hole has entered an exciting phase of growth, with additional expressions developed by Zamanian set to launch later this year and beyond.

BALCONES:

belebrating the Single Barrel

Many great things come from humble beginnings. That's certainly true of Balcones Distilling, which launched in an old welding shop under a bridge in Waco, Texas. After walls were knocked down, bricks laid, and Portuguese pot stills installed, production began in 2009 with the release of the brand's Baby Blue Corn Whisky.*

In the ten years that followed, Balcones' portfolio expanded to include six core whiskies as well as several limited-edition offerings. They're aged in a variety of carefully selected used and new barrels; the latter are primarily sourced from Independent Stave Company and are built from extra-finegrained American, French, or Hungarian oak that's yard-aged, toasted, and charred. As head distiller Jared Himstedt explains, "Barrels of this quality aren't commonly used in whisky due to their cost, but the character they impart upon the whisky is incredibly flavorful and full-bodied."

One of Balcones' most esteemed releases is its Texas Single Malt Whisky Single Barrel. Born from the flagship Texas Single Malt, it's crafted to showcase the relationship between raw materials, barrels, and climate. Aged in new and used American, French, and Hungarian oak barrels, the resulting spirit is an authentic yet complex expression of whisky. Says Himstedt, "We are absolutely driven by both a love of whisky and our fascination with every step of the process. Everything from yeast pitch rates, aeration, fermentation temperatures, condenser temperatures, and reflux protocols to wood species and provenance, barrel sizes, and entry proofs—we are nowhere near exhausting all the nooks and crevices for potential process changes and innovation."

The Single Malt Single Barrel is part of Balcones' Texas Single Malt Private Selection program, which allows retailers and private groups to handpick their own casks and choose their preferred proof, from 106 to cask strength (between 120–130). The program expanded in July to 13 states, with more to follow in the coming year. For on- and off-premise accounts, a custom high-quality whisky provides a way to stand out from the competition. Himstedt adds, "With our single-cask program, we seek to engage the explorative drinker [who's] looking for distinct experiences apart from the norm. There's a certain fulfillment and sense of ownership that comes along with choosing one's own cask, and that builds a bond with our customers that we value greatly." —Jesse Hom-Dawson

*Note: Balcones omits the "e" in its spelling of "whisky."



Balcones Texas Single Malt Whisky Single Barrel Dark amber in hue with a nose of molasses and walnut, pekoe tea, and raspberry. A flash of heat leaves a satin cloud of flavor on the mouth. Lavish notes of cocoa, peanut butter, and saddle leather soon mellow out to reveal orange peel seasoned with black pepper. Decisively big and bold at 128 proof, but well worth the experience. It spends at least 24 months in oak. **96** — *M.M.*

Golden Age: DON Q

When you've been in the rum business for over a century and a half, it can be difficult to stay relevant while also remaining true to the traditions you've built over several generations. Nimbly toeing the line between past and present is a constant at Destilería Serrallés Inc., a family-owned company since its debut in 1865.

Located in Ponce, Puerto Rico, the producer of Don Q—its flagship product—and many other beloved expressions has recently focused its attention on developing barrel-aged rums that offer a new way for customers to experience the storied distillery. "Rum hasn't been managed as a category like other premium spirits," notes Roberto Serrallés, sixth-generation rum maker and Business Development Vice President for Destilería Serrallés. "With our double-aged rums, we wanted to elevate the category and bring some excitement."

Created by Serrallés and Master Blender Jaiker Soto, Don Q Double Aged Sherry Cask Finish Rum is the newest addition to the company portfolio. "Latin-style rums have a connection to the Iberian Peninsula and, therefore, to Sherry," says Serrallés. "We have also used Sherry barrels before in our distillery, so this aging choice was right down our alley." To make the expression, Soto chooses from a selection of rums aged five to eight years in American white oak barrels. These spirits

have been produced using a proprietary yeast strain and water from the Río Inabón—a water source the Serrallés family has relied upon since 1898—which originates on a peak known as Cerro Camacho. The blend then rests for an additional year in casks that originally aged Oloroso Sherry.

With more double-aged rums in the works, consumers can look forward to exploring many new facets of Don Q in the coming years. —Emily Coleman





ELIJAH CRAIG:

An Old Favorite for an Old Fashioned— and for New bocktails Too



Justin Ware, Heaven Hill's 2019 Bartender of the Year, with a cocktail featuring Elijah Craig Small Batch Bourbon.

land speculator, and mill builder, among other things. Of course, he was also a distiller, a job at which he particularly excelled; in fact, he's credited as the first to use charred barrels for aging his spirits. Hence the tagline of his name brand: "He didn't join the bourbon movement. He started it." That's quite an origin story—but the tale hardly ends there. Today produced by Heaven Hill Distillery,

Elijah Craig was a colorful jack-of-all-trades who lived and worked in the 19th century as a Baptist preacher,

Elijah Craig is as relevant as ever. Offering several expressions of Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey, including Barrel Proof, Single Barrel 18 Year Old, and the flagship Small Batch, it's among the top ten fastest-growing brands according to 2018 Nielsen data, outpacing category

growth by more than 30%; the original expression took home a double gold medal at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition last year.

Speaking of winners, Elijah Craig has a devotee in Heaven Hill's 2019 Bartender of the Year, Justin Ware. The Houston-based mixologist considers Small Batch the ideal bourbon for an Old Fashioned for "many reasons": "I personally like the higher proof of the whiskey—coming in at 94 proof allows all its dark, woody characteristics to shine," he explains. "The lower-rye mash bill allows for a smooth and easy whiskey, perfect for mixing. And lastly, the Small Batch shows the care and attention to detail" on which the brand was built.

Of course, all those qualities ensure that not just Old Fashioneds but "any classic bourbon cocktail would benefit from Elijah Craig," Ware adds. Case in point: the Lion's Tail, whose "tiki backbone" is fortified by the whiskey's higher proof and oak notes "to make for the perfect refreshing fall drink." —Ruth Tobias



ELIJAH CRAIG LION'S TAIL

- ▶ 2 oz. Elijah Craig Small Batch Bourbon
- ¾ oz. fresh lime juice
- ₱ ¾ oz. turbinado syrup (2 parts raw sugar to 1 part water)
- ► ½ oz. allspice liqueur

Build in a shaker tin, add ice, and shake well. Fine-strain into a chilled coupe and garnish with a lime wheel.



