# THE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019 MAGAZ MAGAZ ARVINE Averthe SENSES

THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY RELEASES ITS NEW PINOT NOIR, ETERNALLY SILENCED DISTILLED TO APPRECIATE



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# tastingpane

November/December 2019 Vol. 77 No. 8

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### LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# The Great Gift Dilemma



I hate to bring this up, but it's time to start thinking about holiday gift giving. What should you give your mail carrier? What should you give your coworkers? What should you give your uncle Henry (the one who, regrettably, likes Night Train Express) or the in-laws who have everything?

These and other gift-driven dilemmas will torment you in the coming weeks, as they do every year. I sympathize. So here are a few guidelines for making the process a bit less painful as well as more organized.

- 1. Everyone knows you're in the wine and/or spirits business. This doesn't mean that you can't simply give away the products you represent. On the contrary, most people are hopeful that you'll do just that, which leads to my next tip . . .
- Don't give quantity; give quality. A case of \$10 wines? No! Two bottles (or even one) of a \$50 wine or spirit? Yes! Above all, give people something they'll love but are unlikely to buy for themselves. "Exciting" is the watchword.
- 3. Make an effort to find out beforehand what that something may be. This helps to avoid mistakes such as giving an expensive bottle of Scotch to someone whose drink of choice is white Zinfandel. (As for what you should give this hypothetical white Zin lover, how about two bottles of really good French rosé?)
- 4. Presentation matters. Don't just hand over the gift unadorned: Wrap it nicely, put it in a reusable carrying case, or, at the very least, festoon the bottle(s) with colorful holiday ribbons. How a gift is presented has a lot to do with how it is received.
- 5. When it is presented matters too. Don't wait until the last minute: Nice bottles are most appreciated well in advance of formal holiday celebrations, for obvious reasons.
- 6. Be generous, especially if you have access to fine and expensive products. This time of year is made for expressing your love and gratitude to those who make your life and your work easier.



## Welcome home.

Cherry Pie California Tri-County Pinot Noir showcases the best of each county to create a wine with a distinct sense of place. From gravelly, well-draining sites in Monterey which create rich, concentrated earthy flavors, to the cool climate of Carneros in Napa which results in bright red, juicy flavors, and warm, sandy soils in Santa Barbara which provide intense aromatics and acidity. Each cluster begins with the influence of its surroundings.



# UPFIONT

# "Freedom of Choice and FREEDOM OF PROOF"

LYRE'S OPENS UP THE NON-ALCOHOLIC CATEGORY FOR FOLLOWERS OF THE TREND

by Meridith May



Celebrating the California launch of their unprecedented array of non-alcoholic spirits are Lyre's CEO Mark Livings, Chief Marketing Officer Paul Gloster, and Brand Ambassador Kyle Billings. As far away as it may be

from our shores, Australia is often at the epicenter of global pop phenomena, giving us such Hollywood superstars as Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman; cultural touchstones like the Mad Max franchise (which has in turn inspired fashion designers from Yohji Yamamoto to Louis Vuitton's Nicolas Ghesquière); and smash hits by Keith Urban and Sia. So it should come as no surprise that the country is at the forefront of a trend whose popularity is growing at a mind-blowing pace worldwide: Alcohol alternatives have landed stateside thanks to the genius of the folks at Lyre's.

Encompassing everything from rum to whiskey to liqueurs, the brand's portfolio of 12 alcohol-free spirits is the largest to enter the U.S. market, bolstered by a solid distribution partnership with Southern Glazer's. Though California is the number-one focus now, ambitious plans to move the product across the country are imminent, according to CEO Mark Livings and Chief Marketing Officer Paul Gloster. In the meantime, four high-profile, well-respected mixologists and sommeliers have been appointed as brand ambassadors to preach the low-to-no-alcohol gospel throughout the Golden State, bringing new converts into the established fold of believers.

"Even a large spirits portfolio from a traditional beverage company doesn't have the range that we do," comments Livings. "We're not restricted in any genre—instead we are opening avenues for unique cocktail recipes as much as we are supporting the classics. For our 12 variants, we have already captured the imagination of bartenders, and the combinations that can accommodate hundreds of recipes go from medium proof . . . to low proof to no proof." Indeed, one can create cocktails using only Lyre's expressions as building blocks: a proof-less Negroni using Lyre's Aperitif Dry, Lyre's Dry London Spirit, and Lyre's Italian Orange, for instance.

While the brand ambassadors are opening up opportunities for Lyre's at some of California's most sought-after bars, the team has also worked out a unique relationship with BevMo!. "They're taking on the full range," Gloster says proudly. "As the first retail chain to get behind this movement, they are resetting some of their store layouts to spotlight the non-alc category. BevMo! is so forward-thinking as to sampling in place—and for a brand with no alcohol, it's an easier task to accomplish."

Jeff Feist, Category Lead for Spirits & More for BevMo!, is enthusiastic about the prospect of attracting new customers to his stores. "It's rare when a retailer can create a category trend," he explains. "In the case of Lyre's, we're pioneering the non-alc category when . . . the timing is just right and the customer base [is growing]." Feist took nine Lyre's SKUs live on October 15. "Besides opening up a special new section," he says, "we're actually creating a destination placement for Lyre's adjacent to spirits, surrounded by items that would facilitate a one-stop shopping trip for cocktail making such as bitters, Bloody Mary mixers, and glassware. This will certainly anchor the brand—and the category." Having experienced the mixability of Lyre's firsthand, he claims, "What happens when you mix any of their products with traditional cocktail ingredients is like alchemy."

What's more, Gloster is right about Feist's ability to sample a no-alcohol brand in store. "Instead of just setting up a table and hoping that customers will walk by, we will be batching non-alcoholic mixed drinks and walking around the store, offering customers a taste," Feist says. "This turns a tasting upside down. Lyre's is a game changer."

Livings certainly agrees. "We compare our influence over the category to [the way] vegetarian dishes were once relegated to separate menus," he explains. "Now, the options fit happily onto any menu. It's an important change that happened naturally as people desired and were able to easily access—healthier choices at their fingertips. The same holds true for non-alc drinks. We want to be the leaders who are responsible for making that change on drink menus for a seamless transition at the bar. Lyre's will champion freedom of proof and freedom of choice."



"BECAUSE WE'RE A BRAND THAT'S BASED ON MIMICRY, WE GET TO TELL EVERYONE HOW MUCH FUN BEVERAGES ARE AGAIN." —Lyre's CEO Mark Livings

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Actress Maggie Gyllenhaal guesthosted a launch party for The Prisoner Wine Company's latest release, Eternally Silenced Pinot Noir, in New York in September.

8 / the tasting pan



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

Everything. Because at least a couple times a week, our cellar crew takes a break to play a pickup game of soccer. At Hahn Estate, we celebrate the teamwork, pride and drive that every employee has to produce outstanding wine. So, next time you visit the Santa Lucia Highlands, stop by with your sneakers and look for Izzy, Luis and the rest of the crew...you just might be invited to play!

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Pony Up Bar Manager Dylan Holcomb whips up a Chopin Rye Vodka and Dorda Sea Salt Caramel Liqueur cocktail at The Tasting Panel's cocktail speed tasting in Denver, CO.

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PHOTO: JENNIFER OLSON

## USA PIS USA PIS THE TINGUAGE PIS THE TINGUAGE PIS "RICH WITH AROMAS OF DARK CHOCOLATE, SLATE, CEDAR, AND COFFEE..."

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## Wente Family Estates Appoints Aly Wente as Senior Brand Manager

Wente Family Estates recently announced the appointment of Aly Wente as Senior Brand Manager of Wente Vineyards. She joins Christine and Karl Wente, as well as her sisters Jordan and Niki, as a member of the fifth generation behind the oldest continuously operated family-owned winery in the United States.

Aly, who gained four years of marketing experience at Constellation Brands, will lead in developing and executing strategic marketing plans and activities to support both long- and short-term goals for Wente Vineyards. Prior to her time at Constellation, Aly served as a project coordinator at SunCal, a private land-development company. "We require that outside experience and development take place before joining Wente Family Estates, and Aly brings a wealth of skills to this important position for our flagship brand," CEO Carolyn Wente says.

Aly's father, Phil Wente, encouraged her to explore all facets of the family business from a young age. She discovered a love of marketing early on and spent the summers of her college years working as an intern for the Wente Vineyards sales and marketing team. Aly serves on the board of the Wente Foundation for Arts Education and will also sit on the Livermore Valley Winegrowers Foundation Board. In 2017, she attained a Level 3 Advanced Certification in Wine from the prestigious Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET).





## Epic Wines & Spirits Taps Bill Young as Executive Vice President of Sales

pic Wines & Spirits has appointed Bill Young as Executive Vice President of Sales. Young previously spent 15 years with Treasury Wine Estates in various roles, including General Manager of California, Vice President of National Accounts, and Vice President of Global Accounts On-Premise. In his new role with Epic, Young will be responsible for sales divisions throughout all channels.

"We're excited about the background and experience Bill brings to Epic," says President Justin Sternberg. "He is an accomplished leader who understands the disciplines necessary to win in distribution. We are confident that under Bill's direction, Epic will continue to advance market share in California."

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Whether *The Tasting Panel* goes to the brand execs or the brands call us, there is an abundance of news to report, from the latest releases to behind-the-scenes experiences with some of the world's most influential importers, winemakers, distillers . . . well, you name it.

# Brief Encounters

We may not have enough pages in each issue to devote as much attention as we would like to each person whose path we cross, but please note that if it's in the publication, we deem it noteworthy.

-Meridith May, Publisher & Editorial Director

HOTO COURTESY OF CAVALIERE D'ORC

## The Gold Knight of Tuscany: Cavaliere d'Oro Winemaker Federico Cerelli

Before becoming a winemaker at Castello di Gabbiano, Federico Cerelli consulted for more than 30 boutique wineries and family producers across Tuscany. In so doing, he sometimes found himself in the role of diplomat while mediating family disputes; as he recalls, "Older generations didn't want to change their practices at all, but the younger generations did. They wanted to try growing different grapes and [employing] new methods of winemaking." They sought, in short, to adapt to changing technology and tastes.

Cerelli is now the chief winemaker at Cavaliere d'Oro (Italian for "Gold Knight"), a new brand that represents the evolution of Gabbiano and its 500-year heritage. Though it offers six remarkable Tuscan reds, Cavaliere d'Oro is also branching out with Prosecco,

Pinot Grigio from the Veneto, Primitivo from Apulia, and an opulent blend of Nero d'Avola, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon from Sicily.

Cerelli is using his two decades of experience to make quality wines that reflect both his respect for Italian tradition and his interest in implementing new production methods while exploring the terroir of regions

Federico Cerelli is the chief winemaker at Cavaliere d'Oro.

beyond Tuscany. With 13 different expressions (priced from \$10 to \$40) out of the gate, he manages to bridge the gap between Old World and New-Old World, so to speak. Considering his aspirations to craft higherend wines in the future, it'll be fascinating to see how Cavaliere d'Oro expands its portfolio and evolves as a brand. —*Eric Marsh* 

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### **BRIEF** ENCOUNTERS



# Seeking the Truth

### SAN ANTONIO-AREA SOMMELIER MARK ROBERTS COMBINES HIS PASSIONS FOR WINE AND DETECTIVE WORK

#### story and photo by Lori Moffatt

awoke early one recent morning to watch the first of several refrigerated trucks arrive at a winery in eastern Texas from vineyards in the Texas High Plains nine hours away. As the driver stepped out of the cab like a modern-day cowboy and asked for coffee in a vaguely German accent, I thought about how important the job of transporting grapes is to the entire wine industry—and how little most of us pay attention to the process.

San Antonio–area sommelier Mark Roberts is an exception to the rule. He's harbored a lifelong interest in wine: His father was a serious collector with a large cellar in Dallas. "I was a fan of the Ian Fleming novels, so when I read that James Bond was drinking Veuve Clicquot with his scrambled eggs, I'd go into my dad's cellar and think, 'Oh, there's that bottle of wine they were talking about in the book,'" Roberts says with a laugh.

A trip through Europe and an opportunity to work the 1982 harvest in Bordeaux further ignited Roberts' passion, he says, but like his fictional hero, he developed a wide range of professional skills. For more than a decade he served as the beverage director for a Dallas restaurant group before moving to Florida, where he worked briefly as a stuntman and then as a private investigator.

The latter profession is what ultimately influenced Roberts' present career in the wine industry. In 2004, he and his wife, Kathleen, founded Wine Service Consulting, which focuses on wine-loss investigations as well as restaurant consultations. He'll occasionally deal with instances of wine fraud, but the majority of his cases concern cooked wine shipments. "The biggest culprit is wine getting overheated," Roberts notes. "But where did it happen? Did the loss happen on a ship coming in from the south of France, or did it happen at a dock in New York?"

The next time you enjoy a wine that makes your heart sing, thank not only the farmer who grew the grapes and the winemaker who worked such magic with yeast and barrel but also the shipper. Wine is a living thing, and precious cargo indeed.





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In **Beyond the Barrel**, we'll taste and review products that may or may not come from a barrel but definitely land outside the box. From brilliant innovations to zany concepts, we'll approach each one judiciously, with the cognizance that everything has a market.

#### Alloy Wine Works Pinot Noir, Central Coast, California

(\$7/375mL) This handharvested 100% Pinot Noir sees 12 months in neutral French oak before canning. With notes of rose petals, pink peppercorns, cinnamon stick, mushrooms, and fallen leaves, its bouquet is something to revel in. A suggestion of shiitake quickly entices the palate along with a flash of acidity before a sudden finish. Burgundy in color, this wine is almost translucent, bears little weight, and might best be served slightly chilled during warm autumn afternoons.

Lyre's Amaretto Non-Alcoholic Spirit (\$36/700mL) The name sounds like "liar's"—as in "vou're a liar if vou're telling me there's no alcohol in this drink." But Lyre's is free of the heady stuff. The brand has more than ten non-alcoholic expressions. all of which are best enjoyed as ingredients in mocktails. As the base in an Amaretto Sour, its Amaretto alternative shows through with notes of almond skin, subtle peach, and baking spice. Add an egg white to the classic recipe for an afterdinner drink that's equal parts nutty, sweet and sour, and frothy. (For more

NREX MAREITO

on Lyre's, see page 6.)



Azulana Sparkling Tequila (\$14/4-pack of 355mL cans) Call it Jalisco's answer to

hard seltzer. Sweetened with agave syrup, this light, crisp concoction is made with blue agave blanco tequila and natural flavors. Its original expression drinks like a less-citrusy, fairly sweet sparkling Margarita that goes down a little too easy. You can also opt for the lime and pineapple-rosemary flavors, which, like the original, clock in at 4.3% ABV.





**Cascadian Outfitters** 2016 Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$5/375mL) Depicted on the can of this 100% estategrown Chardonnay is a Sasquatch descending a mountain with a chalice in one hand and a wine bottle in the other. as if to suggest that it's so good that a mysterious beast would venture out from the wild to obtain it. As it turns out, he has fine taste. Cracking the stay-tab releases aromas of white jasmine and orange-juice reduction. There's brighter citrus on the palate, along with effervescent minerality and a note of pear tart. Store a can in your jacket pocket while snowshoeing or cross-country skiing in the Pacific Northwest to use as barter in case you cross paths with Bigfoot—it might get you out of a hairy situation.

**Taffer's Mixologist Margarita Mix (\$6/946mL)** By using cane sugar, stevia leaf, and monk fruit extract, Taffer's manages both to keep calories on lockdown and to steer clear of chemical-saccharine territory. Citric acid keeps concentrated lime juice tart, truly awakening the palate. There is a slightly savory element (perhaps from one of the "natural ingredients") redolent of pumpkin spice buried in the finish, which heightens the overall taste profile. Just add tequila for a convenient libation that's less messy than juicing your own limes: It's ideal for happy hour at home.



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

**Andrea Cromaz** has been named Vice President of Marketing at **The Cooper Spirits Company**. She had been the founder of ABV Branding, Inc.

**Matt Litman** has been named Director of Partnerships at **Provi**. He had been Sr. Director, Head of Strategic Accounts, at Drawbridge Inc.

#### CAREER CORNER



## Raises Across the Alcoholic Beverage Industry

As companies increasingly compete for available talent in today's market, money remains an incredibly important factor. ForceBrands' 2019 Talent Market Report, a cross-industry analysis of employee benefits and compensation in the consumer-packaged-goods (CPG) sector, surveyed more than 500 full-time hiring decision-makers—including leaders at the director, President/VP/SVP, and C-suite level—to examine the talent market in more detail. The report found that employees across the CPG industry receive generous raises compared to the national average, which typically hovers around 3%.

That's even more true for beer, wine, and spirits professionals, whose raises average 10%. In cases where employers of all sizes are unable to meet a candidate's desired salary requirements, alternative incentives are often offered, including flexible work schedules, access to free products, and customizable job titles.

"The bev-alc industry has changed dramatically over the last decade, with today's market dominated by a handful of top brands that are focused on appealing to more health-conscious consumers," said Rachel Doueck, ForceBrands' Director of Sales in Spirits, Wine, and Beer. "But amid all these changes and challenges, the industry has largely succeeded in attracting and retaining top talent to sustain its massive footprint."

For more insights, visit forcebrands.com.

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.



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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.

# Coupe de Grâce

### QUALITY BUBBLES TO DRINK (AND SELL) THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

by David Ransom

ow that the leaves are off the trees, it's time to start thinking about what to pour for this year's holiday celebrations. Recently, I attended a couple of events in New York that provided some lovely examples from Spain, Italy, and France.

At SHARE's A Second Helping of Life—a tasting benefit for breast- and ovariancancer support services that featured more than two dozen top female chefs—I fell in love with Pere Ventura Tresor Rosé Cava (\$16; Palm Bay International). Made in the traditional method from 100% Trepat, a red grape native to northeastern Spain, this deeply colored sparkling rosé is laced with aromas of rose petals and filled with strawberry and cherry notes on the palate. A delightful and affordable Cava by any

standards, it's a good candidate for by-the-glass programs.

Then, at Folio Fine Wine Partners' prestige portfolio tasting at the Nomo Soho Hotel, I tasted a number of delicious sparklers from Italy and France. The Italian wines represented three different regions:



"I fell in love with Pere Ventura Tresor Rosé Cava. This deeply colored sparkling rosé is laced with aromas of rose petals and filled with strawberry and cherry notes on the palate."



Bollamatta (\$26), from Tuscan producer Bibi Graetz, is a fresh 100% Sangiovese sparkling rosé with a hint of spice on the palate. The Bruno Giacosa 2015 Spumante Extra Brut (\$50) is made from 100% Pinot Nero in Oltrepo Pavese, spends 30 months on yeasts, and abounds in floral notes. And Villa Sandi's 2017 Prosecco Superiore di Cartizze Vigna La Rivetta (\$52), a simply stunning vintage-dated sparkling Glera, comes from Prosecco's most coveted growing area in Valdobbiadene. The French bubbly that caught my eye, meanwhile, was the rich and creamy Brut Reserve Champagne (\$72) from Charles Heidsieck. Blended from 60 crus and utilizing 40% reserve wine, it spends seven years on the lees before disgorgement.

I always enjoy finding new bubbles to introduce to my family and friends during the holidays. In fact, my cousins liked the Champagne I poured during one Thanksgiving dinner so much that it is now their house bubbly. I wonder if one of these new finds will replace it. ■ Folio Fine Wine Partners' portfolio includes sparklers from Bibi Graetz, Bruno Giacosa, Villa Sandi, and Charles Heidsieck.



## TOP SELLING GLUTEN-FREE SPIRIT



Source: (1) IRI, Total US Food & Drug 52wks ending 9/09/18, Top 25 Spirit Brands





Beverage Director and saké sommelier Bryan Masamitsu Parsons displays a traditional saké cup tray at Kemuri Tatsu-Ya in Austin, TX.



### SAKÉ SOMMELIER BRYAN MASAMITSU PARSONS BUILDS A BRIDGE FROM TEXAS TO JAPAN story and photo by Lori Moffatt

hen Bryan Masamitsu Parsons arrived in Austin with a degree in computer science and experience slinging drinks at beach bars in Florida, he didn't imagine he'd end up with a career that would connect him with his half-Japanese heritage. But a gig tending bar in a Japanese restaurant led to a passion for saké, shochu, and Japanese whisky-elixirs that in 2015 were still off the radar for many Texans. "I kind of went down the rabbit hole of Japanese culture," says Parsons, who recently traveled to Tokyo to earn his Advanced Sake Professional certification from the Sake Education Council.

Today, Parsons serves as a saké sommelier for the multiconcept Tatsu-Ya Group, which includes ramen shops, a shabu-shabu restaurant, a *yokocho*style bar (found in the alleyways of Japan), an ice cream shop, and a Japanese-Polynesian tiki bar that will open in the near future. But his baby is Kemuri Tatsu-Ya, a Japanese-Texan mashup where barbecued eel shares the menu with brisket ramen—and where the drinks menu gives him plenty of room to play. As Kemuri's Beverage Director, Parsons keeps a tight focus on saké, shochu, and whisk(e)y from both Japan and Texas.

"We don't have wine here because we want people to experience saké. We don't have vodka because we want you to try shochu," Parsons says. As for the whiskey element, he adds, "We're evolving and focusing the whisk(e)y program; we want to be known as a Japanese-Texan whisk(e)y house. People can come in and still have one foot in Texas, but the other foot is going to be exploring Japan."

Parsons acknowledges that Japanese saké and spirits present a particular challenge in terms of availability and access, which are dependent on building relationships both here and in Asia. "Japanese whisky, especially, is trending worldwide," he continues, "so it takes a lot of strategy to make sure we have enough of certain things." Similar obstacles exist for saké; at DipDipDip Tatsu-Ya, the restaurant group's shabu-shabu house, more than half of the saké menu was imported into Texas specifically for the business.

"Saké still has a problem that wine doesn't have anymore," Parsons says. "You can come here and discover you really like drinking saké, but you can't easily just run to the store to buy a really good bottle to enjoy with friends at home like you can with wine."

That's one reason that Parsons hosts seminars, presentations, saké dinners, and other educational opportunities for distributors and salespeople as well as consumers every chance he gets. "Education is so important," Parsons says. "We can get people excited about saké at our restaurants, and then the distributors and sellers and importers put energy on the retail side, [so] then you can enjoy it at home."

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### GIFTWORTHY WHISK(E)YS FROM SCOTLAND, IRELAND, AND WALES

# Holiday Spirit

by lan Buxton

DOUBLE ADED FOR EXTRA SMOOTHNESS

write a lot about single malts, but we all know that blends pay the bills—perhaps for no distiller more than Dewar's, which is launching two new products perfect for the holiday season. Both feature its 15 Years Old expression (40% ABV), "an extraordinarily smooth whisky known the world over for its indulgent honey and toffee flavours," to quote the press materials. It's certainly easy drinking—a step up from the 12 Years Old-but still shows plenty of depth, richness, and complexity. Master Blender Stephanie MacLeod built on Dewar's tradition of double aging to create the extra-aged blend; now it's being sold in a 1.75-liter bottle (\$65) that should have great appeal under the tree and on the shelf. It's also available in a special gold-boxed gift pack that includes two glasses at the standard bottle price (\$40).

Meanwhile, there are two new Islay whiskies to tempt the peat freaks on your holiday shopping list. First up is **Ardbeg Traigh Bhan**, a 19-year-old named for a beach known (in translation) as the Singing Sands. At 46.2% ABV, it indeed made sweet music in my glass, showing aromas of pineapple and wood smoke plus a sweet palate of chocolate and smoked paprika. This \$300 bottle will join Ardbeg's permanent lineup, but its recipe will vary slightly from year to year to intrigue the brand's many fans.

On the other side of the island, tiny newcomer Kilchoman is really hitting its stride. Importers ImpEx Beverages have rushed the U.S. allocation of the



Dewars

sion, Glenfiddich Malt Master Brian Kinsman suggests we look for notes of apple blossom, freshly baked bread, candied lemon, sandalwood, and pear sorbet, among other flavours. "Marrying the best of both worlds, the final liquid presents [the] exceptional finesse" of both Scotch and Champagne, he adds.

NUMPER AND A DECEMPTION

Other expressions soon to arrive stateside are Penderyn's **Welsh Gold** and the 2019 release of **The Irishman Vintage Cask**, a rare cask-strength Irish whiskey from Walsh Whiskey. Only 2,346 bottles were produced, each of which is numbered and signed by distillery co-founder Bernard Walsh. Happy holidays!

Kilchoman 100% Islay 9th Edition (50% ABV; \$110); with just 1,440 bottles arriving by airfreight, ImpEx anticipates keen interest from the distillery's growing following. The company tells me that its last Kilchoman shipment sold out of its warehouse in just two hours, so you've been warned!

Back on Scotland's mainland, the folks at the storied Glenfiddich distillery have been busy. Not content to rest on its laurels with the world's bestselling single malt, the brand has released a string of new products in recent years. The latest is **Glenfiddich Grand Cru**, a 23-year-old bottling finished in French cuvée casks from the Champagne region (40% ABV; \$300).

Noting that the oak influence of the French cuvée casks "adds an extra layer of complexity" to the expres-





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## CAPATOLCHILL

D.C. SINKS ITS TEETH INTO WHAT'S COMING OUT OF THE KITCHEN AT A MODERN STEAKHOUSE AND A PERUVIAN CEVICHERIA



**BLT Steak offers** New York prime and American waqyu cuts of beef-as well as irresistible popovers.

# A Passion for Pisco and Prime Cuts .

by Kelly Magyarics

eruvian food has definitely been having a moment in Washington, D.C., with hot spots like José Andrés' Asian-Peruvian-Spanish mashup China Chilcano, the chic Nazca Mochica in Dupont Circle, and Pisco y Nazca Ceviche Gastrobar. When my daughter and I stepped into the latter on a bustling Friday evening in September, we encountered a dining room filled with a happy hour crowd

chefs' yearly travels to Peru. Having just returned from a trip to Lima and Machu Picchu. I was all too excited to sample dishes that could take me back. First to arrive at the table was tiradito de atún, which topped roasted jalapeño puree with ahi, dollops of avocado, and sesame seeds. From the prolific ceviche selection came marinated octopus with Botija olive mayo, avocado, and aji limo, while a sprinkling of fried corn



Marinated octopus ceviche tempts diners at Pisco y Nazca Ceviche Gastrobar, which specializes in pisco-based cocktails like this apple-cinnamon Chilcano.

seeking respite from the endless cycle of impeachment news over rounds of that frothy, bitters-studded Peruvian panacea, the Pisco Sour.

The room is undoubtedly one of the loudest in the city, which made it a bit tricky to hear my server's take on the new fall menu, inspired by the kernels added crunch to succulent shrimp dunked in leche de tigre.

The star, though, was beef in the form of grilled tenderloin with chimichurri, served with grilled corn and fried plantains. I also couldn't resist the tanginess of a pisco-based cocktail called Guapo's Chilcano, flavored

with passion fruit, mint, and a touch of lip-tingling rocoto pepper. To end, the arroz con leche cheesecake was a study in Peruvian ingredients, drizzled with dulce de leche and studded with a thin quinoa wafer. Creamy, crunchy, caramelly: Sí, sí, sí.

Not too far away in the shadow of the White House, BLT Steak is a modern interpretation of a classic steakhouse. Recently, chef Michael Bonk proved his chops during a four-course dinner paired with wines from Australia's Penfolds, starting with BLT's signature fresh-from-the-oven popovers. Other featured dishes included cobia sashimi and a decadent raviolo stuffed with braised Australian lamb neck, but let's face it: Whether it's cowboy rib-eye, dry-aged porterhouse, or wagyu top cap, BLT is mostly about the beef. So when I was presented with an off-menu, ras el hanout-seasoned Australian wagyu strip loin paired with the latest vintage of the iconic Penfolds Grange, I tore into it with gusto. D.C. has more to offer than steak joints for politicos, but when we do them, we do them well (as opposed to well done).

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

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# The Purest Expression

JUSTIN VINEYARDS & WINERY CELEBRATES 30 YEARS AS A LEADING PRODUCER OF CABERNET SAUVIGNON IN PASO ROBLES

by Michelle Ball



Scott Shirley is the winemaker at JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery in Paso Robles.



aso Robles' reputation for Cabernet Sauvignon may be impressive, but it's also relatively recent. The influx of talented producers and capital investments into the region over just the past two decades follows a path paved by a few early pioneers, including Justin Baldwin of JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery, who was among the first to demonstrate the area's enormous potential for producing world-class Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux-style blends.

In 1981, Baldwin purchased 160 acres in the Adelaida District on the western end of the broader Paso Robles AVA and planted Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc in proportions that mirrored those of Bordeaux's Left Bank. Released to great acclaim, the iconic JUSTIN ISOSCELES helped introduce Paso Robles to the world stage as a serious winegrowing appellation. Although the winery's flagship blend is predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon, and in many vintages could be labeled as such, its varietally designated reserve wines contain 100% of the grape.

After 30 years as a leading Cab producer, JUSTIN is releasing the inaugural vintage of its PLATINUM Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2015 PLATINUM Reserve is a blend of barrel-aged wines with the structure and concentration to endure another 24 months of aging in new French oak.

Under the guidance of winemaker Scott Shirley, JUSTIN now produces three tiers of reserve wine. This isn't as easy as it sounds, given that Cabernet Sauvignon is often blended with other grapes for balance in terms of aroma, flavor, acidity, and/or overall structure. Luckily, Shirley is a master when it comes to coaxing out the personality of the fruit from each of the many vineyards that JUSTIN works with.