ELIJAH CRAIG OLD FASHIONED

- ▶ 2 oz. Elijah Craig Small Batch Bourbon
- ½ oz. simple syrup
- 3 dashes bitters

In a mixing glass, add all ingredients and ice. Stir until well chilled and strain into a rocks glass over fresh ice. Garnish with a cherry and a swath of orange.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HEAVEN HILL BRANDS







HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY:

A Whiskey Pioneer Since 1935

Last year, Heaven Hill Vice President of Marketing Kate S. Latts gave a presentation at the influential Impact Marketing Seminar titled "The Future of American Whiskey." She was uniquely suited to the task, given her position at the largest independent, family-owned and -operated distilled-spirits supplier in the United States. The company's stature ensured her the platform from which to make the kind of daring claim that journalists love to (and did) quote: "American whiskey," Latts said, "will be as ubiquitous as Coca-Cola."

The numbers certainly backed her up: Between 2014 and 2018, the category saw 30% volume growth to reach \$4 billion in value. That couldn't be better news for Heaven Hill, which over the course of 84 years and counting has shown "the patience and perseverance to outlast consumer trends and interest" as well as to drive them, according to Latts, who adds, "American whiskey is the darling of the spirits industry, and Kentucky bourbon is hotter than ever. We take seriously our role as a leading supplier who celebrates [the spirit's] rich traditions, helps guide its evolution, and champions its exciting future."

Operating the largest single-site bourbon distillery in the world as well as 58 warehouses that hold more than 1.6 million barrels for aging, the Kentucky-based Heaven Hill boasts a massive portfolio that encompasses all five major styles of American whiskey: traditional bourbon, wheat bourbon, wheat whiskey, rye whiskey, and corn whiskey. Its 100-plus brands include such historical names as Evan Williams, Henry McKenna, Bernheim, Larceny, Old Fitzgerald, Parker's Heritage

Collection, Mellow Corn, Rittenhouse, Pikesville, and, of course, both Heaven Hill and Elijah Craig (see previous page)—and that's to single out just a few.

But the company's not about to stop there. It's currently increasing its production capacity through the installation of new barrel-storage facilities and bottling lines, among other things, to the tune of \$45 million; what's more, it's putting \$17.5 million toward renovating its visitor center in Bardstown. Additions will include interactive and educational features that highlight the historical significance of Elijah Craig, John E. Fitzgerald, and the Shapira family to the development of Kentucky straight bourbon, as well as an immersive "You Do Bourbon" exhibit complete with hands-on laboratory and custom bottling opportunities. A new rooftop bar overlooking Heaven Hill's rickhouses will offer tastings and cocktails, while an enhanced retail section will sell not only whiskey but branded merchandise, specialty food products, and other souvenirs.

It's a huge investment—but it's hardly a risk, especially given that tourism along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail has shot up 90% since 2014, with the state's distilleries welcoming 1.2 million visitors in 2018 alone; Heaven Hill's other visitor center in Louisville, the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience, has seen more than 100,000 guests annually since it opened in 2013. In short, as the old kid on their block, Heaven Hill continues to prove that its future has really only just begun. (Even Coca-Cola could learn a thing or two.)
—Ruth Tobias

EMERGING REGION

An aerial view of vineyards in the Judean Hills region.

AN ANCIENT REGION IS FINDING ITS PLACE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WINE WORLD

> Argaman, an Israeli hybrid of Souzão and Carignan, on the vine at Jezreel Valley Winery.

by Ruth Tobias

iticulturally speaking, geography is destiny: Wherever wine grapes grow, an industry is bound to flourish. Historically speaking, there have been plenty of exceptions to the rule, but cultural and political factors tend only to delay the inevitable. Case in point: Israel.

It's believed that, along with the South Caucasus, the Fertile Crescent was the birthplace of wine, and evidence abounds that production was occurring in what is now the state of Israel as long as five millennia ago. Though the Ottoman conquest put a virtual stop to it for hundreds of years, none other than Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Bordeaux fame aimed to bring it back in the late 19th century, planting vineyards, building operational facilities—namely Carmel Winery, still thriving today—and sending enologists from France to assist the locals. He thereby helped lay the groundwork for a modern industry whose qualitative evolution has been accelerating rapidly since the 1980s and shows no signs of slowing.



Yehuda Nahar and Jacob Ner-David are the co-founders of Jezreel Valley Winery.

Barrel sampling at Carmel Winery's Zichron Ya'acov facility on Mount Carmel.



Merlot grapes being harvested at Barkan Winery in the Judean Foothills.

Enter Wines of Israel, a promotional campaign organized by the Israeli Export Institute and joined by nearly 30 producers large and small. Launched in May, it aims to educate Americans at both the trade and consumer levels about this booming but littleunderstood region through seminars. tastings, and master classes around the country. (For the schedule, visit winesofisrael.com.)

We spoke to a range of key industry players about the challenges and opportunities facing them as they seek to raise the tide that can lift all boats in Israel—which Royal Wine Corporation's Executive VP of Marketing and Director of Wine Education Jay Buchsbaum calls "both the oldest and newest winegrowing region in the world."

What Is (and Isn't) Israeli Wine?

The first step to success is admittedly a doozy: It requires a clear differentiation between Israel the age-old Holy Land and modern political state with Israel the wine region. For starters, ask the average American where Israel is located, and they're likely to point to the Middle East. But from a winemaking perspective, the more accurate answer is the Eastern Mediterranean, as illustrated by Wines of Israel's tagline, "Where the Mediterranean Begins."

Indeed, this country of 8,000 square

miles boasts a mostly Mediterranean climate—albeit with enough variations to render it more than a mere annex of its European counterparts. Just ask Martin Sinkoff, a 40-year veteran of the U.S. wine trade who moved to Tel Aviv to launch his consulting firm. Martin Sinkoff Associates, less than a year ago. "What I think makes Israel special is that, like most good wineproducing countries, it has a complex web of terroir," he says. "There are growing areas, especially in the north, that are mountainous terrain. The Mediterranean climate can be found very quintessentially in the belt around Jerusalem; if I were to take you around with a blindfold, you'd think, 'Well, I'm in Provence.' Wines are now grown in the Negev, in the desert; they're a little bit like the wines of Mendoza in Argentina. So it's very diverse."

Buchsbaum—who with Royal has been instrumental in introducing Israeli wine to the U.S. over the past decade—agrees. "The wonderful thing about Israel," he says, "is that in a country the size and shape of New Jersey, you have the diversity of appellations that can give you both a \$12 great-value Cab and amazing wines in the \$60-\$80 category."

Better still, that diversity is nowhere close to being fully explored. Per Wines of Israel's own press materials, the five officially recognized subregions of Israel—Galilee, Shomron, Samson, the Judean Hills, and Negev-don't neces-

sarily reflect on-the-ground realities today, and efforts for reclassification are underway. And with an ever-clearer picture of the landscape comes a shift in thinking about which grapes belong in the foreground. As the co-founders of Jezreel Valley Winery, Jacob Ner-David and Yehuda Nahar, told me in an email, "Rhône varietals are naturally more suited to the Israeli climate; they were the first to be planted in the resurgence of winemaking in the Holy Land. In the past 20 years, classic Bordeaux varietals took front stage as the first waves of boutique wineries focused on quality and [on] showing they could make excellent Bordeaux wines. We are part of the second wave. bringing the Rhône varietals back on the map as we create an Israeli winemaking identity"—of which local grapes like Dabuki and Argaman "are another important layer."

But there's also a major wrinkle in that identity, according to Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits Director of Education & Events Ira Noroff, who admits, "The unfortunate thing is a lot of people can't easily separate Israeli wine from kosher and Jewish wine"by which they mean the cheap, sweet stuff made for sacramental purposes that did, after all, dominate the export market until recently. And to be sure, even today, most Israeli wine "happens to be kosher," Noroff acknowledges. "It's kosher for those who need it to be." Ironically, though, those who don't need it to be could as easily replace the much-maligned "kosher" designation in their minds with the far trendier "natural," because certification dictates that winemakers "can't really use anything that would be artificial," Noroff explains. "It's also vegan, because they don't use animal products, including eggs in many cases, with respect to fining and filtering."

In any case, the point is that the current generation of Israeli producers has set out to make high-quality wine, period, just like their counterparts in southern France, Greece, or any other Mediterranean growing region. Whether the techniques they use to that end qualify as kosher is a secondary matter—but as Sinkoff observes, "Until a consumer goes into a store and finds wines under the banner of Israel and not in the kosher section, the message will be hard to get across."

Creating a Category

Thus the Wines of Israel campaign needs support at every point along the supply chain. In Sinkoff's words, "There needs to be a discussion of key distributors at the wholesale level. They need to talk to their sales forces. There need to be incentives. There need to be in-store shelf talkers and displays. It's the kind of standard block-and-tackle wine marketing at the street level that has to happen to make this program come alive."

That's exactly what trade vets like Buchsbaum have long been working to achieve—and thanks to key partners such as Total Wine & More and Binny's Beverage Depot, their efforts might be paying off. Total Wine has begun changing its signage to create an Israeli wine category in certain stores across the country: explains Rachel Gross. Senior Manager-Premium Domestic Wine Portfolio, "It depends on how much footage we have, but as long as we have the space, you'll see a heading that says 'Kosher' and another that says 'Israel.' The wines are still merchandised in the kosher section, but [they're keptl separate."

Gross is also committed to in-store promotions particularly "around the holidays—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur—when we'll do a lot more tastings and interactions. We're trying to grow [the initiative] organically, and we're still trying to understand how; the entire chain touches very different demographics. But we've broken out tiered stores so we know where to focus." The primary goal, she says, is "getting people even to think of Israel as something to try. It's all about the exploration, looking for something different."

Certainly retailers are getting a push toward that goal from the wine media. Gross herself marvels at "the amount of press Israeli wines have been getting lately—we're seeing really nice ratings coming out." The critical reception aligns with the advancements Binny's fine-wine buyer Bob Calamai has seen in the category: "The quality-to-price ratio is getting better and better, and that's how I make my buying decisions." More important, he observes, it's how consumers make their purchasing decisions too. Be it the religious customer who "buvs kosher wines because they have to" or the enophile who's comparison shopping in the Bordeaux and Napa aisles,



At Total Wine & More in Boca Raton, FL, Wine Manager Gabe Schnirman shows off the store's commitment to the Israeli category.

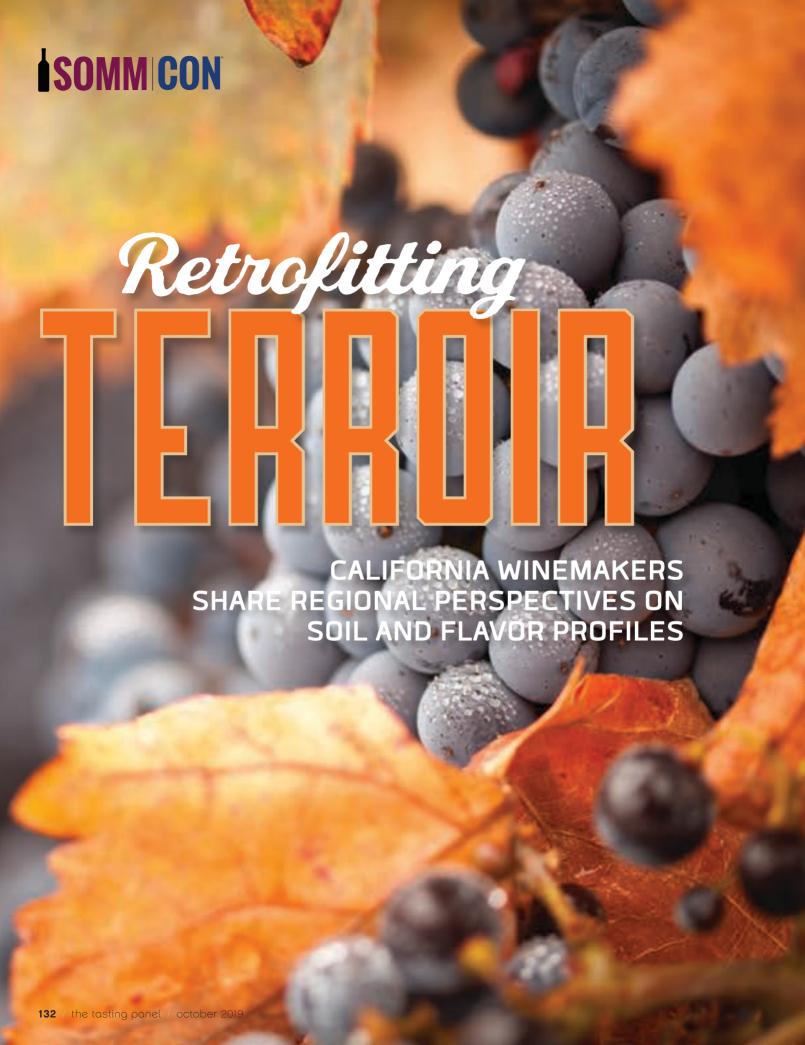
Calamai predicts, the audience will follow the value—and, as at Total Wine, they'll be guided through an increasing number of Binny's outlets by signs that specifically read "Israel."