Shirley spent the early part of his career in Napa Valley, where he cut his teeth at Opus One and The Hess Collection. When Baldwin reached out in 2012 to offer him a winemaking position and the opportunity to collaborate on the design of JUSTIN's newest Paso Robles holdings, Shirley was intrigued by the thought of "being able to walk these vineyard blocks before they were planted, [knowing] that the soil, with all these limestone rocks, [is] so similar to Bordeaux," he says. "I thought, 'If I were a Cabernet Sauvignon vine, this is where I'd want to be planted.""

In addition to overseeing its own estate vineyards, JUSTIN also works with growers throughout Paso Robles, sourcing fruit from nine out of 11 sub-AVAs. Shirley keeps every lot and fermentation separate to avoid premature field blends. "Nothing is picked for JUSTIN until I've walked through the vineyard block, tasted the fruit on the vine, and decided that the right balance of fruit, acidity, and tannin has been reached. Then, when I'm tasting the tanks to make drain and press decisions, I think back to how it tasted in the field," he explains, adding that he doesn't follow a prescribed methodology for fermentations. In other words, it's all a matter of finding the purest expression that each site can achieve.

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# The Takeaway from Takeout

by Jesse Hom-Dawson

nce upon a time, takeout and delivery were largely confined to large cities and mostly limited to pizza and substandard Chinese food. Now, with delivery behemoths like Uber Eats, DoorDash, Caviar, and Grubhub at every smartphone owner's disposal, the available options are staggeringly vast. But just because you *can* order virtually any food via delivery doesn't mean you *should*.

Ice cream? Not in Los Angeles traffic. Sushi? I'm not willing to gamble my health on raw fish that's been sitting in a car. Burgers and fries? Not when they arrive cold with wilted lettuce and a soggy tomato. And while there's something to be said for ordering takeout or delivery from high-end or super-popular restaurants just to skip the line, a large part of their appeal and high price tags—derive from their atmosphere, service, and artful presentation.

Recent scrutiny into the policies of DoorDash, which uses tips to subsidize drivers' pay, has also spurred debate over the moral dilemmas of the gig economy and the lack of accountability companies face in terms of how they treat their contractors. DoorDash has also been accused of the unsavory practice of adding restaurants to its app whether they've consented or not, which often leads to users ordering from outdated menus; this confusion can lead to quality-related complaints that accumulate and, ultimately, might result in negative reviews based on forces beyond the restaurant's control. The process of removing your business from the app's listings is no easy feat, either, as it typically involves making multiple calls to DoorDash with mixed results.

Now more than ever, restaurateurs—no matter how big or small their businesses—must come to terms with the fact that creating a brand image goes beyond designing a logo or crafting an inventive signature dish: It involves protecting their reputation and the quality of their food as well. Just as you wouldn't want someone you haven't vetted cooking your dishes and presenting them with your name on it, you don't want your customers' orders to be left in the hands of a conglomerate start-up without a certain level of oversight. Whether that means limiting your delivery menu to items that travel well or opting out of app participation altogether, make sure you balance the potential profit that can be brought in through delivery with the goal of preserving the integrity of your food. You might find that the money isn't worth the risk.





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## WHERE WERE Eating

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# Down to Earth

## A ONE ON ONE WITH NEIGHBOR CHEF JOSHUA LUCE

bbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice, California, is one of the quirkiest restaurant rows in a city full of quirky restaurant rows: Though ultracasual, it's awash in famous destinations like Gjelina, Felix, and The Butcher's Daughter. Even the lesser-known hot spots boast serious talent in the kitchen, however. Take Neighbor, where chef Joshua Luce—who studied with Jacques Pépin before serving as a lead line chef under Jean-Georges Vongerichten and chef tournant for Alain Ducasse—is happily cooking food for everyone.

#### Merrill Shindler: You were in New York, cooking at the top. Now you're a world apart in Venice. Did the transition give you whiplash?

Joshua Luce: It's that desire to reconnect. When I went to New York, the culinary scene wasn't as intense in [California] as it is now. You had to go and learn in a French kitchen, and that's what New York offered. Then things changed; being closer to where

#### by Merrill Shindler

the products come from became the most important element of . . . cuisine. And there's no place better to be close to the products, and to the growers, than California.

#### What did you learn back east?

I learned technique—I learned it from the masters. Connect that with the products that are so readily available all year round, and you can make magic. Freshness and quality plus technique—that can't be beat. And here [in California], people want a simpler form of cooking. They want to taste the ingredients. My job is to honor the products [and] serve them at their best.

#### What can't be replicated here?

What I miss from New York is beautiful seafood from Long Island and beautiful produce, in season, from the Hudson Valley—they get root vegetables we don't get. But we get so much they don't. I went to New York so I could come back and rediscover this region.

Joshua Luce is the chef at Neighbor in Venice, CA.

## How were the chefs you studied under different from you?

The generation before me all went to Europe to study—to France primarily. They learned a more formal [style] that permeates their cooking. Now, people go to Asia, [or] to Spain for molecular gastronomy. The scene has expanded [to] become global over the decades.

## How would you define the difference between high-end and casual cuisine?

The higher the price point, the higher the expectation; the lower the price point, the lower the expectation. As we scale down, we still do our due diligence—we still use the best ingredients. But we're dealing with a more . . . earthy palate in California. In New York, the food is built around a lot of cream, a lot of butter, a lot of seasoning. Here, it's all built around the ingredients. A tomato has to taste like a tomato. Luckily, here in California, they do.

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# No Signature No Problem

TAKING A CLOSE LOOK AT VIRGINIA'S TOP-PERFORMING VARIETIES by Jessie Birschbach

V irginia Wine's website makes it pretty darn clear that the organization doesn't believe in signature grapes. That message was only reinforced by my recent trip to Virginian wine country, where the majority of those in the know felt that the state's Bordeaux blends would garner its (overdue) recognition.

I'm inclined to agree. Common among most of these blends was a silky thread of elegance, firmly establishing a connection between the Old Dominion and the Old World that's perhaps stronger than that of other domestic regions. (This could be because Virginia and Bordeaux share a similarly humid climate.) We might also consider the state's palsy-walsy community of winemakers, who seem to want more than ever to demonstrate that they and their blends are worthy of consideration.

Even so, I was introduced to several stunning varietal wines as well—including formidable Cab Francs and some of the best dry Petit Mansengs I've ever encountered. Regardless of whether they're blended or not, I've come to consider the following to be Virginia's top-performing grapes (so far). **Cabernet Franc** This Bordeaux variety may be the red that Virginia does best. Yes, the state's wines offer a bit more restraint generally, but don't expect a lithe Chinon: The Cab Francs here are a bit more robust, with a peppery mélange of spices, dried green herbs, and purple flowers. Early Mountain Vineyards, Keswick Vineyards, and Barboursville Vineyards all make excellent examples.

Petit Verdot This Bordeaux variety grows very happily in Virginia. When made into a varietal wine, it will live a long life in bottle, maintaining a full-bodied, tannic profile that typically shows dark fruits and dark chocolate. It's also a big contributor to ageability in blends like those from The Williamsburg Winery, King Family Vineyards, and Paradise Springs Winery, whose PVT—half Petit Verdot, half Tannat—remains one of the state's most fascinating blends.

**Cabernet Sauvignon** Cab Sauv is the leading grape in many of the Bordeaux blends that, as I've mentioned, are a hallmark of Virginian winemaking. Look to RdV Vineyards, King Family Vineyards, and Linden Vineyards for exemplars.

**Petit Manseng** My favorite of Virginia's whites. The full-bodied dry versions offer searing acidity and stone fruit edged in chalky minerality. Awesome examples are made by Michael Shaps Wineworks, Glen Manor Vineyards, King Family Vineyards, and Early Mountain Vineyards (which does a Petit Manseng–dominant blend).

**Viognier** Once considered the state's signature grape, Viognier yields a lovely mix of tropical fruit and white flowers laced with gingery spice. Most every producer here makes a solid example, often fermenting it dry. Standouts include Upper Shirley Vineyards and King Family Vineyards. Horton Vineyards offers a super-sharp sparkler.

**Chardonnay** Chardonnay comes in a wide range of styles, from the steely, minerally wines made in cool coastal regions like the Chesapeake Bay to richer, oakier renditions inland. Seek out expressions from Paradise Springs Winery, Ankida Ridge Vineyards, and Chatham Vineyards.

Norton An honorable mention goes to America's oldest grape, which was first cultivated in Richmond. The crossbreed born from the *Vitis aestivalis* species makes a fruit-forward, high-acid, and ageable red wine. Excellent examples include Chrysalis Vineyards Locksley Reserve, Bluestone Vineyard, and Rappahannock Cellars (which offers both a dry Norton and a dessert style).
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### Double Gold Medal

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



# Molly Brooks

#### ADVANCED SOMMELIER AND CERTIFIED CICERONE



San Diego native, Molly Brooks has extensive experience in the industry that's reflected in her numerous certifications: She's a Level 3 Advanced Sommelier through the Court of Master Sommeliers, a French Wine Scholar through the Wine Scholar Guild, a Certified Specialist of Wine (CSW), and a Certified Cicerone, among other titles. You've spent many years in hospitality in San Diego and have no doubt seen a considerable amount of change. What do you think is on the horizon for the city and Southern California as a whole? As I've transitioned through retail and into distribution over the past few years, I've seen a growing interest in [European] wines from "traditional" wine regions like Burgundy, Rioja, Mosel, and Tuscany as well as "non-traditional" regions like Roussillon in France. Rías Baixas in Spain, Rheingau in Germany, and Etna in Italy. [At the same time,] there's been significant growth in the diversity of small, family-owned restaurants specializing in regional cuisine that reflects the bounty of Southern California. The best restaurants in the world respect seasonality and place.

#### What's your opinion, as a member of the Women's Wine Alliance, on the role organizations like WWA play in the industry on a local level?

The Women's Wine Alliance services two different communities: women who are approaching their love for wine as a second career and women entering the wine and hospitality industry as a primary passion. This organization is valuable because it provides education and allows the opportunity for networking and connectivity that helps our community grow and thrive.

At SommCon, we host a session on career prospects in the wine industry. Which of your roles has challenged you the most, and what advice do you have for your by Michelle Metter

#### contemporaries with respect to evaluating which part of the business is "right" for them?

While all positions have had their challenges, my role as National Account Manager at Truly Fine Wine provided me with a variety of experiences and learning opportunities. I managed its worldwide retail program—including on-site tastings, events, and the online shop—[in addition to] packaging and fulfillment, distributor relations, and the creation of new brands: I also worked as a sales representative in California as well as a liaison between the company and the chamber of commerce. This experience made me a more well-rounded wine professional, providing me with a better grasp of what accounts are looking for.

#### You have ten minutes and one glass of wine. Who are you with and what are you drinking?

Bubbles—always bubbles. If I had to pick just one, I would love to revisit the 1996 Dom Ruinart Rosé that I shared with new and old friends in Bordeaux over the summer. I'd pour it in a wine glass, not a coupe or flute, and I'd be waxing poetic with Theodore Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss.

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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 🤬 🔬 😡

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

#### 4 TALKIES Q Q Q

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

#### 5 TALKIES 🔍 🔍 🔍 🔍

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



Is anyone else desperately looking forward to the new year? We are. Here is a wide range of wines that have two things in common: Their deliciousness provides at least a momentary escape from reality, and the majority are full-bodied enough to keep you warm through the cold, bitter end of 2019.



#### 

**Michael David 2017 Petite Petit, Lodi (\$18)** Rich flavors of ripe blackberry, maraschino cherry, and buttery brown sugar meld together while

nutmeg and an interesting umami note of sautéed mushroom temper the sweet, lavish side of this Lodi Petite Sirah, which also contains 15% Petit Verdot. The blend spends 16 months in barrel (60% new French, 40% neutral). Michael David's label designs never disappoint (the bottle pictured is for the 2015 vintage).



#### 

**Seven Hills 2016 Merlot, Walla Walla Valley** (**\$25)** Black cherry, milk chocolate, black olive, green tobacco, and smoked cedar in a juicy

medium-plus body. Grown in the silt-loam soils of the Walla Walla AVA, hand-farmed, and hand-harvested, this Merlot is blended with 11% Cabernet Sauvignon and 4% Cabernet Franc and aged 16 months in 40% new French as well as American and other European oak. Simple yet intriguing label. 4,100 cases produced.



#### 

Fort Ross Winery 2017 Sea Slopes Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$35) Tart strawberry and raspberry tinged with cinnamon, dank soil,

and fresh carnations. Clocks in at almost 14% ABV, but drinks a percentage or two lower. Fermented in stainless steel, then transferred to a combination of 15% new and 85% neutral French oak for ten months. It's a solid showing by winemaker Jeff Pisoni, with 5,440 cases produced.

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# DOWN THE AISLE



# An Excellent Endcap

Ferrari-Carano 2014 Trésor, Sonoma County (\$50) In

this full-bodied Bordeaux blend of 62% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Petit Verdot, 10% Merlot, 11% Malbec, and 4% Cabernet Franc, blackberry jam and cranberry relish unite upfront while violets and black licorice tend to the background. The luscious texture melts slowly into a dry, graphite-tinged finish. Trésor, meaning "treasure," mines the brightest gems of Sonoma County, incorporating fruit from the Alexander, Napa, Knights, and Dry Creek valleys. Each lot is fermented separately in tank and then racked to French oak (41% new) for malolactic fermentation and 21 months of aging.



#### **Q Q Q C Shooting Star 2017 Zinfandel, Lake County (\$15)** Laced with sweet tea and dark chocolate, mixed-berry pie (boysen-

berry, blueberry, cherry) and tart rhubarb are delivered in a full-bodied, chewy package. Shooting Star is a really cool name that could have a much cooler label. However, the super-delicious, true-to-type Zinfandel that's inside the bottle makes up for the outside, and the price can't be beat. The average age of the vines from which the fruit is sourced is 40 years; some of the grapes come from the Duncan-Shine Vineyard, which boasts some of the oldest Zinfandel vines in the Lake County AVA. 1,150 cases produced.

STEELE WINES



Cedar + Salmon 2018 Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley (\$19) This singlevarietal wine offers juicy lemon, vellow

apple, and apple blossom plus chalky minerality and a creamy, viscous texture. It's fermented cool at 55 degrees Fahrenheit in stainless steel to retain freshness. Minimal racking occurs before blending and bottling.

3 BADGE ENOLOGY



#### •

Fetzer 2018 Riesling, Goosefoot Road, Monterey County (\$10) Fermented in stainless steel, this sustainably farmed

Riesling shows pear, red apple, and a strong note of honeysuckle balanced by peach pit and decent acid. At the forefront of sustainable agriculture for over 50 years, Fetzer is the largest Certified B Corp winery in the world.



# QQCNasiakos 2018 Moschofilero, Mantinia,<br/>Greece (\$16) Sourced from the

Peloponnese region, the Greek variety ge of wines. Nasiakos' version is fuller-

Moschofilero makes an incredible range of wines. Nasiakos' version is fullerbodied than many, offering fresh white peach, green apple, juicy lemon, talcum powder, and daisies while starting and finishing with mouthwatering acid. There is room for improvement in terms of the label, but the wine inside is quite polished.

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# A Q&A with John Meisler

#### VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES FOR SERRALLÉS USA, DESTILERÍA SERRALLÉS, INC.

ohn Meisler has amassed more than 30 years of experience in sales and branding through his stints at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, Jim Beam, and Destilería Serrallés, Inc., where he currently serves as Vice President of Sales for Serrallés USA. He's also long been entrenched in the food industry, with names like Delmonico restaurant and Zatarain's in his family tree.

### ForceBrands: What inspired you to join the alcoholic beverage industry?

John Meisler: While finishing my degree in management science at Tulane and attending Loyola Law School in New Orleans, I had a connection at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits in New Orleans through a coworker at a part-time retail job. The connection just happened to be the top guy! I started calling on a retail chain of 110 convenient stores called Time Saver, selling Riunite wine and MD 20/20, stocking cold boxes, and filling shelves. From there, I went to fine wines. When I graduated law at 23, Southern Glazer's offered me the opportunity to run a spirits division in New Orleans. By this time, I was simply in love with the industry and the entire [world] of food, wine, and spirits. I jumped at the opportunity and never looked back.

### FB: What have been some of the most exciting projects of your career?

JM: Top of the list would be the Ways of Working projects at Beam and Serrallés—defining the distributormanagement processes and translating the marketing plans into executable sales KPIs and straightforward programs. Building the brand education platform at both companies has also been rewarding. After all, the key to sales is not just the relationships we build but a keen knowledge of what we are selling.

Throughout my career, a passion for food has always been present. It's been quite an experience being featured at food, wine, and spirits events all around the world [as host of the seminar] "Cooking with Puerto Rican Rum: My Favorite Spice Rack." It combines the flavors of the Caribbean with the spirit of New Orleans, with Don Q Rum as an integral starting point.

#### FB: What do you find most rewarding about your work?

**JM**: The opportunity to mold a team by combining new ideas and technology with tried-and-true sales practices. It's truly an honor working with a family-owned company like Serrallés [that has] more than 150 years



of rum-making experience in the rum capital of the world: Puerto Rico.

### FB: As a leader, how do you help foster a strong, unified culture?

JM: For universal results in small to mid-size organizations, culture is paramount. Communication comes first—regular, cohesive communication and not just email. It's important that management understands [staff] and can support [them through] issues or roadblocks. Second, specific expectations and rewards: Lay out the roadmaps to personal and professional accomplishment. Finally, a culture that utilizes the different skills of each individual is better prepared to meet challenges, [while] those individuals also have a stronger feeling of inclusion and being part of an organization where they can add value.



ELEVEN 90+ POINT SCORES THE TASTING PANEL



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Maurizio Zanella shares the stage with Wally's Wine & Spirits owner Christian Navarro to discuss the history and future of Ca' del Bosco and Franciacorta.

FRANCIACORTA PRODUCER **CA' DEL BOSCO** CROSSES THE POND TO MAKE A SPLASH IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



# A Passage to Italy

#### story by Kyle Billings / photos by Todd Westphal



Four selections from the Ca' del Bosco portfolio were recently poured at an event hosted by Wally's Wine & Spirits in Santa Monica, CA.



Guests were encouraged to pair caviar with the wines to best highlight their delicate flavors.

Atrons in the private loft of Wally's Wine & Spirits in Santa Monica, California, waited with bated breath as Maurizio Zanella, founder of heralded Franciacorta producer Ca' del Bosco, rose to present his portfolio. Impressively dressed in polished brown loafers and a tailored blazer, he offered a greeting as suave as his outfit. "I will not speak about the wine—it can speak for itself," he proclaimed with a wry smile. "Tonight, I hope to take you to Italy."

The recent tasting event offered means of transport in the form of two northern Italian icons: Ca' del Bosco and Calvisius Caviar. Sparkling wine and salt-cured roe are a classic combination, but the pairing was even more fitting given the geographical proximity of these two internationally recognized producers, separated by a mere 30 miles in the Brescia province.

Upon entry, guests were poured the Ca' del Bosco Cuvée Prestige out of magnums, followed by the Cuvée Prestige Rosé, a rare sparkling rosé made via the saignée method. Once seated, they sampled the 2014 Vintage Collection Dosage Zéro and, finally, the 2009 Annamaria Clementi, named for Zanella's mother.

At 60 years old, Franciacorta is still in its youth as a dedicated sparkling-wine region, Zanella noted. In the absence of centuries of experience and tradition, he credits its growing global renown to its residents' unilateral vision for the land. "Terroir means a lot of things," he said. "The social environment is part of terroir because terroir is not only geology, climate, and altitude—terroir is also how [the appellation] was born and what the people were doing."

That includes their relationship to the soil itself. The 2019 harvest marked Ca' del Bosco's first vintage since the organic certification of all of its vineyards—a passion project 20 years in the making for Zanella. "We believe that we have to preserve our ground, our land," he said. "It is the most expensive thing that we pay [for]. It is our most important asset in our winery. So, if you don't protect it, you are stupid."

Despite continued innovation by him and his compatriots, Zanella rebuffed praise for his professional success. "We are always looking to improve what we do," he said. But he could no doubt forgive the enthusiasm of a room full of people who had metaphorically trekked to the Alpine slopes of Franciacorta and back for a taste of his esteemed expressions.



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#### HIGH SOCIETY



Jean-Charles Boisset, fourth from left, with his team during the Alchemy of the Senses dinner at the XI Visionaries Gallery in New York.

# Alchemist of the Senses

ff arger than life" is perhaps the most overused cliché ever coined. In over three decades in the wine business, I have seen the descriptor applied to scores of personalities—but I've met few who earn it quite like Jean-Charles Boisset, founder of the family-owned winery collective Boisset Collection.

The term "flamboyant" doesn't begin to cover a man with a penchant for brightly colored suits, ascots, ornate lapel pins, leopard-skin prints, and red socks—and whose sworn mission is to convert everyone to his lifestyle, beginning with the wine world.

"Wine is much more than purely wine," he advises. "It's a joie de vivre ... the essence of who we are."

That is the joy Boisset is sharing with guests who've been dressing to the nines and filling the seats at the Alchemy of the Senses dinners he's been hosting at venues around the country since May. From San Francisco to Chicago to Miami (among other locales), Boisset has embarked on what is ostensibly, but much more than, a tour for his book of the same name. Every detail of the dinner arrangements is lovingly curated—from the Last Supper-inspired menu, Bernardaud china, Christofle flatware, JCB Passion Collection Baccarat glassware, red velvet tablecloths, and bejeweled Boisset Collection wine bottles to the displays of Boisset's jewelry, perfumes, custom decanters, and so on. Guests are engaged from the start in what amounts to immersive theater.

In late September at the XI Visionaries Gallery in New York's West Chelsea neighborhood, Boisset took command of the virtual stage in a way that would make P.T. Barnum jealous. Getting the crowd's attention with the clink of two gilded magnums of JCB Gala Champagne, he addressed them with his signature teasing innuendo. "We spend our late-night hours telling different stories to each other," he said with a wink. "But one of my favorite late-night exchanges [begins], 'What would be your last supper?'" A clue to the answer came in the form of the first course—caviar-garnished quail eggs that he advised his guests to eat with their fingers carefully so as to "let [them] melt and bring [them] to the ultimate explosion in your mouth."

JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET IS THE CONSUMMATE HOST OF WINE DINNERS FROM COAST TO COAST by Lars Leicht

> After introducing each member of his team in endearing terms usually reserved for close family, he taught diners the ban Bourguignon, a traditional French singing toast, to usher in the remaining courses. He remarked on celebrating both his 50th birthday and his tenth wedding anniversary earlier this year while issuing bon mots such as "Chew seven times and think about the seven sins you are about to commit"—right up until the cheese course, when he responded to his own initial question: "My ultimate last supper does not have a lot of dessert because it has a lot of wine and cheese!"

> Boisset reveled in the good time had by all, but in the end, it was he who seemed to be having the most fun—and that, essentially, is what the JCB lifestyle is all about.

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# Greetings to Gattinara

#### TASTING THE DOCG OFFERINGS OF PIEDMONT'S TRAVAGLINI

#### by Anthony Dias Blue

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAUB FAMILY COMPANIES



Cinzia Travaglini runs her family's eponymous winery in the Gattinara DOCG zone of Piedmont.

ention Nebbiolo, and conversation immediately turns to Barolo and Barbaresco. But less than two hours north along the A26 in Piedmont, there's another important appellation centered on Italy's most famous red grape: Gattinara produces lovely wines with the depth and structure of the best Nebbiolos, and at a much friendlier price.

Travaglini is considered to be the best producer in this DOCG zone close to the foothills of the Alps. Founded in the 1920s, the winery is now run by fourthgeneration family member Cinzia Travaglini. During a recent visit to Los Angeles, she provided an opportunity to taste its wines in the ideal environment—over lunch at Angelini Trattoria. Here are my notes.

#### Travaglini 2017 Coste della Sesia DOC. Italv

(\$21) A charming everyday wine from the appellation adjacent to Gattinara. Smooth, fresh, and juicy with lovely notes of black raspberry and spicy plum; long, floral, and balanced. 90

#### Travaglini 2015 Gattinara DOCG,

Italy (\$33) The current vintage of the flagship. Silky texture; toasty and crisp with lively black raspberry, notes of tar, and floral elements; bracing, long, and balanced. 92

Travaglini 2013 Tre Vigne Gattinara DOCG, Italy (\$50) A blend of fruit

from three vineyards. Smooth, fleshv nose: toastv. crisp. floral. and lively with plum and berry notes; complex and long. 93

#### Travaglini 2013 **Riserva Gattinara** DOCG, Italy (\$60)

From the estate's best parcels, which are also the oldest (35–60 years). Juicy and crisp, tangy and pure with racy plum and berries; deep, fresh, and long with finesse and balance. 94



Travaglini 2009 Riserva Gattinara **DOCG, Italy** From the same parcels as the 2013. Smooth and rich, pure and focused; toasty, long, and juicy with notes of earth and spice. Complex and balanced, with limited availability. 94

#### Travaglini 2006 Tre Vigne, Gattinara DOCG, Italy Silky, fresh, and soft with good balance; pure, rich, and focused; complex, layered, and long. Limited availability. 94

#### Travaglini 2014 il Sogno, Gattinara DOCG, Italy (\$128)

An extremely special wine. Very rich, with layers of sweet plum and black cherry; round, complex, and intense; concentrated with notes of earth and spice and an incredibly long finish.



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# Secret to Success

#### UMAMI HELPS SAKÉ BRIDGE THE FLAVORS OF EAST AND WEST

hile it has long reigned supreme as the beverage of choice with Pan Asian meals, saké is increasingly being recognized for its ability to transcend culinary boundaries. It's now making a regular appearance on the global table because it gladly "takes a backseat to cuisine,"

one-upmanship, the sakés were served side by side with an oaked California Chardonnay, which, by comparison, was a lackluster partner at best.

Another exercise in umami harmony unfolded at a recent tasting of HeavenSake Junmai, Junmai Ginjo, and Junmai Dai Ginjo alongside the tradi-



Guests at a recent saké seminar hosted by the Consulate-General of Japan in San Francisco tasted four expressions that demonstrated the appeal of umami.

says Marcus Pakiser, a Portland, Oregon–based expert on the category who recently presented at a saké and seafood pairing seminar hosted by the Consulate-General of Japan in San Francisco. But its food friendliness is something most tasters need to experience several times to fully appreciate.

During the event, Pakiser served four superb sakés—among them Daishichi Kimoto Honjozo, Watari Bune Junmai Ginjo, and the rare Taiten Shiragiku Mikinishiki Junmai—alongside an array of shellfish-based bites to demonstrate the universal appeal of umami, a characteristic they all shared. The midpalate nuttiness and hint of bitterness so apparent in the fourth expression, Yuki No Bosha Junmai Ginjo Cabin in the Snow, was mirrored by a scallop nested in an endive spear. And in a bit of wine tional Italian cuisine of San Francisco's A16—which proved an unexpected but highly rewarding partnership. The leesy, autolytic character of the sakés found a mirror in chewy, Ossetra caviar–topped Neapolitan and mushroom pizzas; their acidity, meanwhile, was enhanced by the nutty salinity of prosciutto.

HeavenSake blender Régis Camus is also an expert in Champagne, one of the most acid- and mineraldriven wines in the world; he approximates the region's winemaking techniques by blending three different types of rice from the same prefecture in Japan to

Though saké can be paired with a surprisingly wide variety of dishes, seafood is a sure bet.

#### by Deborah Parker Wong

achieve the consistency of a Grand Marque in his sakés. Service temperature is another priority for Camus, who demonstrated refreshing the saké in his wine glass with small pours.

Traditionally, the omnipresent acidity in tomato-based Italian dishes is countered with wines of equal acidity— Chianti and spaghetti being a classic example. But saké works with the cuisine through a different avenue: the richness of umami, which can be found not only in tomatoes but in mushrooms, cured meats, and even the freshest of cheeses like burrata, which was served with squid-ink crackers.

According to Ry Beville, the founder of *Saké Today* magazine who joined Pakiser at the Consul seminar, pushing the boundaries of saké pairings means being counterintuitive: "Go for contrasting pairings for the optimum appreciation," he said. He also suggested serving smoky foods with flavorful and traditional Kimoto-style sakés like the aforementioned Daishichi Kimoto Honjozo, ideally served in stemless wine glasses for a less formal dining experience.





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The 2016 Westwood Legend marks the inaugural release of wines from Westwood Estate's acclaimed winemaker, Philippe Melka. Westwood's Annadel Gap Vineyard, located at the northern tip of Sonoma Valley, produces world-class Rhône and Burgundian varietals using only certified biodynamic, organic and sustainable farming practices. It's a collaboration of people and place that creates an exceptional portfolio of wines.

# TAKING INVENTORY VOUR BUGINEBOS, VOUR DOIGES

### AMY CURRENS

Beverage Director and Food & Beverage Assistant General Manager, Kimpton Epic Hotel, Miami, FL

With my program, 50% of it is required through Kimpton partnerships—which offer a great range of choices—and I'm able to get creative with the rest. I'm looking first and foremost for somebody who's knowledgeable when I ask questions, as I have a solid idea of what I'm looking for. I got into the wine business studying Biodynamic farming, taking organic to another level, so I'm always looking for regenerative farming projects. Of course the quality has to be there, but I need a little more context for my selections beyond the names on the labels, whether we're talking about commitment to global community or Mother Nature. I've stayed true to a few distributors over the years for that reason—they know how to talk to the producers in their books who abide by these philosophies.

Also, I look for follow-up. We're very busy within our four walls, so it's helpful when people respond with partnering suggestions. I had a recent interaction with a new person at Pernod Ricard: She came in, wanted to meet me, and was extremely conscientious in the way that she spoke. I don't really like being sold to; I like conversations, I'm relationship-oriented, and I don't want to be treated like a buyer robot. She understood that and came forward with great suggestions on how to best partner together. And she's punctual—which is very nice and rather rare in Miami.