Buchsbaum offers evidence of Calamai's point in the form of an anecdote. "I went into a store recently called Metro Wine in Linden, New Jersey," he recounts, where the owner had "put five or six high-end Israeli wines in his special cabinet, where he keeps only his most expensive wines. A guy walked in and said, 'My dad's a big collector. No matter what I buy him, he's going to have it already." The owner suggested a bottle of Binyamina The Cave from Galilee, selling for "probably \$70," Buchsbaum continues. "Three days later, the father comes back and says, 'Can you get me two cases of this wine?' And no, this was not a Jewish person, not a kosher-wine consumer." The takeaway: "It's just a matter of getting into people's consciousness—but mostly onto people's palates."

In that regard, retailers have yet another powerful ally in the hospitality industry, where Israeli cuisine has emerged as a major trend over the past few years. From Bavel in Los Angeles to Saba in New Orleans to Zahav in Philadelphia—which won the James Beard Foundation's 2019 award for Outstanding Restaurant—the beverage programs of highly acclaimed restaurants across the country are exposing many a diner to Israeli wine by the glass as well as the bottle.

All in all, the timing couldn't be better for producers like Jezreel's Ner-David and Nahar to realize their stated dream for "our wines to be found in the Israel section of fine-wine stores around the world and on the menus of leading restaurants that are seeking Mediterranean wines." (The label is currently available in seven states. according to Ner-David, and is adding more "all the time.") Which isn't to deny that taking the long view is always prudent when it comes to introducing consumers to a whole new (to them) category: "I've been doing this for a long time," says Calamai of selling Israeli wine, "and it's been baby steps. But it is emerging and there is something there." After all, Noroff points out, as a 40-year veteran of the trade he can remember "a time when people didn't drink California Cabernet Sauvignon."

Buchsbaum puts his optimism this way: "Ever read The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell? He talks about how brands are made, and one of the examples he gives is Nike. People think it was an overnight sensation, but the fact is [the founders] worked on it for 20 years before they got their big break. I think the tipping point is here or just around the corner—it's happening at Total, at Binny's, at restaurants putting Israeli wines in the Mediterranean sections of their lists." And now that "the Wines of Israel campaign has been established, there's no question in my mind: Give it a year and the floodgates are gonna open."





The panel from left to right, back row: Laura Taffe Balderelli, East Coast Sales Manager, Ancient Peaks Winery, Paso Robles, CA; Noel Basso, winemaker, Oak Ridge Winery, Lodi, CA; Meridith May, Publisher, The Tasting Panel, representing Westwood Estates; Wes Hagen, winemaker, J. Wilkes, Santa Maria, CA; Steve Rogstad, winemaker, Cuvaison, Carneros, Napa Valley, CA; and Fred Delivert, winemaker, Tolosa, Edna Valley, CA. Front row: Jon Emmerich, winemaker, Silverado Vineyards, Napa Valley; and Lars Leicht, moderator and VP/Communications & Trade Relations, The Tasting Panel.

story by Courtney Schiessl / photos by Nick Klein

Yars Yeicht, VP/Communications & Trade Relations for The Tasting Panel, provided a dictionary definition of terroir as he kicked off the "Domestic Terroirists" seminar he moderated at SommCon D.C., held at the Westin Georgetown June 23–25. "Terroir: the complete natural environment in which a particular wine is produced, including factors such as soil, topography, climate, or the characteristic taste and flavor imparted to a wine by the environment in which it is produced," it said.

Terroir is a concept that stems from and is largely associated with the Old World, but in recent years, it's also been adopted in the New World. "As Americans, we are retrofitting the concept," said Leicht, "[and] thank goodness we are." While attendees tasted through seven different wines from across California, the winemakers on the panel discussed how terroir influenced each one.





J. Wilkes 2017 Chardonnay

Santa Maria Valley

"Wines of character, wines of place" is the J. Wilkes motto, but winemaker and brand ambassador Wes Hagen wouldn't necessarily call his work terroir-driven. "I believe 'domestic terroir' is an odd term," he said. "Terroir has to include a cultural phenomenon and influence. I prefer the word 'typicity.'"

The late Jeff Wilkes founded the J. Wilkes label to highlight two sub-AVAs of the Central Coast: Santa Maria Valley and Paso Robles Highlands. Rather than making vineyard designates, then, Hagen crafts appellation-level wines from varieties like Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, and Chardonnay—though he likened the Santa Maria Valley to a French wine region best known for still other grapes. "It's the Loire Valley of California—underpriced and underappreciated—and if you don't know what's going on, you're missing out," he said.

Despite its location at the same latitude as Morocco, the Santa Maria Valley is classified as Region 1A. The cold maritime influence in this transverse valley extends the growing season for balanced Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. In the J. Wilkes 2017 Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay, the fruit is mellow and soft on the nose but ripe on the palate. Bursting with juicy lemon and pear, it's clean, with a balanced, savory finish.



Cuvaison 2017 Chardonnay Coeurtina

Carneros

Spilling into both Napa and Sonoma counties, the boundaries of the Los Carneros AVA mark it as unique. "It was the first AVA based on research rather than political boundaries," said Steve Rogstad, winemaker for Cuvaison, located on the Napa Valley side of the region.

But Carneros is special for other reasons as well. With vines planted in shallow clay soils above the San Pablo Bay, it benefits from windy afternoons and fog that cools and moisturizes the land. It's the perfect setting for cool-climate takes on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, which have ample opportunity to "show their place readily," in Rogstad's words.

Cuvaison plants Chardonnay in the peaks and valleys of its 190 planted acres. The Coeurtina, which relies on the Dijon 548 clone, is aged for 16 months in 50% new French oak to develop opulent aromatics of tropical fruit and a rich, creamy palate with a fine line of acidity.



Tolosa 2017 Hollister Pinot Noir

Edna Valley

The Edna Valley is located halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, where it often goes overlooked by American wine drinkers. "Our goal is to prove that Edna Valley has a spot on the California map of Pinot Noir," said Tolosa winemaker Frederic Delivert. The transverse valley is shadowed by a coastal ridge, which creates a mild climate that averages around 70 degrees Fahrenheit during the summer. The mountains trap this marine influence, allowing Pinot and other grapes to achieve ripeness at lower Brix levels for more balanced, lower-alcohol wines.

The Edna Valley is home to 60 different soil types, ranging from sedimentary to volcanic. Delivert cherishes the diversity: "I get more paints to make my painting," he said. Most of Tolosa's vineyards are planted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Because the Hollister Pinot Noir comes from a small, low-yielding block, its availability is limited. A small amount of new French oak yields a wine with candied, juicy red fruit and a dry, savory finish.



Westwood 2016 Legend

Sonoma Valley

The aptly named Westwood Legend 2016 is the first cuvée to be made by the iconic Philippe Melka for the winery. Distinctly vineyard-focused, it's a blend of varieties from the estate-owned 23-acre Annadel Gap Vineyard at the northern end of Sonoma Valley, located on the eastern edge of the Mayacamas Mountains. Here, fog nestles into the vines each morning, allowing the grapes to develop slowly before it blows out with the evening wind.

The Westwood team uses Demeter-certified Biodynamic practices in the vineyard to farm primarily Rhône and Burgundian varieties in soils similar to those of the Russian River Valley's Gold Ridge. The Cabernet-dominant 2016 Legend is blended with Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre and aged in 56% new oak. The result shows dark fruit layered with chocolate and sweet spices, plus a touch of mint and black pepper on the nose. It's a big, round wine, with grippy tannins on the generous body leading to a well-balanced, lingering finish.



Oak Ridge 2017 Old Soul Cabernet Sauvignon

Lodi

Oak Ridge is the oldest continuously operating winery in Lodi, but it got a new lease on life in 2002, when it was purchased by the Maggio family. With an eye toward quality, the Oak Ridge team takes a hands-on approach to every aspect of viticulture and winemaking.

"Being a family-owned winery, we control everything from when vines are planted to when grapes come into the cellar," said winemaker Noel Basso. Some 2,500 acres of vineyard cover a huge range of soils and temperature levels. Thus Basso keeps his finger on the pulse of each variety on each plot that Oak Ridge farms (much of which is still sold off to other clients).

The Old Soul Cabernet Sauvignon is picked relatively early to retain acidity and aged in both American and French oak. Though it is concentrated with a core of strawberry and raspberry, it also shows notes of pine and coconut that lead to a round, soft finish.



Ancient Peaks 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon

Santa Margarita Ranch, Paso Robles

With 11 new sub-AVAs as of 2014, it would be difficult to assert that Paso Robles is homogenous. Take Santa Margarita Ranch. Set apart from the other sub-appellations, it's the southernmost AVA in Paso Robles and one of the coolest, with direct influence from the Cuesta Grade allowing cool ocean air to flow over it (for more on the area, see page 94).

Almost entirely overlapping with a working cattle ranch owned by three families, it is also home to only one vineyard: Santa Margarita. With its range of distinct soil types, including an ancient seabed, it was discovered by the Mondavi family in the 1990s, who saw its potential and planted vines that were then taken over by the Santa Margarita Ranch owners, who formed Ancient Peaks.

Cabernet Sauvignon is the most important variety grown here, producing structured, serious wines. In this instance, fresh and sun-baked black fruit takes on a meaty, smoky edge on both the nose and palate, adding dimension on top of depth.

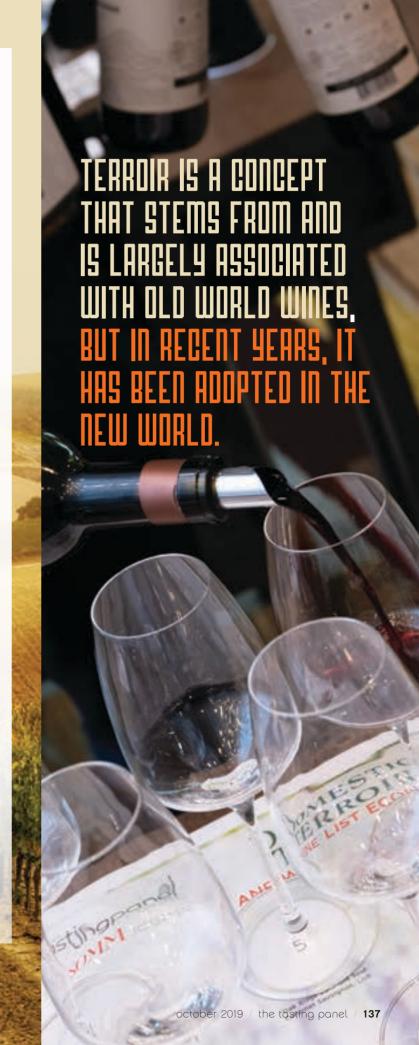


Silverado 2015 Mt George Vineyard GEO Cabernet Sauvignon

Coombsville, Napa Valley

"We do have identifiable terroir here," said Jon Emmerich, winemaker at Napa Valley's Silverado Vineyards. "This shows specifically through the mid-palate texture in all Coombsville wines." Though the Silverado GEO hails from the newest AVA in Napa Valley, Coombsville, it's sourced from one of the region's oldest vineyards, Mt George. Vines were first planted on the gravelly slopes of this dormant volcano in the 1800s.

The second-coldest Napa Valley AVA after Carneros, Coombsville features a combination of sunshine and lower temperatures that yields wines with intensity, structure, and acidity. The 2015 GEO is incredibly complex, revealing layer after layer of ripe black cherry, cocoa, tobacco, and coffee on the nose. The palate is big all around—big tannins, big acidity, big flavor. While the finished wine may not be the result of terroir alone, Emmerich is a faithful believer in the concept. "Anything we do is terroir," he said. "Of course, human intervention has an effect, but at their core, the wines produced from Mt George have one common theme: a unique vineyard site. This is as true now as it was when Henry Hagen made wine from it 150 years ago."





A Fifth of JACK

JACK'S BLACK BOOK **VOLUME V** TO ARRIVE IN SPRING 2020

> story by Rachel Burkons photos by Devin Berko

or the past four years, The Tasting Panel has been proud to join Jack Daniel's U.S. Brand Ambassador Eric "ET" Tecosky as he embarks on a national quest to celebrate the best and brightest of the bartending world. To date, we've shared four volumes of Jack's Black Book filled with personal anecdotes about what makes the featured bartenders so special as well as hundreds of innovative Jack Daniel's recipes.