DRINK RESPONSIBLY



#### EDUARDO BOLAÑOS

Sommelier, Mozza Restaurant Group, Los Angeles, CA

Currently we work with somewhere around 30 distributors, but I'm always happy to give a new person a try. We're mainly [focused on] Italian wine and Champagne, so anytime someone wants to meet and taste, I first consider the regions in their portfolio and the pricing: Is there value in relation to what those regions usually cost?

It's especially great to give these guys with smaller books an opportunity; tasting with them goes a long way, because you never know what you might find. The bigger guys have some diamonds in the rough too, but maybe they don't have a close relationship with the wineries and they're just carrying them to have something from everywhere. Also, they meet with everyone, but [the smaller companies] might represent a producer that no one is carrying yet, and you'll get to jump on it before everyone else does.





#### DERRICK ODOM

Food & Beverage General Manager, The Nickel, Hotel Teatro, Denver, CO

There is a myriad of elements I look for in a distributor, but the first and most obvious is integrity, especially as we try to offer local products—we like to showcase what's great about our own area. While it makes sense to consider cost margins, price cuts for volume aren't typically something [smaller distributors carrying local brands] can always offer. So I don't automatically look for deals. It's when people come to me with a portfolio that's cultivated by a passion and not just built to align with trends, when they've done their research and pitch it as something that could truly benefit our style of operation, when they take that approach with honestv and conviction-that's when I truly listen.

That said, whiskey is a huge part of our beverage program, so it's twice as important to have a great portfolio there. We sell a lot of Old Fashioneds, Vieux Carrés, Sazeracs, and Manhattans; rarely does anyone order those cocktails and say, "I'm fine with well." But as we're located in a hotel, everybody who comes here doesn't necessarily know what's great about Colorado spirits, which means it's nice to have other options. So I also look for someone who will come in and say, "I'd love to help do a little staff training," to ensure that our bartenders love standing behind the product whether it's local or not.

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for the

The name of The Prisoner Wine Company's new Pinot Noir, Eternally Silenced, itself invites quiet contemplation.

60 / the tasting panel / nove

by Lars Leicht

# OF THE PRISONER WINE COMPAN

### THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY RELEASES ITS NEW PINOT NOIR, ETERNALLY SILENCED

decades ago, a wine that broke with tradition in just about every sense-from its edgy name and label to its unusual blend of red grapes-rocked the wine world. Upon its release with the 2000 vintage, The Prisoner all but singlehandedly created the market for the domestic red-blend category, appealing to a new generation of wine drinkers unconstrained by vinous dogma. It spoke directly to the consumer.

In its first decade, The Prisoner grew its production by 200%. The best marketers in the business took note, paying what is called the sincerest form of flattery by creating similar products; meanwhile, the winery behind the phenomenon has evolved into a powerhouse brand that continues to lead by unconventional example.

The Prisoner Wine Company's latest national release, Eternally Silenced, is a case in point. The California Pinot Noir blend was first presented to round out the exclusive selections at the winery's Napa Valley tasting lounge, which opened in 2018. Designed by renowned architect Matt Hollis and interior designer Richard Von Saal, it's a far cry from the industry standard of wine-country rusticity, its gothic- and noir-inspired black-and-white décor based on The Prisoner Wine Company's game-changing labels—which depict everything from Francisco Goya's "The Disasters of War" etchings to cell-wall hashmarks and mug shots-and accented with the likes of shackles and graphite skeletons.



The Prisoner Wine Company opened its ultra-chic Napa Valley tasting lounge in 2018.

THE CONCEPT OF SENSORY DEPRIVATION ISN'T ONE YOUR AVERAGE WINERY WOULD CELEBRATE. BUT THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY IS NOT YOUR AVERAGE WINERY, AND IT PROVES AS MUCH EVERY DAY THROUGH NOT ONLY ITS PORTFOLIO BUT ALSO ITS ORIGINAL APPROACH TO CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT.

#### COVER STORY



Chrissy Wittmann is Director of Winemaking for The Prisoner Wine Company.

If that sounds forbidding, rest assured that the staff more than meets Napa's highest hospitality standards. Reservations are strongly encouraged in the comfortable lounge, where the lineup includes exclusive expressions such as the Chenin Blanc/Viognier blend No. 39007, the Charbono-based blend Headlock, the ERASED Blanc de Blancs, and Syndrome Rosé, which combines Grenache, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Sangiovese, and Mourvèdre. Guests can also indulge in a wine-and-food pairing called The Makery Experience, held in a dedicated space in the lounge that displays the wine-inspired works of area craftspeople, including ceramicists and zero-waste designers.

It all reflects The Prisoner Wine Company's dedication to grassroots production; Director of Winemaking Chrissy Wittmann relies on a network of more than 100 growers throughout California to obtain the most exceptional fruit for her expressions. In the case of Eternally Silenced, she sourced grapes from Santa Barbara, the Sonoma Coast, Napa Valley, Edna Valley, and Monterey County, specifically seeking out vineyards with ideal growing conditions—including "just enough sunlight without too much heat," in her words—to ensure that "the terroir could shine through the transparency" of the fruit. The resulting blend of 95% Pinot Noir and 5% Syrah and Viognier shows rich, elegant dark-fruit flavors with notes of spice, clove, and brush, all heightened when served slightly chilled.

"People loved Eternally Silenced the moment it was introduced in the tasting lounge," says The Prisoner Wine Company's Direct-to-Consumer and Hospitality Director, Deja Harrington. "It quickly became one of the top-selling wines at the winery, which is when we began thinking about making it more widely available." Its success was no surprise to Wittmann. "I spent many years making Pinot Noir on the Central Coast, so it was really fun for

me to return to that world to craft Eternally Silenced," she explains. "The style matches the rest of The Prisoner Wine Company portfolio—ample structure, bold flavors with the added finesse that Pinot Noir brings. I'm really excited to be able to share it with people all over the country; I hope they enjoy it

as much as I enjoyed making it." As Chief Marketing Officer at parent company Constellation Brands, Jim Sabia has no doubt of that, calling the new release "the perfect addition" to a brand portfolio that has seen double-digit growth in dollar sales year after year.

In keeping with its mission to offer thought-provoking guest experiences, The Prisoner Wine Company

#### 62 / the tasting panel / november/december 2019

marked the September debut of Eternally Silenced on the national market by hosting a sensory deprivation-themed dinner at a trendy pop-up venue in New York's Bowery neighborhood with the help of chef Abigail Hitchcock. As the owner of Greenwich Village bistro Abigail's Kitchen, Hitchcock has been serving what she calls "dinners in the dark" to patrons who don blindfolds to sharpen their other senses for 15 years; at this event, she exhorted quests to take advantage of their lack of sight to instead "notice [things like] texture, sounds, the temperature of the water, [and] the temperature of the wine."

First was the "foraging" course, which was presented without plates or utensils and consisted of a loose scattering of nibbles at each place setting: popcorn, cherry tomatoes, edible flowers, cashews, almonds, and hazelnuts. It was appropriately paired, as was later revealed, with The Prisoner Wine Company's 2017 Blindfold, a California white blend of Chardonnay, Roussanne, Viognier, and aromatic Muscat that was aged ten months in a mix of French and Hungarian oak and stainless steel. Nicely chilled, it featured forward flavors of lychee, stone fruit, and citrus that made for a refreshing yet sensuous start; in fact, tasted literally blind, the wine could have been mistaken for a rosé.

Plated New York steelhead trout in shallot cream sauce required diners to find and use silverware they couldn't see—fortunately not an insurmountable task for anyone who knew their way around a table setting. The dish was a perfect foil for The Snitch, a 2017 Napa Valley Chardonnay made from Oak Knoll and Carneros fruit with a touch of Roussanne. The wine's tropical-fruit flavors danced nicely with the trout, while fresh acidity lasered through the cream.

The blindfolds came off for the fourth course, thankfully: Whole quail would have presented a distinct conundrum to the visually challenged, who also wouldn't have been able to see the wine they were drinking with it. Given that surprise celebrity guest host Maggie Gyllenhaal was on hand for the big reveal of the 2017 Eternally Silenced, that would have been a shame—all the more because the bottle's intriguing



The Prisoner Wine Company's lineup includes such provocatively named expressions as Blindfold, ERASED, The Prisoner, Eternally Silenced, The Snitch, and Saldo.



Acclaimed actors (and husband and wife) Peter Sarsgaard and Maggie Gyllenhaal hosted the September launch of Eternally Silenced.

label, partially concealed by a wax dip that leaves only the image of the lower half of an anonymous face, was the inspiration for the evening's theme.

The next course, however, took diners right back out of their comfort zone via earmuffs, leaving them to focus in silence on crisp duck breast paired with the wine that started it all: The Prisoner 2017 Napa Valley Red Blend. Inspired by early-20th-century field blends made by Italian immigrants, it combines Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Syrah, and Charbono, enticing with flavors of cherry, roasted fig, and ripe berries. And it made for the perfect transition into dessert, when the 2017 Saldo California Zinfandel, voluptuously reminiscent of cherry, baking spice, and dark chocolate, meshed intimately with dark chocolate cake and blackberry compote.

The concept of sensory deprivation isn't one your average winery would celebrate. But The Prisoner Wine Company is not your average winery, and it proves as much every day through not only its portfolio but also its original approach to consumer engagement. No doubt Eternally Silenced is going to get people talking across the country.



Cincoro owners Wyc Grousbeck, Emilia Fazzalari, Michael Jordan, Jeanie Buss, and Wes Edens.

and Wes Edens.

CINCORO TEQUILA CHANNELS THE PRESTIGE OF ITS ACCOMPLISHED OWNERS

by Lars Leicht

ff ive NBA owners walk into a bar, and the industry's most exciting new tequila brand walks out." It's not exactly the punch-line of the century, but it sums up what just might be one of the most fascinating brand origin stories to emerge in recent years—not to mention a dream come true for tequila fans.

The celebrity protagonists of the story—Jeanie Buss of the Los Angeles Lakers; Wes Edens of the Milwaukee Bucks; Wyc Grousbeck of the Boston Celtics and his wife, Emilia Fazzalari; and Michael Jordan of the Charlotte Hornets—largely see each other as friendly rivals, yet they have more than a few things in common. All well-established sports entrepreneurs, they also share an appreciation for fine tequila, as they discovered on a balmy evening in July 2016.

That night, the group had a common frustration as well: Their reservations at a trendy pizza joint in Lower Manhattan had been booked for another date. Eager to please the highprofile customers, the restaurateur asked them to wait a half hour until a table was cleared. Having just shared a tequila elsewhere, they lamented the fact that the pizzeria didn't offer the spirit, as a second round would help pass the time. They then transitioned into exchanging opinions on what makes a fine tequila-no doubt a more comfortable topic than team standings and prospects.

That casual conversation soon evolved into a formal proposal. As with any dream-team scenario, considerable resources needed to come together first to bring the five unlikely partners' plan to fruition, but it's fair to say that no expense was spared and no stone left unturned to surpass the gold standard in tequila: Hence the name of the brand, a portmanteau of the Spanish words *cinco* ("five") and *oro* ("gold").

Kept under wraps, product development took more than three years, with the founding partners appointing Fazzalari as CEO. The group had a clear vision for the flavor profile of Cincoro—one that could only be achieved by blending agave from the highland and lowland regions of Jalisco. Highland agave yields sweeter flavors with more floral tones, while lowland agave shows more minerality and earthiness—and while it hasn't historically been common to blend the two distillates, the method results in exceptional complexity.

Cincoro's Vice President of Brand & Trade Development, Chris Spake, is also a Certified Specialist of Wine, and he approaches tequila with an eye for terroir and an appreciation for agave's provenance and age. Like old vines, the mature plant confers greater nuance and concentration. "This is a tequila that appeals to spirits connoisseurs and fine-wine drinkers [alike]," says Spake, adding that the Cincoro distillery currently controls two agave plantations, one in the highlands and one in the lowlands, under long-term contract. achieving that balance, but we were committed to getting the smell, taste, and finish just right."

While blanco tequilas can run the gamut from hot to insipid, Cincoro Blanco (\$70) attacks with a burst of black pepper that gives way to mature fruit, red clay soil, and nuttiness before finishing with the notes of peach, pear, and vanilla that are typical of highland fruit. The Reposado (\$90), aged eight to ten months, yields caramel, spice, vanilla, and a long, harmonious finish, while the Añejo (\$130), aged 24–28 months, exhibits a deep, woodsy fruit flavor of dried apricots and raisins, closing with a distinct finish of dark chocolate. Finally, the Extra Añejo



Another key member of the talent pool behind the brand was Mark Smith, Vice President of Innovation/Special Projects at Nike and a key collaborator on the Air Jordan collection. Tapped to design Cincoro's bottle, packaging, and brand identity system, he created a distinctive polygon to represent the partnership, with an agave leaf sculpted into the angle punt (which measures 23 degrees in homage to Jordan's old jersey number). "It took three years from the first sketch to the final bottle, but everything we have done has been with purpose and meaning," Fazzalari says, noting that the focus has always been above all on the spirit itself. "What we wanted was something that would be smooth on the palate with a long, smooth finish. The hardest part was

(\$1,600), aged for over three years, is a symphonic masterpiece akin to an aged Cognac, Armagnac, or eau de vie.

The brand launched in September, and the timing of its entry into the market seems fortuitous: According to Chief Marketing Officer Russ Pareti, the U.S. leads consumption of tequila at 18.3 million cases per year, representing 56% of global consumption, while the ultra-premium category has grown 19% annually since 2013, led by startup brands. Cincoro's will be among the most expensive tequila expressions sold—but it's right in line with current demands and trends.

"This was a real passion project from the start," says Fazzalari. "It bonded us together in a singular mission, which was to make the world's finest tequila."

# CHEF'S ROLL SOMM'S LIST

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.



### Alvin Pugeda

Lead bartender at Mister A's, San Diego, CA

### **Q** What is your favorite part about being behind the bar?

Bartending has such a diverse set of roles that you play with your guests. You're not just mixing drinks on the same day, you can go from being a chemist to a comedian to a relationship therapist. You never know what role you're going to play when someone moseys up to the bar.

### Q Do you have a favorite cocktail to make, and are there any drinks you dread getting asked for?

I wouldn't necessarily say there is something that I dread making, but I always try to steer my guests into trying something new. I love to see people step outside of their comfort zone or even let me pair a cocktail with something from the menu. My favorite to make is the Last Word [with Green Chartreuse, gin, maraschino liqueur, and lime juice]. It has a rich flavor profile that is certain to charm anyone into the right state of mind.

## Q What advice would you give to others looking to pursue a career in this industry?

Work hard, learn something from everyone around you, and stay humble. The hospitality industry can be demanding at times, but it's never short on laughs and has some of the most entertaining characters you'll ever meet.

### Charles Koll

Co-founder/brewer at Viewpoint Brewing Co., Del Mar, CA

#### What sparked your interest in brewing beer?

Q It was 2013, and I had just moved back to San Diego from San Francisco. I was working for a ball-buster of a chef and really questioning my life choices. My father and I would have talks about where I was and where I wanted to go. I half-seriously spoke about quitting the line-cook game and going to work in a brewery. At some point after that, we both headed to Ballast Point Homebrew Mart and bought our first extract homebrew kit. Three brews later, I was cutting tops off kegs (sorry, Anheuser) and constructing a Frankenstein homebrew setup.

#### What's your favorite part about brewing?

There is no ceiling—you can keep learning about old styles as well as innovating [upon] new ones. Brewing is like cooking in that way: The day you think you know it all is the day you should probably retire.

#### Q Viewpoint is located in Del Mar, just north of San Diego—a city famous for the density of its local breweries. What makes you unique compared to all of the other brewers nearby?

Where we stand apart is that we are not focused on the distribution model but rather the neighborhood brewpub model. This works well for us because we can keep creating new beers and menu items without having to think about a core beer lineup or a permanent menu. If we don't like something, we change it. This also works for our guests. They get upset with us when we don't put something new on the menu, so in turn they also keep us accountable.



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.

# MYSTERIOUS TRANSYLVANIA

Discover Transylvania with Mysterium from Jidvei, the wines that come to life in the dark







#### CHEF'S-EYE VIEW



#### RENOWNED JAPANESE CHEF KAZ OKUCHI REFLECTS ON 20 YEARS OF SUCCESS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS



Chef Kaz Okuchi owns KAZ Sushi Bistro in Washington, D.C.

Okuchi recommends pairing saké with all types of cuisine.



hen Kaz Okuchi opened his Washington, D.C. restaurant 20 years ago, he could have never pictured what the current culinary landscape would look like. The city's dining scene today, he says, "is more innovative and exciting, and we have incredible . . . industry professionals pushing the envelope."

Born and raised in Nagoya, Japan, Okuchi studied fine art in Oklahoma before returning to his home country to attend the Tsuji Culinary Institute in Osaka. Once he completed his formal training in sushi and fugu preparation, he came back to the United States to work at Sushi-Ko, D.C.'s oldest sushi bar. In 1999, he opened KAZ Sushi Bistro, where he executes what he calls "freestyle Japanese cuisine" to showcase fresh and unusual seafood sourced directly from Japan.

Back then, there wasn't much saké to be found in the city; what little you could find was usually best enjoyed hot to mask the oxidation it underwent during shipment. As time passed, quality saké became more readily available, yet misconceptions about the rice-based beverage persisted. Okuchi has been on a mission, especially as of late, to change the way his guests view it.

The chef believes that rice can reflect terroir as much as grapes do, but the differences are subtle enough on the nose and palate to ensure that personal preferences, more than hard and fast rules, can play a role in saké pairings. The key, he says, is to think outside the bento box. "Many people may think saké is good only with Japanese food, but [it] can match with so many other cuisines, like Spanish tapas or French dishes," he points out. "Full-bodied sakés go well with mildly spicy foods or deep-fried ones."

One of his favorites is Daishichi Kimoto Honjozo, a versatile beverage that can be enjoyed warm, cold, or at room temperature. He describes it as "soft yet full-flavored, dry, and very food friendly." Though it's becoming increasingly common to list the bottling date on the label, most sakés should be consumed within a year. All the better to crack open a bottle right now to sip next to KAZ's signature dishes: sea bass Napoleon, smoked ankimo (monkfish liver) with tosazu gelée, and bird's nest, which tops black squid with sea urchin, shiso, and a quail egg.

Okuchi is still having fun after all these years. "I am happy to see and be a part of so much love and attention given to food these days," he says—especially when it's paired with saké.

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

> KAZ Sushi Bistro's signature sea bass Napoleon.



Founded in 1886, Angove Family Winemakers is a 5th generation, family owned winery with a dedication to creating premium wines from McLaren Vale, South Australia.



WINE FAMILIES

# Palate Meets

#### **IMAGERY ESTATE WINERY** PAINTS A PICTURE OF MULTIGENERATIONAL TALENT

story by Liz Thach, MW / photos by Thomas Roberts

he entrance to Imagery Estate Winery along Highway 12 in the Sonoma Valley is heralded by bright turquoise banners flapping in the breeze. It's a fittingly colorful introduction to an esteemed estate known for the eye-catching collection of artwork that adorns its labels as well as its focus on creative blends.

On a recent visit, I was welcomed into the tasting room by head winemaker Jamie Benziger. As a second-generation member of the Benziger family business, which established its eponymous winery as well as Imagery in 1986, she's been on a roll in 2019: Not only was she named the Best Woman Winemaker of the Year in the International Women's Wine Competition, she was also included on *Wine Enthusiast's* list of 40 Under 40 Tastemakers.

Dressed in jeans and boots, Benziger looked every inch the young and energetic talent she is as she led us into a private room where the recently debuted Imagery Wine Collection awaited. "I had a great time working with our winemaking team to develop these, and we stayed true to Imagery's heritage by including a small amount of a unique grape varietal in each bottle," she said. "We also created a new label that pays homage to our artistic roots."



Jamie Benziger is the head winemaker at Imagery Estate Winery in Glen Ellen, CA.

Indeed, all four wines—nationally distributed on- and off-premise diverge from conventional California blends: The Chardonnay incorporates 10% Chenin Blanc, the Sauvignon Blanc 15% Muscat, the Pinot Noir 15% Petit Verdot, and the Cabernet Sauvignon 20% Petite Sirah. (The white fruit comes primarily from Mendocino and Monterey counties, the red from Lodi.) Sales have already surpassed 100,000 cases, with a suggested retail price of \$20 per bottle.

"We are hopeful that when people taste the new Imagery Wine Collection, the next time they visit wine country, they will stop by to taste the unique wines in our Estate Portfolio," explained Benziger. With a smaller total production of around 15,000 cases, the Estate Portfolio wines are primarily sold directly to consumers, including the 6,000-plus members of Imagery's popular wine club, as well as to select restaurants. In addition to blends, the series includes single-varietal wines such as Tannat, Cabernet Franc, Tempranillo, Mourvèdre, Barbera, Albariño, Riesling, Viognier, Muscat Canelli, and Lagrein (whose production is limited to 200 cases).

The new label for the Imagery Wine Collection is meant "to look like a drip of paint on a white canvas . . . [which] allows the consumer to dream about the painting they would like to see on the label," said Benziger. So far, people have interpreted it as depicting everything from the ears of a fox to a wine glass: "It is a great conversation piece," she added, noting that the new bottles also feature Pro-Lux screwcaps, which closely resemble a regular capsule and cork.

During the tasting, Benziger described the circuitous route she had to take before being handed the reins at Imagery. "My family always encouraged us to pursue our own passions, so in the beginning I studied marketing," she said. Benziger soon became antsy sitting behind a desk, however, so when her family invited her back to help with the 2009 harvest, she jumped at the chance and "immediately fell in love with all the excitement of harvest and winemaking."

Like many California wine clans, they wanted her to gain broad experience before coming on full time, so she worked two harvests at Sonoma's St. Francis Winery before traveling to New Zealand to work a harvest for Villa Maria. When she returned, she enrolled in winemaking and viticulture classes at Napa Valley College. Next was a lab-tech job at Bogle Vineyards near Sacramento, followed by a stint with Enterprise Vineyard Management.

When her family felt that she had gained enough external experience, she was again invited to help with the harvest at Imagery in 2015 under the mentorship of her father, Joe. "He was self-taught as a winemaker, but he had an incredible palate," Benziger says. "He taught me everything I know about blending, [which] I like to compare to the way an artist creates new colors by blending on the palette to create something beautiful and magical." In December 2017, Joe retired and Jamie took over the wine program, ushering in a new generation of artistry at Imagery.



**Imagery Wine Collection 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, California (\$20)** Brightness and liveliness bloom out of the glass alongside notes of honeysuckle, green tea, and jasmine. Lime chiffon sidles up to a searing acidity that maintains its freshness to the finish. **90**—*Meridith May* 

**Imagery Wine Collection 2018 Chardonnay, California (\$20)** The addition of Chenin Blanc adds to the lean, clean body, though minerality serves as the core of this edgy and alert wine. Twists of lemon and white grapefruit work in tandem with aromas of herbs such as dill and flavors of green apple and macadamia nut. **91** —*M.M.* 

**Imagery Wine Collection 2018 Pinot Noir, California (\$20)** A whirlwind of blue- and red-fruit freshness dotted with white pepper and rose petals, this expression sings in a vibrato of bright acidity. It finds harmony in its savory notes, base of oak, and round tannins. **92** —*M*.*M*.

**Imagery Wine Collection 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$20)** Rich with aromas of dark chocolate, slate, cedar, and coffee, this youthful Cab is sassy and light on its feet, with notes of spiced blueberries and round, mocha-kissed tannins. Rhubarb and fennel come in mid-palate and stay to the finish. **92** —*M.M.* 

**Imagery Estate Portfolio 2018 Albariño, Sonoma Valley (\$29)** Floral nose with juicy white peach, ginger, and crisp acidity. A hint of white pepper on the rounded mid-palate precedes a kiss of oak on the lingering finish of this lees-aged white. Very refreshing. **92** —*Liz Thach* 

Imagery Estate Portfolio 2016 Lagrein, Upper Ridge Vineyard, Pine Mountain/ Cloverdale Peak (\$45) Inky black with notes of boysenberry, black plum, pepper, and well-integrated oak plus a touch of vanilla. Rounded tannins and a delicious, velvety finish. 93 — *L.T.* 

# 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

**9** Scattered Peaks 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$40) Deep berry color; brisk and juicy with articulated notes of plum and spice. Tangy, deep, and balanced with excellent length. PURPLE WINE + SPIRITS



93 Benessere Vineyards 2016 Aglianico, Holystone Vineyard, St. Helena, Napa Valley (\$60) Opaque ruby color and a spicy nose; smooth and bright with succulent blueberry and boysenberry. Minerally and layered, this is a lovely expression of an important Italian variety.

**5** Ramey Wine Cellars 2015 Syrah, Rodgers Creek Vinevard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$65) Dark berry hue; refined and ripe with toasty, dense flavors and a rich texture.

93 Tablas Creek Vineyard 2017 Mourvèdre, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$40) Silky-smooth with juicy blackberry and a firm structure; long and spicy with minerality and balance. Another exceptional release from this exciting winery.

VINEYARD BRANDS



Cliff Lede Vineyards 2016 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Vallev (\$28) Fresh and crisp with citrus and spice; lovely depth, balance, and length.

**Q** Cliff Lede Vineyards 2016 J Soul Fire Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley (\$110) Dark cherry color; smooth, concentrated, and toasty; juicy, rich, and long.


95 FEL Wines 2016 Pinot Noir, Savoy Vineyard, Anderson Valley (\$70) Lovely cherry nose that echoes with depth on the palate alongside bright acidity and soft spice. Elegant, balanced, and long, it's a lovely Mendocino wine from Cliff Lede.

92 Ponzi Vineyards 2017 Avellana Chardonnay, Chehalem Mountains, Oregon (\$63) Bright and juicy with a sleek texture, notes of tangy apple, and an elegant finish. This is a single-vineyard wine from a long-standing Oregon leader.

**94** Ponzi Vineyards 2017 Avellana Pinot Noir, Chehalem Mountains, Oregon (\$105) Silky and fresh with crisp acidity and bright flavors of red cherry; elegant and racy, bright and complex.

93 Ridge Vineyards 2017 Lytton Estate Petite Sirah, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County (\$45) It's well known that I'm not a fan of this variety, but if all Petite Sirahs were like this, my opinion would be quite different. Dark, almost black color; smooth, concentrated, and ripe with sweet oak. Layered and lush with balance and depth. **95** Ridge Vineyards 2017 Lytton Springs Red Blend, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County (\$43) Vibrant cherry color with a bright berry nose; velvety with sweet new oak and lovely spice. Ripe blackberry joins deep, resonant flavors of spice in this blend of 74% Zinfandel, 15% Petite Sirah, 9% Carignane, and 2% Mataro.

94 Morgan Winery 2017 Double L Syrah, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$44) Deep ruby hue with an opulent and chewy palate. It's meaty and lush yet still balanced and complex: Beneath the flesh beats a heart of pure acidity. If more people made Syrah this good, the variety would be more popular.

93 Morgan Winery 2017 Double L Chardonnay, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$44) Silky and juicy with bright, tangy apple; lively and mouth-filling, this wine is another exciting winner from a producer known for serious quality. It finishes with style and finesse.

91 Gundlach Bundschu 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County (\$55) Deep ruby color with plum and soft herbs on the nose; toasty and earthy with a satiny texture and notes of ripe plum and fig. A long and muscular expression from a reliable Sonoma Valley producer.

# 93 Gundlach Bundschu 2015 Vintage Reserve Red Blend,

Sonoma County (\$125) Smooth nose of plum and spice; the complex and layered palate has a rich texture, with dense notes of ripe plum, berries, and chocolate. Nicely structured, long, and generous.

# 96 Trestle Glen Vineyards 2017 Creekside Cabernet Sau-

vignon, Sonoma County (\$50) Lush nose, with a satiny texture on the palate. Intense and complex with warm, seductive flavors: rich blackberry and blueberry join hints of vanilla and spice. 92 Dueling Pistols Cellars 2016 Red Blend, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County (\$50) Sweet, satisfying notes of blackberry and raspberry jam; smooth and juicy with intensity and depth. A dense, balanced blend of 50% Zinfandel and 50% Syrah with a long finish.



TERLATO WINES

# 92 Dutton Estate Winery 2017 Manzana Vineyard Pinot

**Noir, Russian River Valley** (\$65) Refined and lush with mature cherry and berry notes; silky and rich with hints of spice and earth.



97 Trestle Glen Vineyards 2017 Hillside Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County (\$75) Deep ruby color with a rich nose; velvety, toasty, and dense with lush flavors of plum, black raspberry, and vanilla as well as elements of sweet oak.

# BLUE REVIEWS



**900** Dueling Pistols Cellars 2016 Red Blend, Paso Robles (\$50) Black cherry color; ripe and succulent with over-the-top flavors of sweet plum and cherry; thick and intense with a smooth texture, good acid structure, and a long finish. 50% Petite Sirah, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon. TERLATO WINES



96 Tierra Roja 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$165) Deep, bright crimson hue; velvety and elegant with sweet oak, ripe plum and berries, and cinnamon spice. Smooth and complex with balance and length. OBSESSION WINE COMPANY

# **IMPORTED**

94 Champagne Jean Diot Extra Brut, France (\$55) Fresh, tangy, and crisp with finesse and an elegant structure; bright and stylish. **94** Trinity Hill 2016 Homage Syrah, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$125) Lovely nose of vanilla and pepper; juicy, ripe notes of plum and blackberry are tangy, fresh, and layered. Good balance with a lasting finish.

MT. BEAUTIFUL USA

93 Santi 2014 Santico, Amarone della Valpolicella, Italy (\$45) Deep ruby color with a rich, fruity nose; intense flavors of concentrated berries and toast; integrated and balanced. 65% Corvina, 30% Rondinella, and 5% Molinara.