When Jack's Black Book Volume V arrives on your doorsteps in May 2020, vou can expect to see more badass bartenders and delicious drinks. But the new volume will also follow a theme that's near and dear to Tecosky's heart: mastering the classics. "We really want to explore what classics mean to bartenders—not just in the cocktail world, in their world—by getting to know them through what they consider classic rock, movies, clothing, books, all of that," he explains.

Anyone who's read Jack's Black Book knows to expect some mentions of what Tecosky considers classic—namely Led Zeppelin and all things Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack. But this is, after all, a cocktail book, and there's one classic that never fails to speak to him: the Jack and Coke. "I understand new and shiny is everyone's favorite flavor, but when you look at what's ordered in bars, it's the classics," Tecosky says. "Highballs are starting to rule again, and there's no Highball more classic to anyone walking into a bar than a Jack and Coke."

Every tradition is open to interpretation, however, and we've seen some Jack's Black Book alums rise to the challenge of crafting their own take on the drink. "No matter what tweak they're making—like converting the Coca-Cola into a syrup or bitters or infusing it into something else—they're still using it in a way that harkens back to the nature of a classic." Tecosky explains.

With this new-meets-old mentality in mind, the bartenders featured in the upcoming book will be tasked with putting a distinctive modern twist on a staple recipe. "There's a big trend right now where bartenders are remembering to realize how great this industry is while not taking themselves too seriously," Tecosky says. "Classic cocktails fit into that mindset. We're making people happy—that's our job. That means having fun, being a friend, and going back to those classics our quests love."

Ultimately, in Tecosky's mind, it's all about old-fashioned hospitality: "In 'classic bartending,' the customer always comes first," he adds. "Every time someone walks in our door, we have an opportunity to make their day better—that can be through talking to them, not talking to them, good service, whatever. We have that ability, and when guests are choosing to come to our bar, we should choose to do that."

And to some of those customers, Tecosky argues, modernizing an old standby like the Jack and Coke may represent a heightened emphasis on the value of hospitality. "Sometimes when you go too geeky, people can be put off," he says. "But if a guest walks in and hears 'fancy Jack and Coke cocktail,' at least they hear 'Jack and Coke.' Even if they're intimidated or don't know what the other esoteric ingredients are in that drink, their friend Jack and Coke is there saying, 'We'll get through this together."

So whether your go-to is a Manhattan or a Smash, there are a million ways to modernize cocktails with Jack Daniel's, and we're excited to share them in the upcoming edition of Jack's Black Book. "We're coming full circle," says Tecosky. "When we started Jack's Black Book, it was to shine a light on great bar professionals around the country and all the things that they were doing. Now, the battle of the cocktail revolution is over. You can go into just about any bar these days and get a well-made Old Fashioned, and it was awesome that we went all the way in the other direction with crazy, super-intricate craft cocktails. But right now in bars, it's going back to simple, to fun—back to the experience and just making the customers happy."

SHOW US YOUR

For the first time ever, one lucky bartender will have a chance to win a spot in Jack's Black Book! Until now, all featured bartenders have been hand-selected by Jack Daniel's U.S. Brand Ambassador Eric "ET" Tecosky, but this time around, you could find yourself and your recipe included among them.

Show us your best modern take on a Jack and Coke by midnight on January 1, 2020, for your shot to be featured in Jack's Black Book Volume V. Send a photo and complete recipe to jackandcoke@ tastingpanelmag.com or post to Instagram with the hashtag #JBBJackandCoke and tag both @TastingPanel and @JackDanielsUS.

Jack & Coke Tennessee Tiki

- ▶ 1½ oz. Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey
- ▶ 1½ oz. Coca-Cola
- ▶ 2 oz. fresh pineapple juice
- ▶ 1 oz. banana puree
- ▶ ½ oz fresh lime juice
- ▶ 2-3 dashes Jack Daniel's Cocktail Bitters Shake all ingredients but the Coke with ice. Add the Coke and strain into a tiki glass or mug. Garnish with a Dirty Sue Whiskey Cherry and a mint sprig.

Eric Tecosky gives a classic Jack & Coke the tiki treatment with banana puree and pineapple juice.





Making TIME

WENTE FAMILY ESTATES SHOWS GRATITUDE TO ITS PARTNERS AT THE 11TH ANNUAL LEGACY AWARDS

story by Eric Marsh / photos by Hardy Wilson

t's been 11 years since the first Wente Legacy Awards ceremony took place at Wente Family Estates Vineyards in Livermore, California. This year, the event was held in the 136-year-old winery's sandstone caves. After canapés were passed and all guests had a glass of wine in hand, Carolyn Wente, CEO and fourth-generation winegrower, raised a toast; around her, the crowd gathered in a circle in the warm glow of the overhead chandeliers, where the booming natural acoustics of the cave made a microphone superfluous.

"When I think back to why we started the Legacy Awards, it was about us wanting to show gratitude and appreciation to each of our partners," she said with ardor as the clinking of glasses sounded. "Sometimes suppliers and distributors are in an adversarial relationship as opposed to a partnership, but I really believe that we are partners, that you are my friends, and that you are the ones who have made my family successful. I can't tell you how much gratitude we have for that."

Then Executive Vice President and Chief Global Sales Officer Tyson Overton took over emcee duties. "We are doing things a little differently this year," he said. "Past Legacy Awards were held in late February or March.

This year we're holding it in August when California has outstanding weather, so you can enjoy some exceptional wine-country experiences, like our concert series just outside." Overton pointed in the direction of the estate's natural amphitheater, where 90 tables were draped in white linen on the lush lawn. After the ceremony, the Wente family and their partners would enjoy dinner amid the concertgoers before rock band Daughtry took the stage.

Overton went on to note other changes to the program, including the additions of the Sustainable Growth and Head Start awards for "the one partner across the world who came out of the gate the fastest." Finally, Wente President Amy Hoopes joined Overton in presenting the evening's winners and the guests repaired to the lawn, moving from table to table to chat as the wine flowed and the music carried on close to the midnight hour. It was all in tune with Wente's Make Time movement, which emphasizes the importance of taking breaks from work and technology to connect with family, friends, and partners.

TIER 1 Awards

Opici Family Distributing. New York

The Opici family has been distributing wines and spirits for four generations (since 1913, with a brief pause during Prohibition, of course). The company's partnership with Wente, however, is a new one. "If there was a Rookie of the Year award, you guys would have it," said Wente Regional Sales Manager Marc Jackstadt while honoring Opici. "And we're looking forward to many, many more years to come."

> Aly Wente, Niki Wente, Tyson Overton, Marc Jackstadt, Dave Barna, John Gregory, Dina Opici, Chris Giudice, Carolyn Wente, and Karl Wente.



Martignetti/Classic Wines, **Massachusetts**

"They had double-digit growth in 2018 and led the way with singlevineyard growth as well," Hoopes said of Martianetti/Classic Wines of Massachusetts. The business, now in its third generation of family ownership, is the leading distributor of wines and spirits in New England and the seventhlargest distributor of wines and spirits in the United States.

Jordan Wente, Karl Wente, Jessica Cioci, Dave Fasulo, Matt Stein, Mike Andrews, Chris Giudice, and Carolyn Wente.



Fedway Associates, New Jersey

Fedway Associates of New Jersey picked up both a Legacy Award and the Tier 1 Sustainable Growth Award. Fedway Director of Sales Bill Swenarton remarked that his company has "been partners with Wente for 15 years. Our businesses aligned together, which isn't something that happens often these days. And it's also just wonderful to work with a family-owned business." It may come as no surprise, then, that Fedway has appeared at the Legacy Awards several times over the years.

> Tyson Overton, Jordan Wente, Marc Jackstadt, Max Leventhal, Carolyn Wente, Bill Swenarton, Chris Giudice, and Aly Wente.



TIER 2 Award

Capitol-Husting, Wisconsin

Capitol-Husting's seven Legacy awards—four of them consecutive—are weighing down a shelf somewhere in Milwaukee; this year, the company also picked up the Sustainable Growth Award for Tier 2. Capitol-Husting Vice President of Sales Jerry Zavorka explained his team's loyalty to Wente: "It's a family-owned business, and you don't really see that this day and age, where there's so much consolidation. It's impressive to see multiple generations take pride in the company [and] find their place in the business. That obviously inspires us to represent them."

Jordan Wente, Jamie Alevixos, Amy Hoopes, Kyle Lubke, Jim Dixon, Jerry Zavorka, Carolyn Wente, Karl Wente, Chris Giudice, Niki Wente, Tyson Overton, and Aly Wente.



TIER3 Awards



Jordan Wente, Tyson Overton, Niki Wente, Sharon Bantrup, Chris Bantrup, Michael Provencio, Crystal McIntyre, Amy Hoopes, and Aly Wente.

BRJ Distributing, Idaho

Also no stranger to the Legacy Awards is BRJ Distributing from Idaho. Overton noted that BRJ is a "multiple-year winner with back-to-back wins, having grown another 17% over the course of the last year. They're up double digits in every single category across the portfolio on all our core brands, including Murrieta's Well."



Jordan Wente, Melissa Rancourt, Amy Hoopes, Mike Andrews, Amy Barriault, Chris Giudice, Niki Wente, Aly Wente, and Tyson Overton.

Central Distributors, Maine

"Central Distributors—[namely] Amy Barriault and Melissa Rancourt—along with our team in Maine have done a fantastic job," Hoopes said of the company, which has been family-run since 1934. "They grew their portfolio 14% and had double-digit growth with all of our estate and flagship brands in 2018. They [are also] leading the charge rolling into the first half of this year." Fourth-generation Vice President of Sales Amy Barriault accepted the Legacy Award for her employer, which also clinched the Tier 3 Sustainable Growth Award.



Jordan Wente, Niki Wente, Ericka Story, Michael Provencio, Crystal McIntyre, Amy Hoopes, and Aly Wente.

Young's Market Company, Utah

"Utah is a controlled state," Overton noted. "There are different challenges there, but Ericka Story with Young's Market has managed to guide our business and add growth to it every year. Last year was no exception, and in gaining new distribution, [Young's] propelled future growth." Story and company saw double-digit growth across the board, including for Wente's Wetmore Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon.

EXPORT Awards

International Cellars, Canada

International Cellars has been partners with Wente for over 25 years and is a frequent guest at the Legacy Awards. In 2018, Hoopes noted emphatically, its employees "just haven't stopped doing a fantastic job ... They brought in shipments of 22,000 cases and helped position [Wente] Morning Fog as the numberone-selling California Chardonnay in all of Western Canada." Established in 1983, the Vancouver-based distributor focuses on internationally sought-after fine wines for its broad portfolio.

Derrick Cousins, Amy Hoopes, Genevieve Boisvert, Karl Wente, Susan Arkwright, Michael Parr, Mitchell Shuster, Michelle Burns, Taylor Douglas, Derek Jackson, and Carolyn Wente.



Wijntransport, The Netherlands

Wijntransport is "one of most the astute logistic partners in all of Europe, and they also re-export some of our wines to other countries," including Poland and Germany, Overton said. "We appreciate their help building our business in other parts of Europe." A relatively new partner, Wijntransport started working with Wente in 2016. In 2017, it moved some 4.500 cases, which it then nearly doubled in 2018 with 8,000 cases.

Jordan Wente, Aly Wente, Tristan Diterwich, Michael Parr, Tom Diterwich, Ruud Diterwich, Marco Diterwich, Leen Diterwich, Nicole Diterwich, Niki Wente, and Karl Wente.



HEAD START Award

Tryon Distributing, North Carolina

"If we were to pick one partner across the globe [that] was our best startup, [coming] out of the gate the strongest, that partner would be Tryon Distributing," said Overton upon presenting the company with the Head Start Award. He then introduced Wente Southeast Regional Sales Manager Bobby Goodman, who had done the math to prove Overton's point. Goodman proudly announced that Tryon was "up 77% on single-vineyard wines, 80% on Murrieta's Well . . . and across the portfolio, they'll have moved some 35,000 cases by this year's end." Founded in 1985, Tryon services all of North Carolina from its home base in Charlotte.

Bobby Goodman, Niki Wente, Jordan Wente, Max Perkins, Brooke Heavner, Aly Wente, and Mark Halpern.



WINE DIALOGUES' "WOMEN BEHIND THE WINE" INITIATIVE SPARKS DISCUSSION AMONG YOUNG LEADERS AND EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS

story by Courtney Schiessl / photos by Nick Klein



t first glance, it might have seemed like just another wine dinner. But when 11 of the country's top young wine professionals—recipients of The Tasting Panel and The SOMM Journal's Young Leaders Summit Scholarship as part of SommCon D.C.—gathered at Blue Duck Tavern in the nation's capital on June 24 to chat with principals from E. & J. Gallo's Wine Dialogues platform, it symbolized something more.