FREDERICK WILDMAN

**94** Santi 2012 Proemio, Amarone della Valpolicella, Italy (\$60) The lush, mature, and earthy nose leads to a mature, complex, and concentrated palate with deep prune and blackberry flavors. Long, balanced, and elegant.

FREDERICK WILDMAN

**94** Quinta do Vallado 30 Year Old Tawny Port, Douro, Portugal (\$142) Luscious and toasty with sweet honey and bright rancio; creamy, fresh, and tangy with length and intensity. OUINTESSENTIAL WINES

**90** Passopisciaro 2017 Passobianco Chardonnay, Terre Siciliane IGT, Italy (\$27) Deep, golden color with a rich, buttery nose; lush, smooth, and toasty; ripe, dense, and juicy with good balance.

**90** Passopisciaro 2017 Passorosso, Etna Rosso DOC, Italy (\$27) Medium ruby color; silky and bright with racy, crisp raspberry notes; fresh and long. 100% Nerello Mascalese.

92 Frescobaldi 2017 Benefizio Reserva Chardonnay, Pomino Bianco DOC, Italy (\$48) Luscious and rich with a creamy texture and hints of sweet vanilla oak; refreshing and deep, long and balanced.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS

92 Kay Brothers 2017 Amery Vineyards Basket Pressed

**Grenache, McLaren Vale, Australia** (\$40) Medium ruby color; silky, bright, and juicy with lively cherry and tangy raspberry; lush, ripe, and generous with richness and length.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

# VALUE

**90 La Fête du Rosé 2018 Côtes de Provence, Saint-Tropez, France** (\$24) Soft pink color; bright, tangy, and crisp with a smooth texture and dry, lively fruit flavors. Long, balanced, and charming.



**90** Pascual Toso 2018 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

**90** Benessere 2018 Rosato di Sangiovese, **St. Helena, Napa** Valley (\$25) Pale salmon color; racy, fresh, and dry with crisp berry notes and a tangy finish.



# Alta Vista 2018 Estate Tor-

**Smooth**, fresh, and spicy with bright fruit and racy acidity. Long and juicy, this is a charming, aromatic Chardonnay substitute.

KOBRAND



**90** Altano 2017 Naturalmente Branco, Douro, Portugal (\$17) Bright citrus and peach aromas; crisp and clean with juicy stone fruit and tangy citrus. A surprising wine made from four unusual varieties by famed Port producers Symington Family Estates.

VINEYARD BRANDS

92 Alta Vista 2017 Estate Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$19) Deep ruby color with a rich berry nose; smooth, fresh, and succulent with hints of vanilla, tangy blackberry, and boysenberry. Concentrated with a long, lush, and balanced finish.

KOBRAND

Alois Lageder 2018 Vernatsch-Schiava, Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT, Italy (\$15) Very pale, juicy, and tangy; simple and clean with brightness and elegance. A delicious, aromatic wine built for pairing with food.

DALLA TERRA



# 90 Peter Lehmann 2016 Clancy's Red Blend, Barossa, Australia (\$15) Velvety and lush with ripe berry notes and nice acid structure. Long, rich, and balanced, it's a great value.

DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS

922 Peter Lehmann 2014 Portrait Shiraz, Barossa, Australia (\$18) Deep ruby color, plus a ripe berry nose and silky texture; notes of black raspberry and plum surround a bal-

plum surround a balanced and firm acid core, leading to a long, dense finish.

DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS

92 Peter Lehmann 2015 The Barossan Shiraz, Barossa, Australia (\$22) Smooth berry nose; creamy texture, lively acidity, and bright berry and plum flavors; juicy, fresh, and long.



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DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS

S La Playa 2019 Estate Series Sauvignon Blanc, Curico Valley, Chile (\$8) Bright and refreshingly crisp with balance, lovely fruit, and firm acidity. What an amazing value.

CABERNET CORP.

**90** Nikkal 2018 Pinot Noir, Yarra Valley, Australia (\$25) Pale ruby color; juicy and smooth with bright cherry and soft spice; lively, balanced, and long.



910ak Farm Vineyards 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Lodi (\$20) Bright, crisp citrus and a racy style; fresh and luscious with lively, pure flavors and a long finish.

92 Paxton 2019 NOW Shiraz, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$20) Dark cherry hue; lush, rich, and deep with intense blackberry, lovely spice, and a velvety texture. Made Biodynamically, without sulfur or preservatives.

92 Paxton 2018 Graciano, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$25) Dark ruby color and a spicy nose; fleshy and luscious with flavorful notes of chocolate and spice leading to a long finish. Biodynamic.

92 Ruffino 2016 Tenuta Santedame Chianti Classico DOCG, Italy (\$20) Smooth texture with notes

of juicy raspberry and black cherry; tangy, clean, and racy. A pure and balanced wine with length.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



# **BLUE REVIEWS**

Silver Palm 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$22) Vibrant ruby color and a bright plum nose; silky and mellow with plum, cassis, and blackberry, plus a refined style and



JACKSON FAMILY WINES

**1** Fortress 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County (\$20) Ripe berry aromas; lush and smooth texture with dense flavors of chocolate as well as ripe plum



and boysenberry. Rich, chewy, and long with spice and depth—a remarkable value.

🕇 Tenuta di Ghizzano 2018 II Ghizzano Bianco, Toscana, Italy (\$22) An aromatic, fresh, and polished blend of Trebbiano, Vermentino, and Malvasia Bianca with juicy acidity and good depth of flavor; lively, crisp, and delicious; long and generous.

MAISONS & DOMAINES HENRIOT

Tenuta di Ghizzano 2017 II Ghizzano Rosso, Costa Toscana, Italy (\$22) Smooth and juicy with tangy berry notes and minerality; long and bracing with lovely balance and racy acidity. MAISONS & DOMAINES HENRIOT

# **SPIRITS**

Mezcales de Leyenda Limited-**D** Edition Cuixe, Mexico (\$110) Rich, earthy nose; smoky with generous, toasted flavors of pure, rustic agave. This is the real deal-a stunning artisanal example of masterful distilling.

S Isaac Bowman Port Barrel Finished Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$45) Medium amber color; toasty and rich nose; smooth and complex with a lush style and layers of flavor and spice. There's no age statement, but it's very mature.

**Q** Ableforth's Rumbullion!,  $\bigcirc$  UK (\$35) Bright amber hue with a nose of sweet orange peel and apricot; creamy and rich, with caramelized orange and smooth brown sugar appearing on the palate. Silky and intense with a smashing finish.

PARK STREET IMPORTS

**9** Tom of Finland Organic **Vodka, Finland (\$42)** Soft vanilla nose; silky and rich texture. Sensuous, lush, and long with lovely depth and finesse and a mellow, elegant finish. Organic.

WOLF SPIRITS, LLC

**Rutte Old Si-**' mon Genever. The Netherlands (\$35) Soft amber color and a fresh, spicy nose; complex and bright with a creamy and soft texture. Lovely sweet botanicals and rich malt show up on the finish. ROYAL DUTCH DISTILLERS IMPORTS



Michter's US\*1 Toasted Barrel 🗖 Finish Sour Mash Whiskey, USA (\$60) Smooth and toasty with rich dried fruits, vanilla, Christmas spice, and sweet, toasted oak. Complex and ripe; balanced, charming, and long.



Jack Daniel's Tennessee Apple, USA (\$27) Medium amber color, with crisp apple appearing on both the nose and the generous palate; a silky texture on a base of youthful whiskey, which is sweet but not cloying. Juicy, nicely balanced, and creamy, it's great on the rocks.

**Blood x Sweat** x Tears Vodka, USA (\$27) Clean and sleek with spice, pepper, and balance; it goes edgy on the palate, with some bitter complexity on the finish. Balanced and long. WOLE SPIRITS, LLC.



**O**Sator Square American Dry  $\bigcirc$  Gin, USA (\$45) Fresh aromas of vanilla and butterscotch; mellow and lush with creamy caramel notes as well as dry, soft botanicals, spices, and honey. Generous and lavish, it's exceptional in both style and flavor.

Sonoma Distill-🚄 ing Co. Black Truffle Rye, USA (\$86) Notes of spicy rye and toasty oak; silky texture and a bright, elegant structure that leads to a long finish. Yes, there's just a hint of truffle, which adds complexity to this rich and balanced expression.





# A MEETING PLACE OF SEA, SUN, MOUNTAINS & TERROIR

In Israel, a tiny sliver of a land of stunning beauty and extreme contrast, grapes of every type – classic and local varieties, ancient indigenous vines – are planted in every region. From the sandy Coastal Plain to the volcanic Golan Heights, from the majestic forested peaks of the Galilee to the stony Biblical hills of the Central Mountains, from the verdant valleys of the Judean Foothills to the blooming desert of the Negev, the diversity of the land and its bounty challenges a winemaker by offering unlimited opportunities to create.

# GRAPES, GRAINS, AND OLIVES

The three basics common to all Mediterranean cuisine – bread, wine, and olive oil - originated here in ancient times, and became the foundation of civilizations and a food culture that persists until this day. In Israel, with its wealth of fresh and simple flavors and ingredients, that culture means friends sharing wine around a mezze laden table.



# WHERE THE MEDITERRANEAN BEGINS



# LOOK EAST

Where the Fertile Crescent meets the Mediterranean, wine was produced 5000 years ago. Over millennia it earned a reputation for quality, and was sent west in Canaanite Jars to ancient empires in Egypt, Greece, and Rome. For the local people, it was essential to their livelihood and culture, even their health, and it became a sacred part of everyday life.



# MODERN WINES FROM AN ANCIENT LAND

Inspired by tradition but driven to innovate, a new generation of Israeli winemakers and growers are combining global training with Israel's world-leading agricultural technology. With their anything-is-possible attitude they are fulfilling the promise of this fertile land by creating wines that are increasingly receiving international recognition and awards, and are enjoyed by wine lovers worldwide.



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

Fetzer 2018 Shaly Loam Gewürztraminer. Monterev County (\$11) Made with fruit grown on its namesake soil, this off-dry Gewürztraminer with a touch of Muscat begins with aromas of apricot nectar, honeysuckle, and a hint of cinnamon. Its classic flavor profile mimics an Old World style, but the sun shines from the New World in this charmer: Weighty



on the palate with flavors of peach pie and pineapple coupled with balanced acidity, it's an ideal by-the-glass wine for an array of food options. 90

Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$60) First planted in 1973, Bien Nacido ranks among the most renowned vineyards in the world, and the small-

**0000**0

Bien Nacido 2016

**Estate Pinot Noir.** 



production wines from its namesake estate continue to keep the Santa Maria AVA on the map. The property's diversity in soil (shale, loams, uplifted marine volcanic, and limestone) and its low per-acre yield add to this expression's dynamic complexity and intensity. Aged for 16 months in French oak, it exudes gratifying aromas of rhubarb and earthy, peppered blackberry. With brilliant acidity penetrating to its core, it also features lifted notes of cherry and cinnamon, with black-tea tannins and orange rind leading to a dry finish that's stark and exciting. 96

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY

Worthy of a smooch. 00 French-style double bizou. 000 Wildly infatuated. 0000 Seriously smitten. 00000 Head over heels in love.

# 000

# The White Knight 2017

**Pinot Grigio**, Delle Venezie IGT, Italy (\$12) The nose is delightfully bright, with distinct aromas of apricot and justsqueezed lime. As gorgeous acidity frames this delicate white, minerality is softened on the palate by honeyed pear and lemon chiffon. 91

**3 BADGE ENOLOGY** 



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Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo 2018 Merlot, Valle

**Central, Chile** (\$12) The price point is a big surprise, as this iconic Chilean wine offers abundant character and a liveliness of style. Ripe blueberry and aromatic floral notes lead to a fresh, easygoing



quaff, with black tea and red plum interspersed with pomegranate. Roses continue to exude perfume as bright acidity keeps the palate lighthearted. **90** 

FETZER VINEYARDS

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# Cono Sur 2018 Organic Pinot Noir,

**Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$12)** Terroir punctuates the aromas of forest leaves, cinnamon, and cherries. Delicate notes of white-peppered raspberry and a touch of cedar make this trippingly light red seem as if it floats above the palate with the impeccable balance of a ballet dancer. **91** 

FETZER VINEYARDS



# Ballard Lane 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, Central

**Coast (\$13)** Offering compelling aromas of tangerine and honeyed apricots, this soft, lean, and delicate white aged in 100% stainless steel with no malolactic fermentation. White flowers and orange blossom lead the flavor parade before lemon zest and pineapple march in, paving the way for a



slightly salty finish that keeps the palate fresh and juicy.  $91 \end{tabular}$ 

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



# Ballard Lane 2018

Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$13) Rich and lively, this clean, focused white is perfumed with toasted coconut and cashew butter rimmed with lemon chiffon. Cedar meets minerality on the palate as toasted almond, fennel root, and crisp pear soften the tartness from the finish of lemon peel. The wine



underwent malolactic fermentation in 100% stainless steel before aging six to eight months in 25% new oak, 91

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY

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# Barrel Burner 2017 Chardonnay,

Paso Robles (\$15) Winemaker Clay Brock supercharged this toasty Chardonnay (which incorporates 9% Roussanne and 2% Marsanne) with texture and flavor. The body weight is augmented, leaving oak and acid in balance. Baked apple and lemon pudding work in tandem with rich notes of cashew and vanilla. **89** 

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY

## ⇔ ⇔ < Moobuzz 2016 Pinot Noir.

Monterey County (\$16) An earthiness on the nose gives way to sweet notes of black cherry that sweeten and soften. Round and pillowy in texture, this vibrant red sure overdelivers: Black pepper is merely an echo, with a prominent array of pomegranate and cherry flavors working in tandem with fine acidity. **91** 



3 BADGE ENOLOGY

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# Mon Frère 2017 Pinot Noir,

**California** (\$17) Made with fruit sourced from vineyards in Sonoma Coast, Sta. Rita Hills, and Santa Lucia Highlands, with dense aromas of red cherry, red licorice, chocolate, and earth combining for sweet and savoriness. Bright acidity carries the cherry flavors through round, silky tannins. **89** 

TAUB FAMILY SELECTIONS



# ⇔ ⇔ Parker Station 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso

**Robles (\$18)** This earthy red gave us cause to cheer, with focused and pure aromas of beets in tilled soil, black cherry, and vanilla. The spice on the initial sip leads to an accent of cinnamon and white pepper on the red fruit. Cedar and mocha come in midway and extend through the finish. **90** 



**GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS** 

# **~~~**

# Cline Cellars 2018 Ancient Vines Mourvèdre Rosé,

**Contra Costa County (\$13)** A unique burnt orange hue invites you to a nosing of ripe melon and taffy, with some basil for a savory intro. On the palate, juicy cantaloupe, peach, and mango come alive before the cinnamon-tinged finish. It's bright and pretty, with loads of character and crisp acidity that



makes it refreshing and food-friendly. 92

# 000

Castoro Cellars 2017 Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$20) Following inviting aromas of brambly raspberry and espresso, a curvy, sleek texture and spiced berry notes come to the fore of this Cab courtesy of its aging regimen (ten months in American and French oak). On the palate, cigar leaf, dark chocolate,



and blackberries rush in with gritty coffee tannins and a wave of vanilla—what a great mouthfeel. **91** 

# ••

Lodi Estates 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi (\$22) Exhibiting ripeness, balanced fruit, tannins, and acidity, this fine specimen from the Maggio family is sweet and opulent. Dark cherry, mocha, and currants go big alongside appetizing notes of boysenberry pie. 90



# **Publisher's PICKS**

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Slices 2017 Cabernet

Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$25) Made of 93% Cabernet Sauvignon with 4% Petite Sirah and 3% Petit Verdot, this steakready, blood-hued wine offers aromas of iron and cassis that set off a mouthwatering effect. Tart notes of cranberry and blackberry match with cedar and chocolate, and the acidity is high and rarin' to go. 90



DEEP VALLEY CELLARS

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# Cedar + Salmon 2017 **Pinot Noir, Willamette** Valley, Oregon (\$25) While dark blue and purple fruit perfumes the glass, this bouncy red is light and lithe on the tongue. At 13% ABV, it stays fresh: Spiced blackberry

and licorice add depth to the

sassafras add a savory touch

with hints of earth. 92

mouthfeel as mocha coffee and



# 000

# Kate Arnold 2017 Pinot

Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$25) Made with fruit sourced from seven vineyards in the Eola–Amity Hills sub-AVA, this stunning Pinot Noir shows off a good balance of acidity and concentrated fruit character. Aromas of sweet tobacco, turned soil, and dark cherry precede a silky entry of cherry and cedar that's

accented by ginger root, white pepper, and black-tea tannins. Aged in 100% French oak, it's one to savor. 92

# 0000

# Eden Rift 2018 Griva Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc,

Arrovo Seco AVA. Monterev County (\$25) To produce this wine, Sauvignon Blanc from the Musque clone is grown on low-yielding vines in palm-sized cobblestone beds; the region's maritime influence keeps things cool with fog and strong winds. The juice was fermented 35% in barrel and 65% in tank,



then aged in neutral French oak (35%) and stainless steel (65%) for six months. The crisp texture freshens the flavors of nectarine, white peach, pineapple, and papaya as minerality works to keep things lean. 93



# J. Lohr 2017 Pure Paso

**Proprietary Red**, Paso Robles (\$27) A nod to |. Lohr's 30-plus years of grape-growing in Paso Robles, this inaugural release is a royal purple-hued blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah with small amounts of Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec that offers aromas of cedar, blueberry, and ripe plum. A silky



ranch

beauty aged 18 months in barrel (20% new), it features dusty tannins that develop into a juicier texture as the wine opens up, leaving behind lip-smacking notes of ripe black fruit and dried violets, 92



# LangeTwins 2016 River **Ranch Vinevard** Montepulciano,

Jahant AVA, Lodi (\$28) Lodi's ability to yield a vast array of European varieties with stellar character-thanks to its Mediterranean climate—is exemplified by this red. (The smallest of Lodi's sub-AVAs, Jahant sits on dissected river terraces and old floodplain deposits.) Cedar and

black olive perfume earthy dark cherry and fennel as silky tannins create a wonderful mouthfeel, leading to crushed roses, strawberry, leather, and brioche. Aged in neutral oak barrels for 22 months, with an ABV of 13%.**92** 

# 0000

Bonterra 2017 The **Boost Chardonnay**, Blue Heron Vinevard. Mendocino **County (\$40)** Bonterra offers up this Biodynamically farmed, single-vineyard Chardonnay from the coolest part of inland Mendocino County, near a nesting site for blue herons. With a nose of buttered



pears and orange chiffon, it's a rich, elegant white with texture and grace on the palate; flavors of butterscotch, apple, cinnamon, and cashew precede a hint of saltiness on the finish. 94 FETZER VINEYARDS

# 0000

Andis Wines 2017 Petite Sirah, Sierra Foothills AVA, Amador County (\$30) This vibrant 100% Petite Sirah is an elegant and stunning example of a variety that can be teeth-gripping and over the top. Graceful yet dynamic, it starts with scents of dark chocolate and violets. Black fruit is inky and concentrated, but high-toned acidity cuts





through to keep the wine illuminated and fresh. 93

# 000

**Rémy Pannier 2018** Sancerre, Loire Valley (\$34) This crisp, mineral-driven 100% Sauvignon Blanc offers up a perfume of chamomile flowers, green tea, and buttered pears. Melon and kiwi peek through its full body on the dry palate as citrus notes linger on the tip of the tongue through the finish. 92



PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL







# 0000

# Masút 2016 Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir,

Mendocino County (\$40) Brothers Ben and Jake Fetzer, the grandsons of Barney Fetzer, founded this brand, which is named for a Native American word that translates as "dark, rich earth"; located in the mountainous Eagle Peak appellation, it remains the



sub-AVA's only winery. Aged 12 months in 32% new French oak, this silky red starts off with cherry, chocolate, cinnamon, and oak on the nose. Flavors of soy sauce, peppered fennel root, and coffee bean emerge through mineral-driven soil as blueberry and cherry notes are enveloped in a vanilla core. **93** 

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Bodega Corazon del Sol 2017 Grenache, Revana Vineyard, Single Block 13,

Los Chacayes, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50) High winds blow across this rocky site at 3,600 feet above sea level in Los Chacayes, a newly established subzone of Mendoza.

Only 50 cases of



this limited-edition wine—aged 12 months in used French oak, with an ABV of 13.5%—made it to the U.S. Aromas of jasmine and blue fruit lead to a palate of violets and fresh blueberry, with rhubarb and white pepper adding just the right accent. It's a hedonistic yet elegant red with lively acidity and silky tannins. **95** REVANA WINES

# ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ < Résonance 2017 Hyland Vinevard Chardonnay,

McMinnville, Oregon (\$56) Grown on some of the oldest soils in the Willamette Valley, this project from Louis Jadot shows off his Burgundian influence. The purity on the nose—lemon and quartzite—is akin to crystal-cut glass, giving way to a lean and clean palate

of pear and mouthwatering honeysuckle backed up by a nuttiness on the mid-palate. Alive and shiny!  $95\,$ 

KOBRAND WINE AND SPIRITS

# 0000

# Mayacamas Vineyards

2015 Merlot, Napa Valley (\$60) From the hills of Mount Veeder, this sturdy and ageworthy Merlot expresses aromas and flavors of minerals buried in soil. Dark-chocolate cherries extend throughout, tying in tarry black fruit and round, supple tannins. A licorice creaminess ensues, with notes of tart pomegranate and tobac

of tart pomegranate and tobacco drying the palate. 93

# 0000

Fringe Collective 2017 Rockbound Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$65) A savory and earthy beauty, with tobacco, heather, and red plum filling the round, plump body. Pomegranate and cherry add sweetness and a bright light as minerality shows up on the tilled-soil finish. 94







# vineyards gone WILD



# S A N D P O I N T

Committed to habitat restoration **SINCE 1987** 

SandPointWine.com

# Publisher's PICKS



# **00000** +

Robert Mondavi Winery The Reserve 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, To Kalon Vineyard, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$175) Mesmerizing aromas of earth, violets, and fresh black and blue fruit give way to chalky tannins that dry the palate—part of that is pure youth. The acidity lifts the flavors to compensate for the tighter grip. Savory notes of soy sauce, espresso, sweet soil, and bittersweet dark chocolate rest on a praiseworthy pedestal. 99

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# **Davies 2017 Nobles Vineyard Pinot**

Noir, Fort Ross–Seaview, Sonoma Coast (\$70) From the Davies family of Schramsberg Vineyards, this expressive red has reached prime ripeness in its ninth vintage; it spent 15 months in 100% French oak. Hedonistic aromas of salted plum and pomegranate accompany undertones of ripe cherry, animale, and salty red fruit for a mouthwatering effect. Notes of red tea and a savory finish of fennel and root beer make a unique impression. 93

WILSON DANIELS

# 0000

Lang & Reed 2016 Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley (\$85) One of John Skupny's richest and most concentrated vintages to date: Sweet violets and dark chocolate mingle with a fine mineral core. Sumptuous black

plum and plum-skin tannins emerge. 93

# 0000

### Peju 2016 The Experiment Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa

Valley (\$100) Winemaker Sara Fowler's yearly barrel experiment for this vintage encompassed 30 different toasting styles and 21 coopers; a comparative tasting with her peers determined her final choices. The collaborative result is a rich, curvy 100% Cabernet Sauvignon aged in

French, American, and Hungarian oak for 16 months. Aromas of violets, dark chocolate, and blackberry lead to its luscious palate, with baking spices and cookie dough serving as flavorful additions to the supple yet teeth-gripping tannins. Plum, tobacco, white pepper, and graphite weave through to the finish line. 93

# **0000**0

### J. Davies 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon,

Diamond Mountain District, Napa Valley (\$120) The Davies family purchased Diamond Mountain Vineyard in 1965, replanting it to Bordeaux varieties in 1994. The 16th vintage of this wine is a blend of 84% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Malbec, and 6% Petit Verdot that spent 22 months in 62% new French oak. The opulence on the nose shows off dark chocolate, savory herbs, leather, and blackberry. It's a voluptuous, lush, and earthy red that offers up cinnamon and cumin with a hint of spearmint. The black fruit is lathered with licorice. **95** 

WILSON DANIELS

# 0000

Gérard Bertrand No. 40 Château la Sauvageonne La Villa Rosé, AOC Languedoc (\$85) A complex and serious blend of Vermentino, Mourvèdre, Viognier, and Grenache grown on hillsides, with aromas of spiced cinnamon and strawberry joining a salted minerality. 93

USA WINE WEST, LLC

# **~~~**~

Ponzi 2017 Aurora Pinot Noir, Chehalem Mountains, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$105) Freshly roasted coffee beans, brown sugar, and roses dipped in sweet tobacco make for some pretty intriguing aromas indicative of this certified-sustainable vineyard and its Laurelwood soil. Cigar leaf and cinnamon



bun meld beautifully as earthy notes keep the glass perfumed. Rose petals, bittersweet dark chocolate, and a touch of saltiness merge with high-strung acidity for a truly fine experience. 96

# Award of EXCELLENCE töstingpanel

**Benham's Cin, USA** (\$35) This spirit is handmade in Sonoma, California, with each botanical individually vapor-distilled in column



stills and then blended together; the citrus is locally sourced and hand-zested for a remarkable freshness. Aromas of salted lemon, lavender, and vanilla are delicate and inviting, while vibrant notes of lemon oil, chamomile, and honeysuckle are accented by coriander and rose petals. A wash of wintergreen mint and an echo of juniper melts into a dry, defined, and most stylish finish that's akin to a fresh bouquet of blue flowers. **97** 

PURPLE WINE & SPIRITS

# SPIRITS: WHISK[E]Y EDITION



# 00000 +

Duke Founder's Reserve Double Barrel Rye Whiskey, USA (\$99) Finished in French oak barrels that once held Napa Valley Cabernet and bottled at 98 proof. Unctuous aromas of stone fruit arise with scents of cedar and coffee bean. The mouthfeel is exquisite, with black-peppered peach and apricot joining burnt orange peel, chocolate, and tobacco. 97



# ⇐ ⇐ ⇐ Ҁ KROBĀR Craft Distillery Rye

Whiskey, USA (\$60) Produced in Paso Robles from local grain, this whiskey is double-distilled at 117 proof in 25- to 53-gallon barrels. Bottled at 92 proof, it offers a nose of tobacco and peaches bolstered by walnut and spice. On the palate, the honeyed nectar broadens with burnt orange peel and black pepper. The heat mellows out on the finish with a lavish toastiness. **95** 



# Slay Mist Blended Scotch

Whisky Aged 8 Years, Scotland (\$26) Produced at the Laphroaig Distillery, this 80-proofer has the expected peaty nose, but it's also got a soft, floral lilt with a hint of salted peach. On the palate, the sea salt shows itself, with stone fruit surrounding cinnamon and smoke. 93 M.S. WALKER



# 0000

Elijah Craig Barrel Proof Bourbon, USA (\$60) The third

edition of this bourbon has a proof of 136.8. Appealing and generous aromas of banana, tangerine, and cinnamon-seasoned butterscotch transition into a garden of gardenia and a surge of marzipan on the palate. Salted peach comes in midway, with oatmeal and brown sugar entering on the finish. **94** III HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY





by Deborah Parker Wong



Wente Vineyards CEO Carolyn Wente.

Three members of the Buich family—Jennifer Whitaker, Mike Buich, and Melanie Pipas—enjoy some downtime at their San Francisco restaurant, Tadich Grill, with Wente Vineyards' Aly Wente. by the limitless flow of information and the relentless presence of technology, the imbalance between our professional and personal lives has reached a critical point. With the need to tip the scales being felt by every generation in the workforce, family-run Wente Vineyards is relying on an initiative simply known as "Make Time" to help its employees achieve equilibrium.

As Senior Brand Manager of the highly successful winery and hospitality business, fifth-generation winegrower Aly Wente is an advocate for what her family refers to as a #MakeTime culture. "Life is busy with many distractions and technology competing for our time, and it becomes easy for people to overlook what matters most. At Wente, we are encouraging everyone to . . . make time for the people and the things that are important to them," she says.

Among Aly's passions is spending time in nature, so she avoids the constant lure of social media to go hiking in Tahoe. "I find that I'm more accountable when I schedule time for family and friends on my work calendar," she adds. "And it's truly liberating when you don't have cell service."

She isn't alone, however, in promoting a business philosophy that supports a healthy work/life balance for oneself and one's family members and colleagues. #MakeTime culture is fostered in several ways at the company—just one example being the "#MakeTime Pledge," a program that provides tips and affirmations to employees as they work to prioritize their time effectively.

Wente Vineyards CEO Carolyn Wente cites two family-owned businesses—San Francisco's Tadich Grill and Angus Barn in Raleigh, North Carolina—that have established their own version of #MakeTime culture for themselves and their employees. As Wente's clients, she says, they "understand the value of making time for other important things in life besides work for decades. In many ways, they are role models whose values and priorities have helped us build a successful family business."

The same goes for Wente Vineyards' own hospitality outlet, Vineyard Table and Tasting Lounge. With the holidays fast approaching, the food and beverage industry becomes a proverbial double-edged sword for those seeking a balance between work and leisure; recognizing that they "have many longtime employees who look forward to seeing the holiday regulars," Carolyn says, they nevertheless close on key dates while offering a takeout program to ensure that both families and the community at large get to celebrate the season together.

# Savoring the Moment at Tadich Grill

Third-generation restaurateur Michael "Mike" Buich has seen generation after generation of the same families walk through the door of his restaurant and feel at home. A San Francisco institution founded at the onset of the gold rush in 1849, Tadich Grill boasts employees with decades-long tenures. "The culture of #MakeTime will help restaurants like Tadich survive" the rise in convenience culture, he says. "When those families gather for lunch and for



important life moments, our staff greets them by name."

Buich left his career in technology and entered the family business in 1989, but his great-grandfather had been buying wine from the Wente family since purchasing Tadich Grill





Wente Vineyards Senior Brand Manager Aly Wente shares a glass with third-generation restaurateur Michael "Mike" Buich at San Francisco institution Tadich Grill.

in 1934, back when barrels stenciled with the Wente name were rolled in the back door. With Wente serving as Tadich's perennial house wine, the two businesses continue to work closely together, and the families behind them make an effort to get together on special occasions.

Buich's daughters Melanie Pipas—a pediatric nurse at the University of California, San Francisco, Medical Center—and Jennifer Whitaker, who works as a consultant, grew up in the restaurant and represent the fourth generation of the business, which has always promoted a "work hard, play hard" ethos. Despite their busy schedules, they both routinely carve out personal time. Mike's advice to his daughters and his extended work family could be a #MakeTime motto: "When your phone battery needs to recharge, so do you."

# Empowering Employees at Angus Barn

It may be the convivial, communal nature of the hospitality industry that helps family-run businesses forge such lasting partnerships, but according to second-generation restaurateur Van





Van Eure is the owner of Raleigh, NC, steakhouse Angus Barn.

Eure, owner of Angus Barn steakhouse, "Personal relationships are what make everything work."

"Wente has been our house wine for over 20 years, and I'm so proud of that," she adds, fittingly "making time" to talk about her long partnership with the Wentes in between tasks like unloading hay for her rescue horses. After her father died, Eure took the reins at Angus Barn at an early age, and according to Carolyn Wente, they've swapped best practices for decades: "Van came out to California after we opened the restaurant at Wente in 1986 and we hit it off," she says. "As young women working in tough, male-dominated industries, our life experiences have been very similar."

Having received the Legend Award from the National Restaurant Association for her staff's volunteer work in the community over the decades, Eure says, "When many employees get behind a cause, you can really make a difference." She notes that she requires all of her managers to take one three-day weekend a month: "We impose this to support work/life balance and we empower our employees to make a customer's experience better."

When she's not rescuing horses as well as dogs through her Cheyenne Foundation, you'll often find Eure teaching a class of new employees her tenets of customer service. "You can't stop finding ways to motivate and encourage employees, and you'll see that reflect[ed] in how we work as a team," she says. Wente Vineyards 2017 Estate Grown Southern Hills Cabernet Sauvignon, Livermore Valley (\$20) Two clones originating from wine pioneer Charles Wetmore's 19th-century Bordeaux cuttings comprise this Cab, co-fermented with Petite Sirah, Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. Well-drained rocky soils are home



to these east-west-oriented estate vineyards, located in the southern hills of the valley. Ripe aromas of plum and spicy brush lead to a juicy note of boysenberry as dusty tannins match up against wild strawberries from tilled soil. Licorice and walnut add texture on the finish. **90** —*Meridith May* 

Wente Vineyards 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon Wetmore Vineyard, Livermore Valley (\$30) As California's first agricultural commissioner, Wetmore planted vine cuttings from many of Bordeaux's wellknown châteaux in the Livermore Valley in the 1880s. Those vines continue to produce today in the valley's gravelly loam soils on



the Wente family's CSWA-certified sustainable estate. This single-vineyard wine, named for the pioneer who brought a piece of Margaux to Livermore, is co-fermented with Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, and Malbec in stainless steel and aged for 18 months in 40% new and 60% second- and third-use French barrels. This is a stellar vintage, offering up an intense nose of cigar leaf and espresso-laden blackberry. While the 2016 (which received the same score) was fuller in body, the current release shows a graceful, silky entry, with dried violets and plum. It's juicy to the core, with undertones of coffee bean, soy sauce, orange peel, and cedar that keep the palate entertained. 95 —М.М.

# TRADE EVENTS

# A MILE-HIGH MANAGE OF STATES AND A MILE-HIGH MARATHON

# THE TASTING PANEL HOSTS A COCKTAIL SPEED TASTING AT URBAN FARMER IN DENVER

story by Matt Jackson / photos by Jennifer Olson

SITUATED BETWEEN THE COASTS, the Mile High City is an inland hub of beverage production, with hundreds of craft breweries, distilleries, roasteries, and more helping to fuel a thriving hospitality culture. So it was a fitting place for *The Tasting Panel* to hold its Cocktail Speed Tasting event, with nine esteemed local beverage pros joining Publisher and Editorial Director Meridith May at downtown chophouse Urban Farmer. The guests sampled spirits both straight and in prepared drinks as ten different representatives told the story behind each brand and its respective cocktail recipe—and unlike your typical speed-dating scenario, more than a few lasting impressions were made.

A REAL PROPERTY OF A REAL PROPER



Standing, left to right: Kevin Burke, General Manager, Morin; Beth Gruitch, partner, Crafted Concepts Restaurant Group; Steven Waters, owner, Run for the Roses; Kendra Anderson, owner, Bar Helix; Ky Belk, Bar Director, Edible Beats Restaurant Group; and Brandon McDonald, Beverage Director, ChoLon Restaurant Group. Seated: *Tasting Panel* contributing editor Matt Jackson; Stuart Jensen, partner, Curio and Brass Tacks; and Susan Weiser, General Manager, Urban Farmer.

# **CORRALEJO** Tequila

Few bottles are as striking as the slender, deep-blue vessel that contains Corralejo Reposado Tequila. No less impressive is the brand's legacy: It boasts over 200 years of history as the only tequila distillery in Pénjamo, Guanajuato, and one of the few legally authorized to produce the spirit outside of Jalisco. In fact, Corralejo was among the first to make tequila commercially—in a hacienda that happens to have been the birthplace of Father Miguel Hidalgo, one of the central figures in Mexico's fight for independence from Spain, no less.

The Reposado is Corralejo's bestselling expression. Made from 100% Blue Weber agave, it's distilled twice—first in a column still and then in an alembic copper pot still—before it's aged for four months in American, French, and Mexican Encino oak barrels. The result is a light-bodied yet rich and complex tequila full of honey and Sherry notes, light cedar and tropical accents, and a hint of vanilla spice on the finish.

Bartender Clint Chew showcased it in his Lemon Thyme Tequila Spritzer, a crisp, refreshing, and unpretentious sipper that included lemon juice and a housemade lemon-thyme simple syrup. Its Margarita-like quality suggested that it would be a concoction well suited to warm afternoons.



Bartender and hospitality veteran Clint Chew preps his Corralejo cocktail.

### THE SPIRIT: Corralejo Reposado Tequila

Brown sugar and pears on the nose, with clean agave and a hint of cedar. Generously spreads across the palate with notes of charred pineapple and lime. Extremely smooth. —*Beth Gruitch, partner, Crafted Concepts Restaurant Group* 

# THE COCKTAIL: Lemon Thyme Tequila Spritzer

The drink is as clean-cut as the tequila. It's well balanced and the thyme is a perfect ingredient to bring out the highlights of the agave spirit. —*Ky Belk, Bar Director, Edible Beats Restaurant Group* 



# lemon thyme tequila spritzer

- ▶ 3 oz. Corralejo Reposado tequila
- ▶ 11/2 oz. lemon-thyme syrup\*
- ▶ ¾ oz. of fresh lemon juice
- 2 oz. club soda

In a mixing tin, add ice, tequila, syrup, and lemon juice. Shake for approximately 10 seconds and pour into a Collins glass, filling it threequarters full. Top off with club soda. Garnish with fresh thyme sprigs and a lemon wheel.

\*To make the lemon-thyme syrup, combine 1½ cups granulated sugar, 1½ cups water, the zest of 1 large lemon, and 6 sprigs of fresh thyme in a pot and cook on medium heat for 10-15 minutes, or until all the sugar is dissolved. Cool and strain. Dip a toothpick into thyme essential oil to add a drop to the syrup.



# **AMADOR** Whiskey

The Trinchero family in Napa Valley has a long reputation as one of the country's most successful wine producers, but they're changing things up with their new venture, Amador Whiskey. The label sources Kentucky straight bourbon from the Sazerac Company's Barton 1792 distillery in Bardstown before finishing the spirit in its own Napa Cellars Chardonnay oak barrels; its Double Barrel Whiskey is a rich, smooth, and aromatic expression perfect for cocktails and sipping alike. Amador also offers hop-flavored and ten-year-old versions of its Chardonnay barrel–aged bourbon.

Bartender Andrew Dolinky of Denver's Union Lodge No. 1 created the Walking at Midnight for the panel; a distinctive and exotic play on a traditional Manhattan, it combined the Amador Double Barrel Whiskey with Trinchero Family Estates' own Trincheri Vermouth Rosso, made with Napa Valley Chardonnay and Amador County Barbera. Laced with brown sugar and lapsang souchong tea, the cocktail was delightfully light, expressing flavors of earth and forest floor followed by a sweet and bright citrus finish.

### THE SPIRIT: Amador Double Barrel Whiskey

Brilliant peach nectar with notes of mocha, orange peel, and cedar. Fresh tasting with tons of fruit on the palate. —*Ky Belk, Bar Director, Edible Beats Restaurant Group* 

### THE SPIRIT: Trincheri Vermouth Rosso

Aromas and flavors of plum skin and bitters, with hints of coffee bean and black cherry. —*Kendra Anderson, owner, Bar Helix* 



### THE COCKTAIL: Walking at Midnight

A true whiskey cocktail: earthy [and] zesty with dark, woodsy character. A take on a Manhattan with more amaro-type notes thanks to the vermouth. —*Susan Weiser, General Manager, Urban Farmer* 



# THE REAL McCOY® Rum

Rum brand The Real McCoy is named for Bill McCoy, who was perhaps the first and definitely the most successful rum runner of the Prohibition era. After he began selling Barbados rum just off the shore of New York City—technically in international waters, making his enterprise legal—



McCoy became known for carrying the best of the best. Adulterating spirits with chemicals and juices was a common practice of the time, but McCoy refused to taint his products. Their purity gave rise to the phrase "the real McCoy."

The Real McCov

Jesse Torres, Bar Manager at American Elm in Denver.

Rum founder Bailey Pryor and Jesse Torres, Bar Manager at American Elm in Denver, presented to the group the Missionary's Downfall, a delightfully aromatic twist on a classic Mai Tai. Served on crushed ice with pineapple juice, honey, lime, and The Real McCoy three-year and five-year rums, it burst with flavors of almond bark and vanilla before finishing with a delightful pop of tropical fruit.

### THE SPIRIT: The Real McCoy Single Blended 5-Year Rum

Clean and edgy with vanilla, sweet corn, cinnamon, oak, fresh peach, and pineapple. Great balance. *—Stuart Jensen, partner, Curio and Brass Tacks* 



### THE COCKTAIL: Missionary's Downfall

A great, classic tiki drink with the funk and intense flavors from blending in the three- and five-yearold rums, which complement the pineapple juice and peach liqueur. —Steven Waters, owner, Run for the Roses

# **DENTED BRICK** Distillery

The purest water in the United States makes its way from the aquifers of the Great Salt Lake Basin to an artesian well under Salt Lake City's Dented Brick Distillery. Between that and the organic ingredients they source, the distillery's team aims to provide a truly "grain-to-glass" experience. Director of Communications Sara Baldwin led the group through a tasting of not one but two expressions: Great Basin Bristlecone Gin and Roofraiser Vodka.

Quite possibly the most memorably named cocktail in the entire lineup was the Venus in Furs, created by bartender Skyler Bush of Salt Lake City's Good Grammar to feature both spirits. An herbaceous twist on the Gin Sour, it sprung from the glass with citrus and baking-spice aromas, finishing with flavors of bitter orange peel, star anise, and juniper.



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# THE SPIRIT: Great Basin Bristlecone Gin

Red wheat and rye notes and that distinctive bristlecone profile, along with juniper, fennel and lavender, make for a complex gin. A floral sweetness with a vanilla roundness and excellent mouthfeel. —*Kevin Burke, General Manager, Morin* 

### THE COCKTAIL: Venus in Furs

Sweet citrus notes and Moroccan chocolate dust add even more personality to the spirit in this well-built and -conceived take on a Sour. *—Stuart Jensen, partner, Curio and Brass Tacks* 



Heather Thompson, lead bartender at historic Denver bar The Cruise Room.

# KAIKYO Distillery

As the oldest stone lighthouse in Japan, the Hatozaki Lighthouse shepherded sailors safely around the rocky shores of the Akashi port for nearly four centuries; an enduring symbol of international trade, it serves as Kaikyo Distillery's iconic logo. Hatozaki Finest is a delicately colored and light but unexpectedly substantial whisky, which means it offers considerable versatility as a cocktail ingredient.

Heather Thompson, lead bartender at The Cruise Room (adjacent to Urban Farmer in the Oxford Hotel), appeared on behalf of the brand to present her Safe Harbor cocktail. Subtly sweet due to the addition of ginger liqueur and Bärenjäger, a honey liqueur, the drink was balanced by the whisky's flavors of bitter root and white pepper, along with a surprising saline finish.

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### THE SPIRIT: Hatozaki Finest Japanese Whisky

Great aromatics of brown rice and ginger. Soft chamomile, salted pear, and cereal with a light backbone and smoky earthiness. Surprisingly light-colored for a

12-year-old. —*Steven* Waters, owner, Run for the Roses

### THE COCKTAIL: Safe Harbor

Hatozaki is named for a lighthouse, so the name of the cocktail is fitting. This is a wonderful fallwinter take on an Old Fashioned—a nice feminine approach— [that's] easy to drink. —Beth Gruitch, partner, Crafted Concepts Restaurant Group





Ryan Conklin is Director of Mixology and Spirits Education for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits.

# **DULCE VIDA** Tequila

After its debut nearly a decade ago, Dulce Vida continues to distinguish itself as a trailblazer by offering the only tequila that goes through a full malolactic fermentation, resulting in a rich mouthfeel and smooth, impactful finish. The 100proof Reposado is aged for nine to 11 months in American oak, lending it a sparkling caramel color and a delicate, complex, and woodsy profile.

There was a palpable sense of surprise and delight when Ryan Conklin, Director of Mixology and Spirits Education for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, served his Complicated Romance to the panel. Composed of Oloroso Sherry and Cynar in addition to the Reposado, the floral and elegant drink expressed citrus zest and ripe vine fruit on the nose while finishing with a crisp dryness.

### THE SPIRIT: Dulce Vida Reposado Tequila

Combines earth and stone fruit with lemon zest. Agave is sweet and clean. Really delightful! —*Kendra Anderson, owner, Bar Helix* 

### THE COCKTAIL: Complicated Romance



Oloroso Sherry and Cynar keep it complex and savory, bringing out orange notes and acidity that allows the agave to shine. —Brandon McDonald, Beverage Director, ChoLon Restaurant Group



J.J. Pfister co-founder Kevin Keck.

# **J.J. PFISTER** Distilling Company

In the 19th century, the J.J. Pfister Knitting Company of San Francisco was a manufacturing powerhouse known widely for its fine apparel, especially swimwear. Fast-forward a century later, when Kevin Keck, Pfister's great-grandson, decided to open a distillery named for his forebear. In keeping with Pfister's dedication to quality, Keck prides himself on sourcing top-tier ingredients; the bases of his spirits are made from crops grown on a friend's sustainable farm in the Klamath Basin of Oregon.

Keck presented to the group the herbaceous and smooth J.J. Molly cocktail, consisting of J.J. Pfister London Dry Capitol Gin with blackberry, lemon, rosemary, and sage. Thanks to the rye-heavy grain bill, the gin carries strong rye notes up front and finishes with a hefty viscosity; its aromatics were highlighted by the drink's more savory notes.

**THE SPIRIT:** J.J. Pfister London Dry Capitol Gin Warm, round, earthy notes of heather, spice, and white pepper. Clean and juicy. Juniper notes are



subdued—nicely balanced. —Kendra Anderson, owner, Bar Helix

# THE COCKTAIL: J.J. Molly

Refreshing, like a fresh-squeezed berry lemonade. The botanicals of the gin pair nicely—super approachable, and I love the acid on it. *—Susan Weiser, General Manager, Urban Farmer* 



Chris Chamberlain, National Beverage Development Manager for E. & J. Gallo's spirits division.

# **NEW AMSTERDAM**

New Amsterdam Gin arrived on the market a mere ten years ago, but its popularity (and that of its sister expression, New Amsterdam Vodka) is indisputable. The flagship product in this E. & J. Gallo brand's lineup, Stratusphere, is a vibrantly citrusy and juniper-forward gin with the backbone and complexity to shine in a dry Martini—but it works nicely in virtually any cocktail.

Chris Chamberlain, National Beverage Development Manager for E. & J. Gallo's spirits division, brought to the tasting table the stunningly violet-hued BCG&T (aka Brandied Cherry Gin & Tonic). Refreshing and tart, it offered a fresh effervescence and the essence of vanilla on the palate; the inclusion of Gallo's own soon-to-launch brand of Italian Amarena cherries and a touch of blood orange juice added seasonal warmth.

# THE SPIRIT: New Amsterdam Stratusphere Gin

A juniper-forward nature. Aromas feel warm on the nose, with white flowers, cocoa, and enticing jasmine. The sensation on the palate is equally soothing, soft, and round, without a corner or an edge, a bite or a burn. Juniper settles down on a wave of creamy vanilla and the nostalgic echo of sweet cherry-flavored pipe tobacco. The finish is long, leaving behind tangerine zest. —*Meridith May, Publisher/Editorial Director, The Tasting Panel* 



I admired the citrus notes of orange and grapefruit super approachable. —*Kendra Anderson, owner, Bar Helix* 

## THE COCKTAIL: BCG&T (Brandied Cherry Gin & Tonic)

"The use of the brandysoaked Amarena cherries lifts the drink to new heights. Bittersweet and a cool rendition of Negronimeets–Gin & Tonic. —*Steven Waters, owner, Run for the Roses* 

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Bartender Dylan Holcomb of Denver's Pony Up adds coffee to his creative cocktail.

# **CHOPIN** Vodka

Chopin was at the forefront of the craft-vodka explosion in the mid-1990s, and the brand has continued to blaze trails ever since. In 2011, it debuted its Rye Vodka expression, whose earthy spice notes and hints of anisette helped prove that vodka could be a sipping spirit for connoisseurs rather than merely a neutral base for mixing with soda or juice.

Chopin founder Tad Dorda also produces Dorda Sea Salt Caramel Liqueur, a decadent product that combines the rye vodka with caramel, vanilla, and a touch of Maldon salt. Pony Up Bar Manager Dylan Holcomb used both in his Dorda de Leche, a sumptuous coffee cocktail exhibiting baking spice and woodsy characteristics along with indulgent dark chocolate and caramel flavors on the palate. In a cocktail that could have easily erred on the side of sweetness, Holcomb ensured the essence of the vodka came through.

# THE SPIRIT: Chopin Rye Vodka and Dorda Sea Salt Caramel Liqueur

A vodka with body and integrity: notes of sourdough, black pepper, coffee, and fennel root. Balanced with a bitter and sweet quality. The finish is crisp and clean. The salted caramel liqueur is but-

tery, creamy, and authentic. —Kevin Burke, General Manager, Morin

# THE COCKTAIL:

# Dorda de Leche

Coffee notes are great accents to the vodka, with earthy, herbal, and sweet ingredients adding complexity. Extremely well made to show off the brand(s). *—Brandon McDonald, Beverage Director, ChoLon Restaurant Group* 



# JCB Collection

Truffles are among the world's greatest delicacies. It's fitting, then, that JCB Collection—producer of some of the world's most luxurious vodkas—would infuse them into one of its expressions. It starts with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from Burgundy's Côte d'Or, which are barrelaged for six months and then distilled and infused with Périgord truffles. The result is an elegant vodka whose truffle essence comes through marvelously on the nose as well as on the palate.

The Cruise Room lead bartender Heather Thompson's Truffle Royale encapsulated the opulence of JCB Truffle Vodka. Incorporating Dolin Blanc, Sauternes, and a touch of sparkling Moscato, the cocktail combined tart and dry flavors with the savoriness of thyme to capture the terroir of France.



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### THE SPIRIT: JCB Truffle Vodka

The use of Burgundian Pinot Noir and Chardonnay as its base and the truffles nuances add quality to the vodka's earthy umami, savory notes. —*Stuart Jensen, partner, Curio and Brass Tacks* 

### THE COCKTAIL: Truffle Royale

Sauternes notes are distinctive and offer a sweet charm to the vodka, cooling off any heat. The vermouth makes this well-balanced, Martini-style drink really refreshing. —*Kevin Burke, General Manager, Morin* 

# EARNINGTHE

TREASURY WINE ESTATES TAKES ITS ICON BRANDS ON AN EDUCATIONAL SIX-CITY LUXICON TOUR, STARTING WITH SAN FRANCISCO AND L.A.

> In partnership with SommFoundation, The Tasting Panel and its sister publication, The SOMM Journal, will provide more than \$20,000 in scholarships to deserving wine buyers during Treasury Wine Estates' (TWE) 2019 Luxicon Tour, which officially commenced in September in San Francisco. With stops in five other cities, Luxicon provides an exclusive crash course in deductive tasting as well as "[an] opportunity to present Treasury's luxury tier of icon wines to the sommelier community around the country," explains Education Director Gillian Ballance, MS, DipWSET-including current releases from Beaulieu Vineyard, Stags' Leap Winery, and The Penfolds Collection. Read on for a recap of the first two events; we'll cover Chicago, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., in the December/January issue of The SOMM Journal.



Toasting the winners of San Francisco's blind tasting from left to right: Christine Tran, managing partner, Artisan Wine Depot; TWE Education Director Gillian Ballance, MS; Catherine Fallis, MS; Garo Eldemir, Director of Concessions, Global Gourmet; and Barbara Rooks, wine specialist and concierge, Artisan Wine Depot.

# LUXICON San Francisco

# by Jonathan Cristaldi

The Luxicon Tour kicked off at the Intercontinental Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco, where buyers were invited to a deductive "Techniques of Tasting" seminar led by Ballance and guest co-host Catherine Fallis, MS (whose new book, *Ten Grapes to Know*, was published by W. W. Norton & Company in September). Three \$1,200 scholarships were up for grabs by those who expertly leveraged the five criteria of deductive tasting used by the Court of Master Sommeliers—sight, nose, palate, initial conclusion, and final conclusion—to identify three wines in a blind tasting.

"We work off of the deductive tasting grid because it's a road map," explained Fallis. "It's all about recognizing the classic traits of great varieties." With a glass of white wine in hand, Fallis broke down her approach to sight for the participants: "You're evaluating how a wine reflects light," she said. Granted, it's critical to have not only good light but also clean glassware, noted Ballance, who then turned to the nose. "The first thing you want to do is identify faults," she said. "This gives you a sense of hygiene in the winery, cork taint, or [whether the grapes were harvested] too ripe. Fruit condition—whether tart or ripe—offers a clue to the growing conditions, the climate, and even the variety."

Discussion then turned to the impact of oak barrels. "Producers in classic regions are mixing American and French these days, which can throw you off," said Ballance, "so I try to focus on the size of the barrel, looking for textural oxidative aromas that could come from larger oak vessels."

When analyzing the palate, "you're going back over everything on the nose and then adding in the structure," said Fallis. Ballance asked her to talk about how she perceives acid. "The acid is like running a marathon, and if it's there it will win, so I'm looking for acid a few seconds out," Fallis replied.

Someone inquired about residual sugar, and true to form, Ballance offered a bit of keen advice: "Get to know sweetness in wines." Her reasoning? While the Court has not typically tested on sweet wines, "that is changing," she explained, "because the market is changing."

Assessing body, meanwhile, can get a bit tricky, as "it can come from sugar weight as opposed to alcohol and glycerine weight," said Fallis. And as for drawing conclusions, Ballance reminded the group, "You always want to give a few varieties rather than just one, which means you could possibly earn a point if one of the grapes you named is correct."



Master Sommeliers Catherine Fallis and Gillian Ballance lead a seminar on deductive tasting at the Intercontinental Mark Hopkins Hotel.

The entire deductive-tasting process was then repeated with a red, and for fun, Ballance gave Fallis the floor: After ticking off each box on the grid, the Master Sommelier guessed that it was a 2016 Cabernet-based blend from Coonawarra. Before the big reveal, Fallis stressed that "unless you've had real experience tasting a vintage, you can't call that vintage in a blind tasting."

So, how did Fallis do? Unsurprisingly, she nailed it: The wine was a Penfolds Bin 407 Cabernet Sauvignon from



Three wines were presented blind to attendees of the "Techniques of Tasting" seminar.

2016. "Why did you steer from North America?" asked Ballance. "It's just too big—everything is so vivid from Australia," replied Fallis.

With the bar set high. Ballance turned the room loose to evaluate three wines blind with a goal of guessing the vintage and variety. Afterward, the masters stayed behind to tabulate the scores while the rest headed to the Top of the Mark restaurant on the top floor of the hotel for the portfolio tasting.

Before the winners were announced, the wines—a flight of Syrahs from three different countries-were revealed to the group. First was the **Penfolds** 2016 Bin 28 Kalimna Shiraz from South Australia, followed by the Pax 2017 Armagh Vineyard Syrah from Sonoma Coast and the Domaine de la Roche Paradis 2017 La Madone Saint-Joseph from the Northern Rhône Valley.

One of the scholarship recipients, Christine Tran, a managing partner at Artisan Wine Depot, told The Tasting Panel that "[her] customers love" Treasury's "classic and icon brands." Tran's co-winner and employee Barbara Rooks, a wine specialist and concierge for Artisan, said she plans to use the funds to dive into studying for her WSET diploma, while Garo Eldemir, Director of Concessions at San Francisco-based catering company Global Gourmet, noted that he'll use his winnings to help train floor staff by taking them "to a number of tastings to help expand their palates."

# LUXICON Los Angeles

by Kyle Billings

Blind tasting is often the crucible that forges a sommelier's mettle. Having survived the trial by fire. Gillian Ballance knows this all too well, and she's always keen to pay the lesson forward. After hosting the "Techniques of Tasting" seminar in San Francisco, she ventured southward to the next stop on the Luxicon Tour, Los Angeles, where another group of professionals awaited at Hancock Park restaurant République.

Ballance, who earned her Master Sommelier diploma in 2012, readily conceded that the nervous energy

generated by the exam has never completely subsided, adding that she still gets butterflies as she observes candidates make their way through each level of the program. The blind-tasting portion is famously cited as the most difficult-and the most intimidating. Recognizing this, the Court of Master Sommeliers fosters a spirit of mentorship and community, which Luxicon, now in its third year, helps Ballance promote on her own terms.

"This is about assisting hopefuls and staying engaged," she said. "What I want people who attend this seminar to walk away with is for them to see where they have to go. Every little thing helps to build your arsenal and become a better taster."

In an elevated alcove overlooking the dining room, attendees embarked on a guided blind tasting of five wines. Sharing emcee duties was Ryan Bailey, Wine Director of the NoMad hotel; a stalwart of the Los Angeles and New York sommelier communities, he emphasizes the purpose and power of blind tasting with his staff. "It puts things into perspective," he said. "It's fundamental to understand classic wine regions so you can communicate that when you're on the floor."

During the seminar, Ballance

and Bailey rigorously detailed the process of what the Court refers to as deductive tasting while pointing out common pitfalls. "Often people pick the wine first, then tailor their descriptors to fit that wine," said Ballance, adding that even people who are excellent tasters can fail to properly sieve their observations when drawing conclusions.

Like an acrobat without a net, Bailey skillfully glided through a blind tasting of Penfolds 2016 Bin 407 Cabernet Sauvignon in front of the attentive spectators. With no small amount of panache, he substantiated his expertise, correctly singling out markers for the New World wine such as forget-me-nots, black tea, sweet greens, espresso, spearmint, portobello mushroom, and even amaro.

To conclude the proceedings, students applied their knowledge



Three sommeliers were each presented with \$1,200 SommFoundation scholarships following a blind-tasting test.

toward identifying the three remaining white wines. After submitting their responses, they descended the stairs and navigated through the clamor of tasting stations to partake in a diverse lineup of TWE producers and styles, including Chateau Minuty rosé, Etude Pinot Noir, and various vintages of the esteemed Penfolds Grange.

Ballance joined them once the scores had been tallied, projecting above the din to announce the three sommeliers who best solved each liquid riddle: Eduardo Bolaños. head sommelier at Chi Spacca, wine steward Adam Sanchez of Annandale Golf Club, and sommelier Trevor Nare of Angler. The purpose of the scholarship—to help the winners continue their wine studies—implies that on a sommelier's journey, there's always more road to travel, so it's wise to be aware of your blind spots.



Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance with her co-host, Advanced Sommelier Ryan Bailey of NoMad L.A.



The SommFoundation scholarship recipients from Luxicon L.A.: Eduardo Bolaños, head sommelier at Chi Spacca, wine steward Adam Sanchez of Annandale Golf Club, and sommelier Trevor Nare of Angler.

# **Treasury Wine Estates** *Portfolio Highlights*

PHOTOS: OLIVIA SMARTT PHOTOGRAPHY



Penfolds 2014 Grange Shiraz, South Australia

Beautiful deep ruby color. Fresh and pure aromas of black fruit and dusty, fine-grained tannins with layers of boysenberry and black raspberry. The long, spicy finish reveals clove, smoked meats, and green tobacco leaf, and the texture is reminiscent of silken fruit. —Jonathan Cristaldi



**Beaulieu Vineyard** 2016 Georges de Latour Private **Reserve Cabernet** Sauvignon, Napa Valley Teeming with blackberry, blueberry, crème de cassis, violets, and wild sagebrush. Expansive, full-bodied, and seamless with elongated "Rutherford Dust" tannins and a finish that goes for days. -J.C.



Stags' Leap 2016 The Leap Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap District, Napa Valley Deep black and blue fruits with a powerful core of dusty tannins and a long finish accented by violets, cocoa powder, and fine French oak spices. —J.C.



Stags' Leap 2016 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley This new release is an impressive effort right out of the gate. Lovely, bright, and vivid juniper aromas precede notes of apricot and gooseberry and a richness courtesy of 20% new French oak. —J.C.



Beringer 2017 **Private Reserve** Chardonnay, Napa Valley This is California in a glass, with a golden color and ripe, opulent notes of tropical fruit, crème brûlée, and candied ginger. A deep core of toasty oak and baking spices is balanced by juicy acidity. -J.C.



Château Minuty 2018 Rose et Or, France A flinty minerality yields to strawberry, kiwi, and candied orange peel in this blend of Grenache and Cinsault, which displays a rich mouthfeel and vibrant energy. -J.C.

# DESIGN TRENDS

# In the Bag

# WHEN IT COMES TO SPIRITS PACKAGING, **THE SPEARHEAD GROUP** DELIVERS



Heather Fritzsche, CEO of The Spearhead Group, has made her career in the packaging sector. hile packaging isn't always the most celebrated art, its significance cannot be understated. After price and quality, it's often cited as the most important criterion in consumers' retail-purchasing decisions, and it's a primary driver of profitability and brand loyalty. The right package serves as a visual representation of a brand's story and values, creating a profound connection with customers who report higher satisfaction with products whose packages they love. It's thus an imperative for any spirits company looking to stand out in today's crowded marketplace.

To get more insight, we turned to Heather Fritzsche, who has made her career in packaging. In 2018, she launched The Spearhead Group to become one of only a few women CEOs in this traditional industry sector; over the past 20 years, she's built a global network of what she now refers to as "Pioneer Partners" who are as committed as she is to their craft, lending their expertise on every front from glass manufacturing to sustainability initiatives.

Craft spirits such as bourbon are driving innovation in packaging. Headquartered in Pennsylvania, Fritzsche and her team just opened their first innovation center in Louisville, Kentucky, to offer direct customer service and a hands-on design lab for the dynamic craft industry. The company also manages the Spearhead Asia Pacific Production Center, a full-service manufacturing facility in China, and it recently announced a collaboration with Istituto Europeo di Design in Turin, Italy, in addition to being named a preferred partner by

# Where do your innovative ideas come from?

Creativity is everywhere. We look for inspiration across market sectors, especially those pushing the boundaries on sustainability, design, and production efficiency. We don't wait for creativity to happen; we chase it and actively invest in emerging talent, such as our new program with the best and brightest at the Istituto Europeo di Design. And we rely on our global Pioneer Partners to share the latest



The Spearhead Group recently opened its innovation center within Acuity Packaging and Logistics in Louisville, KY.

Diageo for diversity in leadership. In June 2019, Spearhead finished fourth out of 80 competitors at the Women's Business Enterprise National Council/ Pepsico Pitch Competition. Needless to say, it's been an impressive start.

# The Tasting Panel: You work with both new and established spirits companies. How can brand owners get more out of their packaging investment?

Heather Fritzsche: First and foremost, don't focus on suppliers who can only offer part of the solution. Packaging is a global market, and companies like Spearhead have the bandwidth and production knowledge to go beyond your current capabilities and comfort zone to truly deliver innovation. We provide a full-service approach from design and manufacturing to shipment; we don't think you should settle for less. Finding the right partner to help you navigate a packaging decision makes a world of difference. Every project is custom and has to wholly represent brand values-and having access to expertise and to a turnkey manufacturing process like ours is a significant competitive advantage.

expertise in every aspect from glass to eco-design and luxury materials. Our spirits partners benefit tremendously from best practices with high consumer appeal.

# How do you help clients move from creative inspiration to packaging execution?

Every project is as personalized as the brand. We start by identifying key brand assets, then take into account category differentiation and growth plans to create the perfect pack. Product form and function need to be in sync, and you have to think ahead:

1. Develop your brand hierarchy before the liquids and packaging are completed to ensure the initial investment is as strategic and longterm as possible.

2. Consider the big picture: For example, what are all the primary and secondary packaging components you need, from distinct formats to display shippers to seasonal/valueadded elements (VAPS)?

3. Think about sustainability throughout your design process. This is the right decision on so many levels: It matters to your employees and partners, and, contrary to the prevailing view, sustainable packaging can deliver great value.

4. For existing brands, understand that increasing your equity doesn't have to mean major changes. Packaging redesign should appeal to current consumers, but it can drive new ones too!

# How does the concept of diversity impact your work?

We are a woman-owned business, and one of our founding principles is to use our platform to support other women and minority-owned ventures. We support several female spirits entrepreneurs with their packaging solutions and partner with other women-owned businesses, including Acuity Packaging and Logistics, for co-packing, assembly, and thermoforming; Greener Planet for luxury printing; and Gregory + Vine for communications. We speak out at conferences and through membership in organizations such as Women of the Vine & Spirits. Together we're opening up access to a women-owned supply chain.

# **Current Trends in Packaging**

Limited-edition, customengraved releases

Personalization in the form of producers' signatures and batch numbers

Retro designs

Different designs for different brand expressions

**Ceramic bottles** 

Cours Repail

Diageo named Spearhead a preferred partner for diversity in leadership thanks to projects like the iconic Crown Royal bag. PHOTO COURTESY OF DIAGEC

# NEW RELEASES

# Making Its

NOBLE VINES COLLECTION CRAFTS A NEW RED BLEND, THE MARQUIS RED

by Courtney Schiessl

op quiz: What are the three most popular wine categories in the U.S.? It isn't too difficult to guess the top two— Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon—but the third may surprise you. Rather than a varietal wine, it's the red blend, a style whose growth has been steadily increasing over the past five years.

That's why one of California's top producers of reliable and affordable varietal wines is mixing things up a bit itself: In August, Noble Vines Collection added a new red blend to its portfolio. Now available nationwide, the 2017 Marquis Red is sure to be the new go-to for red-blend lovers across the U.S.

# **Noble Origins**

A part of fourth-generation family-owned wine company Delicato Family Wines, Noble Vines Collection specializes in varietal wines for everyday drinking. The range is crafted not just from international varieties—Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay,



Pinot Noir, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Grigio—but from specific clones of these grapes, ones that proved themselves over time to stand out above the rest as they traveled from their French homes to sunny California plots.

"We take the best of these noble vine stocks and cultivate them in California to craft wines of substance and character," says Andrew Blok, Portfolio Director at Delicato Family Wines. Each Noble Vines wine is labeled with the number of the specific vine clone from which it is made.

The Marquis Red is also crafted from these prized grapes. Its name alludes to the nobility who historically owned many of the most esteemed vines in France. The current vintage contains Syrah, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon grown in California's warm inland valleys; they're blended together to create a harmonious, accessible red and then aged in both American and French oak to add complexity and richness. The result is smooth, full, and fruit forward, with plentiful notes of dark cherry, cinnamon, nutmeg, and vanilla.

# A Modern Approach

The wine's character reflects the philosophy behind the Noble Vines Collection, says Blok: "We're drawing on a noble French heritage of grape growing and blending while crafting wine that's attuned to the contemporary palate." That approach sounds like a smart bet. According to Nielsen data, red blends remain on an upward trajectory, commanding 11% of the market share in 2018. Consumers love them for their smooth textures and generous flavors, and winemakers love them for their flexibility; in Noble Vines Collection's case, it can take advantage of vineyards and varieties across California to craft a wine of consistent style and quality year after year.

At a suggested retail price of just \$15, the juicy, lush Marquis Red is the latest in a long line of noble wines that remain affordable for everyone.

# WOMEN IN WINE

# TIME TO Shine

# SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE & SPIRITS CELEBRATES WOMEN IN THE BEVERAGE INDUSTRY AT WINE & SHINE



For two days, women beverage professionals at the Wine & Shine conference attended enlightening seminars, networked, and raised their glasses to continued success.

or the second year in a row, Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits' Southern California division brought together more than 200 women from across the beverage industry for its two-day conference Wine & Shine, held at The Waterfront Beach Resort in Huntington Beach as part of its Women in Wine & Spirits initiative.

Since its inception in 2012, when a group of 12 women convened in Napa Valley on a networking trip, the business-resource group has continued to grow, adding new board members this year with the hopes of including many more people in the events they host. It aims to empower women in the industry to build confidence while serving as leaders, mentors, educators, and collaborators with different strengths and perspectives as they work toward a goal of personal advancement. In addition to the California-based Women in Wine group, Southern Glazer's is committed to the growth and development of women leaders across its entire organization; its 10 CHEERS to Women business-



SGWS board members, department directors, and supplier partners toast to another successful Wine & Shine. Pictured from left to right: Lisa Brooks, Dru Walker, Kimberly Bedley, Katie Tripp, Loulie Willis, Kristen Johnson, Meshal Kirmani, Sarah Diehm, Sharon Brawner, and Jaelee Eddie.



Attendees celebrated the Women in Wine & Spirits board members who led by example in modeling appropriate corporate attire from Trinityclothing.com and styling by OCChicboutique.com with the self-confidence that everybody deserves to feel.

resource groups are currently in place across the U.S., providing networking, professional development, mentoring, and community engagement opportunities to diverse groups of employees.

Held in August, this year's Wine & Shine event offered such activities as professional headshot sessions, a luncheon complete with a business-attire illustration, and seminars led by an impressive lineup of accomplished speakers, including Kami Craig, a three-time Olympic medalist with the USA Water Polo team. As the co-founder of Camps4Champs, a water polo camp for young women, she inspired attendees with her tales of adversity and triumph, demonstrating how much can be accomplished through hard work and dedication.

Another seminar leader, Jennifer Thomas, is a Los Angeles native who currently serves as Director of Global Accounts for Ste. Michelle Wine Estates. Like many women in the industry, she wore many hats in many roles before obtaining her prestigious position at America's fifth-largest wine supplier; she spoke to the group about using her experience to help others find a seat at the table.

Yet another presenter, McBride Sisters Collection co-founder Robin McBride, has a story made for Hollywood. She and her sibling Andréa both grew up with a passion for wine—while separated by an ocean. Robin grew up in California's Monterey wine region and Andréa was raised among the vines of Marlborough, New Zealand; each remained unaware of the other for nearly half their lives. Twenty years ago, they finally united as sisters and vintners, and they now showcase their wines in the Southern Glazer's portfolio.

Hilary Cline of Cline Cellars and Cline Sisters Imports is also making her mark on the industry—this time on a legendary Sonoma County brand. After training outside the family business in distribution and winery positions, she returned to it this year as Operations Manager, overseeing 750 acres of vineyard. Cline is also preparing to launch her own small-production label, gust, with her sister Megan.

The festivities concluded with a mixology lesson and cocktail contest among the attendees, whose winners donated \$1,000 to nonprofit organization Dress for Success on behalf of Southern Glazer's. With new members joining all the time, Women in Wine & Spirits continues to inspire and support women in our industry with energy, honesty, and a passion for giving back.

# Paulette Fischer: The Consummate Hospitality Professional

### by Rina Bussell

Growing up, Paulette Fischer thought her mom had the coolest job ever as the director of guest services at a resort in Maui, Hawaii. And why wouldn't she? She got to spend her summers poolside, making friends and signing gourmet meals to a room account. So in 1990, when another Hilton property, The Waterfront Beach Resort in Huntington Beach, California, opened its doors, Fischer applied to be a concierge just to get her foot in the door.

Although she soon realized that there was plenty of

elbow grease involved in the gig, she found the work rewarding, especially upon transitioning to the front desk. "Being the welcome experience for the quest made me so happy, as I was able to set the tone for their stay," she says. "I was able to develop personal connections . . . at check-in and become their 'go-to person' for the duration of their stay." In the case of frequent quests, Fischer often became an extension of the family, welcoming children and grandchildren and receiving updates on life events.

On the operations side, Fischer displayed tenacity as she moved into various



Paulette Fischer is the GM of The Waterfront Beach Resort in Huntington Beach, CA.

management roles. The hardest challenge for her was maintaining a professional separation from her colleagues along the way, but she found a strong mentor in John Gilbert, then the General Manager of The Waterfront. Already equipped with a solid work ethic and a natural affinity for building guest experiences, Gilbert helped her strengthen her leadership skills, showing her how to make hard decisions. In December 2013, Fischer was promoted to GM of the resort. "I never told myself that I wanted to be a general manager," she admits. "I just knew I enjoyed operations and being able to make a difference in the experience our guests and associates have while on property."

For Fischer, mentorship is about inclusion and teamwork: "I would never ask anyone to do anything that I wouldn't do myself," she says. Fischer already exudes a calm and warm demeanor, but if you want to add a twinkle to her eye, just inquire about her "four-legged daughter," an American Staffordshire terrier named Madison. Any spare time is spent playing with her and fashioning adorable seasonal costumes for her to wear. Not that there's much of it—after 29 years at the property, Fischer is inseparable from the overall hotel experience. Still, she says she wouldn't change a thing: "It's really been a rewarding and fulfilling career path, and I cherish the relationships I've made."

# A Price Worth Celebrating

# THE NEW **CRUSET BLANC DE BLANCS EXTRA DRY** OFFERS VERSATILITY AND VALUE

### by Nora Buck

Whith the holidays upon us, bubbly sales are expected to soar. Fortunately, there's an affordable way to celebrate the season: Just in time, the Alsace-based winemaking experts behind Les Grands Chais de France (aka GCF Group) have released the latest bottling of their Cruset Blanc de Blancs Extra Dry at an approachable price of just \$17.

Ideal for family gatherings, New Year's Eve toasts, Valentine's Day dinners, and beyond, this bright-gold expression boasts a light and refreshing style that's equally well suited to wedding season and warm-weather occasions. With its fruity and floral aromas and flavors of white stone fruit, it can deftly accompany shellfish and poultry or stand on its own as an apéritif.

As its name implies, Cruset Blanc de Blancs is made exclusively from white grapes via the Charmat method. Awards for its consistent quality include a silver medal at the 2016 Meilleurs Effervescents du Monde. Other Cruset sparkling wines available in the United States include the brand's rosé and brut rosé; they're imported by the Connecticut-based Votto Vines, a family-run business that focuses on fine wines from around the world.

"Cruset offers traditional premium sparkling wines made in France with a touch of modernity [and] prides itself on excellence and quality," noted Aurore Godin, Key Account Manager for Les Grands Chais de France. "Cruset Blanc de Blancs overdelivers on taste and value."

While the broader domestic wine market is showing signs of stagnation, the sparkling wine segment has continued its upward trajectory: It's experienced gains for the past 17 years, with sales up 56% from 2008 to 2018, according to a report from the Beverage Information and Insights Group. Imported wines showed the highest growth, reaching 10.2 million cases last year. Even better news for bubbles is the data showing that the massive millennial market is helping to drive the category's popularity and that these younger consumers are more likely to pour sparkling wine throughout the year, not just during the holidays.



# Cruset Blanc de Blancs Extra Dry Sparkling Wine, France (\$17) Aromas of buttered pears and

lemon chiffon lead off to a startlingly pretty sparkler. The soft bubbles quickly dissipate, spreading out flavors of brioche and lime zest before oregano and cantaloupe develop midway. It's complex and delicious, with a honeysuckle finish. **92** —*Meridith May* 

VOTTO VINES

# THINK OUTSIDE THE BOTTLE



# March 1-3, 2020



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# GOING GREEN

# **Five Decades** on the

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J. Lohr manages water resources very carefully, requiring less than a quarter of the water used by the average producer in the winemaking process.

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## WHY SUSTAINABILITY IS A CORE VALUE OF CALIFORNIA'S J. LOHR VINEYARDS & WINES

by Courtney Schiessl



eloved by enophiles of all stripes for its wide range of approachable wines, J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines encompasses various properties within the now-bustling growing region that is California's Central Coast. But nearly 50 years ago, when founder and proprietor Jerry Lohr found just the right spot in Monterey County in which to plant his first grapes, few had realized the potential for winemaking there.

This pioneering producer now has facilities in Greenfield, Paso Robles, and San Jose, with 1,400 acres of estate vineyard land in cool, windy Monterey County and 2,700 more in warm

Paso Robles. Yet the secret to its decades-long success goes far beyond being in the right place at the right time. "Sustainability, farming, and respect for people have always been core to our whole philosophy," Jerry says. As one of the first wineries to earn the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing designation, J. Lohr has shown a dedication to environmental, social, and economic principles that's setting the winery up for its next 50 years of success.

## **CONSCIENTIOUS TO THE CORE**

Sustainability isn't a new concept for J. Lohr: It's been a core tenet of the winery since Jerry, who grew up on a farm in South Dakota, first bought land in Monterey County in 1971 and launched the winery in 1974. CEO Steve Lohr helped his father plant these vineyards when he was 10 years old. "We didn't necessarily use the word 'sustainability' back then," he says, "but we were always looking to improve the way we prepare and take care of our soils as well as all [other] processes in the vineyards and winery."

Jerry's farming background paved the way for his sustainability efforts. In South Dakota, farmers didn't have herbicides or pesticides and instead used organic practices largely by default. Following their lead rather than that of the corporate agricultural industry, with its increasing reliance on chemicals, he preferred to prioritize healthy soil practices.

J. Lohr co-owner Lawrence Lohr, founder Jerry Lohr, CEO Steve Lohr, and President and COO Jeff Meier.



A portrait of ecological health: A bee rests on

A portrait of ecological health: A be a compost heap at the winery.

Sustainability advocates "take a holistic look at vineyard and winery practices," says Steve. "For example, when you have a lot of tractor passes in the vineyard, you're increasing greenhouse gas emissions. So we're looking at ways we can take care of our soil while also taking care of the air around us."

stems allows J. Lohr to irrigate less.

While J. Lohr's environmental sustainability efforts are numerous, water conservation has been particularly important to the company over the past 16 years. In 2003, the standard industry practice was to use 6–7 gallons of water to make just 1 gallon of wine. J. Lohr began tracking its water usage and found that it was already using water more efficiently than the average winery, measuring around 3.5 gallons of water for per gallon of wine. But the team thought they could do better. By using low-flow, high-pressure nozzles on hoses and timing how long it takes to properly clean barrels, they were able to cut their water use even further; today, J. Lohr averages about 1.5 gallons of

water for every gallon of wine.

Now, it's going one step further by tackling efficient water use in the vineyard. Working with a vineyard water-use specialist from the University of Bordeaux over the past decade, the company found that the vine itself-via the utilization of stem-water potential measurement—is the best soil moisture meter throughout the growing season, even in warmer regions like Paso Robles. "Depending on soil type and season, we can go up to three months in the summer without irrigating, with no detriment to yield or vine health," says Jeff Meier, President and COO of J. Lohr. "In fact, we've seen an improvement in wine quality." In July, the winery began working with some of its growers to decrease irrigation and promote efficient water use throughout the region.

## **TAKING THE LEAD**

The J. Lohr team believes that sustainability must also extend beyond their wineries, estate vineyards, and growers, and Jerry's decades of experience put him in the position to lead. "Sometimes the research gets done and gets published without getting used," he says. "We're going to try to engage more people at a practical level." Whether that's through financing universities that lack the funds to travel and share research with the wine community or holding leadership positions at industry organizations across the state, J. Lohr doesn't just want to enact change—it wants to drive change.

"Part of the ethos of our company is that anything worth doing is worth doing well," says Lawrence Lohr, coowner of J. Lohr, "and industry leadership and collaboration are paramount to what we all hold so dear here." Jerry is now pushing for legislative change when it comes to water-management practices; current California laws require that farmers continue to irrigate land even when it is fallow in order to preserve their water rights, which can be unnecessarily wasteful. "The things we do are not necessarily for short-term profits. They are for the longterm health of the soil, the of the soil, the and the people around us." -J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines CEO Steve Lohr

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Not only was J. Lohr one of the first 17 vineyards and wineries to earn the aforementioned Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CCSW) distinction, it aided in pioneering the certification itself. Jerry helped form the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA) in 2001 as an outgrowth of the Wine Institute and the California Association of Winegrape Growers. In 2008, Steve formed the J. Lohr Sustainability Team, which meets quarterly to analyze ways to improve practices in the company's vineyards and wineries; the same year, J. Lohr was part of the CSWA group that decided a sustainability certification could bring clarity and guidance to the industry.

"At the time, there was some greenwashing in the industry—people saying they were sustainable, but there was no way to prove it," says Steve, who has been on the board of CSWA for nine years and served as chairman in 2017 and 2018. "So the CSWA decided to create a certification program verified by a third-party auditor, using the code of sustainable winegrowing practices that is part of the organization." In January 2010, the first CCSW certifications were awarded.

### SOCIAL EQUITY

"Sustainability, in addition to looking at the environment, also focuses on social equity and economics," says Steve. It's important for employees to know that they are valued, the team agrees, so J. Lohr looks to properly compensate associates and has implemented an incentive-based profit-sharing plan. "We think of it as taking care of our employees," he adds, "and by taking care of our employees, we create an environment where people enjoy coming to work and have a major stake in our success."

Social equity is also about giving back to the community. After Jerry's wife, Carol, died of breast cancer in 2008, the winery began partnering with the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Today, J. Lohr makes a donation from every bottle sold of Carol's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon to help women around the country get mammograms who would not otherwise be able to afford them. J. Lohr also hires people with developmental disabilities to work on projects like bottle labeling. "It's a chance for them to feel good about doing work and getting paid for it," says Steve. "We're really happy to have them with us."

Whether their projects pertain to the environment, social equity, or economics, the J. Lohr team is thinking ahead not just months or years but decades. "Sustainability has a short-term effect as well as a long-term focus to it," says Steve. "The average life of a grapevine is 25 to 30 years—the same time frame as many of our sustainability practices. The things we do are not necessarily for short-term profits. They are for the longterm health of the soil, the water, the air, and the people around us."

## ISRAEL

Paul Yanon, Vice President of Wine at Colangelo & Partners, addresses guests at the Wines of Israel dinner in Chicago. Yanon has created an array of trade and consumer programs to raise awareness about Israeli wine in 2019 and 2020.

# Everything Ancient Is

#### by Christy Fuhrman

WINES OF ISRAEL MAKES A SPLASH AT A CHICAGO DINNER HOSTED BY THE TASTING PANEL rends come and go in the wine business as in any other; much as buyers both on- and off-premise may value the heritage of the Old World, they're always looking for the new "it" region. Admittedly rare is the country that can offer both history and discovery. Enter Israel.

Forget about those bottom-shelf bottles of kosher wine that many Americans have long assumed to be the extent of Israeli production. With origins that date back millennia, Israel's wine industry today is on an exciting path to international renown for its high-quality expressions of noble and native varieties alike. And with the stateside launch of a new promotional campaign, Wines of Israel, this ancient, overlooked, and definitely underestimated region is finally putting a new face forward.

On September 5, *The Tasting Panel* joined Wines of Israel in hosting a dinner at Bellemore during the Full Circle Beverage Conference in Chicago. The goal was to introduce esteemed wine professionals from across the country to this rising star of the Eastern Mediterranean. It was a truly eye-opening experience.



Trade members were in town to attend the Full Circle Beverage Conference organized by Evan Goldstein, MS (pictured), and his Full Circle Wine Solutions business partner, Limeng Stroh.



Seattle sommelier Jackson Rohrbaugh with Wines of Israel spokesperson Erik Segelbaum and Spec's Austin-based wine consultant, Evan Davis.

As one of the creative forces behind the campaign, Colangelo & Partners Vice President of Wine Paul Yanon began by familiarizing guests with Israel's terroir. The size of New Jersey, the country currently has five wine regions (though changes to the official map are afoot). Galilee includes Upper Galilee, Lower Galilee, and the Golan Heights: Shomron encompasses Mt. Carmel, Menashe Hills, and Shomron Hills; and Samson covers the Central Coastal Plain and the Judean Foothills, while the Judean Hills appellation encircles Jerusalem on the west, north, and south. Finally, Negev is a high-desert region to the south. Viticulture occurs at altitudes ranging from 100 meters in the Coastal Plains to 1,200 meters (nearly 4,000 feet) in the Golan Heights.

Broadly speaking, these zones enjoy a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and rainy winters, which is perfect for cultivating a variety of grapes (although drip irrigation is essential in the growing season, when the Hamsin wind blows warm air from the Arabian Desert). They're also blessed with a diversity of soils: volcanic to the north, chalk and limestone in the hills, and red sandy soils near the coast, similar to those of Coonawara in Australia. Within these soils, Israeli producers plant Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Carignan, and Petit Verdot as well as autochthonous red grapes Argaman, Baladi Asmar, and Bittuni; white varieties include Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Gewürztraminer, and Colombard along with Dabouki, Marawi, and Jandali.

The mix of international and local grapes described by Yanon prompted Evan Goldstein, MS, to remark, "For buyers and consumers alike, I see blends of indigenous Israeli varieties and international grapes as a bridge to get wine drinkers comfortably excited about the category while demonstrating uniqueness."

Joining Goldstein as our guests were Michelle Brinning of Cellar 65 in Vancouver, Washington; Evan Davis of Spec's Wines, Spirits & Finer Foods in Austin, Texas; T.J. Douglas of Boston's The Urban Grape; Jessica Norris of Front Burner Restaurants in Dallas, Texas; Jackson Rohrbaugh, formerly of Seattle's Canlis; Nancy Sabatini of Mainstreet Wines & Spirits in Countryside. Illinois: Tonya Pitts of One Market Restaurant and Cara Patricia Higgins of DECANTsf, both located in San Francisco; and Erik Segelbaum, founder of Washington, D.C. consulting firm SOMLYAY and a Wines of Israel spokesperson.

"What excites me as a sommelier about Israeli wines is how immensely diverse the production is, coupled with an incredible confluence of social, cultural and environmental consciousness exceeding that of regions far larger," Segelbaum said. "I cannot think of another wine-producing region that has so many different styles of wine in such a small area. One wouldn't expect cool-climate and high-altitude winemaking [here], but Israel excels at it in the north in regions such as Galillee and Golan Heights. In addition to all of this, Israeli winemakers tend to be lighthouses for environmental consciousness, minimal-resource usage, agricultural technology development, and more. This is born as much out of necessity as it is a purposeful cultural desire for minimal-impact agriculture and environmental friendliness. Truly Israel is a country that simultaneously looks to the past for inspiration and forward with innovation."

As the group dug into a multicourse meal accompanied by wines from Dalton, Recanati, Jezreel Valley, Teperberg, and Yatir, Segelbaum discussed how the pairings refuted lingering misconceptions of the region. "People should understand that the kosher aspect is merely a coincidence of Israeli wine," he explained. "As an analogy, there are some incredible wines that are Biodynamic. However, [their] being Biodynamic is not necessarily what makes them incredible; that word has nothing to do with quality one way or the other." So it is with the kosher designation: "Most people tend to associate it with lower quality, because their only understanding of it is correlated to sacramental wine. But that would be like saying all rosés are sweet because white Zinfandel is sweet."

Pitts concurred, duly noting the lesson that "these wines can stand on their own and pair well with a variety of dishes." In so doing, added Davis, they showed "a lot of character and a lot of sense of place—which is one of the first things you look for in any wine."

Given the positive reception, the guests were asked if they could see

placements for Israeli wines in their programs. "Absolutely," replied Douglas. "They will be a great addition to The Urban Grape's progressive shelving and to all of our Bostonbased clients; they will not be shoved in a dark corner labeled 'Kosher Wine,' collecting dust." Sabatini offered a philosophical assent. "I think that these wines will still be a handsell in the retail sector. but they can integrate nicely in the correct setting," she said, adding optimistically: "I think the future of the wines of Israel lies in education. Consumers are clamoring for information regarding all wines, and they're eager to discover new places to explore."



T.J. Douglas, owner of Boston's The Urban Grape, with Nancy Sabatini of Mainstreet Wines & Spirits in Countryside, IL.

## PUBLISHER MERIDITH MAY'S **Tasting Notes**



**Dalton Winery 2018** Pét-Nat, Galilee (\$22) Orange peel and butterscotch are the highlights of this sparkling blend of Sémillon and Muscat of Alexandria from the Galilee's high-elevation vineyards—only the second pét-nat, or méthode ancestrale, bubbly ever made in Israel. Soft beads melt on the palate and spread across the mouth. 92



**Recanati Winery 2017** Marawi, Judean Hills (\$35) Marawi, also known as Hamdani, is an indigenous white grape that Recanati has sourced from a Palestinian-owned vineyard in Bethlehem. (With the next vintage, the grapes will come from Recananti's own Biodynamic vineyard in Upper Galilee, the first of its kind in Israel.) It's all about exotic white flowers, including the perfume of tropical gardenia. Ripe mango and herbs come into play on a creamy mouthfeel, while citrus and stoniness add depth to its frisky acidity. 93



Jezreel Valley Winery 2016 Argaman, Shomron (\$60)

Argaman—which means "deep purple" in Hebrew—is a crossing of Souzão and Carignan created by Pinchas Spiegel-Roy at Volcani Research Center. This big, bold, single-vineyard red is aged 22 months in oak and shows off fresh blue- and red-berry notes. **93** 



**Teperberg Winery** 2014 Legacy, Cabernet Franc. Judean Hills (\$70) This 100% Cabernet Franc comes from a vineyard that sits 650 meters above sea level on the slopes of the Ephraim Hills. Aromas of herbs and red fruit perform a balancing act that's mirrored on the palate. Peppered violets meet earthy, tongue-coating notes of fennel, graphite, and the blackest fruit and plum skin, which work in tandem with great acidity. Round tannins complement a juicy, floral finish. 95



Yatir Winery 2014 Forest, Judean Hills (\$100) Dark chocolate and red cherry are perfume partners, with a hint of red pepper. Wildflowersmarigolds, roses, heather-accentuate and add texture to the aromatics, while bright fruit excites the palate. Orange peel zings on the finish, perpetuating the freshness in this concentrated blend of 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Petit Verdot, and 9% Tannat. 96

## UNCOVERING A WORLD OF SPIRITS IN THE U.S. OF A.

Don McLean might be interested to know that the good ol' boys drinking whiskey and rye have a lot of company these days. Given the remarkable growth of the American whiskey category—2018 sales were up 6.6% from 2017 to \$3.6 billion per the Distilled Spirits Council, led by premium and super-premium brands—it's clear that every walk of life from coast to coast has taken a shine to well-crafted domestic spirits.

Meanwhile, the good ol' boys (and girls) themselves have reason to broaden their palates as the U.S. distilling industry evolves apace, taking a page from Latin America and the Caribbean to make rum one moment and adopting the single malt styles of Scotland and Japan the next. Who knows—in 2020, this category report could well include homegrown cachaça and baijiu. But we've rounded up plenty of fine spirits for you to sample until then.

# Sunshine State Sipper:

AMERICAN

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZÍAMI RUM



Drawn to the world of craft beverages, ZÍAMI founder Victor Olshansky saw an opportunity in the domestic rum category, which, fortuitously, was already a hot commodity in his native Florida. Using the state's own sugarcane, Olshansky and his small team have released a trio of molasses-based rums: Platinum, Ruby Rush with natural grapefruit flavoring, and the limited-edition Barrel Proof, which he describes as "a fullbodied overproof rum designed for the mixology scene."

"[Caribbean rums] have their own traditional style, but we wanted to create something distinctive and contemporary," Olshansky says. "We're striving to produce rums that embody the spirit of Miami from A to Z, hence the name ZÍAMI."

ZÍAMI has partnered with two other Florida distilleries for initial production runs since its debut in January 2018, but the recent opening of its own distillery and tasting room in nearby Hollywood, Florida, will enable the brand to introduce more expressions inspired by the state's classic flavors. —*Kate Newton* 

**ZÍAMI Platinum Rum** This elegant 80-proof spirit rests in American oak casks. Aromas of Florida sunshine arise in the glass: orange peel, brioche, and a whiff of salty sea breeze. Vanilla and spiced white cherry illuminate the satin-textured and round palate. **94** —*Meridith May* 

ZÍAMI Ruby Rush Grapefruit Flavored Rum A 70-proof spirit with an authentic perfume of just-squeezed pink grapefruit and a hint of zest from the skin. Flavors of wild cherry prance in and sweeten the generous and silky mouthfeel. Nuances of white pepper and mocha add more depth. **94** —*M.M.* 

ZÍAMI Barrel Proof Florida Overproof Rum Aged in bourbon barrels, this expression clocks in at 130 proof. Noser beware: Scents of apricots bathed in molasses and charred orange peel may mesmerize. The hot and fiery palate smooths out to a sensational flavor profile of baked apple tart and chocolate croissant. **95**—*M.M.* 

ovember/december 2019

## The Dynamic Brand Co-Created by Bob Dylan Defines Itself as Whiskey's Great Unifier

## LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN

A trip to Ryan Perry's Chicago office will leave no doubts as to his passion for whiskey: It's packed with nearly 600 bottles of the stuff. The longtime connoisseur helped develop Heaven's Door Spirits in partnership with Bob Dylan, debuting the label in 2018 after years of painstaking preparation by Perry and his fellow cofounder, Marc Bushala.

The brand's youth surprises many newcomers to the Heaven's Door portfolio, which currently comprises an eight-year-old Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$50), a blend of three whiskeys dubbed the Double Barrel (\$50), the Straight Rye Whiskey Finished in Vosges Oak Barrels (\$80), and a limited-edition 10 Year Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$130). "With us still being pretty new, there have been a lot of misconceptions around the age of our whiskey," says Perry, who began procuring aged product from various distilling partners across North America nearly six years ago.

The hunt, in fact, began long before he and Bushala had any conception of what their joint venture would actually look like let alone the iconic co-creator it would attract. Their overarching goal, though, was clear from the onset: to find whiskeys that "checked all the boxes of quality and history," Perry says, while still managing to distinguish themselves from "what else was out there," including what those distilling partners were already offering as part of their own portfolios. "As I was sitting here procuring a collection of aged bar-

#### by Kate Newton

their whiskeys through the blending and barrel-finishing processes that Perry oversees as master blender. While the current lineup is an assemblage of whiskeys from Indiana, New York, Kentucky, and



The Heaven's Door portfolio currently features an eight-year-old Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey, a blend of three whiskeys called the Double Barrel, and the Straight Rye Whiskey Finished in Vosges Oak Barrels, as well as a limited-edition 10 Year Straight Bourbon Whiskey.

rels, my imagination was running wild as to what we could do with it all, but that totally evolved and changed several times over before we had anything in the bottle ready to sell," he adds.

Drawing from a myriad of aged barrel acquisitions, the Heaven's Door team sought early on to put their own proprietary touch on Tennessee—where Heaven's Door is set to open its own distillery in Nashville in 2020—"we have our portfolio of aged stock that we used to create the brand, and when those barrels are depleted, we'll release new and innovative spirits," Perry explains.

As of now, though, they're perfectly content touting what

PHOTO: AZUREE WIITALA



Ryan Perry co-created Heaven's Door with Marc Bushala and Bob Dylan.

their current products bring to the ever-expanding domestic whiskey category. Their Tennessee bourbon, for example, doesn't go through the same charcoal mellowing—known as the Lincoln County process that's employed in virtually all Tennessee whiskeys; rye grain also claims a much higher proportion of its mash bill, comprising more than 20% versus what's typically less than 10%. The Double Barrel also offers something "totally different," Perry says, as it aged in freshly dumped bourbon barrels for six and a half years before finishing in new American oak for another year, prompting it to develop "a very different flavor profile" redolent of citrus, spice, and caramel.

While the new distillery will enable Heaven's Door to experiment with variables like mash bills and barrel finishes fully on its own terms while also making its own whiskey, Perry says the brand intends to preserve its penchant for collaboration. The building itself will be a collaborative showcase for the works of local musicians, painters, sculptors, and artisans in the spirit of Dylan's own artistic side projects. which will also make an appearance. "Whiskey will be a big component of it, obviously, but Heaven's Door has taken pride in craftsmanship, artistry and

creativity in general . . . so that has allowed us to think more on a macro level what else we could bring" into the space, Perry says.

On the whiskey side, the brand team has a hunger for meaningful partnerships—a perspective Perry has readily represented while meeting and creating relationships with distillers that others might perceive strictly as competitors. "I learned there are so many great distilleries and tastemakers and people in the trade who are really talented, so I think we'd be doing ourselves a disservice if we didn't say we were interested to talk and work with those people," he says.

Launched in mid-November, the brand's limited-edition Bootleg series has ushered in the next round of these collaborations: information was limited as of press time, but among the line's releases is a highly allocated 26-year-old whiskey. Perry says Dylan was as involved in the year-and-a-halflong development process behind Bootleg as he was in the curation of the original lineup—a "rigorous process" that saw him tasting with Perry regularly and providing extensive feedback. "That was part of his value add, that he was overtly not going to be a shameless marketer for the brand [and] really [be] behind the scenes," he adds. "He's still actively touring so he's making a huge effort to be available, which is a testament to how big into the brand he is."

Dylan has never been one to play by the book—a fact that would hardly surprise any of his longtime fans. This passion project is no exception. Beholden to personal standards of taste and quality rather than category norms, he's enabled the Heaven's Door team to be, above all, nontraditional. "That's been a refreshing perspective, to have someone who's not living in the spirits industry every day, to be passionate and weigh in on the way we're doing things," Perry says.

#### Heaven's Door Straight Rye Whiskey Finished in Vosges Oak Barrels This

whiskey has a brilliant amber color with an orange core. The ambrosial nose expresses a nectar-like quality of summer peaches but also brings in headier notes of new leather and hazelnut. The purity on the palate is stunning at 92 proof, warming the mouth without bite or edge; instead, the lava flow of stone fruit, jasmine, and tobacco is lengthy and serene. **99**—*M.M.* 

#### Heaven's Door Double Barrel

Whiskey This 100-proof spirit endures a year-long finishing process in heavily charred American white oak bourbon barrels. Tropical fruit aromas are sweet, with ripe pineapple and mango emerging as a tangerine scent also blossoms out of the glass. It takes a second or two for the initial heat to pass on the palate, but once it does, a white-peppered fruit and floral sensation reveals itself. Spiced cedar notes take on dark caramel on the finish. **97**—*M.M.* 

#### Heaven's Door Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey This 90-proof

spirit, whose mash bill comprises 30% "small grains," rests for seven years in new American oak barrels. Golden oats, butterscotch, and apricot tart make up the heavenly nose as the palate is pampered with notes of walnut, toffee, and sweet tobacco. Stone fruit nectar woos you through the finish. **97**—*M.M.* 

## AMÉRICAN MADE SPIRITS



## Title Match

- ▶ 2 parts Title 21 Bourbon
- ▶ ½ part Cynar
- ½ part honey simple syrup
- ▶ 1⁄2 part fresh lemon juice
- 2 dashes Angostura bitters
  Shake all ingredients over ice. Strain into a coupe and garnish with an orange twist.

# **TITLE 21:**

## The All-American Appeal of Repeal

Countless domestic whiskey producers wrap themselves in the red, white, and blue, but Texas-proud Title 21 takes its American spirit—in every sense of the phrase—to the limit.

Produced by the Lone Star State's own Southwest Spirits, the brand encompasses three expressions—bourbon, rye, and, of course, American whiskey—all of which have won either double gold or platinum SIP Awards under the stewardship of Master Distiller John Fortman, who nevertheless refuses to rest on his laurels. He tinkers with each run of the bourbon, a blend of three to five high-rye base spirits aged up to two years, until he's achieved the crisp yet honeyed profile that is its hallmark; his rye also includes a small amount of bourbon aged up to nine years for a smooth yet snappy result designed to appeal to a wide range of consumers.

Clearly his methods work: Title 21 is now available in, fittingly enough, 21 states, making for a 50% increase in distribution over the year prior. Nearing the 5,000-case mark, the growth is robust enough that, according to Southwest Spirits' Vice President of Marketing Ronna Feifarek, the company is currently "working on a wheated bourbon that will be a full grain-to-glass Texas product."

But the brand's appeal goes beyond American tastes, extending to our values. Its creation was inspired by the 21st Amendment, which repealed Prohibition on December 5, 1933—and its updated packaging, which rolls out in the first quarter of 2020, speaks to that historical moment directly. As Feifarek explains, the product exists to "celebrate our great social freedoms, and we felt a key figure to represent the liberties we enjoy today is the court. Lady Liberty is outside every courthouse; she ties into our

patriotic messaging, allowing us to convey the scales [of justice] tipping in our favor." Of course, those national freedoms didn't come without a little rebellion; boasting a design whose label serves as Lady Liberty's blindfold of impartiality, the new look "is more disruptive to better resonate with our theme and encourage more brand interaction," says Feifarek.

Also encouraging interaction is a bottle necker that issues a quality guarantee via a full refund to any unsatisfied customer—not that the folks at Southwest Spirits expect anyone to take them up on the offer. But they make it anyway on the grounds that people who think freely should get to drink freely. Cheers to that. —*Ruth Tobias* 



## **MICHTER'S:** Restoring an Icon

In the 1970s, North American whiskey production topped 80 million 9-liter cases; by 2000, the number had dropped to 30 million. "It was a bad period in our industry for brown spirits," remarks Joseph J. Magliocco, President of Pennsylvannia-based brand Michter's; rather, the beginning of the new millennium marked a golden age for white spirits, with vodka leading the way.

Magliocco, however, was a fan of whiskey even then—including Michter's, which had gone bankrupt in 1989. So he and his brothers decided to resurrect it with the consulting help of one of Magliocco's mentors—Dick Newman, the former president of Wild Turkey.

Given the category's decline, it was a risk to relaunch a niche line of bourbon and rye. As Magliocco puts it, "This was a time when American age-statement whiskeys sold very little, rye was not popular, and high-end bourbon was not in fashion." But, he insists, "It seemed like a shame to let an iconic whiskey brand disappear, and we wanted to honor the Michter's legacy." His group filed for the abandoned trademark, paid a mere \$245 for the rights, and moved the brand to Kentucky.

To create the modern-day Michter's, Magliocco and Newman started their first phase of production by sourcing whiskey that was already made. The pair went on a tasting tour of Kentucky in search of, in Magliocco's words, "a style we really liked drinking ourselves and wanted to emulate." In the early 2000s, the second phase commenced as they began production in another company's distillery, employing the same mash bill recipe, yeast, and costly lowerproof barreling method they use today.

The third phase of production came in 2012 when the company finally opened its own distillery. "Our goal is to make the greatest American whiskey," says Magliocco, "and I am so lucky to have partners that say, 'Whatever it costs, go ahead and do it.' It's that quality that helped us grow." And grow it did: Michter's currently operates its own 87,000-square-foot distillery on 12.8 acres in the Shively suburb of Louisville as well as Michter's Fort Nelson Distillery in downtown Louisville. —*Meridith May* 



Joseph J. Magliocco, President of Michter's.



**Michter's US\*1 Small Batch Bourbon, 91.4 proof (\$50)** The nose exhibits a surge of caramel, tobacco, and sweet peach before the palate widens, releasing apricot nectar and exotic spice. A taste of char is tempered by vanilla on the pleasant finish. **95** —*M.M.* 

**Michter's US\*1 Single Barrel Straight Rye, 84.8 proof (\$50)** Dotted with black pepper and oatmeal on the nose, this rye reveals a mouth-warming palate compounded by flavors of butterscotch, caraway, new leather, and ripe peach. **94** —*M.M.* 

**Michter's US\*1 Unblended American Whiskey, 83.4 proof (\$50)** A complex array of scents—rancio, cedar, black cherry, and saddle leather—appear on the nose. On the bold palate, cigar leaf and mocha are gently balanced by dried apricot. There's some wet-stone minerality on the finish that works well with a touch of caramel. **94** —*M.M.* 

**Michter's US\*1 Original Sour Mash, 86 proof (\$50)** This limited release with an exquisite perfume of brown sugar, cinnamon, and apple pie is awash in flavors of peach, white pepper, and sassafras. With a heavenly texture, the satin glide of liquid stays on the tongue and finishes with a buttery sensation. **96** —*M*.*M*.



# A SINGULAR SUCCEPSS SINCEPSS

Balcones Distilling Is Blazing Trails for American Single Malt **By LORI MOFFATT** 

Balcones Distillery Manager Tommy Mote and Head Distiller Jared Himstedt.

fter a recent tour of Balcones Distilling in Waco, Texas, I stopped for lunch across the street at Milo, a casual chef-driven restaurant that makes generous use of Balcones' vast portfolio in its cocktail program. I struck up a conversation with a stranger-turned-friend at the barstool beside me, and soon we decided to share a pour of one of Balcones' limited-release single malt whiskies-a gorgeous expression called Hechiceros, which finishes in Port barrels and evokes apricots, bread pudding, and juicy cherries. Other Balcones Single Malts are finished in Sherry and rum casks, and some are made with barley that was smoked over peat in Scotland—but they all speak to the distilling team's zeal for leadership in this emerging category.

Still, none of these compelling elixirs would exist were it not for the success of Balcones' flagship product: Texas Single Malt. (Because Balcones pays homage to Scottish tradition, "whisky" is the brand's preferred spelling.) Shortly after its release, it prevailed over such iconic Scottish distilleries as Balvenie and The Macallan in London's 2012 Best in Glass competition—a remarkable upset that some have compared to 1976's legendary "Judgement of Paris," when a California Cabernet and Chardonnay beat European wines in a prestigious blind tasting.

Balcones has been positioning itself as a forerunner in the burgeoning American single malt whisky movement ever since, garnering (among still other honors) not only a double gold medal but the Best Craft Distiller Whiskey award at the 2018 San Francisco World Spirits Competition for its flagship product. What's more, Head Distiller Jared Himstedt is among the founders of the American Single Malt Whisky Commission, which serves to establish and promote the category. "A federal definition could allow us to import and label in countries where we currently can't," says Himstedt by way of explaining the commission's objectives. "But more importantly, if distillers work together, there is a lot more momentum in getting training for bar staff, better placement at the liquor store, [and] education for consumers. Right now, you see whiskey-focused bars that have Scotch, Irish whiskey, Japanese whisky, and all that. But they don't have an American single malt on the menu."



That's about to change.

Single malt whisky, whether it's distilled in Scotland, Japan, or Texas, must be made in a single distillery from a mash bill containing only malted barley. With one exception—a limited release containing barley grown in the Texas High Plains-Balcones uses an heirloom Scottish barley known as Golden Promise for all of its single malt expressions. As often as every two weeks, Balcones receives a delivery of 18 metric tons of it that's transferred via compressed air to a looming silo beside the distillery. "Golden Promise was the barley of choice for Scotch production for a long time, but in recent decades it has been passed over for grains with higher yields," says Distillery Manager Tommy Mote. It lends a luxurious silkiness to the Texas Single Malt expression, as well as stunning flavors of honey and orchard fruit; the long finish evokes wood and toasted malt with every sip.

But the use of Old World barley is not the only way that Balcones honors Scottish tradition in the heartland of Texas. "Malt whisky is equipment focused, so we have one production line for our American whisky tradition and another for our Scottish whisky tradition," says Mote. Whereas bourbon and rye are typically made with corn, rye, and wheat crushed in a hammer mill and fermented on grain in a cereal cooker, single malt whiskies use a roller mill (which yields fine, uniform grist) and a mash tun to separate the grain from liquid before fermentation. Balcones' burnished copper pot stills were made in Scotland by fourth-generation craftsmen at Forsyths; the team even refurbished a decommissioned 60-year-old mash tun from the 1897 Speyburn Distillery. "It just feels right to have a tie to the other side of the pond and also to decades of whisky making," observes Himstedt.

It's tradition you can literally taste. "The yeast, the grain, and the stills we use are extremely traditional [for] single malt, yet our barrel program has more in common with bourbon and rye production," Mote says. "Almost all Scotch is aged in exbourbon barrels, [whereas] we use virgin oak from America, France, and Hungary. For the consumer, there are a lot of familiar flavor profiles in an American single malt."

"As a maker, I feel like we've just begun," Himstedt says. "It's rare to be able to watch a new category of whisky develop. We're excited and curious to see where we can take it. There are a million directions we still want to explore, to learn what single malt looks like and what's possible to make in the United States, especially central Texas."

## JACK DANIEĽS

# Sweet (and Sour) VICTORY



Ian McLaughlin pours cocktails for judges to taste at the Gentleman Jack Whiskey Sour Classic.

## BARTENDERS FROM ACROSS THE U.S. FACE OFF AT THE GENTLEMAN JACK WHISKEY SOUR CLASSIC

## by Eric Marsh

ith egg white or without? That is the everpertinent question when it comes to making a Whiskey Sour—and the debate can get a little heated. But for the judges at the second annual Gentleman Jack Whiskey Sour Classic cocktail competition—held by sponsors Jack Daniel's, *Liquor.com*, and the Tales of the Cocktail Foundation in Nashville, Tennessee, in August—the question went a bit deeper: With vanilla-scented egg white or not? With mesquitesmoked orgeat or not? How about *aquafaba*? To the latter inquiry, the answer from the judges was a resounding "yes."

The Gentleman and a Scholar cocktail from this year's champion, Ian McLaughlin, featured both aquafaba and a strawberry-beer syrup that McLaughlin and his team make at gastro-cocktail bar Botanist



The three judges from left to right: Eric "ET" Tecosky, Dale DeGroff aka "King Cocktail," and Shel Bourdon.



Thomas Upshaw's variation on a Whiskey Sour included mesquite-smoked orgeat.

in Portland, Oregon, as part of their zero-waste initiative. (Aquafaba, or "aqua bean," is a vegan egg-white substitute that consists of the water left over after soaking legumes and is used as an emulsifier.) Even though he had already won the Pacific Northwest regional with the recipe, which also includes lemon and Angostura bitters, McLaughlin said that he stayed at Botanist all night prior to the final competition, "making the drink over and over, practicing and talking to coworkers as though they were judges" until his motions were as fluid as the drink. He then went home, packed a bag, and headed to the airport.

Jack Daniel's U.S. Ambassador Eric "ET" Tecosky explained that the impetus for the competition was "to see how bartenders across the country could take a simple drink and put their own unique stamp on it using Gentleman Jack." Tecosky also served as one of the judges, along with Shel Bourdon, the National Director of Bars for Thompson and Joie de Vivre Hotels, and legendary cocktail expert and author Dale DeGroff.

Along with McLaughlin, six other regional winners were flown to Nashville to compete in the final. Thomas Upshaw of The Jones Assembly in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, made waves with his Rock Da Boat cocktail, an adventurous take on the Whiskey Sour that included mesquitesmoked orgeat and banana liqueur. Regarding the inspiration behind his creation, Upshaw said that he'd "just gotten a smoking gun for personal use, and orgeat is one of [his] favorite cocktail ingredients."

He soon began experimenting with a recipe that involved smoked-almond syrup, ultimately incorporating fresh pineapple juice as well for its frothy texture once shaken.

As the bartenders prepared the drinks, the judges pressed them as to why each ingredient was used. The diversity was vast: There was an herbaceous sour made with Pasubio Vino Amaro; a Latin-influenced sour sweetened with cinnamonpiloncillo syrup; and a Mediterranean-inspired sour shaken with Greek yogurt (not to mention a few variations on "acid-adjusted" citrus).

Of course, the one ingredient that all of the drinks had in



Jack Daniel's Master Distiller Jeff Arnett leads a comprehensive tasting for contestants and judges at the Jack Daniel's Distillery in Lynchburg, TN.

common was whiskey—specifically, Jack Daniel's Gentleman Jack. Prior to the competition, the contestants embarked on a two-day excursion to see how the spirit is made from log to bottle, touring the Jack Daniel's stave mill, cooperage, and distillery, where they attended a private tasting with Master Distiller Jeff Arnett.

"The stave mill left the biggest impression on me," said McLaughlin. "Not only do they bring in their own logs, but it's a zero-landfill facility, which means nothing is thrown away" in the first stage of barrel making; instead,

> he observed, "All leftover debris is sold to a paper mill or to a company that makes grilling pellets." Upshaw, meanwhile, said he "was most excited to see the charcoal milling process" that takes place at the distillery. "They literally take dehydrated [sugar maple] wood and burn the hell out of it," he added with a laugh. "The [resulting] charcoal is then tightly packed into a 10-foot-tall wall that distillers slowly drip the raw spirit through."

All Jack Daniel's products are made from the same types of water, grain, and yeast and go through an identical filtration process before they're barrel aged—except for Gentleman Jack, which undergoes a second charcoal filtration after aging. This "double-mellowing" is done to soften the oak notes that develop in the barrel. "Gentleman Jack is meant to be approachable and enjoyed by a variety of whiskey drinkers," said Tecosky, adding that its distinctive production method makes it

"a great whiskey for [both] classic and modern takes on the sour." (It's also why the brand is a fitting sponsor for a national sour competition.)

Along with prestige, McLaughlin also won a trip to Bar Convent in Berlin, a city he said he's excited to visit given that it's "considered by some to be the next mecca in cocktailing." He remained humble, crediting the Botanist crew for providing inspiration and helping him make some of the ingredients in his now-decorated cocktail. But his mixture of talent, creativity, and passion for making a good drink deserves equal praise.



McLaughlin took top honors with his Gentleman Jack-based Gentleman and a Scholar cocktail.

## GIVING BACK

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION DREAM BIG DARLING LAUNCHES ITS MENTORSHIP RETREAT FOR WOMEN IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

Teamwork Makes the

HEOU

by Michelle Ball



Pictured above, the Dream Big Darling mentorship retreat's inaugural group of attendees are lovingly nicknamed Tribe One. Below, an early-morning walking meditation led participants through Ancient Peaks Winery's Margarita Vineyard. Generative only as capable as what you truly believe," insisted Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, founder and President of Dream Big Darling, during her opening remarks at the Paso Robles-based nonprofit's inaugural retreat to promote women in the wine and spirits profession. Her team raised over \$100,000 at a kick-off dinner last year to host the threeday mentorship event in September at the Oyster Ridge Barn in the heart of Ancient Peaks Winery's Margarita Vineyard. Attendees participated in vibrant panel discussions and embarked on networking excursions with industry leaders while glamping on the property for two nights; scholarships, meanwhile, were awarded to more than 30 women who've shown dedication to their careers as well as their personal growth.

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The concept behind Dream Big Darling is to equip the next generation of women business leaders with the tools, insight, and courage to cultivate professional success. Initially launched in 2014 as an internship program at Ancient Peaks, it aimed to enable young students to work in various aspects of a multifaceted business. Wittstrom-Higgins—who serves as the winery's VP of Operations—quickly realized the impact that such a program could have on a broad scale, especially for women in a male-dominated industry, and pushed to expand it; as she put it during the retreat, "Couldn't we change the world if we brought together the brightest minds—from all over the country, from different segments of the business—and created this culture of giving back and learning from one another?"



Attendees chose their own outdoor adventures, including horseback riding and kayaking.



Panels featured industry leaders who shared their life stories and work experiences.

Wittstrom-Higgins took the organization's name from her grandmother, a powerful figure in her life who always called her "darling" and imparted on her that the biggest gift we can give one another is kindness. In addition, Wittstrom-Higgins shared, "Someone once told me that the world doesn't know if your idea is big or if it's little. So why not dream big?"

One powerful takeaway from the event was to treat failure as feedback. Failure is not an excuse to kick yourself when you're already down: Because formal education doesn't always impart the wisdom that experience provides, painful lessons are powerful tools for advancement and change. Another topic explored was the old adage that "mindset is everything," which rings true in a world of unpredictability: All you can really control is your attitude, your work ethic, and how you treat the people around you.

The value of the retreat went far beyond the outdoor activities and convivial feasts with delicious wines. The spirit of all those who attended—and who were brave enough to share their personal stories, listen intently, offer guidance, and support one another—made it unforgettable. After less than 72 hours, this group of strangers left as friends with a new motto pulsing in their hearts: Dream big, darling.

## A Dream Big Darling Directory

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Visit dreambigdarling.org to learn more about upcoming events and how to apply for scholarships.

# tasting PANEL

PART II

# THE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019 **DESCRIPTION**

Skrewball creators Steve Yeng and Brittany Merrill Yeng, pictured with daughter Adele and another on the way, are expanding their family as they grow their brand. SKREWBAL

<section-header>



The Man Behind the Brands



## LETTER FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

## Respect Is a Two-Way Street

PHOTO: JENNIFER OLSON PHOTOGRAPHY



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

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Recently, I received a press release via email that made me wonder if I'd somehow gone into winter hibernation only to reawaken on April Fool's Day. Beneath the subject line "#respectwine: a worldwide campaign to prohibit the use of ice in wine" unfolded a missive about French chef-restaurateur Alexandre Callet's initiative to promote "respectful consumption" of the fruit of the vine. Despite such juicy subheads as "The fight against 'ketchupization'" and "Ice cubes, more dangerous to French wine than Trump" (an allusion to the administration's newly implemented tariffs), however, there was no real information about what the campaign entailed beyond the hashtag.

Nevertheless amused, I did some cursory online research. The public-relations agency behind the release appeared to be legit though its first attempt to spread the word on Twitter wasn't exactly gaining much traction, having garnered just two retweets in five days. Callet himself, meanwhile, appeared to be something of a character. Googling him yielded a slew of articles from 2016, when the chef made international waves for refusing to serve bankers after being rejected for a loan. The headline on Eater: "French Restaurant Bans Finance Bros, Welcomes Dogs."

Well, provocateurs gonna provoke. But the question the #respectwine campaign perhaps inadvertently raises about the relationship between wine education and wine service is always worth exploring. As Managing Editor of *The SOMM Journal*, my colleague Jessie Birschbach had a response to the email colored by her years in the hospitality industry, personally agreeing with Callet's premise while professionally disagreeing with his methods. "If someone wants to spend \$500 on a bottle and then add Coke and ice, it's their prerogative," she told me. "Who am I to judge—especially when I'm the sommelier who gets to try a sip first to make sure it's not corked before the guest soils it with soda?" Yes, she was alluding in this instance to a real-life experience with a customer at a restaurant that shall remain nameless; another regular, she recalled, "would order 9 ounces of wagyu well done" with a side of—you guessed it—ketchup. "It was a blatant waste of highcaliber beef, but he tipped well!"

Presumably, he tipped well because he enjoyed his meal and appreciated the service he received—admittedly operating according to a "have-it-your-way" U.S. model that's antithetical to that of "your-wayis-quelle-stupide" France. I'm being glib here, but the point remains: Surely graciousness is a better starting point for education than condescension? Would the Mister Cab-and-Cokes of the world be more open to "respect[ing] the work of viticulturists" when the message is coming from a sommelier who plainly disrespects them in turn or when it comes from one who gives their intelligence and potential sense of taste the benefit of the doubt by engaging them politely? #Respectwine all you want—but if you don't #respectwinedrinkers too, your most beautiful bottle is bound to leave a sour taste in their mouths.



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## SONOMA COUNTY

# Gold Mettle

## FAMED CONSULTANT NICK GOLDSCHMIDT BUILDS HIS OWN LEGACY AT **GOLDSCHMIDT VINEYARDS**



PHOTO COURTESY OF GOLDSCHMIDT VINEYARDS

by Anthony Dias Blue

Nick Goldschmidt founded

his wife. Yolvn.

Goldschmidt Vineyards with

ne of the world's most soughtafter winemaking consultants, Nick Goldschmidt has made wine in his home country of New Zealand as well as in Australia, Canada, Spain, Mexico, Portugal, Argentina, Chile, and California. Thirty years ago, he and his wife, Yolyn, moved to Sonoma, where they established Goldschmidt Vineyards and managed to raise five children as well. Among all the wines for which he's responsible, Goldschmidt is most proud of those that bear his and his daughters' names. Here are my notes from a recent tasting with him.

**Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$17)** Fresh and juicy with notes of melon and toast; complex and charming—an amazing value. **91** 

Chelsea Goldschmidt 2017 Merlot, Salmon's Leap Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley (\$19) Clean plum nose; silky and lush, juicy and smooth with bright plum, cherry, spice, and toast; long and balanced. **91** 

Chelsea Goldschmidt 2017 Guidestone Rise Merlot, Alexander Valley (\$19) Dark ruby color; plum and earth nose. Smooth, tangy, and softly tannic with plum and toast flavors; complex with a lengthy finish. 92



Boulder Bank 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, Fitzroy Vineyard, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$18) Tangy passion fruit and citrus. Pure, bright, and racy; long and charming. 92

Forefathers 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, Wax Eye Vineyard, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$20) Fresh with bright citrus and herbs; complex, rich, and bracing. 91

Goldschmidt 2018 Singing Tree

Katherine Goldschmidt 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Stonemason Hill, Alexander Valley (\$21) Showing rich berries and plum, it's smooth and spicy, with depth and complexity. A great value. **92** 

Hilary Goldschmidt 2016 Charming Creek Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$45) Dark ruby color; deep and rich with plum, spice, and chocolate; juicy, lush, and long. **93**  Goldschmidt Vineyard 2016 Rendition Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$35) Dense nose; intense and concentrated with deep plum and spice; toasty and balanced with an enduring finish. 93

Forefathers 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Lone Tree Vineyard, Alexander Valley (\$45) Deep crimson hue with a rich plum nose; tangy with notes of juicy plum, cherry, and hints of licorice; long and lovely. 94

Goldschmidt Vineyard 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Game Ranch Vineyard, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$85) Aromatic nose of herbs and toast; fresh palate with a velvety texture and flavors of deep plum, cherry, and soft herbs; complex and exquisite. 95

Goldschmidt Vineyard 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Yoeman Vineyard, Alexander Valley (\$75) Dark ruby color; smooth, lush, and rich with plum, black cherry, and spice; intense and long. **94** 

Goldschmidt Vineyard 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Plus, Yoeman Vineyard, Alexander Valley (\$120) Luscious berry and plum nose; creamy texture and juicy notes of boysenberry; toasty, dense, and long, with power and finesse. **96** 

Goldschmidt Vineyard 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon Plus, Game Ranch, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$150) Clean earth, spice, and toasty aromas. Smooth and lush with plum, pomegranate, vanilla, chocolate, and sweet oak; a stellar expression with length and balance. **98** 

Goldschmidt Vineyard 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Ultimatum, Double Rock, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$500) Deep, dark ruby color; lush plum nose. Concentrated and complex palate of blackberry, cherry, and spice with toasty and sweet oak; amazing and very long. 97

## **DISCOVER EUROPEAN QUALITY WINES:** GARNACHA Grenache **IS ALWAYS THE PERFECT PAIRING**

In European culture, wine isn't just for sipping—it's for sharing. No other wine begs to be shared among friends and family at the dinner table as European Garnacha (a.k.a. Grenache), a grape that commands attention for its wide range of food-friendly

With red, white, and grey variants, Garnacha is a remarkably diverse grape. Some of the the best European Garnacha are included under the PDO and PGI quality schemes of the EU, that includes a remarkable variety of fine wines that range from light to full, dry to sweet, still to sparkling, white, red, or rosé. An expressive grape, Grenache's aromas, flavors, and textures are wide - ranging, particularly when the grape is grown in the schist, limestone, and clay soils of its European birthplace in northeastern Spain and France's Roussillon. The pairing possibilities are endless.

The moderate tannins of bold, red Garnacha wines, Europe's most prominent style, classically match with rich dishes like braised meats and hearty stews, while lighter reds work well with summer barbecue or roasted chicken. Sparkling Grenache is an intriguing and delicious option to welcome guests for a dinner party, pairing well with light bites and appetizers. Dry rosés and light whites are also excellent dinner party wines, transitioning from easy-drinking, pre-meal aperitifs to versatile matches for fresh salads, white fish, or even spicy tacos. Try structured Garnacha whites or the oxidative style of dry rancio with umami - laden foods like morel mushrooms or salty cheeses.

Grenache's fortified wines can make for some of the most exciting food pairings, working with sweet and savory dishes alike. Sweet white Garnacha cools down the palate from spicy international cuisines like Szechuan or Thai, while fortified sweet red Grenache is a unique pairing for rich, dark chocolate desserts.

## No matter what's on the table, European Garnacha is the wine to pair with it — from start to finish.



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WINE SPEAK 2020: The Interview

PREMIER TRADE SUMMIT OF MASTER SOMMELIERS & WINEMAKERS RETURNS TO PASO ROBLES







hen Chuck Furuya and Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins initially developed Wine Speak Paso Robles, they envisioned it as a one-time gathering of some of best and brightest minds in the New World wine industry. Now, more than two years later, Wine Speak is set to return for a third edition on January 14-16, 2020—effectively cementing the event's reputation as an annual trade experience that is not to be missed.

"Wine Speak has grown beyond our wildest imagination," says Wittstrom-Higgins, who is VP of operations at Ancient Peaks Winery and founder of Dream Big Darling. Adds Furuya, a renowned master sommelier and partner at Hawaii's DK Restaurants, "After the first Wine Speak, our guests kept asking when the next one was going to be. We never planned on it being an annual event, but





that's what people wanted. We decided to step up and honor that interest."

Now, with the third edition coming early in the new year, we caught up with Furuya and Wittstrom-Higgins to learn more about the origins of the event—and more about what's to come at Wine Speak 2020:

## What would a successful event mean to you?

AWH: Success with Wine Speak is really getting the next generation of professionals in our industry a chance to learn, grow and share in ways that might not otherwise be possible. We hope guests leave inspired by the wines they have tasted and people they have met, all in the name of moving our industry ahead.

*CF:* By sharing valuable thoughts and wisdom we hope to inspire a culture of camaraderie, community and collaboration. By simulating learning and wonder with varietals, people and regions within our industry, I know we can change the future of the industry. To me success is when I see young people inspired to grow and challenge themselves.

### How do you sum up the vision behind Wine Speak?

*AWH:* The vision has been the same since day one: To create a special experience for wine industry

## JANUARY 14-16TH WINESPEAKPASO.COM

professionals to grow and learn together. Wine Speak gets bigger and better each year, but everything stems from that core value. It's not just about education, but also fellowship, friendship and working together to move our industry forward.

*CF:* I think that's what makes Wine Speak unique. It's not just for winemakers or sommeliers or hospitality professionals. It's for all of us. It's an intimate event with a big tent because we're all in this industry together. If we grow together, we succeed together.

## It seems like the scope of Wine Speak is growing beyond the New World?

*CF*: Yes, Wine Speak is still New World-centric, but we are now also segueing into more discussions about terroir on a global scale. So for 2020, we have seasoned the list of speakers with experts from places such Argentina, Spain and France, just to add further dimension to the sharing and discussion.

## What else can people expect at Wine Speak 2020?

AWH: This is our most dynamic cast of speakers and panelists to date. The public grand tasting has been expanded to feature "Wines of The World"—there are going to be some amazing wines there and at the other experiences, such as the BYOB Dinner. We're taking everything to the next level for 2020.

"Wine Speak is not just for winemakers or sommeliers or hospitality professionals. It's for all of us."

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www.WineSpeakPaso.com

WINE SPEAK PASO ROBLES IS A PREMIER INDUSTRY SUMMIT THAT BRINGS SOMMELIERS, WINE INDUSTRY LEADERS AND HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONALS TOGETHER FOR AN INTIMATE EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY.

## Highlights of Wine Speak 2020 include:

## **JANUARY 14**

**"Sense of Place"** with Tegan Passalacqua (Turley Wine Cellars, Paso Robles) & Laura Catena (Bodega Catena Zapata, Argentina)

"Paso Robles Overview" with Jason Haas (Tablas Creek), Jordan Fiorentini (Epoch), Steve Peck (J. Lohr) and Mike Sinor (Ancient Peaks), moderated by Amanda Wittstrom Higgins (co-founder of Wine Speak / VP of Ancient Peaks)

## "Wines of The World"

At this public grand tasting, local chefs will present wine-friendly small plates, and an international cast of winemakers will showcase some of their finest reserve and library bottlings.

## **JANUARY 15**

"Dream Big, Darling—Wine from a Different Perspective" with Master Sommelier Madeline Triffon, moderated by Amanda Wittstrom Higgins (co-founder of Wine Speak / VP of Ancient Peaks / President and Founder of Dream Big Darling)

**\*Inside/Outside—Crazy Red Blends**\* with Stephan Asseo (L'Aventure, Paso Robles) and Emanuel Kemiji, Master Sommelier (Clos Pissarra, Priorat, Spain)

## "BYOB Dinner"

BYOB Dinner is an opportunity to gather with wine and friends from near and far. Attendees bring bottles of their favorite wines to share—and everyone is always amazed at what they get to taste.

DREAM BIG

A portion of the proceeds benefit Dream Big Darling a nonprofit 501C3 and all of the community charitites it serves. The Dream Big Darling nonprofit will be responsible in collecting all donations and tickets sales.

## COVER STORY

MORE THAN A NUTTY IDEA, SKREWBALL PEANUT BUTTER WHISKEY IS THE MOST INNOVATIVE BRAND OF THE YEAR

atrue

Steve Yeng co-founded Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey with his wife, CEO Brittany Merrill Yeng.

## **STORY BY RINA BUSSELL** Photos by James Tran

t's been a surreal year for Brittany and Steve Yeng. Since the release of Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey in July 2018, they've received exposure to a degree that's virtually unheard of for an upstart brand like theirs: their fast-track success is as unprecedented as, well, peanut butter whiskey itself. No wonder several major suppliers are now looking to enter the category they've single-handedly createdbut it's going to be tough for any competitor to sway the loyal following the Yengs have garnered along the way.





## AS THIS DYNAMIC DUO ENTERS INTO TALKS FOR INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION, IT APPEARS THAT THEIR FUTURE WILL ONLY GET

## COVER STORY

At the 2019 SIP Awards International Spirits Competition, Skrewball took home both the Best in Class and the Innovation awards. Accolades were never the Yengs' primary goal, however: Prioritizing family was. As the parents of a daughter, Adele (they now have another child on the way), they founded the brand as a way to stay close and build something together. Both had already enjoyed professional success on their own, with Brittany working in pharmaceutical patent litigation after earning a master's degree in chemistry and a law degree. Steve, meanwhile, had opened three bustling restaurants in the Ocean Beach community of San Diego, California. But as they spent increasingly long periods away from one another—sometimes working 23-hour days—they realized that in striving so hard to further their careers, they were disregarding their future as a couple. So in 2017, they began their joint project, working on recipes for a product derived from a





Newport Farms Market & Liquor in Ocean Beach, San Diego, is one of many local accounts to embrace Skrewball from the get-go.

popular peanut butter–and–whiskey cocktail that Steve had long before concocted for his bar program.

The significance of peanut butter in Steve's life went all the way back to his turbulent childhood as a Cambodian refugee paralyzed by polio. After six years in a refugee camp, his family was finally able to move to America. When they landed in Ocean Beach, one of their neighbors took note at how malnourished and small the children were; the good Samaritan did not have much himself, but he would give them baskets of bread, apples, and peanut butter and jelly to sustain them. For Steve, it was a revelation: Peanut butter would become a lifelong love, and as he sought to channel that affection for the flavor into their new venture, he and Brittany each brought their own skills to the table. "I thought that I could just put creamy peanut butter into a bottle of whiskey and be done!" Steve confides. "I don't know where I would be without Brittany."

As Brittany herself explains it, "My strength as an attorney was always my creativity, but it's not a field in which you fully get to embrace that side of yourself, so [the project] was an exciting outlet for me." In addition to assisting in the development of a shelfstable product, it was she who took the lead in conceiving Skrewball's identity from scratch. She came up with the name, the black-sheep logo, and the label design of a black sheep leading a herd of white sheep by way of building a brand that was unpretentious and a little cheeky—one that encouraged the dreamers, misfits, and, yes, the "skrewballs" in all of us to embrace their eccentricities.

The couple could relate to that concept, given that they had to front their own money to get Skrewball off the ground. Potential investors were dubious about the prospects for such an outlandishly flavored whiskey, but their skepticism only made Steve and Brittany (not least as a woman in a male-dominated industry) more determined. Despite the financial risk, they refused to cut corners in realizing their vision: "We put quality and taste first [by] using a high-proof American grain whiskey with flavors made from real peanuts," says Brittany. Joined by her mom and a few of Steve's former bartenders, they formed a team that they lovingly refer to now as "the Skrew Krew."

The latter proved a challenge too, as the whiskey initially required face-toface promotion. Steve's cocktail had garnered such an ardent following around San Diego that when Krew members visited prospective accounts without the Yengs, they would get turned away: "People thought that Skrewball was an imitation of my signature cocktail and refused to get behind it," Steve recalls.

Once they built recognition, however, the brand took off. Just by going door to door, the Skrew Krew started moving 2,000 cases a month, attracting a level of attention that eventually reached large distributor Young's Market. Although they presented their brand to Infinium Spirits, a familyowned spirits supplier under Young's Holdings, just prior to OND-the acronym for the last months of the year, when most new product pick-up stops—Young's Holdings Chairman Vern Underwood was floored by the quality and flavor of their product and approved it on the spot.

Local press soon snowballed to



national media coverage, and attention from the *TODAY* show, Apple News, *Huffington Post*, and *Fortune* helped spread the Skrewball fire. Following a national-representation agreement with Infinium Spirits just six months ago, the whiskey entered new markets one by one in quick succession and is now available in 47 states. It also began racking up the accolades in national competitions, earning double gold medals and Best in Class nods at the New York World Wine and Spirits Competition in both 2018 and 2019.

Steve remains modest: "We aren't trying to create something too complex," he says while stressing the fun versatility of Skrewball. (Take his spicy passion fruit Margarita, which the peanut butter whiskey gives a creamy texture to, softening the acidic finish.) But he's not sweating the competition either. "We created this category," he points out, adding that he has no intention of being "grouped in with bad whiskey." The Yengs truly believe that they owe their success to their ability to connect with consumers in a way that other brands haven't-with humility, hospitality, and really, really hard work. And as this dynamic duo enters into talks for international distribution, it appears that their future will only get brighter. 🔳

## **READY TO DRINK**

# Crushing It

## TERRY WHEATLEY MAKES THE CASE FOR VINTAGE WINE ESTATES' MOST RECENT ENDEAVOR, **GAZE** WINE COCKTAILS

by Jessie Birschbach

n her decades of experience in the beverage industry, Vintage Wine Estates President Terry Wheatley has sailed upon the ebbs and flows of countless trends. For instance, Wheatley's start at E. & J. Gallo coincided with the explosive popularity of wine coolers in the 1980s—a craze spurred in part by Gallo brand Bartles & Jaymes and its humorously clever television ads.

Today, as President of Vintage Wine Estates, Wheatley has come full circle by adding the GAZE wine-cocktail brand to the company's portfolio of quality-driven wineries earlier this year. Made with wine from top growing regions and natural ingredients, GAZE is gluten-free and clocks in at 70–80 calories per 5-ounce serving, depending on the expression. It's also low in alcohol at 4.5% ABV, but most importantly, GAZE is abundant in flavor. (See tasting notes on page 13b.) We sat down with Wheatley to explore the reasons behind Vintage Wine Estates' entrance into the wine-cocktail category.

> Terry Wheatley is President of Vintage Wine Estates.



GAZE is in a category all its own. It's not a malt beverage. It's a blend of premium wine with popular ingredients such as coconut water and blueberrypomegranate juice." —Terry Wheatley

**Q** The Tasting Panel: What was the impetus for GAZE? Terry Wheatley: Canned wine, while still a small segment of the wine industry, is one of the faster-growing categories, thanks to the millennial drinker. Although bottled wines grab nearly 90% of wine sales, they are growing much more slowly. Innovation is a key focus at Vintage Wine Estates, and we wanted to get into the category with a product that was different from simply wine in a can.

## **Q** With your great experience, you've seen many trends come and go. Why do you think we're seeing this surge in the popularity of canned wine cocktails?

You could say I was there at the dawn of the wine cooler trend. I was working at Gallo at the time Bartles & Jaymes was launched, and [Vintage Wine Estates CEO] Pat Roney worked on California wine coolers at Seagram's. These products were incredibly successful in large part due to brilliant marketing, and, remember, they were targeted to the millennials of the day. Of course, these products were like fashion in the sense that a certain consumer wants the latest, then trends change, and something new becomes the next hottest thing.

Today, the trends are alternative packaging, lower alcohol, lower calorie, [and] unique flavor profiles. The lines are blurring between categories—it's a grab-and-go purchase whether it's a wine cocktail, infused waters, or other healthconscious beverages like kombucha, teas, and green juices.

And you can't underestimate the importance of social media in driving this. Back in the day, it was television advertising. Today, it's social networks. It's how the word spreads for these new innovative products and how they catch on.

## Q Is GAZE meant to compete with other low-calorie canned cocktails and malt beverages? If so, how is GAZE different?

GAZE is in a category all its own. It's not a malt beverage. It's a blend of premium wine with popular ingredients such as coconut water and blueberry-pomegranate juice. It's low alcohol, lower calorie, and lightly effervescent. We see people enjoying it after yoga or a hike, poolside, tailgating, or whenever you might want a refreshing wine cocktail maybe followed by a glass or two of wine at dinner. And it's packaged in a beautiful, portable, recyclable—dare I say Instagrammable—aluminum bottle. It tastes delicious and looks good when you're sharing a moment on social media. It's a definite quality statement all the way around.

**Q** I've heard you dislike the term "wine cooler." Why? It just doesn't accurately describe GAZE. GAZE is made with wine, not malt-beverage alcohol, which is the standard for wine coolers. It was important for us, as a wine company focused on quality, to have premium wine in this product and to differentiate GAZE from products that did not.

**Q** Are there more flavors on the horizon? Yes. Green Tea Moscato and Kombucha Moscato will start shipping in February and be on store shelves by March.

## Tasting Notes

## GAZE Coconut Moscato Chardonnay (\$6/375mL)

A soft sparkle delivers refreshing coconut and tangy pineapple with a sprinkling of salt. Thankfully, this wine cocktail weighs in at only 4.5% ABV, and the authentic, thirst-quenching fruit and white-wine flavor are almost too crushable. —*Jessie Birschbach* 

### GAZE Blueberry Pomegranate Moscato (\$6/375mL)

Tart cranberries, ripe blueberries, and a touch of violet, plus a gentle effervescence. —*J.B.* 



## RESULTS OF THE TASTING ALLIANCE'S 2019 SINGAPORE WORLD SPIRITS COMPETITION

Expanding its footprint into Asia, The Tasting Alliance—proprietor of the San Francisco World Spirits Competition—established the Singapore World Spirits Competition in June of this year. Judges from all over the continent convened for two days to evaluate spirits available in the Asian market. Here are the results from an exciting field of entrants.

## **BEST OF SHOW**

#### BEST IN SHOW WHITE SPIRIT & BEST GIN Tangueray No. Ten Gin, Scotland Diageo Singapore Pte Ltd.

**BEST IN SHOW WHISKY & BEST SINGLE MALT SCOTCH** 

Wolfburn Langskip Single Malt Scotch, Scottish Highlands \$150 WOLFBURN WHISKY

BEST IN SHOW BRANDY & BEST SPANISH GRAPE BRANDY Fundador Supremo 15 Year Old Brandy Aged in Amontillado Sherry Casks, Jerez, Spain \$260 EMPERADOR INC.

## **BEST IN SHOW LIQUEUR**

Jaan Paan Liqueur, Ontario, Canada \$28 JAAN INC.

## **PREMIUM AWARD WINNERS**

BEST RUM & BEST SOUTHEAST ASIAN RUM Samai Premium Gold Rum, Cambodia \$115 SAMAI DISTILLERY CAMBODIA PTE. LTD.

BEST SAUCE-AROMA BAIJIU Guizhou Renhuai Hengfu Tiancidituo Jiancangban, China \$698 renhua, Guizhou Hengfu Baijiu co. Ltd. BEST VODKA

BOLD Vodka, Quebec, Canada \$24 MONTBEL WINES & SPIRITS INC.

**BEST APÉRITIF & BEST VERMOUTH Cucielo Bianco Vermouth di Torino, Piedmont, Italy** Artisan spirits Ltd.

BEST FLAVORED VODKA Carvia Spiced Vodka, France \$50 MAISON DE LA VODKA

BEST BAIJIU & BEST MIXED-AROMA BAIJIU Jiahu Zhongyuanweidao Baijiu, Henan, China \$78 JIAHU BAIJIU GROUP CO. LTD.

BEST LIGHT-AROMA BAIJIU Chengliji Baijiu, Yinchuan, China \$257 Ningxia chengliji Baijiu co. Ltd.

## BEST STRONG-AROMA BAIJIU

Yifuchun Mianrou Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$888 SICHUAN YIFUCHUN BAIJIU CO. LTD.

## **BEST BOURBON**

Garrison Brothers Single Barrel Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey, Texas, USA \$120 GARRISON BROTHERS DISTILLERY

## **BEST ASIAN WHISKY & BEST SINGLE MALT**

Paul John Classic Select Cask Indian Single Malt Whisky, Goa, India \$80 JOHN DISTILLERIES PVT LTD.

## **DOUBLE GOLD MEDAL WINNERS**

#### BAIJIU

Gansu Jiuquanhanwu Liquanchangsheng, Gansu, China \$398 gansu jiuquanhanwu baijiu co. LTD.

Mangpinjiang Baijiu, Guizhou, China \$900 Guizhou Mangpinjiang Baijiu co. ltd.

Mengtiangong Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$160 CHONGZHOU TIANGONG BAIJIU CO. LTD.

Zhenyuejiu Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$129 CHENGDU JIUZHANGUI BAIJIU CO. LTD.

Shenjiu Group Jiangxiang Collection Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$465 SHENJIU GROUP CO. LTD.

Xiaojiaolou Hongfulu Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$18 sichuan yuanhong xiaojiaolou baijiu co. ltd.

Guxiaojiu Jiangxin Baijiu Maotaizhen, Guizhou, China \$239 sichuan shiquanshimei baijiu co. Ltd.

Shangpinhu Baijiu, Yunnan, China \$458 yunan Pinhutang Baijiu co. Ltd.

Quantu Sauce Flavored Jingxuan (Classic Style) Maotai, Guizhou, China \$899 QUANTU SAUCE FLAVORED BAIJIU WORKSHOP

#### GIN

Never Never Distilling Co. Southern Strength Gin, South Australia \$75 NEVER NEVER DISTLILLING CO. Unit 43 Distilling Co. The Prospector Gin, South Africa \$30 UNIT 43 DISTILLING COMPANY

Ableforth's Bathtub Gin, United Kingdom Atom BRANDS

Central City Brewers + Distillers Queensborough Dry Gin, British Columbia, Canada \$45 CENTRAL CITY BREWERS AND DISTILLERS Prohibition Liquor Co. Original Gin, South Australia \$99 PROHIBITION LIQUOR CO.

#### WHISKEY/WHISKY

Paul John Bold Peated Single Malt Whisky, Goa, India \$70 JOHN DISTILLERIES PVT LTD. Bunnahabhain Toiteach A Dhà Single Malt Scotch, Islay, Scotland \$170 DISTELL INTERNATIONAL Deanston Virgin Oak Single Malt Scotch, Scottish Highlands \$140 DISTELL INTERNATIONAL Bruichladdich The Classic Laddie Single Malt Scotch, Islay, Scotland \$110 RÉMY COINTREAU

Bruichladdich Port Charlotte 10 Year Old Single Malt Scotch, Islay, Scotland \$125 RÉMY COINTREAU

That Boutique-y Whisky Company Bourbon Whiskey #1, USA ATOM BRANDS

That Boutique-y Whisky Company Islay Single Malt Scotch #2, Islay, Scotland Atom BRANDS

#### LIQUEUR

Jaan Paan Liqueur, Ontario, Canada \$28 JAAN INC.

## **GOLD MEDAL WINNERS**

#### BAIJIU

Bainian 1919 Baijiu Dayi, Sichuan, China \$498 Sichuan bainian baijiu co. Ltd.

Binhe Jiunian Baijiu Zhangye, Gansu, China \$158 gansu binhe food industry group co. Ltd.

Chengdu Huaxiang You Qian Hua, Sichuan, China \$588 chengdu huaxiang baijiu co. ltd.

Chengdu Youqianhua You Qian Hua, Sichuan, China \$128 chengdu youqianhua baijiu co. Ltd.

Guizhou Renhuai Hengfu Tiancidituo, Zaoji, China \$698 Renhua, guizhou hengfu baijiu co. ltd.

Guizhouchun Tiehe Baijiu, Guizhou, China \$58 Guizhouchun Baijiu co. Ltd.

Guxiaojiu Baijinnong Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$299 sichuan shiquanshimei baijiu co. Ltd.

Jiahu Zhongyuanweidao Baijiu, Henan, China \$88 JIAHU BAIJIU GROUP CO. LTD.

Lushantang Qingxiang Baijiu, Fujian, China \$369 XIAMEN LUSHANTANG BAIJIU CO. LTD.

Meicheng Shengshi Longyin Baijiu, Hebei, China \$998 CHENGDE QIANLONGZUI BAIJIU CO. LTD.

Pinhuchun Yunnanjiyi Baijiu, Yunnan, China **\$20** Yunan pinhutang baijiu co. Ltd.

Quantu Sauce Flavored Jingxuan (Soft Style) Maotai, Guizhou, China \$899 QUANTU SAUCE FLAVORED BAIJIU WORKSHOP

Shenjiu Group Chenxiang Collection Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$678 SHENJIU GROUP CO. LTD.

Shenjiu Group Hongci Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$87 Shenjiu Group Co. Ltd.

Wuhen Baijiu, Sichuan, China \$900 NANJING QINJINKE BAIJIU CO. LTD.

Zhejiang Tongshanzuimeiren Gou Jian Wang Zhuji, Zhejiang, China \$215 ZHEJIANG TONGSHANZUIMEIREN BAIJIU CO. LTD.

### GIN

Distillerie du Fjord Km12 Gin, Quebec, Canada \$47 DISTILLERIE DU FJORD

Imperial Measures Distilling Ounce Gin Bold, South Australia \$71 IMPERIAL MEASURES DISTILLING Never Never Distilling Co. Triple Juniper Gin, South Australia \$60 NEVER NEVER DISTILLING CO. Never Never Distilling Co. Juniper Freak Gin, South Australia \$85 NEVER NEVER DISTILLING CO. Poltergeist Unfiltered Gin, Tasmania, Australia \$95 DISTILLING DISTULTION DISTILLING

Australia \$85 Shene distillery PTY LTD.

#### VODKA

Georgian Bay Vodka, Ontario, Canada \$40 GEORGAIN BAY SPIRIT CO.

Ice Eyes Vodka, Belgium \$41 KEYPHARM LABORATORIES

Arktika Vodka, Victoria, Australia \$22 EDGEMILL GROUP

Bedlam Vodka, North Carolina, USA \$22 GRAYBEARD DISTILLERY, INC.

Vural Vodka, Austria \$56 vural vodka International Cape Grim 666 Autumn Butter Vodka,

Tasmania, Australia \$88 PURE DISTILLERY COMPANY PTE LTD.

Fire & Ice Extra Soft Vodka, Switzerland \$14

#### BRANDY/COGNAC/RUM/RHUM AGRICOLE

Fundador Supremo 18 Year Old Brandy Aged in Oloroso Sherry Casks, Jerez, Spain \$260 EMPERADOR INC.

Hampden Estate 7 Year Old Rum, Jamaica \$157 LA MAISON AND VELIER

Lucien de Fontaneau Cognac XO, France \$130 MAISON DES PIERRES

That Boutique-y Rum Company Issan Rum, Thailand Atom BRANDS

Zabana Sherry Oak Cask Rum, The Philippines \$25 EMPERADOR INC.

### LIQUEUR/APÉRITIF/OTHER

Cucielo Rosso Vermouth di Torino, Piedmont, Italy Artisan Spirits Ltd.

Italicus Rosolio di Bergamotto, Italy \$38 ITALICUS LTD.

Kimo Sabe Joven Albedo Mezcal, Mexico WHOLESOME FOOD PEOPLE PTE LTD.

Nocturne Noir Coffee Infused Liquor, Singapore \$188 INGENIOUS BEVERAGES PTE LTD.

#### WHISKEY/WHISKY

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Bunnahabhain 18 Year Old Single Malt Scotch, Islay, Scotland \$350 DISTELL INTERNATIONAL Bunnahabhain 12 Year Old Single Malt

Scotch, Islay, Scotland \$170 distell international

Deanston 12 Year Old Single Malt Scotch, Scottish Highlands \$170 DISTELL INTERNATIONAL

Garrison Brothers Balmorhea Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey, Texas, USA \$150 GARRISON BROTHERS DISTILLERY

Johnnie Walker Gold Label Reserve Blended Scotch, Scotland Diageo SINGAPORE PTE LTD.

The Glenrothes Whisky Maker's Cut Single Malt Scotch, Speyside, Scotland \$160 EDRINGTON SINGAPORE PTE. LTD.

The Glenrothes 12 Year Old Single Malt Scotch, Speyside, Scotland \$116 EDRINGTON SINGAPORE PTE. LTD.

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Uncle Nearest 1856 Premium Whiskey, Tennessee, USA \$58 UNCLE NEAREST INC.



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