"Tonight is all about sharing our own stories and our own truths," began Suzanne Denevan-Brown, Channel Marketing Brand Manager for Wine Dialogues, which aims to engage trade members and consumers in conversations about the professional and social aspects that define wine culture. Conceived as part of the platform's "Women Behind the Wine" campaign, launched in spring 2019 to support the advancement of women in the wine business, the dinner sparked connection, conversation, and enthusiasm to push the next generation of professionals forward.

Authenticity Leads to Advancement

The event welcomed the aforementioned scholarship winners to give wine professionals under the age of 30 the opportunity to network and taste with industry experts. According to Denevan-Brown, this dedication to advancement through inclusion is central to the mission of E. & J. Gallo, which was ranked No. 14 on the Glassdoor Employees' Choice Awards list of the 100 Best Places to Work in 2018: "It's an extension of our culture." she said. After all, when Ernest and Julio Gallo founded the winery in 1933, the wine industry was still nascent in the U.S., prompting the brothers to get creative as they attempted to grow their business. "In order to provide for their families," added Denevan-Brown, "they needed to take a culture of whiskey and bar lovers and turn them into wine lovers."

This level of innovation, Denevan-Brown said, relies on authenticity and personal growth—tenets that the E. & J. Gallo team believes should extend beyond the company to the industry at large. By utilizing the Wine Dialogues



Hugo Arias Sánchez, sommelier at restaurant Del Mar in Washington, D.C.; importer Alissa Diaz; and Brooklyn Bain, sommelier at Chan's Wine World in Destin, FL.



platform, "we want to promote the current generation of leaders and advance the next generation through scholarships," said Denevan-Brown.

As the young leaders toasted with glasses of J Vineyards & Winery Cuvée 20 Brut NV—a well-balanced, toasty, citrus-tinged Russian River Valley sparkler made by winemaker Nicole Hitchcock—each shared the story of what earned them a seat at the table. For many of the scholarship recipients, the kind of opportunity offered by the Young Leaders Summit Scholarship

was invaluable. "I never saw myself sitting here in Washington, D.C., today," said Barbara Burgess, the Wine Director and sommelier at Restaurant Tyler in Starkville, Mississippi.

Supporting Women in Wine

Of the 11 SommCon D.C. scholarship winners, ten were women-a testament to the changing dynamics of the wine industry, which hasn't always welcomed them into its ranks. "When I was starting in the wine industry, it was difficult to be a woman," said Liz Comte-Monk, Export Manager for Les Maîtres Vignerons in Provence, which produces the Fleur de Mer Rosé. "You had to work twice as hard as a man."

As attendees swirled the 2018 vintage of the rosé—a pale, crisp blend of Grenache, Cinsault, and Carignan that bursts with mouthwatering acidity-Comte-Monk reflected on how things have changed for women in recent years. "I feel that we have grown more space and more credibility," she said. "We don't have to work so hard to prove ourselves."

This shift is one of the driving forces behind "Women Behind the Wine," which, in addition to highlighting female leaders in the industry through printed materials and events like the SommCon D.C. dinner, offers financial aid to women seeking to further their education through certifications, schooling, and conferences.



"I feel that we have grown more space and more credibility. We don't have to work so hard to prove ourselves," said Liz Comte-Monk, Export Manager for Fleur de Mer Rosé. On her left is Katie Vogt, winemaker for Louis M. Martini Winery in Napa Valley.

opportunity presents itself, as it did for Katie Vogt, the assistant winemaker for Louis M. Martini Winery in Napa Valley. Vogt had no intention of becoming a winemaker, but when she was given the chance to work a harvest in Paso Robles, she took a leap of faith—and everything changed. "I fell in love to another level," said Vogt. After working at that winery for eight years, she joined Louis M. Martini in 2015.

As Vogt shared the iconic Louis M. Martini 2014 Monte Rosso Cabernet Sauvignon from Sonoma Valley—a robust, dark-fruited stunner with layers of chocolate, caramel, and herbal, anise-like tones—she urged attendees to seek out the right places and the right people in order to advance in their careers. "Find a place where you feel supported and have the potential to grow," said Vogt.

Achieving Balance

But as young leaders, particularly young women, strive to find professional success, how can they ensure they're acting in their own best interests as well? The question was posed over the Talbott Vineyards 2016 Sleepy Hollow Pinot Noir, crafted from the winery's flagship Sleepy Hollow vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands, where the maritime climate creates exceptionally well-balanced, elegant wines.

While a sense of balance may not come naturally to driven wine professionals, the experienced women from E. & J. Gallo had some advice for the aspiring leaders. "I want to help everyone, but sometimes it's to the detriment of my job," said Luxury On-Premise Specialist Britt Roh. "Saying no is OK!"

Denevan-Brown agreed with this sentiment, recalling the first time she ever said no to one of her top buyers. While it was difficult, she noted that "from that point forward, the respect increased, and we didn't waste time on the impossible."





"I never saw myself sitting here in Washington, D.C., today," said Barbara Burgess, Wine Director and sommelier at Restaurant Tyler in Starkville, MS. Seated to her left are Lexi Parsagian, sommelier at D.C.'s Maxwell Park, and wine consultant Desirée Harrison-Brown.

Taking Chances for Success

Throughout the evening, each of the attendees—young and established leaders alike—shared the stories of how they entered the industry. While some fell in love with wine by traveling to Europe in their youth and others transitioned from entirely different careers or studies, there was a common thread connecting everyone around the table: an inclination for "taking a chance," Denevan-Brown said.

This penchant for risk taking is especially important when an unexpected

Both *Tasting Panel* Publisher Meridith May and Denevan-Brown also stressed the importance of finding mentors in the industry. "Choose the company you keep well to advance yourself," said Denevan-Brown. "And do not confuse change with advancement."

As the evening came to a close, the energy in the room was palpable. The scholarship recipients seemed motivated and emboldened to push forward and do great things—which was precisely the goal of Wine Dialogues and "Women Behind the Wine."



The Man Behind the Brands







92 PTS.

2018

Miller Ranch
Sauvignon Blanc



93_{PTS}.
2017
Estate Grown
Chardonnay



94PTS. 2016 Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon

