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MAGAZINE

JUNE 2021 • \$6.95



See page 8 for a complete list of the Jack's Black Book alumni pictured here.

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## CORRECTION

In the Blue Reviews section of our April/May 2021 issue, we listed  
the vintage of the **Alta Vista 2018 Atemporal, Albanave Estate,  
Mendoza, Argentina (\$22)** incorrectly as 2019. We regret the error.

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# upfront

by Kelly Magyarics

Dubbed the "original American craft gin," Junipero contributes a bold, juniper-forward profile to a variety of cocktails.

The  
Sipping,  
Shaking,  
and  
Stirring

Solution

IMPORTER AND DISTILLER **HOTALING & CO.**  
BRINGS ARTISANAL SPIRITS AND OTHER COCKTAIL  
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## In the early months

of the pandemic, Hotaling & Co. found its sales down 30%—which wasn't surprising considering that almost half of its business was tied to on-premise accounts. But the company held the line through the lockdown phase—and after hiring three salespeople to focus specifically on retail chains and tweaking its marketing strategy, it turned things around to end the year up 10%.

Its ability to pivot mirrors its overarching philosophy, according to CEO Dan Leese, which involves drawing from its considerable experience as an established industry player even as it empowers its team to engage in the creative thinking and quick decision-making typically associated with startups. “We have many industry veterans who bring strong skills and leadership to the company, yet we have a true entrepreneurial spirit,” he says, which amounts to “the best of two worlds.”

Hotaling & Co. was founded in 1993 as Anchor Distilling Company by Fritz Maytag, owner of the historic Anchor Brewing in San Francisco since 1965. After Japan's Sapporo Holdings Limited acquired the brewery in 2017, the company's leadership changed the name of its distilling branch to pay homage to the man behind the West Coast's largest liquor wholesaler in the late 1800s: spirits dealer A.P. Hotaling, whose whiskey warehouse famously survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Today, Hotaling & Co. oversees a premier portfolio of artisanal spirits and cocktail ingredients, serving as the sole U.S. importer of the brands it doesn't own outright. Leese took the helm a little more than a year and a half ago, bringing with him four decades of experience in the beverage industry, mainly in the wine sector. Since the transition, he's discovered that there's not only more brand loyalty among spirits consumers but also more opportunity for innovation in the category on every front, from production to marketing: After all, he says, you can only make Chardonnay so many different ways, but when crafting gin, for example, you can experiment with botanicals



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOTALING & CO.

to open up a whole world of styles and therefore options for bartenders.

In fact, many of Hotaling's 65 employees were tapped from behind the bar, as their mixology skills, deep product knowledge, and understanding of spirits history easily translate into carrying out the company's key mission of identifying, developing, and marketing cocktail applications. Take **Junipero**, launched in 1996 and considered the original craft gin produced in the U.S. While bold and traditionally juniper forward, it competes with more modern-styled brands like Aviation and Bluecoat in such drinks as the Spanish G&T, Gimlet, and Negroni; a recent (and splashy) packaging refresh underscores that point. It joins two other gins in the portfolio: the modern, sophisticated **No. 3** and **Nikka**, which incorporates Japanese botanicals. Together, they appeal to a wide range of palates.

Also closely associated with mixology is one of Hotaling's most popular products, **Luxardo Original Maraschino Cherries**. Produced in the Veneto region of northern Italy by the brand's namesake family using fruit from their 30,000 Marasca cherry trees, Luxardo is considered by bartenders around the world to be the gold standard in garnishes thanks in part to its texture, neither hard nor mushy. As Leese puts it, “When you pay \$18 for a beautiful Manhattan



PHOTO: ALLISON WEBBER

**Luxardo Original Maraschino Cherries remain the gold standard among bartenders.**

and they throw a crummy cherry in there, that's not a good signature.” Sales have steadily grown for years, but they exploded during the pandemic as people under lockdown began stocking their home bars.

Speaking of Manhattans: Given Hotaling's cocktail-centric portfolio, one surprising hole is vermouth. Despite attempts, the company has been unable to locate a U.S. brand with strong traction in need of a partner, but it aims to add an internationally produced one by next year; it's also experimenting with what Leese calls a California-style vermouth. In any case, the temporary hurdle is hardly representative of the company's prospects elsewhere: Leese says he receives multiple queries every month from brands seeking an importer or distributor to allow access to the coveted U.S. market.

That said, he believes Hotaling & Co. has a responsibility to be hyper-



selective so that its portfolio remains valuable, high in quality, distinctive, and completely supported in the marketplace by the suppliers themselves. For each prospective addition, leadership scrutinizes what new dimension the brand would bring while ensuring it wouldn't compete with existing products; it also must offer a pathway for viable growth in the super-premium category. The most important litmus test, however, is a bit more subjective: "Do we want to go have a drink with that potential supplier once the meeting is over?" Leese asks. "[Did we establish] mutual trust [and] values and an opportunity to be strong partners, or was it just transactional?"

For example, Hotaling & Co. has been keeping a watchful eye on the exploding agave spirits category, where an increasing number of newcomers are slapping labels onto mediocre products endorsed by

high-profile celebrities with little vested interest. Determined to represent only producers of integrity such as **Chinaco Tequila**, the company is launching three other promisingly authentic brands in which it has a stake: **Severo Tequila**; bestselling Oaxacan brand **Convite Mezcal**; and **Fiero**, a tequila infused with habanero pepper.

Meanwhile, on the whiskey side, Hotaling & Co. relaunched a staple of its portfolio, **Hirsch The Horizon Bourbon**, last year with new packaging. Due to limited quantity, it was offered in just six markets, with six more added this year; the company aims to consider it a cornerstone brand going forward. It's also working with Walsh Whiskey—the company behind **Writers' Tears** and **The Irishman**—on experiments with aging and finishing in a variety of



casks; the results will add even more excitement to the ever-expanding category of Irish whiskey. **Old Potrero**, a copper pot-distilled rye that pays tribute to the original style of American whiskey, is undergoing a welcome relaunch at the end of this year as a straight rye with new packaging, while **Nikka Days**, an entry-level Japanese whiskey with a bright-yellow label, is perfect for sipping or mixing into a Highball.

As consumers collectively awaken from their pandemic-induced haze, Leese hopes that they will feel encouraged to return to their favorite bars and restaurants, yet he's optimistic that at-home cocktailing will continue. He's also excited about the release this summer of a trio of RTD options from Luxardo: **Aperitivo Spritz**, **Bianco Spritz**, and **Sour Cherry Gin and Tonic**, sold in four-packs of 200-milliliter cans. "Canned cocktails are coming a long way, and [we] are going to do fun stuff that will broaden our appeal," Leese says, likening the category to a new frontier in which well-made, low-ABV products that deliver on flavor and portability will open up opportunities for placement in concert and sports venues as the country reopens.

Over the next five years, the company projects a minimum of 20% growth annually—a lofty ambition of which Leese remains confident, mainly because of the balanced blend of experienced industry veterans and eager up-and-comers surrounding him. "Our philosophy is to be the authentic, passionate people we are and [to] be hungry," he says. "We are a collection of storytellers that care about quality and the unique, like-minded spirits behind every single brand in our portfolio." 



Japanese whiskey Nikka Days is built for Highballs.

PHOTO: ALLISON WEBBER

# contents

Dining at the MacArthur Place Hotel & Spa in Sonoma, CA.

# 65

PHOTO: EMMA K. MORRIS

## cover story

# 56

### PAYING IT FORWARD

Two *Jack's Black Book* Alums Adopt Creative Ways to Give Back to the Hospitality Community



## up front

# 4

### THE SIPPING, SHAKING, AND STIRRING SOLUTION

Importer and Distiller Hotaling & Co. Brings All the Cocktail Essentials Together Under One Roof

## category reports

# 104

### RETAIL RAINBOW

Wine That Shines on Supermarket Shelves

# 116

### RUM AMOK

Go Where the Spirit Takes You

# About the Cover

**Released in 1967**, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* ushered in the Summer of Love, bringing people together for an unforgettable cultural moment. For the past year or so, the entire world has also shared an experience that will change us forever. As hospitality workers have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic, I believe this is their Summer of (We Need) Love.

That belief was the inspiration for the 2021 edition of *Jack's Black Book* (included with this issue). So, "With a Little Help from My Friends," we have reimagined the classic album cover in hopes of capturing the love we have for the bar community and sharing it far and wide. On page 56, you will read about two of the many *Black Book* alumni who are out in the world doing great things and proving to all of us that it's "Getting Better" all the time . . .

*Eric "ET" Tecosky*  
*Jack Daniel's U.S. brand ambassador and Jack's Black Book author*

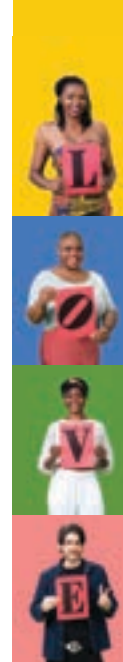


PHOTO: MONA SHIELD PAYNE

PHOTOS: MIMI LEAKE

**Jack's Black Book alumni, from left to right: Back row:** Eric Oley, Jeffrey Morgenthaler, Christine Wiseman, Travis Nass, Simone Mims, Ashlee Lafayette, Michael Neff, Alex Maynard, Dalton Grant, Jessica Ney, and Alex Alberico. **Middle row:** Tal Ronnen, Travis Sanders, Jesse Peterson, Yael Vengroff, Allison Lovemoore, Zach Patterson, Cari Hah, Rachel Burkons, Keith McCarthy, Mia Mastroianni, Joaquín Simó, and Jacques Bezuidenhout. **Front row:** Shannon Krol, Michael Carlisi, Tiffanie Barriere, Keyatta Mincey-Parker, Rori Robinson, Eric "ET" Tecosky, Ashlyn "Ash" Miyasaki, and Elliott Clark. **Seated:** Tony Abou-Ganim, Dale DeGroff, Eric "ET" Tecosky, and Andrew Pollard. **Dogs:** Lucy, Frankie, Deuce, and Peanut.





Vermentino di Sardegna  
**GIUNCO**  
2017



Carignano del Sulcis  
**BUIO BUIO RISERVA**  
2016



Carignano del Sulcis  
**BUIO**  
2017



# features

## 60

### MAKING MOVES

Six Producers Tout Their Off-Premise Prowess During Our Wine Speed Tasting Webinar with ECRM

## 66

### ON THE RADAR

Our Spirits Speed Tasting Webinar with ECRM Showcased Six Producers You Need to Know

## 124

### DISRUPTING EXPECTATIONS

Félix Solís Avantis Ups the Ante for Spanish Wine Stateside

# 130



PHOTO: JESSE RICHMOND

Star bartender and sustainability advocate Bad Birdy.

# departments

- 12** Industry Spotlight
- 16** Capitol Chill
- 18** The Ransom Note
- 20** Lone Star Libations
- 22** A Voice Uncorked
- 24** Dining and Drinking From A to Z
- 26** Taking Inventory
- 32** Brand Spotlight: Monkey Wrench Hard Seltzer
- 34** Scotch Report
- 36** Notes from the Winemaker
- 38** Wheying In
- 40** Trends
- 42** Portugal: Moncão and Melgaço
- 44** What's New: PATRIMONY Estate
- 46** Fresh Voices
- 48** RTD: El Luchador
- 50** Beer: Weed Cellars
- 52** Saké
- 65** Travel
- 72** Bev Biz: Hoshizaki
- 74** Wine Families: Gust
- 77** Beyond the Barrel
- 78** Somm Sessions: Penfolds
- 80** Brand Spotlight: Campo Bravo
- 82** Industry Forecast
- 86** Blue Reviews
- 92** Publisher's Picks
- 98** Publisher's Picks EXTRA
- 100** Tequila: Duke Spirits
- 102** Five Minutes With... Nick McClure
- 109** Sonoma: Emeritus Vineyards
- 110** Exports: Smoke Lab
- 112** Launch Pad: SAP56
- 114** Down the Aisle
- 130** Dear Emma

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- MERIDITH MAY , MARCH 2021

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# Token by the Glass

VIV & OAK COMBINES CANNABIS AND CALIFORNIA WINE GRAPES

**Wine grapes from California** form the foundation of liquid-cannabis sensation Viv & Oak. Because the brand contains zero alcohol, its aromatics are able to come through—as are the mild cannabinoid effects, which are induced within ten to 15 minutes. Beautifully packaged in 750-milliliter wine bottles, Viv & Oak contains only 3 grams of sugar and 24 calories per glass.

The recommended serving size for the “High” version is 5 ounces, which contains 10 milligrams of THC; a “Low” version contains a 5-ounce serving with 20 milligrams of CBD and 0.8 milligrams of THC. As founder/president Alana Burstein puts it, “You can thank us in the morning.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALANA BURSTEIN

Alana Burstein, founder and president of Viv & Oak.

# Chatham Imports and Mestre Consortium Form 50/50 Venture for Super-Premium Mezcal Los Siete Misterios

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHATHAM IMPORTS



Los Siete Misterios co-founders Eduardo and Julio Mestre.

**Global supplier Chatham Imports** and a consortium led by Eduardo and Julio Mestre have formed a new 50/50 venture to own the global trademark rights to the celebrated super-premium mezcal brand Los Siete Misterios.

Under the agreement, Chatham becomes the exclusive global sales and marketing agent for Los Siete Misterios, excluding Mexico, while the Mestres remain responsible for the production of Los Siete Misterios as well as sales in Mexico. This new partnership, which entails an equity investment by Chatham, will bolster Los Siete Misterios’ production capacity and enhance the brand’s route-to-market strategy within the United States and abroad.

“We couldn’t think of a better partner to help us take Los Siete Misterios to the next level,” says Julio

Mestre, CEO of Los Siete Misterios. “Both companies have the same values and [share] the same passion to produce the best spirits in our respective categories.” For more information, visit [sietemisterios.com](http://sietemisterios.com).

# Treasury Wine Estates Enters Partnership with Republic National Distributing Company

**Treasury Wine Estates Ltd (TWE)**, one of the world’s largest wine companies, has announced that it has entered a long-term distribution agreement with Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC). Effective as early as July 1, 2021, the agreement will cover distribution in multiple markets in California, along with other states including Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Mississippi, Utah, Wyoming, and Nebraska. Presently, RNDC distributes Treasury’s portfolio in Michigan, Georgia, and New Mexico.

“We are in a position of growth, and our premium and luxury wines are outpacing the market,” TWE Americas president Ben Dollard says. “Our innovation continues to be a highlight; specifically, 19 Crimes and the Snoop Dogg collaboration [as well as] the launch of the Penfolds California Collection are great recent achievements. . . . Our decision to partner with RNDC presents us a terrific opportunity to cultivate our trade partnership, fast-track growth, execute our plans, and build long-term value.”

“Treasury Wine Estates has an impressive portfolio of luxury wineries, including Penfolds, Beaulieu Vineyards, Beringer, Stags’ Leap Winery, and Etude, and has led the market through brand building and innovation,” says RNDC CEO Tom Cole. “As collaborative brand builders ourselves, we are confident that RNDC is the right partner for TWE to drive growth in key markets for these award-winning wines.”

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# Joseph Phelps Vineyards Appoints Jay James, MS, as New Vice President, Sales

### Joseph Phelps Vineyards

recently announced the appointment of Jay James, MS, to vice president, sales. James will join the Joseph Phelps leadership team and assume responsibility of strategic sales positioning and growth in the United States and internationally.



James—who most recently was vice president and general manager at Larkmead Vineyards after serving as director of sales at Chappellet Winery for several years—brings an extensive background in wholesale management, wine education, and hospitality to his new role. “We are elated to welcome Jay,” says Clarice Turner, president of Joseph Phelps Vineyards. “His knowledge and experience within the wine industry are a strategic match for our winery.”

A Master Sommelier since 1997, James was the opening director of wine for The Bellagio Resort in Las Vegas, which he developed into what was then the world’s most successful hotel wine program. He currently serves as co-chairman of SommFoundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that exists to further beverage education, elevate the sommelier profession, and provide relevant scholarships and educational opportunities.

James and his daughter live in Napa with his fiancée, Lauren. He enjoys playing guitar, photography, and cycling the roads of Napa Valley.

# BACARDÍ Legacy Cocktail Competition Funds Creative Projects via Its El Coco Bartender Grants

**BACARDÍ will rework the format** of the postponed 2020 BACARDÍ Legacy Global Final to offer all competitors the opportunity to secure a \$5,000 grant in addition to competing for the global title at the virtual final in June. The grant will fund each competitor’s efforts in devising and developing a project or enterprise that supports the industry’s recovery, following the huge impact that the pandemic has had across the bartending world.

The El Coco grants—named after the iconic palm tree planted outside the first BACARDÍ distillery in Cuba that came to symbolize strength and resilience—will be paid directly to each of the 2020 global finalists upon receipt of their idea. They will then be invited to vie for the global title with their original Legacy cocktail in a livestreamed virtual competition, with the winner announced on June 30.



Ronnapun Kanivichaporn, the 2019 BACARDÍ Legacy Global Champion, celebrates his win.

“We are happy to confirm that our amazing competitors from 2020 will finally have their opportunity to compete for the title, and I’m so proud that the BACARDÍ Legacy Gran Familia will be putting . . . some real support behind them this year as they persist in an industry that has suffered great challenges,” says global brand ambassador Dickie Cullimore. “We have all missed BACARDÍ Legacy this last year, but we can’t wait to bring the ‘gran familia’ together again virtually in 2021 for an incredible week of education, friendship, great cocktails, and competition.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF BACARDÍ RUM



# Mariah Carey Prepares to Debut a New Luxury Alcohol Brand

**Global superstar, songwriter,** and #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Mariah Carey recently announced her entrance into the alcoholic beverage business with her very own luxurious cream-beverage brand. Due out later this year in the United States and crafted to perfection, the decadent product is set to elevate its category, and Carey has personally overseen every detail to ensure an unparalleled drinking experience. **LT**

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# Wine on the Mind

AS IN-PERSON DINING RETURNS TO THE D.C. AREA, CHEFS AND SOMMELIERS TURN THEIR FOCUS BACK TO THE GLASS

**“Even French fries have gained weight** during the pandemic,” I uttered to my dining companion as our server set down the signature starter at Bourbon Steak. Paired with dipping sauces, the three different types of fries it features were once slender-cut, but it seemed to me they might have padded on a crispy layer or two. Then again, after well over a year in isolation, my recollection of dishes past—no matter how beloved—might be a little fuzzy.

In any case, it was good to be back at the D.C. location of Michael Mina’s steakhouse, housed inside the Four Seasons in Georgetown—even if the once tome-like cocktail menu has been pared down by newly minted lead bartender Engi Alebachew and the properly distanced tables made the main dining room feel a bit sparse. Newly promoted executive chef Robert Curtis, whose pedigree includes an apprenticeship at Copenhagen’s Noma under René Redzepi and stints at Requin and Hazel in D.C., brought a fun element of luxury to the spring menu through dishes like silky scallop crudo dotted with caviar; spice-dusted king crab; hot smoked salmon with celery salad; and 7X Cattle Company’s *picanha*, a hard-



PHOTOS: KELLY MAGYARICS

**The multicourse private chef’s dinner at Salamander Resort & Spa in Middleburg, VA, included gnocchi with asparagus, English peas, lemon zest, fava beans, and a coddled egg (inset).**

to-find American wagyu cut popular in Brazilian steakhouses. Head sommelier Winn Robertson, who paired that steak with a restrained Cabernet-Merlot blend from Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand, spoke excitedly about the upcoming Winn’s Wine Wednesdays series, for which he’ll pour a selection of eclectic off-list wines, as well as the return of the restaurant’s ever-popular wine dinners. Bring ‘em on.

Another spot reopening with a wine-soaked bang is Salamander Resort & Spa in Middleburg, Virginia: The gateway to both horse and wine country, it served as the site of a much-needed weeknight getaway with my best friend. Sommelier Catherine Watkins told us about its recently launched Salamander Uncorked series, which introduces guests to bottlings from around the globe matched with small bites from the culinary team. Ongoing themed dinners bring in renowned area producers like Luca

Paschina from Barbourville Vineyards, whose luscious 2015 Paxxito—a riff on sweet Italian styles made with concentrated dried grapes—recently won top honors at the 2021 Virginia Governor’s Cup. *Molto bene.*

Meanwhile, Salamander’s Harrimans Cooking Studio, once a theater-style venue for demos and cooking classes, has been temporarily converted to a private space for chef’s tastings. We arrived to find a single table set for us to experience seven-plus courses from executive chef Bill Welch, who came on board last summer after a decade at Sea Island Resort in Georgia. I’m still dreaming about the light-as-air gnocchi with seasonal asparagus, English peas, lemon zest, fava beans, and a perfectly coddled egg matched with a well-chilled Soave. While I’m not sure the crisp Italian white needed the Coravin treatment that it (and the rest of the bottles) received, the slow pour was an exercise in patience that made us appreciate every last aerated sip. And the best part? It was all enjoyed not on our patios or sofas but out and about. Cheers to more of that. **LV**



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FOUR SEASONS

**Bourbon Steak in Washington, D.C., featured *picanha*, a hard-to-find American wagyu cut, on its spring menu.**



# ANTIGAL

— WINERY & ESTATES —



## Choose One. Tell Many.

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CONSISTENCY OVER THE YEARS.



The Ransom Note is a column by Tasting Panel East Coast editor-at-large David Ransom. Each issue, David connects readers with some of the people, products, and events making news along the Eastern Seaboard.

# Sharing Wines for Summer as the World Opens Up

For the past year, this column has focused on industry responses to the pandemic; the experiences of the trade members I interviewed might, I thought, inspire our readers to overcome their own hurdles during this monumentally challenging time. I gained some great insight in speaking to a wonderful cross-section of professionals, and I hope that in some way I was able to help.

has proven its adaptability as South Africa opens more growing regions to cultivation, thereby earning a reputation as the country's signature white variety. While in New Orleans this spring, I got a chance to try some Chenin Blanc wines I had not had previously, thanks to new importer South to South Wines (*southtosouthwines.com*), led by Suzaan Laing. A native of Cape Town, Laing has personally

It is true that the southern Italian region's crushingly hot climate can be a bit of a challenge in terms of keeping alcohol levels in check; in fact, some of the wines I tried during a recent tasting held by the Consorzio di Tutela Primitivo di Manduria reached 18% ABV. But most range from 14% to 16% ABV, right in line with California's Zinfandels (coincidence? We all know the answer to that). They're soft and



PHOTOS: DAVID RANSOM

Now, as the nation's restaurants move toward operating once again at full capacity, I believe it's time to refocus on the core purpose of my column—in other words, to get back to reporting on what to drink. So here are a couple of red and white wines I have come across during my travels this past winter that I think will be a great fit for summer meals, either at home or at a restaurant.

First, let's talk whites—namely Chenin Blanc from South Africa. It's an open secret by now that its quality is high, especially given its prices, but I think we can also agree that Chenin

curated all of the brands in her portfolio, and I was impressed with her efforts. Chenins to look for from South to South include the crisp and elegant **Jardin** and the sur lie-aged **Laibach**, production of which is limited to 18,400 bottles. Other interesting expressions include a Durbanville Cape Town Riesling from **Nirida** and a Skuinsberg ("Steep Slope") Bush Vine Cinsault from Stellenbosch producer **Kaapzicht**.

Speaking of reds, I think this summer will be the perfect season to dive into the ripe and powerful yet fruity Primitivo di Manduria wines of Puglia.

round on the palate, making them a perfect choice for summer's culinary endeavors—think grilled meats and fish or wood-fired pizzas with fresh sliced tomatoes, grilled mushrooms, and roasted garlic. A few to try are **Cantine San Marzano Sessantanni** (which translates to "60 years," the age of the vines it's sourced from) and Vinicola Savese's **Ajanao**, **Papale**, and **Licurti**. These producers and other Primitivo di Manduria wines are available in the U.S. through various importers and, like South African Chenins, are attractively priced for the market. **VZ**



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POINTS

BEST PRODUCTS  
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tastingpanel

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# Thirty Eight & Vine Hits a Home Run

THIS FORT WORTH WINE BAR'S SIGNATURE SELF-POUR SYSTEM IS TAILOR-MADE FOR THE TIMES



PHOTO: JEN MORLEY BURNER

**Jennifer and Sam Demel's Fort Worth wine bar features a self-service pouring system with 42 labels on tap.**

**With backgrounds in Major League Baseball and real estate,** husband-and-wife team Sam and Jennifer Demel were accustomed to life's proverbial curveballs even before they opened their Fort Worth wine bar, Thirty Eight & Vine, in 2019. "If you had told us six years ago that we'd someday own a wine bar, we'd have said, 'no way,'" Jennifer says. But during Sam's ten-year pro-baseball career, which culminated with a stint as a pitcher for the Arizona Diamondbacks, the couple traveled the country tasting stellar bottles—and fell deeply in love with wine along the way. With an eye toward his retirement back in Fort Worth, where they'd met in college, they started exploring options and noting trends that contribute to a sense of community. "We wanted to bring something fresh to Fort Worth, a city with a great entrepreneurial spirit and such support from locals," Jennifer says.

In Chicago, a restaurant they visited featured a self-pour concept, which not only allowed guests to mingle while they selected their wines but also afforded its sommelier the opportunity to offer dozens of labels in pours as small as 1 ounce. This egalitarian feature—along with low-slung tables, cozy club chairs, and the understated vibe of a sidewalk café—soon became the signature of Thirty Eight & Vine. And then came the pandemic.

Though the bar finally reopened after a seven-month closure, its self-pour stations remained off limits as a precaution. "We were so bummed; it felt like we removed the heart of our business," Jennifer says. "But we hung on with curbside pickup and monthly wine dinners with local chefs and food trucks [at 50% capacity]. For example, our recent fried chicken-and-waffles dinner, paired with a flight of sparkling wines, was so much fun. If there is one thing that 2020 taught us, it's that collaborations are key to survival. We have to work together and support each other."

It wasn't until mid-April that the Demels were able to flip the switch, once again allowing guests to choose between pouring wine for themselves or receiving full service at a table. These days, the couple feels that both approaches have their merits—especially now that Advanced Sommelier Tiffany Tobey has joined the team and enjoys making rounds of the tables. "Tiffany's wine knowledge is impeccable, and she has curated a boutique wine list that is ever-evolving," Jennifer says. "With Tiffany on board, we'll once again focus on events, wine dinners, and experiences—and also ramp up our wine club."

But for guests who may be vacillating between a 3-ounce pour of Greek Moscofilero (\$6.60) or Italian Arneis (\$7.10), even Tobey probably can't play the umpire. She's apt to suggest, "Why not try them both?" **VZ**



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BY PARIS VASSER

# “Not Your Spring Break Tequila”

ANTEEL OFFERS A PREMIUM SIPPING SPIRIT FOR THE MASSES

**If you could make a living doing anything you want, what would you do?** That’s the question Detroit, Michigan-based Nayana Ferguson asked her husband and business partner, Don, in 2017, a few months after getting married. Don responded that he had dreamed of owning a tequila brand but ultimately quelled the ambition, resigning himself to the fact that “nobody just does that.”

Setting out to prove him wrong, Ferguson feverishly researched how to make his dream a reality; two days after posing the thought-provoking question, she returned with a possible distiller, a list of first steps, and a financial breakdown of how the couple could afford to launch their own tequila label. They used this blueprint to dive headfirst into the expansive world of spirits, gaining insight that shaped the elongated bottles and iridescent colors of their brand, Anteel, as they sought to make their product easier for bartenders to spot and grab while working a busy shift.

PHOTO: MADDI IBANE



**Nayana Ferguson**  
co-founded Anteel Tequila  
with her husband, Don.

“ I’M A SURVIVOR, AND I’M STILL HERE, AND I’M STILL CREATING. REACHING YOUR GOALS IS ABOUT MOVING FORWARD AND TRUSTING YOURSELF. ”

PHOTO: DON FERGUSON



**Anteel’s award-winning portfolio comprises Coconut Lime Blanco, Reposado, and Classic Blanco tequilas.**

Though the venture sounds like a strenuous uphill climb, Ferguson had already overcome significant challenges

as both a pancreatic and breast cancer survivor. This forged her desire to seek out moments of indulgence while remaining conscious of her health, so in developing Anteel, she wanted a spirit that was low in sugar without compromising flavor. Launched in 2018, Anteel’s award-winning portfolio consists of a Reposado, a Classic Blanco, and a Coconut Lime Blanco, the latter of which forgoes artificial flavoring for natural coconut and lime extract. “It’s a cocktail in a glass,” Ferguson notes, but without the sugary juices often found in tequila-based drinks.

Ferguson is also quick to clarify that Anteel “is not your spring break tequila”; instead, the couple wanted it to be the antithesis of fateful college nights spent chasing shots with salt and lime. “You can sip a premium

tequila like you can fine Scotch,” Ferguson says. To make their offerings stand out, they combine the sweet profile of highland agave with the earthy spice of lowland agave. They also age their Reposado in Tennessee whiskey barrels instead of standard American oak for eight months, resulting in a darker spirit that’s often mistaken for an Añejo thanks to its smooth mouthfeel and hints of whiskey on the palate.

While the couple have proven that they could fulfill their vision of introducing a high-quality tequila to the market, Ferguson is also proud to serve as an encouraging voice for others to chase their dreams and create their own legacy. “I’m a survivor, and I’m still here, and I’m still creating,” she says. “Reaching your goals is about moving forward and trusting yourself.” **LE**

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# Writing the Next Chapter

WITH THE SCOTTSDALE-BASED **MAGGIORE GROUP**, THE CHILDREN OF THE LATE TOMASO MAGGIORE CARRY ON HIS CULINARY LEGACY

Though the founder of the Scottsdale-based Maggiore Group, Tomaso Maggiore, lost his battle with cancer earlier this year, his passion for the restaurant industry lives on in his children, Joey and Melissa Maggiore, who in turn are making an indelible mark on the Arizona food scene through both their business and charitable ventures.

Tomaso immigrated to Phoenix from Palermo, Sicily, and together with his

school. The restaurant business was our home . . . and that's how we have looked at it every day of our lives. The idol was my father, but we also idolized the business."

Joey realized his dream of working with his father when he co-founded The Maggiore Group with his wife, Cristina, and his business partner, Flora Tersigni. "I would come up with these crazy 'black sheep' ideas, as my dad

**A loaded Bloody Mary from Hash Kitchen's build-your-own bar.**



PHOTO: MARCI SYMINGTON

the former, customers can build their own bruschetta and charcuterie boards or create a dish from a selection of housemade pastas, sauces, and meatball options, while The Sicilian Baker showcases a selection of Italian delicacies.

Despite the economic setbacks caused by the pandemic, the future of The Maggiore Group remains promising. The company currently employs a staff of 748 across its 12 concepts, with plans to expand into Denver, Houston, and Dallas. In April, Melissa debuted The Italian Daughter, a trattoria serving stone-fired pizzas and handcrafted pastas among other Italian specialties; later this summer, The Mexicano will open with Mexican fare such as street tacos served on blue corn tortillas and a build-your-own Michelada bar.

Today, the population of Phoenix has grown to over 4.5 million, but the original Tomaso's still stands. The Maggiore Group plans to rename the restaurant Tomaso's Italian Legacy and remodel it to include a piano lounge and bar area. What's more, in September, Joey and Melissa intend to launch the Tomaso Maggiore Culinary Arts Foundation with the goal of bringing chefs from Sicily to Arizona, and vice versa, for culinary training. It's a fitting tribute to a gregarious patriarch who was known for sharing his love of Italian food with every guest who walked through his restaurants' doors. *Saluti* to Tomaso, to his legacy, and to the Maggiore family's next chapter. **LT**



The late Tomaso Maggiore with his children, Melissa and Joey.

wife, Patricia, opened Tomaso's Italian Restaurant on Camelback Road in 1977 with 12 employees. His goal was to serve the traditional Italian food he was raised on in this desert city of what was then 1.2 million residents. He quickly won the hearts and stomachs of local diners, garnering press accolades and winning several restaurant awards, and over the next few decades, he opened several more concepts in Arizona as well as in California.

With his strong work ethic, Tomaso proved an effective role model for his children. Explains Joey, "We were [at Tomaso's] every single morning, after school, and any day there was no

called them," Joey recalls. "And then after he sat with it for a little bit, he felt like they would work. He was excited that I would take the lead."

The first of these ideas spawned Hash Kitchen, which opened in 2015. The restaurant's creative brunch fare includes a variety of frittatas, scrambles, and hashes as well as over-the-top confections like cannoli donuts. That descriptor also applies to the cocktail menu, epitomized by a build-your-own Bloody Mary bar with over 50 items.

Capitalizing on the city's growth and strong economy, The Maggiore Group opened The Sicilian Butcher in 2017 and The Sicilian Baker in early 2019. At

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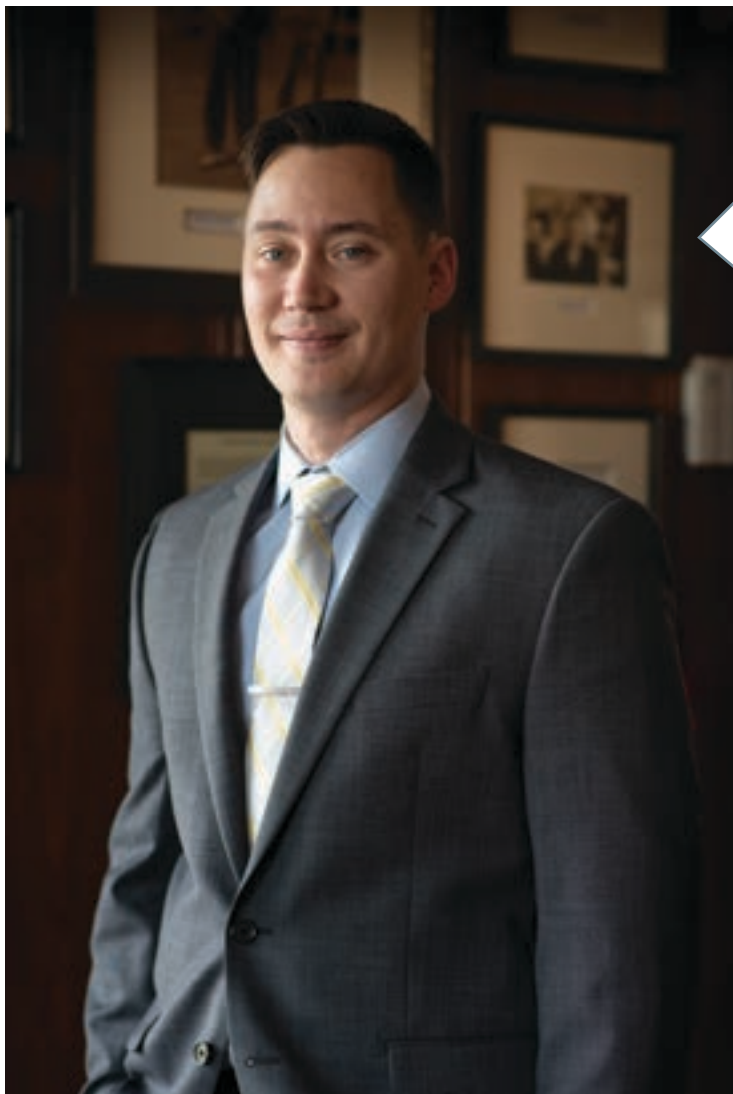
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# TAKING INVENTORY YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR VOICES

## What's the single best piece of professional advice you ever received?

PHOTO: ROSALYN CHARGUJALAF @ROZ.LEN.PHOTOGRAPHY



### MICHAEL FICK

ASSISTANT CLUBHOUSE MANAGER,  
ANSLEY GOLF CLUB, ATLANTA, GA

The biggest thing I've learned is to be hungry for education, hungry to learn and to grow, but [not so hungry that you] eat your relationships. As younger managers, we want to earn accolades and make a name for ourselves; we get tunnel vision, and as we're climbing up these ladders, we often forget where we wanted to go and what got us there—it isn't just our knowledge and our accomplishments but the people around us. [Sometimes] mentorship isn't something you find but something you realize you've had the whole time. And at some point [in your career], things are going to get complicated and convoluted, and you'll need people to reach out to. If you haven't been building relationships, [you'll find] it's kind of lonely at the top.

I participate in the CMAA [Club Management Association of America], which has both local and national chapters. We talk with sister clubs, sister restaurants; we talk to purveyors; it's just a great network. There's an educational component, and I've been on the education committee for three years, helping to develop [programs]. It's a volunteer effort. I also attend the Atlanta Food & Wine Festival; events like that and TEXSOM are opportunities we want to present to our team that enhance our personal and professional growth. Jumping into new environments, out of our comfort zones, we can [discover] things we might not be exposed to in our daily experience; for instance, if you're working in an Italian restaurant, you may never be exposed to Slovakian or Swiss or other esoteric wines.

So any of those conferences or local and national organizations are beneficial. And of course [so are] tasting groups and forums. As you meet other people, it becomes less about how much you know as an individual and more about how big your network is for supporting one another and consequently your own growth. [After all,] we're in the people business; people are people, and they needed to be treated as such. I was raised to treat everyone the way I'd treat my grandparents, my parents, my siblings. Well, maybe not my siblings [laughs]. But everybody deserves that.

[Relatedly,] I think the biggest thing I took from 2020 was finding a work-life balance, finding time with family. We can strive to achieve our aspirations, but at the end of the day, we need somebody to come home to—we can't forget what we're doing it for and who we're doing it for.



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## SARAH FOOTE

WINE AND SERVICE DIRECTOR, CASTLE HOT SPRINGS, MORRISTOWN, AZ

There are two things, the first of which I really figured out on my own: Essentially follow your heart, and if you're going to do something, be the best at it. I worked in restaurants for many, many years as a means to an end, and I was almost embarrassed that I loved it so much, because people would tell me it wasn't a real job. I would think, "Wait a minute, I'm making more money than you and having more fun than you!" After I achieved my Level 1 [certification], I realized that if I was going to [continue down this path], I had to go all in and embrace it, giving myself to this profession and being proud of it. And now I find myself to be very happy all the time.

The other piece of advice I got was: Know your worth and ask for your worth. That's a tough one to do: [In hospitality,] you give yourself to others your entire profession, so it's hard to step back and say, "What's best for me?" Especially if you're a woman. But I was guided by someone who I was working with a couple of years ago and also my aunt, who was incredibly influential to me. Of course they also taught me that if you're going to ask for it, you've got to prove it. My proof is happy guests. Really, I work for two people: the owner and the guest. If they're both happy, I'm double-winning. If I'm turning a profit for the resort and if my guests feel comfortable and happy—if they see something that represents them on the wine list and they're excited to talk to me when I come to the table—that's me proving my worth here at the resort.

My aunt also gave me another piece of advice that was fantastic, which is that you should have always three pools of people around you: the people you're learning from, your peers, and the people you're teaching. And as you grow, your pools change—in the beginning you're mostly learning with your peers, and then it becomes your duty to pass on the knowledge that's been taught to you; now I love teaching about wine. Maybe this should have been my first pick, because I live it every day. **V**

# MEET THE NEWEST MEMBER IN THE GALLO LINEUP

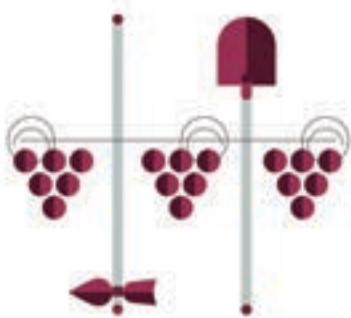


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**Slow Wine**, the publisher of Italy's most popular wine guide, is set to release its first standalone U.S. publication. The *Slow Wine Guide USA* has now expanded to cover not only California and Oregon but also New York and Washington states.

As the only U.S. wine guide that has eco-friendly criteria for inclusion, the 2021 edition profiles 285 producers and more than 850 wines, all of which celebrate and demonstrate the Slow Food ethos of "good, clean, and fair." Our immensely talented team of 20 field coordinators from across the four states responded to the pandemic by conducting virtual winery visits in place of in-person visits, which is just one of the many features that make the *Slow Wine Guide* so unique. The purchase of even one guide goes a long way toward supporting their efforts—and we're offering the readers of *The Tasting Panel* and *The SOMM Journal* a trade discount.

To order your guide directly from Slow Wine, send your name, shipping address, and payment to PayPal [slowwineguideusa@gmail.com](mailto:slowwineguideusa@gmail.com) or Venmo [@slowwineguideusa](https://venmo.com/slowwineguideusa). Pricing is as follows:

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Exciting initiatives lie ahead for the launch of the 2021 *Slow Wine Guide USA*. We will be working closely with producers in all four states to speed the adoption of the newly introduced Slow Food Manifesto for good, clean, and fair wine—a ten-point pledge that establishes a code of practice beyond the vineyard and winery to the community at large.

Deborah Parker Wong  
National editor, *Slow Wine Guide USA*

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# Throwing a Monkey Wrench at Hard Seltzer

A NAPA VALLEY–BASED NEWCOMER PUTS AN ITALIAN SPIN ON THE RTD CRAZE

by Deborah Parker Wong

As one of the fastest-growing consumer product segments in the alcoholic beverage industry, hard seltzer is inviting innovation. The dynamic category caught the eye of Napa Valley businessman Paul D’Antilio, inspiring him to create Monkey Wrench, a playfully branded hard seltzer with a modern Italian spin.

“I grew up in Boston, where great food and even better beverages were some of the most important and most enjoyable parts of life,” says D’Antilio. “My professional background includes technology and investments, but I’ve always had a side project or hobby that involved food and beverage.” After moving to Calistoga, California, a few years ago, he saw an opportunity to turn that passion into a company that could take advantage of hard seltzer’s trajectory.



Paul D’Antilio is the founder of Monkey Wrench.

Staying true to his vision meant selecting ingredients that paid homage to the flavors of his Italian roots without replicating any specific cocktail.

“Our goal was to keep the lighter, more refreshing and healthful aspects of a seltzer using the best ingredients,” he explains. Monkey Wrench’s lineup of four expressions—Grapefruit, Blood Orange,

Bee’s Knees, and Ranch Water—indeed falls somewhere between hard seltzer and RTD cocktail in terms of style while featuring a mélange of organic citrus: yuzu, Persian lime, Meyer lemon, and more along with hibiscus extract, natural London Dry gin essence, and organic agave (depending on the flavor).

The brand has already piqued the interest and the palates of industry pros like Master Sommelier Gillian Ballance, who discovered it when shopping at Farmstead Market in St. Helena. She thought the Grapefruit expression would be refreshing when paired with fried chicken—and her instincts were right. “On their own or elevating a cocktail, these mixology-inspired hard seltzers offer pure palate refreshment,” she says. “I love [the] Blood Orange with Prosecco and a touch of Campari.”

According to D’Antilio, the hard seltzer brands currently dominating the market seem not only to be chasing the same look but also to share a similar flavor profile. But by throwing a monkey wrench into the category, he reminds us how essential that “darned useful tool” is to innovation. **L**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MONKEY WRENCH

## Tasting Notes

I enjoyed all four authentically flavored expressions of Napa Valley–based Monkey Wrench Hard Seltzers. The Blood Orange and Grapefruit are traditional hard seltzers with 110 calories and no carbs other than those that come from real fruit. The Ranch Water and Bee’s Knees are more akin to seltzer-based cocktails, with a small amount of organic agave to make their profiles more complex. These scores are based on the category; they are not to be compared with wine ratings. —*Meridith May*

**Monkey Wrench Blood Orange Hard Seltzer** The nose is wonderful, the fruit exact, and the taste profile quite satisfying. It stays clean, with a honeyed floral tone on the finish. **91**

**Monkey Wrench Grapefruit Hard Seltzer** This zesty and perfectly balanced expression allows you to experience the perfume and flavor of every part of the fruit. **92**

**Monkey Wrench Bee’s Knees with Meyer Lemon and Agave** White pepper and a touch of salinity season lemon chiffon. The agave is unmasked and shines through. Clean and fragrant. **92**



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# A Focus on Finishes, Part I

**Whisky producers now seem to broadly agree** that the cask in which their spirit is aged has a fundamental influence on its flavour: Some experts suggest that up to 60% or more of the taste of the whisky we drink has been derived from the wood itself.

That's why we hear so much these days about the stage of the production process known as finishing—far more than we used to. In part one of this two-part series, I'm taking a close look at the phenomenon, including which producers are doing it and where it might lead us.

Finishing is simply defined: Essentially, it involves moving the maturing spirit from one barrel to another with the aim of adding a new layer of flavour. Though the whisky may have spent many years in its original cask, the finishing process comes just ahead of bottling and may involve only a few months of additional aging in the new barrel. Generally speaking, this vessel will have previously contained something relatively unusual, as the distiller intends for it to add an interesting new dimension to the whisky.

The story starts in Scotland in the early 1980s, when William Grant & Sons launched The Balvenie Classic—which had started life as much Scotch does, in ex-bourbon barrels, before it was transferred to Sherry butts for an unspecified period. There was relatively little fanfare around this decision at the time, but the modest launch proved highly influential (though eventually the Classic was replaced in 1993 with DoubleWood, still available today).

The next—and more deliberately experimental—entrant to the market was Glenmorangie with the limited

release of its Sherry cask-finished 1963 Vintage, followed in the early 1990s by expressions finished in Port and Madeira casks. Its range has since evolved to include whiskies finished in not only Port and Sherry but also Malaga and Sauternes barrels of various types and ages.

While Glenmorangie drove the concept of finishing further and faster than many, today it has been widely taken up; that's particularly the case among single malt producers, as enthusiasts have

proven receptive to more experimental special editions. An extreme example is The Dalmore's King Alexander III, for which master blender Richard Paterson used no fewer than six different cask types—red wine, Madeira, Sherry, Marsala, Kentucky bourbon, and Port—resulting in a notably rich and fruity whisky.

As the range of flavours being explored continues to expand, distillers beyond Scotland have embraced the finishing trend with growing enthusiasm. Popular Taiwanese single malt Kavalan is one energetic example, as demonstrated by its

highly successful Concertmaster series of Port and Sherry finishes. And in Ireland, Jameson is engaging in a similar level of experimentation with its Crested Finished in Devil's Ladder Belgian Tripel Barrels expression, a recent limited release of Irish whiskey matured in former Belgian-style beer barrels from its County Cork neighbour Eight Degrees Brewing.

But whereas the other brands mentioned here are single malts, Jameson is a blended whiskey—and it is with blends that finishing has entered a new phase, one that I will explore in the next issue. **LZ**



*Finishing is simply defined: Essentially, it involves moving the maturing spirit from one barrel to another with the aim of adding a new layer of flavour.*



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**Enjoy Responsibly**



by Kate Norwell-Smith



# No Compromise

HOW **BRICK & MORTAR** EMBRACED CANNED WINE AND NEVER LOOKED BACK

**Imagine that you've poured your all** into establishing a fine wine label focused on still and sparkling Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from California's top AVAs. You've developed a keen following and placement at Michelin-starred restaurants like The French Laundry and Daniel. Would you risk your reputation by adding canned wines to your lineup? In the case of Matt and Alexis Iaconis, the husband-and-wife team behind high-end brand Brick & Mortar based in Healdsburg, Sonoma County, the answer was yes. And they've met with resounding success.

it?" Matt recalls asking. They concluded that their target audience would be people who are adventurous in their wine choices and also perhaps quite outdoorsy, as the packaging would enable them to imbibe "by the pool, by the beach, [and] after a hike," he adds.

Matt knew right away that there would be, in his words, a "beautiful synergy between what we do as a

to ensure that excessively reductive notes don't develop in the can's anaerobic environment.

Still, for the project to succeed, it had to pencil out financially. Because they were determined to use only 100% California grapes, the couple set out to source from overlooked AVAs with venerable winegrowing pasts, such as Clarksburg; they also decided to use lesser-known varieties and to blend when necessary to create the very best expression of each vintage.

The resulting tank-fermented sparkling and still wines are a fun, bright look at California "through the lens of Brick & Mortar," in Matt's words. Think of them as the chillaxed cousin of the brand's single-vineyard offerings; in fact, according to Alexis, the same sommeliers who place Brick & Mortar on their wine lists next to Krug enjoy these cans on their days off.

What's next? The recent TTB approval of alternative volume packaging has enabled the couple to launch a second line of cans in a 250-milliliter format, which has already proven to be a popular size outside the U.S., for their Delta for Environmental Change wine label. "It's a lifestyle choice, and it's a sexy size," says Alexis. "People look sexy drinking it." Indeed, the can is sleek, elegant, and, most importantly, delivers the ideal amount of alcohol per serving for those seeking to enjoy responsibly.

Instead of cheapening their image, the couple's decision to diversify has not only created new markets but raised the profile of their high-end offerings, inspiring fans of the cans to take a chance on the bottles as well. In talking to them, I realized that this is not an either/or proposition: It's a "yes/and" situation. Yes, you can place Brick & Mortar's fine wines on your dinner table, *and* you can enjoy its cans anywhere you care to roam. **LT**



**Matt and Alexis Iaconis of Brick & Mortar in Healdsburg, CA.**

Prior to working with cans, the couple's wines were all single-vineyard bottlings. Then, in 2017, a distributor asked them to attempt something virtually no producer had before: create a seriously delicious wine in a canned format. Their first consideration was whether it would appeal to consumers: "Who's going to buy the can, and where are they going to want to drink

winery and what cans need." The elements that make their portfolio so delightful—the acidity, freshness, and purity of flavor—translate beautifully to the easy-drinking style one looks for in a can. Their approach to winemaking was also conducive to the format: "We pick very early," says Matt, "which maintains low pH [levels], so I don't have to add a lot of sulfur." This helps

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PHOTO: JANET FLETCHER/PLANET CHEESE

# Fair-Weather FETA

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GREECE AND BEYOND

**A baked feta pasta recipe that went viral on TikTok** earlier this year sent sales of the cheese soaring. In some communities, shelves were wiped clean. Matters seem to have normalized, fortunately, because the thought of a long-term shortage filled me with dread. Feta is my desert island cheese, the one that I am never without. I have started stockpiling it, just in case a new TikTok craze threatens supplies.

Similar to a wine appellation, Feta is a protected designation of origin in the European Union that can only come from designated regions of Greece. It must contain at least 70% sheep's milk, with the remainder being goat's milk. (Cow's milk is never allowed.) Generally speaking, the higher the percentage of sheep's milk, the creamier the feta, while more goat's milk makes the cheese spicier.

Even within the EU, countries have fought fiercely over the feta name. France makes a lot of feta, as do Bulgaria, Germany, and Denmark. They just can't call it feta any longer, following a long legal battle that culminated in a favorable ruling for the Greeks.

The U.S. doesn't feel obliged to

respect the EU's naming conventions, so plenty of American producers make feta and market it as such—just as American wineries continued to make “Champagne” and “Burgundy” long after the French objected. But the U.S. has yet to produce a feta that compares favorably with that of Greece. We simply don't have the sheep's milk, and the domestic feta made with cow's or goat's milk tends to be crumbly and dry. American cheesemakers that do have access to sheep's milk—there are a handful—would be foolish to use it for feta because they can't begin to compete on price.

Great feta is creamy, sliceable, tangy, and sold in its brine, which flavors and preserves it; feta that's not in brine declines quickly, so if you purchase it without, use 3 tablespoons of salt per quart of water (a 5% brine solution) to cover it. Then use a fork when you retrieve a chunk to keep your fingers out of the brine.

For an easy meze, top a block of feta with extra-virgin olive oil and crumbled oregano. Add olives, radishes, and dill sprigs. Warm some pita and open a bottle of Vermentino or Assyrtiko. This

brief shopping guide should steer you in the right direction:

**FETA PDO:** It's Greek, of course, and reliably high quality thanks to the PDO standards. Most Feta PDO is packed in tins early in its life and ages anaerobically. Keep an eye out for barrel-aged feta, which comprises about 15% of Greek production. As with oak-aged wine, the air exchange adds complexity. Brands to watch for include Dodoni, Essex Street, Hotos, Kourellas, and Mt Vikos.

**VALBRESO:** This 100% sheep's milk cheese is made by a French dairy giant that also produces Roquefort. Initially developed to avoid flooding the Roquefort market, Valbreso is feta in everything but name. Thanks to all that sheep's milk, it is exceptionally creamy and mellow.

**ISRAELI FETA:** Typically 100% sheep's milk, Israeli feta is creamier and less tangy than Feta PDO. Check the ingredient label: At least one brand contains a preservative called potassium sorbate that I think you can taste. **LF**

96 POINTS

THE **tastingpanel** MAGAZINE

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# Flight of the Booze Fairies

A CLANDESTINE FLOCK OF “DRINKERBELLES” ARE SPREADING GOOD SPIRITS ACROSS AMERICA **by Richard Carleton Hacker**

**One of the many perks** of my writing profession is that over the decades I have amassed a sizable library of spirits and wine—more than I can responsibly consume. So last year, I decided to spread some good cheer during lockdown by clandestinely leaving unopened bottles of booze on my neighbors’ doorsteps. The anonymity was a big part of the feel-good fun, but eventually I was found out, as my

social media, offering customers bottle discounts or making suggestions as to which products might be appropriate for a booze fairy encounter. So I asked a few industry professionals for their thoughts.

“I consider a number of our regular customers as booze fairies—we call them Do Gooders,” says Brian Facquet, head distiller and founder of the appropriately named Do Good Spirits in Roscoe, New York. “[Being] in a close-knit town, we all pitch in to help one another when we fall down and need a little help.” For instance, the distillery donates 100% of its proceeds from tastings to the Third Option Foundation,

dropping off batched and bottled cocktails for my neighbors throughout the pandemic,” says Kaplan. “The [concept] is incredibly charming and just what many of us need these days—a lovely reminder of others’ generosity and a glass of something to take the edge off. . . . It seems easy enough to carry the intent of this forward.”

Peter Jarjour, owner of Los Angeles-area businesses Flask Fine Wine &



**Founder and head distiller Brian Facquet conducts a tasting at Do Good Spirits in Roscoe, NY.**

neighborhood is a place where, while not everyone knows your name à la *Cheers*, nearly everyone knows your face (even while masked). Soon, adult beverages and other treats began appearing on my doorstep as well.

I subsequently discovered that we weren’t alone in our altruistic endeavors. As reported last December in *The New York Times*, there is a movement afoot by individuals “around the country [who] have staked out each other’s homes in the name of a quest that gained popularity during the pandemic: raising spirits by giving spirits, anonymously. . . . But the origins of the modern-day booze fairies are mysterious and murky. Several groups claim to be the original, yet most are unaware that others exist.”

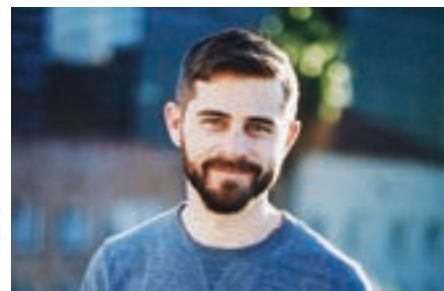
Realizing I had unknowingly become a booze fairy—or a “Drinkerbelle,” as I prefer to call it—I began to envision the off-premise trade getting in on this under-the-radar trend through



**Peter Jarjour, owner of Flask Fine Wine & Whisky and The Bar at Oyster House in Studio City, CA; Flask Highland Park in Los Angeles, CA; and Du Vin Fine Wine & Spirits in West Hollywood, CA.**

a charity dedicated to assisting and honoring members of the CIA’s special operations division and their families. “Due to legalities,” adds Facquet, “we can’t give alcohol away, but we have a ‘buy a bottle, give a bottle’ [program that] allows a person to give a bottle of sanitizer to health care and frontline workers. It’s a nice way to say thank you to those who have done so much for us.”

David Kaplan, founder and co-owner of avant-garde speakeasy Death & Co.—which has locations in New York City, Denver, and Los Angeles—has also inadvertently become a frontrunner in the movement. “I have been randomly



**David Kaplan is founder and co-owner of Death & Co., which has locations in New York City, Denver, and Los Angeles.**

Whisky, Flask Highland Park, Du Vin Fine Wine & Spirits, and The Bar at Oyster House, concurs, noting that “packaging cocktail ingredients into curated bags or boxes, sharing recipes, and introducing people to spirits and liqueurs they otherwise wouldn’t try would be a great way to make it easy for people to play the fairy forward, so to speak. If we were going to start putting some packages together . . . the first thing I would do is involve our bartenders from Oyster House. They love creating new cocktails, and I would give them the creative freedom to make something they love without having to worry about the traditional limits that apply to a busy bar environment.”

During times like these, everyone has to believe in something, and knowing booze fairies really exist could be reassuring to those still unable to raise a glass with friends and family in person. Next time I find another surprise drink on my doorstep, I’ll toast in their honor. **LT**

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIAN FACQUET

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Alvarinho is the key grape of the Monção e Melgaço subregion in Portugal's Vinho Verde DOC.

# Alvarinho's Authentic Terroir

EXPLORING THE VINHO VERDE SUBREGION OF **MONÇÃO E MELGAÇO**

by Deborah Parker Wong

Despite its close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and the Minho River, the Monção e Melgaço subregion of Portugal's Vinho Verde DOC has a Mediterranean climate, with hot summers and mild, rainy winters. The horseshoe-shaped Gerês Mountains, home to Portugal's oldest and largest national park, encompass the area in a natural amphitheater that opens northeast to the Minho River and the border with Spain.

The mesoclimate created by those mountains, which reach elevations of up to 1,550 meters, is utterly unique within the Vinho Verde region and is a defining factor in the character of the Alvarinho wines produced there. The peaks protect the vineyards from the cool maritime influence of the Atlantic coast and create a rain shadow that delivers 1,178 millimeters of rain during the winter months—less than half of the annual precipitation received by other Vinho Verde subregions. Average temperatures during the growing season in Monção e Melgaço are also warmer, resulting in an ideal climate for producing a range of styles of Alvarinho.

The area's soils—a combination of shallow, weathered granite and coarse sand from colluvial runoff and aeolian erosion—don't have much water-holding capacity and are naturally high in acidity, with low levels of phosphorus. Winegrowers use terraces and natural fertilizers to enrich the soil,



A village surrounded by vineyards in Monção e Melgaço.

but the low vigor ultimately works in their favor.

Above 500 meters, the terrain is notoriously rugged and inhospitable, so vineyards around the towns of Monção and Melgaço are typically sited below 300 meters—**Soalheiro**, for instance, produces its aptly named Alvarinho Granit from sites above 200 meters. Alvarinho, which originated in the Minho River valley, dominates the plantings here, producing wines with extraordinary minerality and physiologically ripe fruit character but without searing levels of acidity. The range of styles includes both light, fresh wines like the **Adega de Monção** 2020 Deu la Deu—offering lime and tangerine flavors and a suggestion of pétillance—and richer expressions that show marked intensity and purity of

fruit as well as minerality, such as the **Valados de Melgaço** 2019 Alvarinho Reserva laden with peach, apricot, and just-ripe tropical fruits; these can age gracefully for several years.

Winemaking techniques also play a role in the range of styles characteristic of the region. While most fermentation takes place in stainless-steel tanks, winemakers do allow

higher-temperature fermentations that result in less overtly floral wines and greater focus of flavors on the palate. The reserve wines typically undergo bâtonnage and aging on the fine lees to help build body and add complexity.

Alvarinho produced in its native terroir is incomparable to expressions of the variety grown elsewhere. But it may ultimately prove to be on a trajectory similar to that of Pinot Gris, which is renowned for producing light, delicately floral wines in Italy's Collio region and wines of great mineral intensity and fruit purity in Alsace. Time will tell. **LV**



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# “A Paradigm Shift”

**PATRIMONY ESTATE**  
ADDS AN ENTIRELY  
NEW DIMENSION TO  
PASO ROBLES' WINE  
INDUSTRY

by Randy Caparoso

**PATRIMONY winemaker and co-proprietor Daniel Daou stands atop the site of the brand's future winery facility at an elevation of 2,200 feet; DAOU Mountain can be seen in the background.**

**The first thing to know about PATRIMONY Estate** is that it isn't merely an extension of DAOU Vineyards & Winery in Paso Robles. Think of NASA's Gemini and Apollo space programs: Like the former, DAOU laid the groundwork for further exploration of the appellation by doing more to elevate the profile of Paso Cabernet Sauvignon than any other brand since its first vintage in 2010. But PATRIMONY Estate takes more than a step beyond its sibling as far as expressing the Bordelaise quality of the terroir goes—it represents the giant leap that has landed proprietors Daniel and Georges Daou on a proverbial moon.

The inaugural PATRIMONY Estate releases were all sourced from DAOU Mountain, which ranges from 1,700 to 2,200 feet in elevation in the Adelaida District AVA. The brand is being handled as completely separate from DAOU, with its own sales and marketing team. Moreover, the wines it produces are much more intense and demonstrative of their terroir than their DAOU predecessors. Daniel has been describing PATRIMONY as a “paradigm shift”—something so new, so startlingly different, that it may even surprise Cabernet Sauvignon devotees already familiar with Paso Robles.

As he explains, “When you look at Cabernet Sauvignons and Bordeaux [wines], the objective way of measuring the quality of the best vintages has always been to look at phenolics”—that is, the total amount of anthocyanins (pigments) and tannins derived from grape skins contributing to the color, smell, and taste of red wines. Accordingly, the PATRIMONY team has “checked the phenolics of Cabernet Sauvignons from every major region in the world. In great vintages, phenolic content generally measures 30–50% higher than in average vintages. On DAOU Mountain, the phenolics are off the charts every year—something never before seen in the wine world.”

Reflecting their quality, all of the PATRIMONY Estate wines will retail for a suggested price of \$275, in comparison to the \$50–\$150 range of DAOU Reserve bottlings. Meanwhile, the Daous have just broken ground on another property within the Adelaida District, encompassing 270 acres atop a ridge that's separated from the DAOU Mountain estate by a rugged canyon. “The new estate will be dedicated to PATRIMONY,” says Daniel. “We're planting 70 acres in similar style to what we've successfully done on DAOU Mountain, with vine spacing at 6-by-2 feet, each vine cropped for minimal yield with 5-foot canopies to maximize photosynthesis.”

PHOTOS: RANDY CAPAROSO





**DAOU Mountain, where PATRIMONY is currently produced, ranges from 1,700 to 2,200 feet in elevation in Paso Robles' Adelaida District AVA.**

In 2022, construction will begin on a winemaking and hospitality facility at the top of the estate, which, at 2,200 feet in elevation, is in “direct line of sight of DAOU Mountain,” Daniel says. A chateau adjoining the winery will house eight master suites so that guests can stay for multiday experiences complete with farm-to-table dinners. “If all goes well, we’ll be receiving our first PATRIMONY guests by 2024, when all the vines will be three to four years old and in full production.”

The site boasts other assets in addition to its relatively high elevation. “Temperature-wise, we get lower highs and higher lows than anywhere else in Paso Robles,” Daniel explains, “and vines are planted in over 90% calcareous clay, primarily in the Linne Calodo and Nacimiento soil series.” Most of the Cabernet Sauvignon will be planted on the lower slopes, where loamier clay “gives us maximum phenolics. This may be the only appellation in California where we are at 2,200 feet yet only 13 miles from the ocean.”

As young as the label is, Daniel is already confident that “when people try PATRIMONY, they’ll have a hard time going back to other wines. When I do blind tastings, I can tell which is my wine just by looking at them. I call it a rare phenomenon because it really is.” Not that higher phenolics are always preferable, he acknowledges: “You can overextract phenolics to a point where a wine is undrinkable. We extract only to a point where wine is perfectly balanced, using just free-run, never any pressed, wine. While *élevage* [takes place] in the finest custom-made oak in the world, our goal is to achieve a point where wood never comes between a wine and flavor. The style of PATRIMONY is always about elegance, which we’ve found we can achieve after about 30 months in oak, when you get the longest-chain tannins.”

To make his case, Daniel pours his PATRIMONY Cabernet Sauvignon from the 2016 vintage—an ultra-deep and opaque wine that’s dense and tautly wired yet velvety-smooth and seamless from bow to stern. It’s as concentrated as any Cabernet Sauvignon-based red in the world and as pure an expression of Paso Robles, and specifically Adelaida District, fruit as you can find. Everything in its place, faithful to its origin, fulfilling its inherent promise: *That’s PATRIMONY.* **V**

## TASTING NOTES

It has been proven that the phenolics on DAOU Mountain, in the heart of the Paso Robles’ prestigious Adelaida District, are among the highest in the world. This speaks to the depth of color, potency of flavor, and tremendous structure it imparts in its wines.

Daniel Daou has, from the beginning, led a pioneering effort in Paso Robles to create Bordeaux varieties in an inimitable style. His newest project, PATRIMONY, is a cosmos unto itself: Setting the standard for a California “first-growth” Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, these wines exhibit character that is as loyal to the terroir as it is unique on the world stage. —*Meridith May*



**PATRIMONY 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$275)** Creamy, silky, and intense,

this startlingly inky-black liquid exudes aromas of tilled soil, leather, soy sauce, and black plum. Tannins coat the tongue with coffee-chocolate grit that’s smoothed out by ripe blackberry and heather. Dense and sturdy, the body remains ethereal, saturating the palate with anise, dark chocolate, and espresso. Aged for 30 months in the finest French oak barrels. **99**



**PATRIMONY 2017 Cabernet Franc, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$275)** There is something to be said about

the extraordinary character of Paso Robles Cabernet, especially within the Adelaida District, which brings a distinct calcareous nature to its profile. Here, we find the best of its kind—augmented by the efforts of Daniel Daou and his team. From the influence of rare, super-fine-grained, French pink-oak barrels to the phenolic ferocity of its terroir, this regal purple-black liquid deserves a crown. Violets, persimmon, cigar leaf, orange peel, and a parade of blue and purple fruit join with chalky, finely grained tannins. Built like a skyscraper, its statuesque form is polished, with a streamlined, glassy mouthfeel. **100**



**PATRIMONY 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$305)** Grainy tannins take hold as

the dense liquid saturates the palate with pencil shavings, cocoa powder, and roasted coffee. Licorice coats the tongue as would a fine Sambuca, making for an unctuous and hedonistic experience. A profusion of blackberry preserves and a hint of coconut surface, connecting to the wine’s inner brawn before sweetening and mollifying themselves on the exquisite finish. **98**



**PATRIMONY 2018 Caves des Lions, Adelaida District, Paso Robles (\$275)** Earthy scents

of truffle and licorice tempt the palate, encouraging further investigation. Mint coats a deep, rich blackberry core. Black-tea and dark-chocolate tannins wrap around the tongue as crushed stone intertwines with dried heather, creating a chalky sensation. This blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon and 40% Cab Franc is almost more Bordeaux-like than Paso—but it’s arguably more Paso than any other wine in the world. **100**



# Marketing to Latinos

EXPLORING STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE IN BEVERAGE INDUSTRY CULTURE

by Nancy Ulloa

## As a Latina consumer and business owner,

I know the importance of developing a marketing plan that will reach the people in my community, who have often been neglected by the wine industry. According to the Census Bureau, the U.S. will see a 163% increase in the Latino population between 2010 and 2050, making us roughly one-third of the total population. This signals a big opportunity to generate revenue. But how do we effectively market to Latinos, inviting them to seek wine experiences?

Over the past two years, I have been working to build my own wine brand, Ulloa Cellars, while fulfilling my mission to provide inclusivity, education, and empowerment to Latinos one glass of wine at a time. Let me share with you what I have found to be successful:

### INCORPORATE CULTURE

Pride in my heritage is a key focus of my branding efforts. According to *Forbes*, 88% of Latinos online pay attention to digital ads that include aspects of their culture, so I incorporate elements of my upbringing, values, work ethic, and more in my campaigns. For instance, I wear traditional Mexican attire for photo shoots, and I develop


wine pairings for Mexican dishes that I share on Instagram to show a side of wine that's rarely explored. This strategy assures Latinos that they don't need to have a gourmet French meal in order to enjoy wine. The appearance of my mom's pozole recipe alongside the Ulloa Cellars Grüner Veltliner in *Edible SLO* has been a hit, driving traffic to my brand and inspiring me to continue enhancing the enjoyment of my wines through suggested pairings with ethnic flavors. I also share my experiences as an immigrant woman entrepreneur on social media: Transparency about the struggles I have encountered in becoming a business owner has been one of my strongest tools for drawing people who might appreciate and support my journey.

### DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN DIVERSE LATINO EXPERIENCES

In the words of my friend Griselda, "Realizing that Latinos are not a monolith is a good start" to creating a successful marketing campaign. We come from many places, backgrounds, and economic circumstances. It is important to identify generational and cultural gaps before attempting to target a particular group: What's important to an

immigrant who has lived in the United States for only a couple of years might be significantly different from what matters to a second-generation Latino. Our language also shows variances across borders, which means that using Spanish as it's spoken in one region in your advertising may not be effective for reaching Latinos from another.

### HIRE LATINOS

Lastly, the key to generating authentic marketing content is to hire Latinos. A diverse team can bring ideas to the table without risk of cultural appropriation. We know best the Latino experience and can contribute an understanding of what is appealing, valuable, and important to us. For more information, visit [ulloacellars.com](http://ulloacellars.com). 

*Fresh Voices is a collaborative effort between The Tasting Panel, The SOMM Journal, and 501(c)(3) organization Dream Big Darling. The concept centers around providing opportunities to and amplifying the voices of the next generation of women in the wine and spirits industry. To learn more about Dream Big Darling, visit [dreambigdarling.org](http://dreambigdarling.org) or follow @dreambigdarling\_org.*



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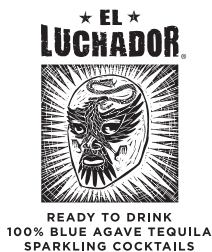
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# Winning the FLAVOR FIGHT



MEXICAN BRAND  
**EL LUCHADOR**  
IS READY TO  
DOMINATE THE RTD  
RING WITH ITS NEW  
LINE OF CANNED  
COCKTAILS

Although he's never donned a *mash*, El Luchador founder David Ravandi was so fascinated by the instantly recognizable colorful garb, acrobatic ring style, and showmanship of *lucha libre* wrestlers that he used them as inspiration for his tequila brand. *Lucha libre* directly translates as “free fight,” and, like the spirit itself, it is a cultural institution in Mexico with its own governing body, the Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre.

As the visionary behind 123 Spirits, Ravandi introduced El Luchador to the market in early 2013. Since that time, the bartending community has fully embraced distill-proof tequila for the authenticity that it brings to traditional cocktails. Recognizing that a typical cocktail has an ABV of around 8%, Ravandi focused on authenticity to develop a best-in-class canned version at that same level. “El Luchador RTDs were created to deliver ‘just-built’ cocktail satisfaction,” Ravandi says. “And that’s exactly what a correctly formulated RTD should offer.”

Now available in 26 states following an April launch, El Luchador’s Sparkling Classic Lime Margarita, Sparkling Paloma, and Sparkling Blood Orange Margarita aim to capture both fervent fans of artisanal tequila and devotees of the explosive RTD category through an ingredient list that Ravandi says reflects the brand’s “less is more” philosophy: raw sugar, sparkling water, real fruit juice, and 100% blue agave tequila. “You want to drink the real thing—that’s the






## TASTING NOTES

concept of these cocktails,” he adds. “For well-structured drinks, it’s always [about] balance. We are intentionally using raw sugar but to the minimum [in order] to complement the flavor profile rather than overpower [it].”

Blanco tequila traditionally serves as the foundation of classic cocktails, and in the case of the Sparkling Lime Margarita, El Luchador’s blanco—bottled right off of the still—offers complex aromas of fresh agave, lemon pepper, and sea salt as well as classic zesty-lime flavors and a velvety mouthfeel. With its vibrant pink hue, the bright ruby-grapefruit flavors of the Sparkling Paloma are juxtaposed with silky-sweet notes of nougat, coconut, and agave that round out the mid-palate and add complexity to the finish. And finally, the Sparkling Blood Orange Margarita has a characteristic, subtly sweet orange flavor infused with tangy red grapefruit; hints of tart cherry and raspberry are complimented by white pepper, lemongrass, and soothing touches of mint from the blanco tequila.

Ravandi’s signature branding for all three expressions, sold in single-flavor four-packs of sleek 12-ounce cans, is unmistakable. When stacked, their green, white, and red 24-can cases create a dynamic display depicting both the El Luchador mask and the Mexican flag. At \$5 per can and \$20 per four-pack, El Luchador has established the industry’s high-water mark for ultra-premium RTDs.

Like all of the brands he’s ushered to success since his entrée into the artisanal tequila business in the mid-1990s, Ravandi made sure that he and his team, in his words, “really put a lot of time, effort, and energy into doing the project right.” With the RTD category expanding beyond his already lofty expectations, he sees its potential within the similarly explosive tequila industry as particularly fruitful, as consumers of all ages benefit from its convenience while using their rising awareness to seek out brands like El Luchador “that have a lot of love and passion and hard work [behind them],” he says, adding, “The beauty of tequila is that people always look at who is behind it and what is the history of the brand, and I think that is very important.” 



**El Luchador Sparkling Lime Margarita, Mexico (\$5)** The nose attests to a tart yet sweet lime character while unmasking the agave freshness. The fizz is gentle and allows just the right level of citrusy sweetness to release. This is an unprecedented tequila-based ready-to-drink cocktail with superb flavor components and an ABV of 8%. **91** —*Meridith May*



**El Luchador Sparkling Paloma, Mexico (\$5)** This prom-dress-pink beauty engages via scents of rose petals, vanilla, and grapefruit. The citrus is enveloped by hibiscus, a noteworthy floral tone that adds dimension to the satisfying and delicious cocktail. **92** —*M.M.*



**El Luchador Sparkling Blood Orange Margarita, Mexico (\$5)** A neon-orange hue akin to a Southwestern sunset greets the eyes as citrus perfumes the glass with a pungent ripeness. The bright flavors of just-squeezed orange are streamlined by a hint of vanilla, which keeps the drink from being cloying. There’s a lingering flavor of orange zest without any bitterness or aftertaste. Clean and refreshing. **90** —*M.M.*



# Supremely Sessionable

WEED CELLARS LAUNCHES TWO SUMMER-WORTHY BEERS

**Brewed in Texas**, Weed Cellars' recently released Weed Light Lager and Weed Golden Ale (\$15/12-pack of 12-ounce cans) differ in style, but they're equally refreshing and crushable. What they're not is laced with cannabis (and neither are the brand's wines and spirits): As stated on its website, Weed Cellars' products are THC-free. The Los Angeles-based company's name instead "reflects the changing times, as consumers gravitate to more risqué marques and dynamic branding." It's designed, in short, to grab the attention of many a shopper who spy it on display cases and in coolers.

But let's take a look at what *is* in the liquid. Weed Light is brewed with Pilsner malt, rice, corn, and Hallertau hops. Consumers concerned with the nutritional information of their libations (as drinkers of hard seltzer, light beer's major competitor, have proven to be) will note that Weed Light clocks in at 4% ABV and has 105 calories, 8.6 grams of carbohydrates, 0.9 grams of protein, and 0 grams of fat per serving. Pouring the slightly hazy, straw-colored liquid from the can into a glass releases aromas of freshly baked sourdough and lemon zest. Meyer lemon oil is at the fore of the palate, along with a faint malty note that washes away quickly before a snappy finish.

Scents of toasted brioche and Buddha's hand zest waft over a glass of Weed Golden Ale, meanwhile; on the palate, white flowers and subtle notes of tropical fruits are balanced by hoppiness and acidity. This nuanced yet approachable golden ale weighs in at a fractionally headier 4.7% ABV and is brewed with Pilsner malt, rice malt, corn, and three hops: Hallertau, Cluster, and Herzbrucher. As Weed Cellars general manager of beer Hunter Sasser Oetinger explains, "There's this idea around Weed being a little bit irreverent and free-spirited, which I think ties into that American ethos of forging our own paths and pioneering"—but when it comes to brewing, the brand still strives to meet "a really high standard. We're here to make great beer that's accessible to all beer drinkers." **LT**



IMAGES COURTESY OF WEED CELLARS

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OPTIMIZES ALL WINES

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BY **ANDREA ROBINSON**  
MASTER SOMMELIER



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“ We love your glasses! We comparison-tasted with our staff and they were the best. Very, very excited to have them for all of our restaurants.

**CAROLYN STYNE**

Wine Director & Partner, Lucques, AOC & Tavern, Los Angeles

[ANDREAWINE.COM/THEONEWINEGLASS](http://ANDREAWINE.COM/THEONEWINEGLASS)



# Deserving of Distinction

## MASTER SAKE SOMMELIER TOSHIO UENO APPOINTED AS A JAPANESE CUISINE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

by Michelle M. Metter

**In a recent virtual ceremony,** Master Sake Sommelier Toshio Ueno was named a Japanese Cuisine Goodwill Ambassador—an incredible honor for the vice president and executive instructor of the Sake School of America in Los Angeles.

Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) created the role to promote Japanese cuisine and food culture overseas, including in North America; it has been bestowed to just ten other professionals since 2015. Here, Ueno shares his thoughts on the honor while reflecting on his storied career.

### Q What was your reaction to being appointed as a Japanese Cuisine Goodwill Ambassador?

I found out [about] the honor from Mr. Kota Kimura [of the] Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles. It is my most honorable achievement in life so far, and the timing was also most favorable, as the Japanese government is going to promote Japanese food culture abroad [now] more than ever. There will be more responsibilities to promote Japanese cuisine and saké to a broader audience [as well as] to educate more professionals and consumers, nurture younger educators, and work closely with Japanese government agencies.

### Q Given your career, this is such a well-deserved recognition. Can you share a little about your journey to your current position?

I am originally from Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan, where my family grows many fruits, including Koshu and Muscat Bailey grapes, [which are] sold to wineries. When I started to work for a pastry company, the president loved wines and serving wines to his guests, and one day he told me to study wine and gave me a key to his cellar. That's when I started to learn about wine and other alcoholic beverages. I found my love [of saké], which I was introduced to by a sushi chef while I was working in Tokyo.

I seriously started to study saké and shochu after I began at Mutual Trading Co., Inc., in 2002. Mutual Trading Co. is a Japanese food and saké importer and distributor headquartered in Los Angeles, which [has been] the pioneer of the sushi and Japanese restaurant business in the United States for over 95 years. Our former chairman, Mr. Noritoshi Kanai, introduced sushi to America in the mid-1960s and started the Miyako Sushi & Washoku School in L.A. in 2009. I pitched the idea of starting a saké school while we were having lunch in our cafeteria one day. I was traveling outside of California to sell saké as a sales manager and needed to educate non-Japanese people about saké so turnover would be better—otherwise [it] was collecting dust on store shelves due to lack of knowledge and [inability] to advise customers or answer their questions. So, in 2010, he founded the Sake School of America, Inc., [and] asked me to manage it. That's how I have become the executive instructor and vice president of the [school] and also, [since] 2019, the director of the Sake Specialist Division of Mutual Trading Co., Inc.

Our school started with just two programs in partnership with the Sake Service Institute in Japan and continued to add more programs; now we are also offering programs from WSET, the Japan Sommelier Association, and the Society of Wine Educators. Since 2010, we have [issued] over 2,400 certificates and expanded to China and the U.K., where [our instructors] lecture online or in person and proctor the certification exams. **LV**



Master Sake Sommelier  
Toshio Ueno at the  
Japanese Cuisine Goodwill  
Ambassador appointment  
ceremony with Kota Kimura  
of the Consulate General of  
Japan in Los Angeles.



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# CONGRATULATIONS JAY JOHNSON

Region President, RNDC West



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2021



[jim@weedcellars.com](mailto:jim@weedcellars.com) / [@weedcellars](https://www.instagram.com/weedcellars)





The industry professionals featured in previous volumes of annual Jack Daniel's publication *Jack's Black Book*—the newest edition of which is included with this issue—have gone on to do some pretty amazing things. Here are two inspiring stories from alumni to prove it: one about a garden designed to alleviate bartenders' stress while providing food for their families, the other about an organization offering educational and professional advancement opportunities in addition to emergency grants.


## PAYING IT

# Forward

### TWO JACK'S BLACK BOOK ALUMS ADOPT CREATIVE WAYS TO GIVE BACK TO THE HOSPITALITY COMMUNITY

story by Kelly Magyarics  
photos by Mimi Leake



 Clockwise from top left: A Sip of Paradise Garden founder and director Keyatta Mincey-Parker; bartender and cocktail researcher Tiffanie Barriere; Jack Daniel's U.S. ambassador and *Jack's Black Book* author Eric "ET" Tecosky; and A Sip of Paradise Garden director of gardening and development Rori Robinson.

### Keyatta Mincey-Parker

Founder and director, *A Sip of Paradise Garden*

Growing up in her native Liberia, Keyatta Mincey-Parker tended a garden with her grandmother and shopped for greens, rice, and fish with the family housekeeper at Waterside, a colorful farmers market; eating fresh and local ingredients was woven into the culture there. When she moved to the U.S., however, she discovered that what had been a way of life back home proved elusive and expensive here. Yet the benefits of growing your own food go well beyond nutrition or even saving money: Gardening also nourishes the soul. "There is something about putting something in the ground, giving it attention, and watching it grow with your time and energy," Mincey-Parker says. "Gardening teaches you patience and focus, which is something we can all always use."

After the model turned bartender and cocktail consultant was named one of the top three finalists in Bombay Sapphire's 2020 Most Imaginative Bartender Competition, she had the chance to tour the U.K.'s Royal Botanic Gardens outside London. She described the lush space, replete with heady flowers and rare plants, as magical; it also served as the inspiration for her final cocktail in the competition, a tea-based tippie with ingredients connecting her life in Liberia to her current home of Atlanta.

So when the pandemic hit, Mincey-Parker naturally turned to horticulture as a way to help her colleagues. "It was simple:



**A view of several plots in Keyatta Mincey-Parker's A Sip of Paradise Garden, which she formed as a community space where hospitality professionals could gather as well as reserve spaces to grow herbs, vegetables, and flowers for their families and their businesses.**

I wanted to play in the dirt with my friends,” she says. She reached out to Community Farmers Markets (CFM), with whom she had previously collaborated on charity events, with the idea of creating a community garden specifically for bartenders. After CFM provided her with a plot of land, she decided to launch a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tapping her friends and fellow industry members to serve as her staff, board of directors, and sponsors.

Today, the organization—named A Sip of Paradise—is flourishing and empowering Atlanta’s bar community in many ways, primarily by serving as a space in which bartenders can reserve plots to grow herbs, vegetables, and flowers for their families and their businesses. As its director of gardening and development, Rori Robinson—featured in *Jack’s Black Book Vol. 6*—uses the ingredients she cultivates for the syrups, salts, sugars, and tisanes she sells through her company, Bloom Bar Garnish Company; Rhea Allen, a manager at seafood restaurant Bon

Ton, grows hot peppers to use in experiments with hot sauces and spice blends, while Brooke Elrod, a bartender at Little Spirit, adds her herbs to homemade soaps. The garden has also inspired some interesting collaborations, as mixologist members have a bevy of likeminded people to consult about their ideas for cocktail creation; for example, Grey Goose ambassador Jenny Feldt and Angel’s Envy “whiskey guardian” Stephanie Saputo, among others, use the space for R&D as well as happy hours and educational events.

But just as impactful as its business applications are its effects on mental and emotional health: The garden is a calming, restorative spot where bar professionals can recharge creatively and prioritize their wellness. Tiffanie Barriere, a bartender and cocktail historian who also happens to be Mincey-Parker’s best friend, installed a white picket fence around her plot and can often be found meditating—a common practice in the garden, which hosts yoga and Pilates classes as well as

formal meditation sessions.

Some members have confided how grateful they’ve been to have somewhere to go, especially during the early months of the pandemic, when bars and restaurants were shuttered, unemployment was rampant, and an utter feeling of desperation was palpable. After one bartender admitted they would have taken their own life had they not had the garden to escape to, Mincey-Parker cried recounting the story to her husband, scared by the fact that the person had felt so hopeless. “I knew then that if this small gesture of providing a safe space for my friends [helped them] to do whatever they wanted or needed, I had to keep going.”

Finally, A Sip of Paradise encourages a surprising level of communal nostalgia, according to Mincey-Parker, who never realized how many fellow bartenders grew up helping their grandparents, parents, or neighbors in the garden. “It takes you back to a memory or time in your life when [things were] simple,” she says. “I need

that and I wanted to share that with my friends.”

In addition to consulting on events and developing cocktails for a variety of clients, Mincey-Parker also runs a foundation called The Jim Project, which aims to provide hospitality training and opportunities to young women in Liberia. A Sip of Paradise, however, remains her primary undertaking. The strategic plan centers on expansion, with similar gardens planned for other cities and countries to address a universal need for food security and mental-health awareness. The upkeep required—weeding, water, pruning, planting, fertilizing—is hard work, but that’s something bartenders are already well accustomed to. “Working long hours in different conditions—we are built for this,” she says.

For more on A Sip of Paradise, visit [asipofparadisegarden.org](http://asipofparadisegarden.org).

PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVIS NASS



**Another Round Another Rally co-founder/COO Travis Nass appeared in *Jack’s Black Book Vol. 2*.**

relief, with half of that given to undocumented workers and others who lacked access to other forms of assistance. ARAR has helped feed more than 10,000 families with grocery-relief vouchers while giving more than \$700,000 to front-of-house workers of color and more than \$200,000 to employees who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. It has also sent out more than \$50,000 in grants for Black hospitality workers seeking mental-health care and \$10,000 in grants and scholarships for women.

## Travis Nass

*Co-founder/COO, Another Round Another Rally*

Back in 2018, Travis Nass, a Scottsdale, Arizona-based independent beverage consultant who appeared in *Jack’s Black Book Vol. 2*, decided to team up with his friend Amanda Gunderson, a bartender and former brand ambassador, to give back after lamenting the lack of resources in the hospitality industry. By using their skill sets and extensive networks, “we wanted to focus our vision on providing emergency resources for those who might encounter unexpected situations,” Nass says, “but also to help provide tools and resources to those who have been historically excluded from bar and restaurant leadership.” The result was Another Round Another Rally (ARAR), a nonprofit offering professional-development grants and reimbursements for sommelier, mixologist, and cicerone training and certification costs via corporate funding and personal donations.


When the pandemic hit, however, the organization had to retool its primary mission to focus on emergency assistance. Within the first day of posting a coronavirus-relief application in March 2020, it had more than 25,000 applicants, or about one every second—demonstrating that support was desperately needed. Since then, the vetting team has continued to process

applications and give \$500 relief grants to bartenders, servers, hosts, and others who were financially impacted by the shutdowns, prioritizing those caring for children or elders, people with underlying health conditions, and anyone who has been unable to receive governmental aid.

It’s gut-wrenching work, Nass says, especially knowing that there are many more worthy recipients than there are funds. While he doesn’t seek to diminish anyone’s struggle, he likens the pandemic’s effects to “some folks screaming because they have their foot caught in a bear trap, [while] others are halfway through a meat grinder.” Every application represents an affecting story, but one that stood out was that of a pregnant young server on the verge of losing her housing after escaping an abusive relationship; six months after receiving financial aid, she sent a thank-you note with photos of her healthy baby. These expressions of gratitude are what keep Nass and the ARAR staff going. “We are so very lucky to have been in a position to help over the past year,” he says. “I can’t imagine how I would have coped with the pandemic if I didn’t have this outlet to help.”

Out of the more than \$3.5 million that ARAR has raised so far, nearly \$2 million has gone toward COVID-19

Of course, the struggles ARAR set out to alleviate before the pandemic still exist; to that end, it has awarded more than \$250,000 in emergency relief unrelated to COVID-19, including to a Denver bartender diagnosed with brain cancer and the family of a San Diego bartender who died by suicide. And in turn, their recipients often give back in their own ways—whether by turning down a grant because their financial situation has improved or returning funds so they can be reallocated to someone whose need is more dire.

The pandemic has laid bare how desperately ARAR’s resources are needed, Nass says, and even though he and his team have been forced to refocus their efforts over the past year, the core of their mission hasn’t changed—nor will it. In the future, they hope to offer immersive and philanthropic experiences such as an educational rum tour around the Caribbean, but they will also continue to help those who have fallen on hard times while fighting for a fairer industry. “Whether that is providing tools to those who have been historically excluded from leadership or providing resources to help reimagine hospitality systems in a more sustainable, equitable way, we are here to help with all of it,” Nass says. For more on Another Round Another Rally, visit [anotherroundanotherally.org](http://anotherroundanotherally.org). 



# MAKING *Moves*

**SIX PRODUCERS TOUT THEIR OFF-  
PREMISE PROWESS DURING OUR WINE  
SPEED TASTING WEBINAR WITH ECRM**

**BY RACHEL BURKONS**

**On March 30**, buyers from across the country logged on to their Zoom accounts for a Wine Speed Tasting Webinar hosted by *Tasting Panel* editor-at-large Jonathan Cristaldi and our partners at ECRM. They were joined by representatives of six wineries from across the globe, each of which has a unique market share, perspective, and strategy; from the development of new categories to innovation in point-of-sale materials, they showed the audience their retail moves.



## 7 DEADLY

Presented by **SCOTT DAHLSTROM**, senior director of winemaking, and **CARRIE LESCHER**, senior brand manager

When 7 Deadly was launched in 2002, it was crafted with Zinfandel sourced from seven different vineyards. “The name was born from the winemaker’s Catholic school upbringing,” senior brand manager Carrie Lescher said, “but also a passion for the bold, robust Zinfandel that the Lodi AVA has become known for.” Fast-forward nearly 20 years, and it seems that passion for Lodi Zin has paid off: 7 Deadly has become a retail juggernaut as the bestselling Zinfandel at any price point in the U.S.

So it made sense for 7 Deadly to roll out a Cabernet Sauvignon last year, said Lescher, explaining that Cab and Zin tend to speak to the same consumer: “It was a natural extension for us, [as] Cab is also a big, bold varietal. [So] it not only aligns with our brand, it aligns with our consumer, who was [already] buying just as much Cab as they were Zinfandel.”

But most importantly, producing a Cab made sense from a winemaking perspective, according to 7 Deadly senior director of winemaking Scott Dahlstrom. Noting that the winery adheres to the strict sustainability program of LODI RULES, he said, “Lodi is a gem in the Central Valley because it has perfect growing conditions—especially for Zinfandel and Bordeaux varietals like Cabernet Sauvignon.”

THE WINE GROUP

## BUTTERNUT WINES

Presented by **WES HAGEN**, consulting winemaker, Miller Family Wine Company



When the Miller Family Wine Company acquired Butternut Wines in October 2020, consulting winemaker Wes Hagen recalled, they did a taste test of all the brands “that surround Butternut in the market. I was really impressed



PHOTO COURTESY OF MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY

with the residual sugar; it has one-fifth of the residual sugar compared to the others.”

Hagen was also impressed with Butternut Chardonnay’s elegant profile, balanced yet bright with notes of lime blossom, apple, and pear. “It screams summer in a glass,” said Hagen. “These wines are a beautiful way to drink affordably, and you can pour [them] for your wine-geeky friends and not have them look at you funny.”


Quality at an accessible price is at the heart of the brand’s ethos, according to Hagen, who added that while he and the Miller Family team were enthusiastic about Butternut’s position in the “sessionable” value sector from the get-go, they’re equally excited about where they’ll be able to take it from here. “Acquiring this brand gives us the opportunity

to focus in and use our own fruit,” he explained, referring to their 1,400-acre French Camp estate vineyard in Paso Robles. “From ground to glass, Butternut will be a focused pole brand”—not only in the retail market but in restaurants as well. “Wine is an excuse to keep people we love at the table for another hour,” he explained, “[and] Butternut is going to become an on-premise [staple] with all of the sales and distribution support we have, so watch for things there.”



# MARQUÉS DE CÁCERES

Presented by **LUIS BURGUEÑO**, export manager

 “Not a lot of people know we have a French background,” began Marqués de Cáceres export manager Luis Burgueño, launching into the story of the Forner family, who fled to France on the brink of the Spanish Civil War in the early 1930s. Operating as a wine merchant in the Rhône and Loire valleys throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Enrique Forner also purchased two châteaux Grands Crus Classés in the hopes of making his own Bordeaux; in 1968, however, he returned to Spain and set his sights on Rioja, where he founded Marqués de Cáceres, using what he learned from the best winemakers in France to help revitalize the region. His daughter, fifth-generation vintner Cristina Forner, oversees the now-legendary wine company today.

While upholding her father’s legacy of world-class Rioja, she has worked to put her own stamp on Marqués de Cáceres through expansion. “Having her own investment in a red-wine region where she could have an impact was important to her,” said Burgueño. “Then [along] came Finca La Capilla in Ribera del Duero. . . . For years [she] searched for the right property to invest in, and it was there that she found the vineyard of her dreams.” It consists of 150 acres of Tempranillo just outside the small town of Roa de Duero, where the region’s extreme weather and rocky soils result in robust, intense wines. The grapes are hand-harvested plot by plot and aged in French oak.

As the buyers in virtual attendance tasted the 2016 Finca La Capilla Crianza, Burgueño shared his excitement for the site’s potential, calling the first vintage under Marqués de Cáceres’ ownership “a very good example of what we are able to do with those vines.” That’s no surprise once you know the Forners’ tradition of producing world-class wines wherever they are. “Marqués de Cáceres is a big-name wine company,” admitted Burgueño, “but it is family-run, and everything is run in a very personal way, so we care for who is handling our wines here in the United States. The communication with importers, distributors, and accounts is pivotal for us.” And with the future looking brighter for in-person meetings, Burgueño is ready to once again prove it.

VINEYARD BRANDS





## WEED CELLARS

Presented by **DANE THROOP**, VP of sales West



“Why ‘Weed?’” asked Weed Cellars’ VP of sales West, Dane Throop, rhetorically. “Why not? It’s irreverent, thought-provoking, and will stop people in their tracks!” The lifestyle brand with the notable name caters to consumers “who are looking for something different,” he explained—and on that score, it delivers, as one of only a few beverage companies to “capture three areas of the alcohol space: wine, beer, and spirits.” In the former category, the Weed portfolio ranges from canned wines to DOC Proseccos to still bottlings like its limited-production red blend, Private Reserve Stags Leap; in the latter, it includes a golden ale and light beer (available in kegs, cans, and bottles) as well as a Kentucky bourbon.

Meanwhile, branded Weed Lounges in Los Angeles, California, and Nashville, Tennessee, serve as tasting rooms and event venues; the company has partnered with The Artist Management Group for concerts and, to further its outreach, has brought on several investors and influencers as brand partners as well. “The business model is that these opportunities with the Weed brand support and feed into each other,” explained Throop.

At the retail level, Weed has developed a wide variety of packaging and POS materials designed to be eye-catching for the consumer. For instance, in addition to standard formats, the bourbon comes in “nickel bags’ and ‘dime bags’: fun little stash bags of five or ten 50-milliliter [bottles]. Just a fun thing to bring to a party,” commented Throop. “Our POS includes neckers, buttons, shelf-wobblers, posters, cooler and floor decals, display racks, tap handles, coozies, wine openers, wine buckets. . . . We offer dealer loaders—pizza ovens, bikes, kayaks—[as well], and we’re going to do a Weed smoker soon too.” He added that they even offer branded staff T-shirts with retailers’ names and logos.

With its strong roots in lifestyle, a product line that offers something for everyone, and exciting opportunities for brand support, Weed Cellars is one to watch both on- and off-premise. (See also pages 50 and 107.)



## FIREHOUSE CAN COMPANY

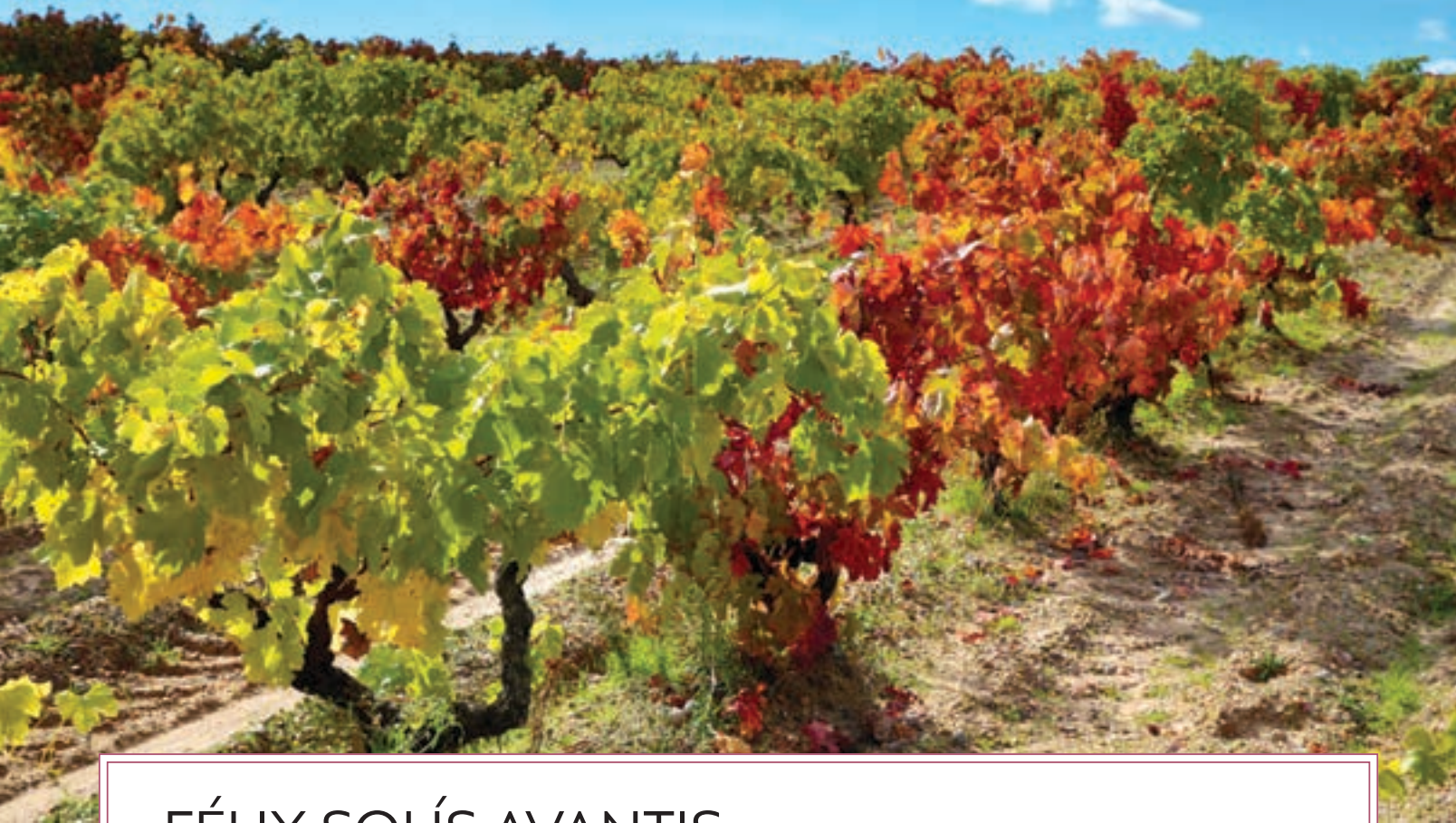
Presented by **GRAHAM VEYSEY**, co-founder



Streaming from his brand’s landmark headquarters—built in 1854 to predate its home base of Cleveland, Ohio—Graham Veysey cracked open a can of wine and began telling the story of how he and his childhood friend Fisk Biggar were inspired to start Firehouse Can Company. While working on a construction project one day, Veysey found himself hot and covered in dust and wanted to cool off with some wine. “I said, ‘Why isn’t there wine in a can?’ We did a quick search and the only thing that popped up was this little pink can,” he said (alluding to a certain well-known bubbly brand).

So in 2015, the duo launched MANCAN Wine as the first dedicated canned-wine company in the U.S.; it remains an authentic expression of both their personalities and friendship. Explained Veysey, “It’s a deliberately nonvintage, non-varietal [label]—but for all the winos on this call, the White is an unoaked Chard with Viognier . . . the best of both worlds. It’s one of those things: Once you put the cans in a cooler on ice, you’re gonna crush it. Our White with Bubbles is the same great juice with forced carbonation, no added sugar.” And now Firehouse’s latest release, Graham + Fisk’s Wine-in-a-Can, is proving to be an equally big hit: “People will crack open a can and say, ‘Wow.’ We really deliver above our weight class,” said Veysey.

By putting their names right on the packaging, the two friends only underscore the message: Authenticity is at the core of this brand. “This is a very personal endeavor for us,” continued Veysey, “and something we’re very proud of. When we get to share our stories with you, we know that turns into more sales. We would love to be your supplier of choice.”



## FÉLIX SOLÍS AVANTIS

Presented by **PEDRO GARCÍA**, managing director USA & Canada



“The plan with Félix Solís Avantis is simple,” began Pedro García. “Expand Spanish wine culture to the world and be the leaders in our sectors.” As the number-one still-wine producer in Spain, Félix Solís Avantis is positioned to make those moves, and it’s García’s mission to crack the North American market: “If we want to get more American consumers to the Spanish category, we need to remove our grandpa hats . . . and create products that are in a flavor profile and package that appeals to [them].”

With that mission in mind, Félix Solís Avantis has launched Mucho Mas, an internationally distributed and “disruptive brand delivering on flavor profile; clean, modern-looking packaging; and an affordable price point,” García said. And while many Americans will immediately understand the meaning of its name, Mucho Mas is Spanish at its core, with fruit sourced from Félix Solís Avantis’ vineyard holdings across the country.

The results have been promising, with the brand selling more than 12,000 bottles in its first 30 days in the United States, where it launched via an exclusive partnership with wine review and retail app Vivino. “It has more than 18,000 reviews and a 4.1 score on Vivino,” remarked García. “It overdelivers in price point and quality.”


García concluded by noting that Mucho Mas “wasn’t built to play in the Spanish set” but rather was “built to compete with other red blends.” “Eventually we can graduate the consumer up to the Crianzas, Riservas, and Ribera del Dueros of the world,” he added, hinting that his work to introduce Spanish wines to the U.S. consumer is just beginning. (For more on Félix Solís Avantis, see page 124.) 



PHOTO COURTESY OF FÉLIX SOLÍS AVANTIS



# Rising to the Challenge

HOTELS ARE ADAPTING TO THE TIMES WITH NEW PROGRAMMING AIMED AT VISITORS AND LOCALS ALIKE

by Hana-Lee Sedgwick

**While the past year has shaken our world in dramatic ways**, one of the most important things it has shown us is that we all must learn to adapt—perhaps none more so than those in the hospitality and tourism industries. With the onset of lockdowns and travel restrictions, many hotels found themselves with reduced occupancy, furloughed staff, and no guarantee if or when things might return to normal. Despite these unprecedented circumstances, hotel professionals have persevered, finding new and

occurs with guests during their dining experience,” explains Fish. “[This program] became a way to continue these discussions, providing new and exciting wines for members to try each month. [It’s also] a new platform to deliver an experience to a broader [audience]”—not just guests.

At El Encanto, a Belmond hotel also located in Santa Barbara, recovering from the pandemic has meant launching new initiatives focused on immersive experiences. Its “Taste of El Encanto” package, co-hosted by repre-



PHOTO: JUSTIN LEE

**The MacArthur Place Hotel & Spa in Sonoma, CA, created its “Sip Now, Stay Later” promotion in partnership with ten local wineries.**

Wise Vineyards, Donum Estate, and Beltane Ranch—which offered a complimentary one-night stay at the property with the purchase of one or more cases of wine. “The program was designed to feed people’s love of wine and lust for travel while supporting local Sonoma businesses in the wake

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSEWOOD MIRAMAR BEACH



**In Santa Barbara, CA, Rosewood Miramar Beach director of wine Daniel Fish has created a new monthly wine club for members, Miramar Wine Collective.**

innovative ways to connect with guests and engage with the communities around them. Here are three examples from California.

At Santa Barbara’s Rosewood Miramar Beach, director of wine Daniel Fish has learned to embrace the unexpected, using the pandemic to “open the door to a new type of creativity when approaching the guest experience,” he says. Looking to enhance it “both during their time with us and before and after their stays,” he designed the Miramar Wine Collective, a bespoke wine club that offers each of its members a monthly shipment of bottlings entirely customized to their tastes and preferences. “I wanted to create another way to continue the dialogue around wine that normally

sentatives of such brands as Volcán de Mi Tierra Tequila and Colgin Cellars, includes three days of extravagant culinary activities and events, from cocktail and tortilla-making workshops to themed in-room breakfasts and dinners. “We’ve had to constantly pivot, but it’s also been a time to get creative and think strategically,” says Janis Clapoff, general manager of El Encanto. “It has united us as a team”—and as restrictions loosen, “[it] has also allowed us to bring the community [back] together in such unique and meaningful ways.”

In Sonoma, early travel restrictions led MacArthur Place Hotel & Spa to develop its “Sip Now, Stay Later” promotion in partnership with ten local wineries—among them B.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BELMOND EL ENCANTO



**Dining at Belmond El Encanto in Santa Barbara, CA, has a new dimension thanks to the hotel’s “Taste of El Encanto” package.**

of then-recent COVID closures,” says creative marketing manager Liddy Parlato. “Our strengthened partnerships have resulted in some creative and compelling programs and are a lasting and welcome legacy of last year’s challenges.”

While the pandemic has greatly affected tourism, the ability to adapt, evolve, and reimagine how hospitality can be experienced and shared has helped the hotel industry to move forward. This renewed approach to delivering memorable experiences will no doubt continue to be a positive outcome of such a challenging time. **LV**



# ON THE RADAR

OUR SPIRITS SPEED TASTING  
WEBINAR WITH ECRM  
SHOWCASED SIX PRODUCERS  
YOU NEED TO KNOW

by Jonathan Cristaldi

Last year, I hosted my first webinar for an ECRM conference that had been scheduled to take place right in my backyard of Sonoma before it was canceled due to the pandemic. Thinking about the in-person camaraderie that all those would-be attendees had been deprived of, I resolved to make it as lively and fun as possible for the on- and off-premise buyers tuning in from around the country. It went well, and on March 22 of this year, I was fully prepared to host my zillionth Zoom session—this one in the form of our Spirits Speed Tasting Webinar in partnership with ECRM.

Since the pandemic began, the company has done great work to keep members of the beverage trade connected and maintain some semblance of day-to-day normality. Before the webinar, when I spoke with ECRM senior VP of food and beverage Sarah Davidson about the shift to online events, she noted how well the beverage industry as a whole has adapted: “The industry continues to show its resilience and ability to pivot during this unprecedented time,” she said. “I have been so impressed with the new solutions and partnerships we have seen form in wake of the pandemic. After our move to conduct our in-person sessions virtually through ECRM Connect, starting in May 2020, we have seen about a 20% increase in buyer participation. They are still hungry for new products and solutions for the ever-changing demands of their customers.” Let’s keep the good news flowing with this recap of our webinar, featuring six producers we believe deserve a place in your bar program or on your retail store shelves.



## MIJENTA TEQUILA

Presented by **MIKE HOWARD**, president and general manager, Altos Planos

Taking its name from the Spanish phrase *mij gente*, “Mijenta means ‘my people,’ and it pays direct homage to the people of Mexico,” said Mike Howard, general manager of the brand’s parent company, Altos Planos. In fact, the Mijenta team—including co-founder (and former Bacardi Limited CEO) Michael Dolan and master distiller Ana María Romero Mena—are focused on community representation and environmental sustainability in the part of Jalisco where their tequila is produced. Their efforts are evident in the packaging alone: Mijenta’s glass bottles are locally sourced, and its labels are produced from *bagasse*—dry agave pulp left over from the fermentation process.

As for the tequila inside, *Tasting Panel* publisher Meridith May rated the **Blanco** 97 points and the **Reposado** an astounding 99 points. No surprise there, perhaps, given the deft hand of Romero Mena, who penned the groundbreaking *The Aromas of Tequila: The Art of Tasting*, which describes some 600 different aromas found in the spirit. Mijenta’s profoundly aromatic expressions conjure many descriptors of their own thanks to a slow, careful agave-to-bottle process that involves fermenting fully mature plants with proprietary yeasts for more than 100 hours—much longer than the norm.

Bartenders—especially those who have read Romero Mena’s book—have already expressed their approval, according to Howard. He also believes Mijenta is filling a niche for consumers looking to trade up from what he called “the big three,” namely Don Julio, Casamigos, and Patrón, with the Blanco retailing at around \$48 and the Reposado at about \$70. Currently available in 15 states, Mijenta is aiming to be fully national by the first quarter of 2022.

## OLE SMOKY

Presented by **MASON ENGSTROM**, VP on premise sales—global

For a relatively new company, established in 2009, Ole Smoky is “doing things in a very old-fashioned way,” said vice president of on premise sales Mason Engstrom while seated in front of an array of house products. Yet it’s growing in ways that would make the original moonshiners’ heads spin. With its portfolio now available in all 50 U.S. states and 35 countries, it ranks as the 17th top-selling American whiskey brand in the U.S. market—where its moonshine is the category’s bestseller.

Ole Smoky operates four distilleries throughout Tennessee, including its flagship in Gatlinburg, The Holler, where it produces moonshines ranging from 40 to 128 proof. Because the iconic Mason jars they’re sold in do pose complications for bartenders intent on precise pours, Engstrom noted, the company recently introduced 1-liter bottles for all of its core products nationwide. Buyers tuning into the webinar sampled its bestselling moonshine, **Apple Pie**, and also popped open bottles of **Salty Caramel Whiskey**, which is not only Ole Smoky’s top-selling whiskey but its top-selling product overall. “This is surprisingly what a lot of people are getting to know us [for],” said Engstrom.


Despite the pandemic, the brand finished strong in 2020, with sales up over 93.4%, said Engstrom, who attributes its success to the fact that “our master distillers continue to use a 100-year-old recipe passed down from generation to generation. It’s an authentic product [distilled] in copper pot stills using corn, and we’re making it ourselves in the Smoky Mountains.”





# KULEANA RUM WORKS

Presented by **STEVE JEFFERSON**, founder and CEO

 If you’ve ever wondered whether the world really needs another rum brand, you’re not alone. But thanks to Steve Jefferson, founder and CEO of the Kohala, Hawaii-based Kuleana Rum Works, the answer to the question is emphatically yes.

He in turn credits his first profound tasting of French rum agricole in 2007 as a real “aha” moment: “At first sip, I was completely blown away,” he recalled. When Jefferson and his wife, Jackie, learned that it’s made from fresh sugarcane juice, they had the same lightbulb idea to move back to Jefferson’s home state and start making their own rum. In 2013, they opened the first legal distillery on the Big Island—thereby catching the eye of High West Distillery founder David Perkins, who now serves as a

company investor and advisor.

“We’re trying to elevate rum by celebrating it as a world-class spirit,” he said in front of a backdrop of his own sugarcane fields, noting that a major recent discovery is helping them do just that. “There are about 40 varieties of sugarcane that are unique to Hawaii,” he explained, which were identified by Dr. Noa Kekuewa Lincoln while studying the Leeward Kohala Field System as a Stanford University Ph.D. candidate. “So we juice and distill these incredibly delicious heirloom sugarcanes called *kō*. . . into our **Hawaiian Rum Agricole** just two days after harvesting them. We also scour the world for the best rums to create innovative blends, and we never put in colors, flavors, or sugars, which makes us fairly unique.”

Participants sampled **Huihui**, which

blends a base rum from Papua New Guinea—believed to be the birthplace of sugarcane—with the Hawaiian Rum Agricole and a splash of rhum agricole from Martinique. They also sipped **Nanea**, Kuleana’s “answer to gold rum,” as Jefferson put it. Gold rum is typically a light rum with caramel colors and sugars added to it; Nanea, by contrast, is properly aged, blending two-, three-, and four-year-old rums sourced from prime suppliers and aged in bourbon barrels.

“The rum category really hasn’t gone through the same process of premiumization that whiskey and tequila have,” observed co-presenter Matt Korpela, Kuleana’s vice president of sales. “We feel like this is a perfect time to be introducing premium, nothing-added rums to the world.” The brand is currently available in eight states through three distributors and has signed a national agreement with Southern Wine & Spirits for the remaining 42 states. (For more on Kuleana, see page 119.)



# SLIQ SPIRITED ICE

Presented by **GAVIN WEGNER**,  
senior brand manager



“We’re a very slick brand, as we like to say,” joked Gavin Wegner, senior brand manager for SLIQ Spirited Ice, as he began presenting the booze-infused freezer pops. It’s owned by distillery and brewery 21 Holdings, a subsidiary of the Jel Sert Company, which produces freezable and powdered food and beverage products. Jel Sert is “the world’s leading manufacturer of freezer pops,” Wegner stated. “[They’re] our bread and butter.” Still, three years of formulation, branding, messaging, and positioning work went into the launch of SLIQ Spirited Ice’s core product line of flavored variety packs: **Vodka**, **Rum**, and **Agave Spirit**. “The spirits we use can be deemed as premium,” explained Wegner: “The agave is 100% blue agave; the vodka is distilled seven times; and the rum is a superior white rum that we source from the top distillery in the Caribbean.” With fewer than 100 calories, each pop contains 8% ABV, which means that two deliver about the same amount of alcohol as a 1.5-ounce shot of an 80-proof spirit.

Buzz is already building in the media, with online

outlet MyRecipes.com describing SLIQ as “the next White Claw” within the emerging hard-freezer pop category. The brand is also working with influencers to “fuel word-of-mouth conversations,” said Wegner, and it has partnered with digital media company Barstool Sports—a top content destination for millennial and Gen Z consumers—as its exclusive hard-pops sponsor. Finally, it has formed a partnership with recycling company TerraCycle. “We’re very socially conscious,” emphasized Wegner. “With this collaboration, all of our plastic-tube packaging can be sent in for free to TerraCycle for recycling.”

Near the end of Wegner’s presentation, one participant commented that SLIQ made “hands down the best ice pops in the market.” Wegner was happy to hear it and concluded by pointing out that, “with hard seltzers spearheading the way, the timing was right more than ever to enter this space. And as the world continues to turn right side up, and opportunities arise to go back out and enjoy time with family and friends, you’ll have these pops. Our mantra is, ‘SLIQ is for good times only.’”

# REDWOOD EMPIRE WHISKEY



THE BRAND'S IDENTITY IS CENTERED AROUND THE EONYMOUS REGION OF CALIFORNIA, WHICH STRETCHES FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO THE OREGON BORDER AND IS HOME TO SOME OF THE OLDEST AND TALLEST TREES ON THE PLANET.



Presented by **THE PURPLE BRANDS**  
MARKETING TEAM



Redwood Empire Whiskey was created by parent group Purple Brands, a wine and spirits company based in Sonoma County. After selling his massively successful Blackstone and Mark West labels to Constellation Brands for roughly \$350 million, Purple founder Derek Benham converted his winery facility in Graton into a distillery and began producing whiskey as well as purchasing stock from Indiana, Tennessee, and Kentucky. By 2015, he'd launched Benham's, a Sonoma dry gin. The award-winning Redwood Empire Whiskey was created in 2017, receiving a full launch with distinctive packaging in 2019.

The brand's identity is centered around the eponymous region of California, which stretches from San Francisco to the Oregon border and is home to some of the oldest and tallest trees on the planet—a few of which have lent their names to the portfolio. Pipe Dream Bourbon is named after the 14th largest tree on the planet, Emerald Giant Rye after the fastest-growing redwood in the world, and straight whiskey blend Lost Monarch after the world's largest coastal redwood.

**Pipe Dream** (which received 94 points from *The Tasting Panel*) is designed to be a great sipping bourbon. With a high-corn mash bill (75%), it's a blend of barrels aged between four and 12 years, with the distillery's own grain-to-glass whiskey making up a significant percentage of the liquid. **Lost Monarch**, meanwhile, is a blend of three- to five-year-old rye whiskey (60%) and four- to 12-year-old bourbon (40%); designed to serve as a mixer, it's perfect for classic cocktails thanks to its nice balance between spiciness and smoothness. Finally, **Emerald Giant** (which received 97 points from this magazine) is a rye whiskey made with 95% rye and 5% malted barley aged three to five years, resulting in a spicy profile with notes of honey and orange peel followed by a cinnamon-tinged finish.

Buyers should take note of the price points: At \$35–\$45, these labels are real bargains given their quality—all credited to master distiller Jeff Duckhorn, who has recently been joined by head distiller Lauren Patz.

# SOMBRA

Presented by **ANDRÉS PORTELA**, global brand ambassador



Andrés Portela became the global brand ambassador for Sombra, which falls under the Davos Brands umbrella, three and a half years ago—shortly after it built its own distillery in Santiago Matatlán in Oaxaca. Sombra currently offers three different mezcals: **Espadín Joven**, **Espadín Reposé** (Reposado), and **Ensamble**—an extremely limited release made from the rare and wild Tepeztate and Tobilá agave species, which are harvested high in the Oaxacan Sierras (only about 2,000 bottles have been released). “Tobilá plants take ten to 12 years to mature; Tepeztate takes 18 to 30 years to mature. And we actually planted around 18,000 to 20,000 baby Tobilás from seed to give back to the land,” said Portela.

According to him, the words “Mezcal Artesanal” on Sombra’s labels indicate that “we do the cooking with black sustainable oak. It takes eight to nine hours to have our oven ready, and we load in around 10 tons of piñas [at a time], then cover them with a cotton canvas, and we let [them] caramelize for four days. This is where the smoky flavor comes from, and if you’ve ever tried cooked agave, it’s delicious—it’s pretty sweet.” In fact, it’s reminiscent of the primary flavors found in mezcal—sweet potato, honey, and even pumpkin.

At Sombra’s distillery, the juice from the agave is combined with well water and pressed fibers from the plant, because “it is very sweet and has a lot of sugar, especially Espadín, which essentially invites spontaneous fermentation from wild yeasts,” Portela explained. Fermentation takes about eight days before double distillation in copper pot stills, which creates a high-octane spirit of up to 114 proof; spring water is then added to adjust the ABV to around 45% for the Joven and Reposé.

Sombra’s dedication to sustainable practices is such that, once production is complete, it does something pretty extraordinary. Spent agave fibers are not ideal for composting, and often—sadly—are dumped into waterways along with a distillation byproduct called *vinasse*; according to Portela, “There’s a lot of this acidic residue, which is very toxic. So we developed a program with a group of architects to convert the fibers into agave bricks” for use in rebuilding houses in some of the areas hardest hit by the Puebla earthquake in 2017. [↗](#)

Sombra is distributed by Southern Glazer’s nationwide.





Nice

I

C



Sphere ice adds elegance to sprightly warm-weather cocktails like these.

E

Baby

HOW **HOSHIZAKI** IS RESHAPING THE CUBE FOR THE BAR INDUSTRY

by Amy Antonation

Hoshizaki brand ambassador Jenner Cormier is the co-owner of Bar Kismet in Halifax, Nova Scotia.





**What is there to say** about ice that a certain Miami rapper who shall not be named didn't say back in the early '90s? These days, quite a lot: If the evolution of cocktail culture and the rise of image-driven social media helped to spur the recent renaissance in ice production, the reopening of bars after a very long year of drinking at home is further inspiration for ensuring that the crystals that go into your creations are more eye-catching than ever.

But there are still other reasons to care about the humblest of ingredients. While you may not give the same consideration to choosing an ice machine as you do to selecting an artisanal gin made with botanicals foraged within 3.1 miles of the still under a waxing gibbous moon, Hoshizaki brand ambassador Jenner Cormier—an award-winning bartender and co-owner of Bar Kismet in Halifax, Nova Scotia—thinks you should.

"I don't think people learn about ice enough," Cormier says. "[They] neglect dilution or take it for granted, [though it accounts for] 15–30% of a drink's volume. When you look at it that way, you can understand why the ice needs to be unhampered by any taste or aroma."

Cormier's preferred ice makers come from Hoshizaki, a Japan-based global brand with a broad range of machines that, collectively, produce a total of eight different types of ice—more than any other manufacturer. It currently has three under-counter specialty ice machines on the market: a 1- by 1-inch cube machine it introduced in 2015, a 1.8-inch sphere ice maker that launched in 2020, and a model released in late May that makes 2- by 2-inch cubes and has already received a National Restaurant Association 2021 Kitchen Innovations Award. All produce a crystal-clear product that marries form and function.

Quality is key for Cormier. When we ask what can go wrong with ice makers, he reels off a list of answers: Off flavors and aromas, which can be a result of impurities caused by flawed filtration systems. Discoloration due to buildup in the bin. Thin, almost hollow ice that breaks apart in the shaker or melts too quickly (picture that bucket of hotel ice that becomes liquid before you've even gotten it back to your room).

By contrast, Cormier praises not only the clarity but also the density of the ice that comes out of Hoshizaki's compact specialty machines. "It's important



**Hoshizaki's sphere-cube machine produces 50 pounds, or roughly 500 spheres, of ice daily.**

to have something dense, so it melts slowly," he explains, comparing the use of high-quality ice to that of seasoning while cooking: Without care, a drink can easily remain underdiluted or become waterlogged.

Hoshizaki achieves that density thanks to its horizontal clamshell evaporator. A tiny hole in the bottom of the clamshell mold allows water to spray into it; the evaporator then freezes the water slowly from the top down, giving heavier impurities time to settle and drain out of the mold. The resulting ice is very hard and very clear, ensuring superior cocktails no matter the method of preparation.

Cormier says he loves the 2- by 2-inch cubes for spirit-forward cocktails like Old Fashioneds and Negronis, noting that the slow-melting cube won't water them down; he also likes to add several at a time to group serves. He appreciates the 1- by 1-inch cubes, meanwhile, for their versatility—they provide excellent aeration during the preparation of shaken drinks, and they're equally good when it comes to stirring and serving. As for the 1.8-inch spheres, he recommends them for stirred cocktails as well: "It's almost like [Hoshizaki] designed the ice for a Collins glass," he says. "They stack perfectly." And when he popped one into the shaker instead of a cube for an egg drink, he found that he got an even better whip. In fact, Cormier is effusive about both the caliber and the convenience of Hoshizaki's sphere ice maker.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOSHIZAKI ICE

**An Old Fashioned (left) featuring Hoshizaki's 2-inch cube and the company's 1-inch cubes with mineral water (right).**

"It was mind-blowing to play with," he acknowledges. "It's never, ever crossed my mind that that was something that could come out of a machine."

Of course, spherical ice isn't new; there are several methods for getting the globes. But most have drawbacks. Silicone molds yield cloudy ice. Machines that melt cubes into spheres are slow and leave puddles of water in the wake of each use. Hand-chipping is labor-intensive, requiring a high level of skill. (Cormier recalls an ice program at a previous job that involved freezing 30 liters of water into blocks days before service, removing sections of cloudy ice, and then spending a minute—or more—chiseling each globe. "The extent that people go to to get perfect ice is remarkable," he says.) By comparison, Hoshizaki's machine—which won its own National Restaurant Association Kitchen Innovations Award in 2020—takes the time out of creating perfect spheres, turning out 500 of them (50 pounds' worth) per day. And with less surface area than a comparably sized cube, each one melts even more slowly than the traditional shape.

Still, a machine that makes the prettiest, most perfect ice in the world is useless if it's inconsistent. And in an age when, as Cormier puts it, "You're essentially putting your resume on the internet every time you make a drink," bartenders need to be sure the ice is the same from the first to the last drink of every service. Hoshizaki gets high marks there too: "We've been beating the crap out of our machine for the last four years," he says. "I love that little thing."

Want to see the product in all its glittering, slow-melting glory? Hoshizaki will be at the Nightclub & Bar Show in Las Vegas, Nevada, June 28–30 as well as the North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers Show in Orlando, Florida, August 26–28. [▶](#)

# A BREATH OF

# fresh air



Second-generation winemakers  
Megan and Hilary Cline of Gust.

WITH THEIR NEW LABEL, **GUST**, SISTERS MEGAN AND HILARY CLINE CELEBRATE THE DEFINING FEATURE OF THE PETALUMA GAP

by Liz Thach, MW

**Sisters Megan and Hilary Cline grew up in the vineyards of Sonoma County:** Their family home in the Petaluma Gap was surrounded by nearly 600 acres of vines, including blocks planted by their father, Fred Cline of Cline Family Cellars, in 1995—well before his cool and windy part of the Sonoma Coast was designated in 2017.

In fact the first appellation in the world that is based on wind patterns, the Petaluma Gap AVA specializes in Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and cool-climate Syrah. “Many mornings when we awoke,” recalls Megan, “the vines outside my bedroom were cloaked in thick white fog. Then, in the afternoons, the famous gusty wind of the Petaluma Gap would sweep in. It is this wind that we celebrate in our new wine brand”—called, of course, Gust.



**Gust is sourced from two of the Cline family's estate vineyards: Diamond Pile and Catapult.**

### The Birth of the Brand

Like many children raised in a wine family (including their five siblings), Megan and Hilary were encouraged to follow their interests and work in other industries before deciding whether or not to enter the business. Megan headed south to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she studied communications and Italian while taking up sailing and kayaking. Upon graduation, she worked as a sommelier for three years before heading back home.

Hilary went north to Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, where she studied Russian. After getting her degree, she received a Fulbright Scholarship to teach English in Siberia for a year, but then she too returned to the wine industry, working in viticulture in both New Zealand and Northern California; she also gained experience as a harvest intern at Sonoma's Sojourn Cellars.

When their parents decided they wanted to retire, they reached out to their children, and Megan and Hilary answered the call—under one condition. In addition to helping to run Cline Family Cellars, they wanted to start their own brand with a focus on the best blocks from their Petaluma Gap vineyards. Thus Gust was launched with the 2017 vintage.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GUST

### Two Vineyards for Two Sisters

With a lifelong knowledge of their family's properties, the sisters decided to focus on special blocks in the Diamond Pile and Catapult vineyards as the sources for Gust. Both sites are blessed by the effects of the eponymous wind, which keeps temperatures cool in the summer afternoons and causes the grape skins to thicken. These factors result in wines that exhibit naturally high acidity, a textured palate, and complex flavors.

Certified sustainable and organically farmed, both vineyards are planted to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah in deep clay-loam soil, which requires minimal irrigation. Of the two, Diamond Pile receives more exposure

to cool marine air and is planted to Dijon clones. "[It] was named because my dad put all of his old tractors and other equipment in one part of the vineyard," explains Megan. "Even though some people would call it a junk pile, he calls it his 'diamond pile,' because he is always able to find old parts he can use for his projects. It is actually part of his sustainability philosophy to reuse as much as he can."

Catapult, meanwhile, is more sheltered and slightly warmer. Planted to California heritage clones of all three grapes, which exhibit riper, rounder character, it gets its name from the old catapult that one of their siblings built in the vineyard for them to play on when they were young.



Each autumn, the sisters walk the vineyards to taste the grapes and decide which rows in which blocks will go into Gust. “We select based on a number of factors,” says Megan, “including berry size and consistency of flavor profile. Our goal is to create a wine that is a combination of Old and New World [qualities], with both earthiness and classic California fruit.”

In the cellar, the sisters work closely with winemaker Tom Gendall (who is also director of winemaking and viticulture for Cline Family Cellars). In keeping with their philosophy that low-intervention methods preserve wine’s sense of place, they use natural yeast and partial whole-cluster fermentation, and they punch down the Pinot Noir and Syrah in open-top fermenters, while the Chardonnay is fermented slowly in used French oak barrels. All three wines are aged 12 months in oak: 25% new for the Chardonnay, 45% new for the Pinot Noir, and 50% new for the Syrah.

### Gust in the Marketplace

The sisters worked with Cline Family Cellars’ graphic designer, Sydney Sharek, to create the Gust label with the goal of “portray[ing] movement on the label as well as texture,” in Megan’s words. “Therefore you see the wind gusts moving across the label, which has a parchment texture to it.” The website reflects their minimalist aesthetic, its black-and-white homepage emblazoned with the slogan “A breath of fresh air.”

“Our original plan,” says Megan, “was to age a few vintages in our cellar and to release the wines in 2020. But then COVID hit, and we had to revert to a soft launch with an online DTC focus.” Since they currently produce only around 800 cases per year, however, their efforts to sell wine through virtual Zoom tastings as well as local retailers have been a success. Eventually, the plan is to increase production to around 2,000 cases and to build a tasting room next to Green String Farm on the family estate. “Since we produce a lot of fresh, organic vegetables [there],” says Megan, “we can do some creative pairings and vegetarian options with our wines.”

In the meantime, the sisters are enjoying the excitement of building their new brand. In addition to working with one another, says Hilary, “The best part is the opportunity to dig deep into the Petaluma Gap region and really strive to translate that unique terroir into our wines.” *LM*



Hilary and Megan Cline grew up in the Petaluma Gap before it became an AVA.



### tasting notes

**Gust 2018 Chardonnay, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$38)** Texturally unique with its generous dollop of caramel cream on graham cracker yet enough acidity to lighten and brighten. Tangerine and apricot flavors come in rich and lengthy, broadening the reach of this fine white. **93**  
—*Meridith May*

**Gust 2017 Syrah, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$48)** Dry, chalky tannins lead to dusty dark chocolate as well as meaty blackberry and licorice notes. The wine’s exceptional depth is marked by brown-sugared plum preserves and enhanced by crushed violets, slate, black pepper, and tar. **94**  
—*M.M.*

**Gust 2017 Pinot Noir, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County (\$48)** Scents of sassafras, cinnamon, and cedar are breathtaking. This well-balanced, velvet-lined Pinot Noir generates earthy notes that evolve as the palate opens up to a patch of wild strawberries and a field of sweet tobacco. Cherry preserves lift while cherry-skin tannins dry on the finish. **95**  
—*M.M.*

# BEYOND *the* BARREL

In *Beyond the Barrel*, deputy editor Eric Marsh tastes everything from craft spirits and fine wines to brilliant innovations and zany concepts that land outside the box. He then reviews the products with a judicious approach and the cognizance that all goods have a market.

**Negranti Creamery Ice Creams and Sorbets (\$9/473-ml)** Negranti Creamery, which ships nationwide via Goldbelly, purports to be the only ice cream producer in the country to use sheep's milk. Located in Paso Robles, California, it collaborated last year with local winery Halter Ranch to create a limited-release Syrah Blackberry Sorbet. It was such a hit that it sold out, but word on the street is that the brand will continue to release similar expressions in future harvest seasons. In the meantime, sate your adventurous sweet tooth with Negranti's Strawberry Basil and Salted Brown Sugar flavors, or play it safe with Chocolate or Vanilla Bean.



**IZZE Sparkling Lemonade (\$4/4-pack of 248-ml cans)**

In place of added sugar, IZZE uses apple and grape juice concentrates to give this nonalcoholic quencher a surprisingly full mouthfeel while taking the tart edge off of the effervescence—yet there's still enough acidity to rouse the taste buds. While it drinks well on its own, it's also an effective mixer with the hard stuff: Just pour over ice with a few ounces of Tennessee whiskey for an uncomplicated play on a Lynchburg Lemonade.




**Round Barn Raspberry Lemonade (\$20/4-pack of 355-ml cans)**

The tartness of this fruity and sparkling canned wine is balanced by beet-sugar sweetness; acidic with minerality and slight effervescence, it's built to satisfy your thirst during the backyard barbecues that, vaccine willing, should fill your schedule this summer.



**Fugitives Tennessee Waltz Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$55/750-ml)**

This Nashville-based distiller sources sustainable, organic, and heirloom Tennessee grains to make its small-batch whiskey. If you like a buttery bourbon, this might be heaven in a bottle: The notes of orange zest, toasted pecan, and brown sugar as well as browned butter on the nose carry over onto the palate, where they're joined by a woody spice blend. The butteriness lingers on the tongue and teeth long after the silky finish, making for an opulent and refined sipper.

**Fun Earth Company Mushroom Mocha (\$48/100-g jar)** This functional line of mushroom-powder mix was co-founded by L.A.-based restaurateur Zach Patterson during the pandemic with the health and wellness of hospitality professionals in mind. (Incarnations of Fun Earth Company's Mushroom Mocha have been on the menu for years at his cocktail destination, Melrose Umbrella Co.) The formula comprises equal parts organic lion's mane, chaga, reishi, and turkey-tail mushroom powders mixed with organic cacao powder, coconut sugar, and cinnamon. As Patterson tells it, "Mushrooms have proven health benefits; are adept at immune modulation; and affect hematopoietic stem cells, lymphocytes, macrophages, T cells, dendritic cells, and natural killer cells." Or, "in more simple terms: They help keep the immune system in balance." Add it to your coffee, tea, or smoothie and drink to your health. 



# Making History by Defying Geography

SOMM SESSIONS GOES  
GLOBAL WITH **PENFOLDS’  
NEW CALIFORNIA  
COLLECTION** ON THE  
BRAND’S 175TH ANNIVERSARY

by Jonathan Cristaldi

**On March 8, 2021**, Lars Leicht, VP of education at *The Tasting Panel* and sister publication *The SOMM Journal*, joined Gillian Ballance, MS, education manager at Treasury Wine Estates, in co-hosting the latest Somm Sessions webinar. The excitement was palpable, as those in attendance were among the first in the country to learn about Penfolds’ brand-new, showstopping series: The California Collection.

Of the lineup, Leicht said, “Some are fully California-appellated, and some are produced with a small amount of Aussie grapes”—including the top-tier Quantum Bin 98 (\$700) and Bin 149 (\$149), the former of which combines California Cabernet with what the winery calls “A+ grade” Australian Shiraz, while the latter comprises Napa Cabernet with a small percentage of “A+ grade” Australian Cabernet. Penfolds coined these cross-country blends “Wine of the World,” which is emblazoned on the label; the term is joined by a horizontal line drawn through the center of the circular logo, symbolizing the two hemispheres separating the U.S. and Australia.

Leicht wondered if Penfolds chief winemaker Peter Gago felt that “something was missing” from the California cuvées, prompting him to blend in Aussie Shiraz, but according to Ballance, neither Gago nor his colleagues, winemakers Stephanie Dutton and Andrew Baldwin, had any idea before the first blending session that they’d be mixing Australian and California wine. It was a serendipitous moment that came out of their



**Camatta Hills is Penfolds’  
610-acre estate in the Creston  
District of Paso Robles.**



*“Collectors, journalists, members of the trade, sommeliers—everyone seems to be excited about these wines.”*

*—Gillian Ballance, MS*

exhaustive blind-blending classification trials, conducted in Napa Valley at the end of the 2018 harvest.

The wines have so far been met with overwhelming praise and support from the wine industry. “Collectors, journalists, members of the trade, sommeliers—everyone seems to be excited about these wines,” said Ballance, adding that they’re “priced for unique, high-end by-the-glass programs, bottle lists, and collectors.” *Tasting Panel* publisher Meridith May, for her part, rated Quantum Bin 98 a perfect 100 points, calling it “a wine that is making history in the footsteps of its forebear, Grange.”

The untold story of Quantum Bin 98—and the blending of high-quality Australian wine with equally prestigious American wine—arose only briefly during the webinar, but the full version reveals just how far Penfolds has gone to craft a multicountry blend worthy of the luxury tier. After “A+ grade” Shiraz grapes were harvested in Australia, the young wine they yielded was transferred to custom-crafted stainless-steel tanks—rather

than stored in bladders, as is standard practice—to maintain its integrity during its ocean voyage.

“The first step was to create a vessel [that could contain] exactly the amount of wine we needed,” according to Baldwin, who serves as Penfolds’ red winemaker. “And the vessel went from a port in Barossa to California, then straight to Oakville, all in a temperature-controlled environment each step of the way.” The wine, while just six months old and unfinished, was of the “highest quality to meet its blending companions,” in his words. From the barrel room at Penfolds’ Magill Estate in Barossa to one of Treasury Wine Estates’ world-class cellars in Napa, the entire journey lasted one month.

During the webinar, Leicht asked a question on everyone’s mind: “How are you able to retain that classic Penfolds character in California-made wines?” Ballance took us through the process, explaining that the Napa Valley portion was blended with the Australian wine in a new tank and then put back into barrel. After six months of maturation, the liquid underwent a rack and

return—just like Grange or any other wine in the Penfolds portfolio—and then went straight back to barrel.

Incredibly, the California Collection began to take shape way back in 1997, when Penfolds purchased the 610-acre Creston 600 Ranch in Paso Robles, California, and renamed it Camatta Hills. In 1998, it planted 200 acres; another 210 were rooted a year later, including 10 acres of cuttings from its Magill Estate and Kalimna heritage vines in South Australia—vines never impacted by phylloxera. In addition to the Quantum Bin 98 and the Bin 149, two other wines were produced: Bin 704, a Napa Cabernet, and Bin 600, a Cabernet-Shiraz blend that pays homage to the original name of the Camatta Hills vineyard.

Toward the end of the webinar, Leicht asked what inspired Penfolds to embark on such an ambitious project. “It’s just like Champagne houses that moved [to the U.S.] to make sparkling wine or the Burgundy houses that have moved to Oregon to make Pinot Noir,” Ballance observed, comparing the terroir of the Barossa Valley to that of Paso and the Creston District in particular, “where it is a bit warmer, [making it] an ideal place to cultivate Rhône varieties.” Above all, it’s the kind of project that makes celebrating 175 years in business all the more exciting while allowing the current generation of Penfolds vintners to capture something new—hopefully inspiring the next generation to pursue their own bold ventures. **LE**



HEADED TO THE FRONT OF THE PACK:

# CAMPO BRAVO

IMAGES COURTESY OF CAMPO BRAVO



Campo Bravo's new advertising campaign revolves around the slogan "Unleash the Wolf."

BY RUTH TOBIAS

**Y**ou've got your vaccination card in your pocket, a mask that matches your outfit, and a stool waiting at the reopening of your favorite bar: At long last, you're back out on the prowl and ready to howl (within any remaining distancing guidelines, of course). The only question is what to drink in celebration—until, that is, you spy a bottle on the backbar that looks like an answer. With an edgy black-and-white label depicting a fierce-looking wolf in the wild, Campo Bravo is positioning itself to be the tequila brand of the post-COVID moment.

Certainly the numbers suggest that it's on a trajectory from underdog to leader of the category pack: Despite the fact that its Plata (\$24) launched in the U.S. just before the pandemic began, forcing the marketing team to put all promotional events on hold, Campo Bravo's sales are up nearly 250% to date. The release of a Reposado (\$24) in early 2021, as well as the recent introduction of 50-milliliter packaging to the current lineup of 750-milliliter, 1-liter, and 1.75-liter bottles, should only increase the momentum.

Milestone Brands CEO Eric Dopkins attributes Campo Bravo's rapid success primarily to its value at both the trade and consumer level. Consider first and foremost that its tequilas are 100% estate grown and



produced by fifth-generation farmers (hence the name, which translates from Spanish as Brave Field). Note second that they're certified vegan, kosher, non-GMO, gluten-free, and bat-friendly, meaning that at least 5% of the grower's agave plants (themselves certified Fairtrade International) are left to flower for pollinating bats to feed on. Given all that, Dopkins says, "The huge thing is, because [the brand] is vertically integrated, the price is just unbelievable for the quality. When people who taste it realize it is 100% blue agave and produced the way it is, they say, 'It tastes like tequilas that are twice the price.' That's not me saying that—that's retailer after retailer and consumer after consumer."

Now, as bars reopen nationwide, he expects that more and more on-premise buyers will add their voices to the chorus. "A lot of them are looking at their pour costs [and considering] quality versus value," Dopkins notes, adding that Campo Bravo "is incredibly appealing to the accounts that have to pay attention to their pour costs but don't want to compromise on quality. They're using it for their premium wells; they feature it in their Margaritas. And the packaging is amazing, so they're putting it on their backbar."

No wonder, then, that his team is laser-focused on increasing distribution in all channels across the country. "We're thinking big on this one—the brand has already surpassed what we thought it was going to do, so it's [surely] just scratching the surface in terms of what it can do [moving forward]," says Dopkins.

Which brings us back to that howling wolf. In keeping with the audacious label, Milestone Brands' marketing crew is going bold on social media with image captions like "The official tequila of the full moon" and "The wolf trusts its own instincts—trust yours"; they'll soon be rolling out a new digital ad campaign that will likewise highlight the mystery surrounding the wild creature at the heart of the brand. "I think one of the really clever elements of [our strategy] is this element of interpretation," says vice president of marketing Marc Carson, allowing people to "identify with Campo Bravo as their own personal brand."

As they do, of course, they'll also be deciding for themselves how best to drink it. Aged 11 months in ex-whiskey barrels of American oak, Reposado is tailor-made for richer concoctions, offering butterscotch and florals on the nose before a citrusy palate with hints of licorice and peppercorn. The Plata, meanwhile—with its aromas of vanilla and white chocolate and flavors of citrus, spices, and herbs—shines in refreshing cocktails like the Alpha Rita and El Sol Lobo; see recipes at right. **V**

#### ALPHA RITA

- ▶ 1½ oz. Campo Bravo Plata
  - ▶ ½ oz. Naranja Orange Liqueur
  - ▶ ½ oz. agave nectar
  - ▶ 1 oz. fresh lime juice
- Shake ingredients over ice and pour into a salt-rimmed rocks glass. Garnish with a lime wheel.



#### EL SOL LOBO

- ▶ 1½ oz. Campo Bravo Plata
  - ▶ ½ oz. Naranja Orange Liqueur
  - ▶ 3 oz. fresh orange juice
  - ▶ 1 oz. red wine
- Shake the tequila, liqueur, and juice with ice and pour over ice into a rocks glass. Top with wine and garnish with a Luxardo cherry and an orange slice.



The view enjoyed by diners at luxury resort Auberge du Soleil in Rutherford, CA.

# Leaning into LUXURY

ARE WE ABOUT TO WITNESS A RETURN TO THE ROARING '20S?

PHOTO: TRINETTE REED



Cultivar SF is a restaurant, wine bar, and retail shop in the Marina neighborhood of San Francisco, CA.

by **Nell Jerome**

**A**

ccording to the National Restaurant Association, more than 100,000 U.S. restaurants permanently closed in 2020 due to the pandemic, and sales were \$240 billion below estimate. But now that municipal restrictions on business operations are easing (along with our nerves) as more people are vaccinated, restaurants across the country are reopening their dining rooms.

As of April, food-and-beverage research consultancy CGA reports, velocity in on-premise outlets was already up 325% over last year. Meanwhile, the retail sector has been booming, with total off-premise alcohol sales up 23% since 2019. While this may not be surprising, perhaps the more interesting statistic is that (per reports from Nielsen and DISCUS) sales of wine \$20 and above have been growing, as have those of premium and ultra-premium spirits. So will the end of the pandemic mark the return of the Roaring '20s, with celebratory consumer trends reminiscent of the post-Prohibition era? We reached out to some retailers and restaurateurs for their perspective.

Renee Risch, who has spent more than 20 years in luxury hospitality, is the director of sales and marketing for Auberge du Soleil in Rutherford, California, which this year received its seventh 5-Star Award from the *Forbes Travel Guide* and was named the Best Hotel in Napa Valley by *U.S. News & World Report*. The Restaurant at Auberge du Soleil, which has 13 consecutive Michelin stars, recently reopened after shutting down for an entire year. "There's so much pent-up demand," Risch notes. "Everyone has postponed celebrating special occasions, and they are looking forward to returning to the comfort of those special places they have been missing all these months. We are seeing a lot of spontaneity now that things are opening up—the attitude is 'let's go now!'" As a result, she adds, "We are encouraging guests to make reservations well in advance to avoid disappointment. When you finally arrive at where you've been longing to go,



**Renee Risch is the director of sales and marketing for Auberge du Soleil.**



**Gingy Harris Gable and Jody Harris are the brother-and-sister team behind Cultivar SF in San Francisco and Cultivar Wines in Napa, CA.**

you want to make sure there's a table available for you."

And consumers aren't just returning to restaurants—many appear to be spending more when they get there. "Since travel was nearly nonexistent in 2020, many guests are ready to spend their travel savings," Risch observes, recalling a recent customer who purchased a \$3,500 bottle of wine with dinner in compensation for the fact that they'd had to cancel a vacation to Italy during the pandemic—twice. As she puts it, "From splurging on an incredible three-star Michelin experience to seeking out the best burger in [a given locale] and pairing it with a cult Cabernet, it's whatever brings happiness at the moment. Caviar for breakfast with your perfectly scrambled organically farmed eggs? Why not?"

Whether the upsurge in on-premise indulgence will coincide with a downturn in off-premise sales, however, remains to be seen. "Spending is all over the place," says Duey Kratzer, the owner of Mondo Vino in Denver, Colorado. "Some are still going crazy, and some are back to boxed wine. Luxury takes time and money." Kratzer, who founded the beloved independent wine shop 23 years ago, is concerned about what the on-premise rebound means for retailers: "During the early side of the pandemic, we were so busy at the shop, and now it is starting to slow down a bit." New laws allowing restaurants to sell to-go alcohol to help them make up for some of their pandemic-related losses have been extended in many places, and some operators are even hoping to make them permanent, leading Kratzer to comment, "I am nervous about the

restaurants being able to act like liquor stores. They can sell whatever they want out the door. I am happy for the restaurants, but if this stays, I think we will be in trouble as independent liquor stores." As it turns out, Colorado's House of Representatives recently passed a proposal to uphold the legislation for at least five years, while the Florida Senate has just approved a similar bill; this may be a sign of things to come nationwide.

Brother-and-sister team Gingy Harris Gable and Jody Harris own Cultivar SF, a restaurant, wine bar, and retail shop in the millennial-favorite Marina neighborhood of San Francisco. They originally envisioned an urban tasting room for the portfolio of wines produced at their Napa winery, but the business quickly became popular and now serves brunch in addition to an all-day menu indoors and out on the back patio or their newly created streetside space. Experiencing the impact of COVID-19 as both on- and off-premise operators, Gable and Harris feel lucky to have the flexibility to make crucial decisions quickly. "We have an amazing team that is great at pivoting," Gable says. "Our chef and the kitchen team worked to make the online to-go [menu] work and stay true to Cultivar SF; we have been a neighborhood place, and the people in the Marina were great at supporting us." They not only saw an upturn in retail wine purchases during the pandemic but also found that wine with takeout was a big draw. "When guests are having a meal delivered, many want it to be special," she points out. "The most popular item on the takeout menu is a high-ring item, the New York steak, which is paired with Cultivar Wines Cabernet."

Better still, Gable, like Risch, is now seeing an increase in guests who come to splurge. "People are leaning into luxury when they go out, since they were not going out as often [during the pandemic]," she says. But will these changes continue, and will dining ever return to normal? "What I think will stay is being able to do the spur-of-the-moment kind of entertaining at home with the new to-go options," says Gable. "The other thing that I hope stays is expanded outdoor dining. You get a flavor of the restaurant based on their outdoor space, and for locations that have small storefronts, the additional space makes people take notice." She is also optimistic that events will make a comeback: "People want to be with other people, and they want to celebrate," she points out. "We are getting requests for wedding dinners, brunch birthday parties, and of course wedding and baby showers."

Admittedly, after losing income from more than 200 canceled weddings over the past year, Kratzer doesn't yet share her positive outlook. "I still have no idea



PHOTO: GINA HEMMINGS

**Duey Kratzer is the owner of Mondo Vino in Denver, CO.**

what to expect in the near or distant future," he acknowledges. But Risch sees a silver lining to the year many of us spent without the luxuries and life experiences we'd taken for granted. "We'll see how short our memories are," she says, "but hopefully the awareness for how travel enriches our lives will live on, and guests will truly appreciate the return of warm and welcoming hospitality [from] dedicated workers who ensure all the details are attended to so they can relax and truly enjoy all the nuances of their journey." **W**



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AGAVE DE LOS ANDES

# Anthony Dias

## BLUE REVIEWS

Presented by  BLUE LIFESTYLE

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

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**88-89: VERY GOOD**

**90-94: OUTSTANDING**

**95-100: CLASSIC**

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

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

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

Prices are for 750-mL bottles unless otherwise noted.

### DOMESTIC

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**92** **Ramble 2019 Carignan, Buddha's Dharma Vineyard, Mendocino (\$28)** Fresh, tangy, and lively notes of strawberry and pomegranate. Clean, fresh, and crunchy; bright, long, and balanced.

**93** **Lasseter Family Winery 2017 Chemin de Fer, Justi Creek Estate, Sonoma Valley (\$38)** Deep color and a nose of earth, spice, and ripe berries. Velvety, lush, and rich; nicely balanced and spicy, with dense, meaty flavors of blueberry, black raspberry, and cassis.

**93** **Jada Vineyard & Winery 2017 Hell's Kitchen, Paso Robles (\$65)** Dark color and aromas of earthy, ripe fruit. Juicy and smooth, long and seamless, with black raspberry, pepper, and other spices. 60% Syrah, 20% Grenache, 16% Graciano, 3% Viognier, and 1% Tannat.

**91** **Three Rivers Winery 2018 Syrah, Pepper Bridge Vineyard, Walla Walla Valley, Washington (\$42)** From an internationally renowned vineyard in Walla Walla comes this deep, dark wine. It's a balanced, stylish effort, with spice, blackberry, and earth.

FOLEY FAMILY WINES



**92** Three Rivers Winery 2018 Svelte Bordeaux Red, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$50) Smooth and generous, with dense plum and berry notes. Lush, balanced, and long; deep and classic.

FOLEY FAMILY WINES

**92** Knights Bridge Winery 2019 Chardonnay, Knights Valley (\$40) Toasty vanilla nose; luscious and creamy, with balance, style, and good depth culminating in a lengthy finish. Clean, mellow, and juicy.

**91** Knights Bridge Winery 2019 Unoaked Chardonnay, Knights Valley (\$30) Soft and smooth, with a velvety texture and juicy flavors of pear. Clean, balanced, and elegant; complex despite the absence of oak.

**95** Knights Bridge Winery 2019 Chardonnay, West Block, Knights Valley (\$85) Smooth and bright with tangy acidity; juicy and layered, fresh and complex, with finesse and gorgeous style. A masterful entry in the Chardonnay sweepstakes.

**94** Knights Bridge Winery 2019 Chardonnay, East Block, Knights Valley (\$75) Ripe, fat, and rich; deep and intense, yet with polished, elegant style; long and interesting to the last drop.

**94** The Wine Foundry 2018 Pinot Noir, Lindsay's Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills (\$62) Silky and juicy, with complex notes of bright cherry and tangy acidity giving way to a delightful tinge of sweetness on the finish. Fresh and elegant, with finesse and glorious style.

**93** The Wine Foundry 2018 Chardonnay, Courtney's Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills (\$52) Silky, deep, and juicy, with sweet vanilla and toasted oak; balanced and generous, long and lovely.

**93** Pfendler Vineyards 2019 Chardonnay, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma Coast (\$45) Fresh and smooth, with crisp tropical fruit and toasty oak; stylish and nicely balanced, elegant and long.

**95** AXR 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$84) Deep color and a rich, ripe nose; bountiful flavors of lush black fruit appear on the velvety and dense palate around a firm core of acidity. Great balance throughout and a long, smooth finish.

**92** King Estate Winery 2019 Domaine Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$29) Smooth, lush, rich, and refined, with hints of vanilla. Juicy and deep, it's a lovely wine—and not your grandfather's Pinot Grigio.

**93** King Estate Winery 2018 Paradox Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$35) Bright floral nose; toasty and creamy, long and lovely, with depth, finesse, and style.



**94** Oleandri 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$90) Intense garnet color and rich aromas of earth and plum. Blackberry and spice appear on the palate, which is balanced and complex yet seamless. Delicious and long, with excellent finesse.



**92** Sonoma-Cutrer 2019 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$23) Golden color and a vanilla nose; smooth flavors of pear and vanilla as well as a crisp acid structure. Classic and balanced, with a long, fresh finish.

# BLUE REVIEWS



**93** Fort Ross Vineyard  
2018 Sea Slopes  
Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast  
(\$35) Medium ruby color and  
a spicy nose; juicy and crisp but  
showing some depth; balanced,  
long, and amiable. 🍷



**92** Fort Ross Vineyard  
2019 Sea Slopes  
Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast  
(\$30) Aromas of pear transition  
to the palate with vanilla. Smooth  
and creamy, with a bright acid  
structure; fresh and long. 🍷



**92** Longwood Estate  
2016 Family Reserve  
Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley  
(\$60) Vibrant garnet color; a soft  
nose of herbs and plum, and a  
smooth texture; balanced and  
long. The addition of other Bor-  
deaux varieties gives this wine  
seamless complexity.

**90** Rivaura 2019 Estate Viog-  
nier, Lewis-Clark Valley AVA,  
Idaho (\$28) Smooth and creamy yet  
fresh and balanced, with notes of pear and  
honeysuckle leading to a tinge of bitterness  
on the finish.

**94** Ste. Chapelle Winery 2018  
Panoramic Malbec, Shoshone  
Falls, Snake River Valley, Idaho (\$30)  
Deep garnet color and a rich vanilla nose;  
smooth, balanced, and juicy; mellow and  
layered. An impressive effort.

**94** Telaya Wine Co 2018 Syrah,  
Snake River Valley, Idaho  
(\$34) Very dark, with a fragrant, floral  
nose and a fruit-driven palate. Dense, juicy,  
elegant, and balanced; rich and lovely.

**91** Wine Guy and Wine Gal 2019  
Allons Ensemble Pinot Noir,  
Russian River Valley (\$50) Deep ruby  
color and a rich cherry nose; earthy and  
long, with lush notes of black cherry.

**91** Wine Guy and Wine Gal 2018  
Allons Ensemble Zinfandel,  
Dry Creek Valley (\$40) Opaque garnet  
hue; smooth, dense, and ripe, with flavors  
of berry and earth as well as good acid  
structure.

**91** Pamplin Family Winery 2017  
J|R|G Red Wine, Columbia  
Valley, Oregon (\$30) Aromas of berry  
and earth carry over to the dense palate  
with flavors of spice, a smooth texture, and  
a lasting finish.





**95** Longwood Estate 2016 Family Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$100) Succulent plum nose; smooth, tangy, and complex, with lovely fruit character; intense yet elegant.



**94** Three Sticks 2019 Pinot Blanc, Sonoma Coast (\$50) This is an outstanding example of an underserved variety, with aromas of ripe fruit and a fresh, tangy, crisp, and juicy palate.

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92 POINTS

THE **tastingpanel** MAGAZINE

April/May 2021



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# BLUE REVIEWS

**93 Pamplin Family Winery 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Oregon (\$50)** Rich garnet color and a nose of plum and chocolate that transfers to the palate with flavors of berries and spice; lush and intense, long and balanced.

## IMPORTED

**97 Taittinger 2014 Brut Champagne, France (\$103)** Here we have the house variety, Chardonnay, sharing the spotlight equally with Pinot: The result is richer and more complex, with lush fruit and layered flavors. It's a beautiful and complete wine that's deep and intense yet also elegant and refined.

KOBRAND

**95 Château La Nerthe 2015 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuveé des Cadettes Rouge, France (\$165)** Slightly brick-red color and aromas of earth, wood, and spice. Complex and deep, with lovely acidity and rich, seamless flavors; long and balanced.

KOBRAND

**95 Bodega Norton 2018 Lote Negro, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$40)** A dark, dense, and ripe Malbec-Cabernet Sauvignon blend from the Uco Valley, where the vineyards are over 3,000 feet above sea level. Smooth and elegant, it's outstandingly stunning.

KOBRAND

**92 Marie-Pierre Manciat 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé Les Petites Bruyeres, France (\$29)** Smooth and bright, with pure Chardonnay flavors and crisp, lovely acidity. Clean, fresh, and balanced, with a long, silky finish—a standout.

SHIVERICK IMPORTS

## VALUE

**90 Billy D. Wines 2019 French Colombard, California (\$11)** Smooth, aromatic, and charming; fresh yet mellow; balanced, with bracing length. ☺

**91 Louis Jadot 2018 Pinot Noir Bourgogne, France (\$19)** Bright, clean, and silky, with crisp cherry; juicy, lively, and balanced. A charming wine and a great value.

KOBRAND

**91 Angelini 2020 Prosecco Rosé, Italy (\$12)** Light pink color; fresh and foamy, crisp and juicy, with notes of strawberry and peach. Dry with bright acidity and a hint of fruity sweetness; smooth, long, and alluring.

ANGELINI WINE LTD

**91 Bodega Norton 2020 Altura Sémillon, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina (\$13)** Creamy and smooth, with rich aromatics and charming style; juicy, balanced, and deep.

KOBRAND

**92 Domaine du Terme 2018 Vacqueyras, France (\$22)** This smooth and lush expression of Syrah comes from one of the Rhône Valley's best appellations, though it's lesser known. Rich, ripe, and juicy; fresh and spicy, long and balanced.

SHIVERICK IMPORTS

**88 Mystory Wine Co. 2020 Rosé, Paso Robles (\$17)** Bright pink color; clean and fresh, dry and tangy; juicy, lively, and balanced. ☺

**91 Care 2018 Finca Marimu Carriñena, Spain (\$20)** Rich garnet hue; juicy and spiced, with notes of earth, plum, and blackberry; smooth and long.

GRAPEJUICE GROUP

**88 Cloud Break 2020 Rosé, California (\$10)** Soft salmon-pink color; clean and dry, simple and refreshing. ☺

**90 Agitator 2019 Bourbon Barrel Aged Red Wine, California (\$20)** A smooth, spicy, and rich blend of Zinfandel, Petit Verdot, and Merlot with a toasted palate of plum and tobacco; long and balanced.

**92 Williamson Orchards & Vineyards 2018 Sangiovese, Snake River Valley, Idaho (\$25)** Clean, polished, juicy, and balanced, with notes of berries, spice, violets, and plum. Serious yet fresh and charming.

WILLIAM GRANT & SONS

**92 Vintage Longbottom 2019 H Syrah, Adelaide Hills, Australia (\$30)** Aromas of blackberry and vanilla and a flavor profile of lush berries and toast within a good acid structure; long and balanced. ☺

QUINTESSENTIAL



**93 Casanova di Neri 2018 Irroso Toscana IGT, Italy (\$22)** Deep berry nose; lush, spicy, and long; smooth and tangy, ripe and balanced. Made primarily from relatively young Sangiovese and blended with a small portion of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot.

DALLA TERRA

**92 Centorri 2020 Moscato di Pavia, Italy (\$10)** Foamy, ripe, and sweet; fresh, long, and charming. ☺

DALLA TERRA

**90** **Domaine de Cala 2020 Coteaux Varois en Provence Rosé, France** (\$22) Light salmon pink; clean and fresh yet soft and smooth; aromatic and juicy, balanced and long.

WINE WAREHOUSE

**92** **The Dalmore Highland Single Malt Scotch Whiskey Aged 12 Years, Scotland** (\$60) A good, solid Highland malt. Balanced, smooth, and rich, with notes of caramel and toasty oak; elegant and concentrated, with a tiny tinge of sweetness.

E. & J. GALLO

**94** **Tequila Dahlia Cristalino, Mexico** (\$40) Very pale amber color and a soft floral-agave nose; spicy yet creamy and sweet, with pure notes of vanilla and oak. Elegant and long, with a kick of pepper on the finish.

PARK STREET IMPORTS

## SPIRITS

**92** **Mad March Hare Premium Irish Poitín, Ireland** (\$30)

Made from malted barley, this traditional Irish spirit was outlawed for centuries; it's very much like white whiskey, though this small-batch expression is actually rather elegant. Malty nose and a smooth texture; rich, intense, and deep.

MAD MARCH IMPORTS

**92** **Bumbu Rum Co. Crème, Panama** (\$50) This Panamanian entry into the cream liqueur category is a balanced blend of rum, spices, and cream, with lush notes of mint and chocolate.

BUMBU RUM CO.


**94** **Larceny Barrel Proof Batch A121 Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA** (\$50) This splendid spirit from Old Fitzgerald is refined, spiced, and layered with sweet caramel and floral notes. It's silky and lush when watered.

**92** **Broken Top Mountain Whiskey Straight Rye, USA** (\$40) Smooth, soft amber color; fresh and graceful, with toasted notes of vanilla and caramel; creamy, elegant, and long. Distilled in Indiana and bottled in Oregon.

**94** **Sagamore Spirits Tequila Finish Rye Whiskey, USA** (\$69)

Deep amber color and a toasted agave nose. Rich, intense, and off-dry, with a velvety texture and lovely hints of agave and toasted oak; floral and spicy.

**93** **6 O'Clock Gin, United Kingdom** (\$35)

Smooth, dry, and elegant; creamy, peppery, and long. Try it in a Gin & Tonic. 

NO LIMIT BRANDS & IMPORT SERVICES



**91** **PLUSH Pure Spirit Straight Vodka, USA** (\$25) Ripe nose and a smooth texture; clean and long, with dense flavors of corn and vanilla.



**90** **PLUSH Premium Plum Flavored Vodka, USA** (\$25) Creamy texture and rich notes of sweet plum and vanilla; clean yet lush and long.



**93** **Cathead Bitter Orange Vodka, USA** (\$20) Authentic orange nose and a silky texture; dry, clean flavors of orange with an acceptable measure of bitterness. A great base for an exciting cocktail. 

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

# Publisher's PICKS

PHOTO: DEVIN BERKO



*Publisher Meridith May and her dog, Porter, with Emma Roberts (author of our “Dear Emma” column) of Porta Via restaurant in Los Angeles, CA.*

## WINES



**Trivento 2019 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendoza, Argentina (\$11)** Aromas of plum and jasmine stop you in your tracks before the first sip. The wine is dark and dense, with a low ABV of 13.5% and chewy, dusty tannins that show complexity and texture. Vivid red plum and orange zest complement the fine acid structure as espresso and sandalwood unite on the finish. **91**



FETZER VINEYARDS



**Cline Cellars 2019 Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi (\$11)** Big, jammy blueberry notes are followed by vanilla bean and black pepper before a bright thread of wild strawberry engages the palate with juicy, well-structured dignity. Maturity is apparent in the generous, concentrated mouthfeel. **90**



**Leese-Fitch 2018 Red Blend, California (\$13)** A blend of eight varieties, including Petite Sirah, Tempranillo, and Syrah, with most of the fruit hailing from Clarksburg and Lodi. This accessible red offers dark chocolate, spiced blackberry preserves, and leather. Oak integrates well with tart black cherry and a liveliness ensues on the finish. **89**



DON SEBASTIANI & SONS



**J. Lohr Estates 2020 Flume Crossing Sauvignon Blanc, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$14)** Showing off a Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing seal on its back label, this vivacious and delicious wine demonstrates J. Lohr's commitment to the environment. Salted pear, pine nut, and honeysuckle are full of esprit, as are sprightly notes of lime, guava, and kiwi dotted with confectioner's sugar. **92**



**Guinigi 2019 Pinot Grigio, DOC delle Venezie, Italy (\$14)** Aromatic stone fruit joins golden apple and peach, which go tart on the palate with a squeeze of lemon. With bright acidity and a cooling mineral base, this floral white shines. **91**



3 BADGE ENOLOGY

Worthy of a smooch.

French-style double bizou.

Wildly infatuated.

Seriously smitten.

Head over heels in love.



**Butternut 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, California**

(\$15) Spicy blackberry and sage are dotted with cedar in this harmoniously balanced wine, which also shows notes of red plum, espresso, and bittersweet dark chocolate. Good tannin structure is evident. Aged in 25% new French oak. **90**



MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



**Oak Ridge Winery 2019 Old Soul Pinot Noir, Lodi**

(\$16) Tart black cherry and bright acidity define this lively red aged six months in 100% French oak. Spiced cinnamon and a touch of earthiness gain textural and aromatic complexity before the finish of cedar and tobacco. **90**



**Ultimate Provence 2020 Rosé, AOP Côtes de Provence, France**

(\$22) Housed in a breathtakingly beautiful bottle, this fresh, aromatic rosé of Syrah, Cinsault, Grenache Noir, and Rolle is a superb food-pairing wine. Peachy notes with a snap of ginger, neroli, and jasmine help the expressive pink make a floral and fruity statement. Dry and mineral-driven on the finish, with a hint of spice. **92**



PROVENCE ROSÉ GROUP



**Cline Cellars 2019 Petite Sirah, Contra Costa County**

(\$15) Mocha and violets make a decidedly delicious impression on a palate that's ripe, round, and well balanced, with floral scents and flavors that persist with each sip. **92**



**Ant Moore 2020 Signature Series Rosé, Marlborough, New Zealand**

(\$17) What a glorious rosé! Lovely aromas of strawberry and red tea precede exhilarating flavors of orange peel and ripe cherry. A touch of Italian herbs seasons notes of hibiscus. **92**



**Raeburn 2019 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County**

(\$24) There's a certain romance to this wine: It's lithe, feminine, and juicy, with a sprinkle of white pepper on raspberry as well as a touch of stoniness. Rainier cherry and great acidity merge on the finish line. **94**



PURPLE BRANDS



**Parducci 2019 Small Lot Pinot Noir, Mendocino County**

(\$15) Parducci's Small Lot program continues to live up to its reputation for consistent quality. Palate-coating cherry, skin and all, aligns with notes of chocolate and cola, creating textural complexity. Earthiness is bolstered by orange peel and tart cranberry. Rose petals and strawberry give way to a dry finish, readying you for the next sip. **90**



**Paso Highlands Cellars 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles Highlands District, Paso Robles**

(\$17) Devilishly deep and delicious, with cherry preserves weaving through flavors of fudge cake. The acidity is high, keeping the fruit tart and fresh, and the tannins are dry and dusty. A hint of black tea offers palate-smacking goodness. The grapes were grown at elevations ranging from 1,160 to 2,086 feet above sea level, and the wine aged in French and American oak for nine months, imparting a plush yet spicy mouthfeel. **91**



MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



**RouteStock 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley**

(\$25) A pleasant array of chocolate, white pepper, soy sauce, and tart cherry show well in this promising red composed of 91.3% Cabernet Sauvignon with small portions of the four other Bordeaux varieties. Spending 21 months in French oak for soft, supple tannins and a gentle fruit character, it certainly overdelivers for the price. **91**

WILSON DANIELS



**Bonterra 2019 Zinfandel, California**

(\$16) The addition of Petite Sirah, Syrah, and other red grapes to this 80% Zinfandel made with organic grapes contributes seasoning and layers of flavors. While the sweetness of summer plum and black cherry is dense and intense, it's balanced by vibrant acidity. Mocha notes play a role in calming the tannins, introducing a supple nature on the finish. **90**



FETZER VINEYARDS



**Bonterra 2019 Pinot Noir, Mendocino County**

(\$18) Crafted with certified-organic grapes and aged 12 months in French and American oak, this red opens up with richness defined by notes of vanilla and coffee dappled with strawberry and white pepper. Silky, with a hint of spiced tobacco, a swath of licorice, and a touch of bergamot, it leaves behind a generous, lasting finish. **92**



FETZER VINEYARDS



**Round Pond Estate 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley**

(\$28) Light and tart notes of lemon blossom and white grapefruit meet zingy flavors of honeydew, prickly pear, and salted lemon before the finish introduces a mellower vanilla note. Fermented in 100% stainless steel. **93**



# Notable Chardonnays

THESE LUXE WHITES DESERVE SPECIAL ATTENTION



**Cono Sur 2020 Bicicleta Unoaked Chardonnay, Chile (\$8)** Aromas of lemon verbena and golden apple scent the glass as honeysuckle leads a parade of pineapple, mango, and wet stone flavors. Delicate and floral. **89**

FETZER VINEYARDS



**Migration 2018 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$42)** Winemaker Dana Epperson's 2018 vintage is showing strong—we loved this white for its innate elegance. A unique honeyed-walnut character shows through cedar and baked apple as the wine develops length and more length, with litig acidity that holds it together so well. **93**

THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO



**Nickel & Nickel 2019 Chardonnay, Truchard Vineyard, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$55)** This famous 270-acre vineyard has always attracted winemakers and wine drinkers alike with its ability to deliver superb juice. Lighthearted, lean, and loyal to its terroir of volcanic ash and rock in cool Carneros, this mineral-kissed white possesses an ethereal quality; it's so elegantly appointed, melding subtle stone fruit, honeysuckle, kiwi, and oregano within a silky mouthfeel. **95**



**McManis Family Vineyards 2019 Chardonnay, River Junction AVA (\$13)** River Junction, located west of the city of Modesto and south of Lodi, is one of California's smallest AVAs. This vineyard sits at the confluence of the San Joaquin and Stanislaus rivers, benefiting from cooler temperatures than the surrounding sites. Lychee and stone fruit, including Anjou pear and ripe summer peach, integrate well with toasty brioche as the buttery mouthfeel expands and paints the palate with caramel-coated pineapple. Aged in French oak for four to six months, the wine overdelivers with grace. **92**

THE WINE GROUP



**Trois Noix 2019 Chardonnay, Napa Valley (\$50)** Oak Knoll fruit from the historic Muir-Hanna Vineyard forms the base of this exotic-tasting Chardonnay, aged in all-neutral French oak and stainless steel. Its edgy personality plays on its food-pairing strength, thanks to high acidity. Founder and vintner Jaime Araujo affectionately named the wine for his three children (*trois noix* is French for "three nuts"). Flavors of pine nut, jasmine, chamomile, and lemon curd are ethereal, and the mouthfeel is stark and steely. **95**



**Calera 2018 Chardonnay, Mt. Harlan AVA, Central Coast (\$55)** The palate of this rich and luxurious wine is sparked by jasmine and sea salt. From an elevation of 2,200 feet, it showcases limestone soil through a line of flint that runs through its core. Lemon verbena and a billowy mouthfeel keep the exquisite parade marching. **96**

THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO



**Schug 2018 Chardonnay, Carneros (\$35)** Yellow apple, saffron, and lemon verbena combine for fragrance and flavor. Perky acidity and a well-rounded body are balanced, delivering a marvelous mouthfeel. **93**



**Ladera 2018 Chardonnay, Pillow Road Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$55)** The vineyard's 10-mile proximity to the Pacific forms this wine's alert, eloquent personality, and sur lie aging in French oak for 15 months provides its lush texture. A veil of chamomile and custard surrounds a creamy core. Daffodil and lemon blossom merge to create an acute sense of focus on the palate, where they're bolstered by high-toned acidity. **95**



**Far Niente 2019 Chardonnay, Napa Valley (\$70)** Coombsville vineyards protected by the hills east of downtown Napa are home to this Chardonnay. They're as cool as Carneros but less windy, with deeper soils of gravel and volcanic ash, and their influence on this dignified white shows in its complex persona. A fine balance of stone fruit, acid structure, and zingy citrus creates a tangible yet delicate mouthfeel. Honeysuckle and gardenia offer significant floral tones. **95**



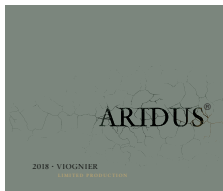
**Lloyd Cellars by Robert Lloyd 2019 Chardonnay, Carneros (\$40)** Lush notes of lemon cream pie add to the silky mouthfeel of this superlative white, which is texturally generous with spiced sandalwood and voluptuous notes of chamomile and honey. Hints of sage, cinnamon, and jasmine make it exotic. **94.5**





**Aridus 2018 Viognier, Co-chise County, Arizona (\$28)**

What once was an apple warehouse is now home to this winery. Its 40 acres of estate vineyard in Pearce, Arizona, are about a half hour away, rising to an elevation of about 5,000 feet to experience monsoons, snow, and extreme temperatures both hot and cold. This aromatic, floral white spent 22 months in oak and showcases long-lasting notes of apricot nectar with a thread of salinity as well as lemon verbena and toffee. Lush and elegant, it manages to uphold its acid structure, while its fairly low alcohol (12.7% ABV) keeps the flavors dynamic. **92**



**Smith-Madrone 2017 Estate Bottled Riesling, Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley (\$34)**

Grapes grown on steep mountain vineyards continue to create one of our favorite California Rieslings year after year. Aromas of beeswax, buttercup, and wet stone are enticing, and flavors of passion fruit are accentuated by fine acidity and a remarkable mouthfeel. Daisy, lemon blossom, and freshly sliced Anjou pear feel serene as saltiness refreshes the palate, urging another sip. **94**

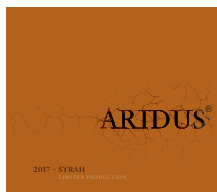


**Schug 2018 Pinot Noir, Carneros (\$35)** Defined by spiced cedar and a rapture of cinnamon-kissed cherry, this delicate Pinot Noir offers just a touch of earth as well as freshness imparted by an energetic acid structure. **93**



**Aridus 2017 Syrah, Cochise County, Arizona (\$37)**

With the addition of 17% Viognier, this Northern Rhône-style Syrah features notes of grilled, smoked meats and mountain sage. On the palate, vanilla and rhubarb are spiked with cedar, cinnamon, and black olive. It has depth of character and an earthy core. **93**



**Prescription 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$30)**

Big, tarry espresso notes wrap deep, resonant flavors of blackberry in satin. Dry, chalky tannins abound on the mid-palate with a hint of mint and shale. It's an expressive, ageworthy, big-boy red that offers a defined structure. **92**



LLOYD CELLARS



**Oak Ridge Winery 2018 1906 Vintners Zinfandel, Lodi (\$32)**

A blend of 95% Zinfandel and 5% Petite Sirah, this ripe red aged in 75% French and 25% American oak for 18 months. With fragrant scents of cedar, earth, and raspberry and a billowy, rich mouthfeel with zippy spice, it has a well-defined sense of freshness. **91**



**Schild Estate 2018 Prämie Shiraz, Narrow Road Vineyard, Barossa Valley, Australia (\$40)**

Aromas of grilled steak with a blackberry-pepper rub provide a sense of this juicy and fragrant wine's depth. The black pepper continues to show its worth as it seasons plum preserves and black licorice. Notes of blue heather, iron, and tilled soil also make an appearance. **93**



**Hawk and Horse Vineyards 2017 Block Three Cabernet Sauvignon, Red Hills, Lake County (\$60)**

With 10% Petit Verdot and 5% Cab Franc added in, this 100% French oak-aged red has a distinguished demeanor. Black cherry, mocha, and plum form a plush pillow as the chewy liquid engages with chalky, teeth-coating tannins and develops an intimacy with the palate. A valentine of plum and pomegranate is delivered on the finish. **94**



**Hawk and Horse Vineyards 2017 Cabernet Franc, Red Hills, Lake County (\$65)**

Made with fruit farmed biodynamically on the winery's 180-acre mountain estate, Hawk and Horse's first Cabernet Franc release shows remarkable success in bringing out the best of the variety's nature. Crushed stone and dried violets merge with a wave of blackberry and chocolate in this slick and opulent wine. **95**



**Hawk and Horse Vineyards 2017 Petit Verdot, Red Hills, Lake County (\$65)**

Silky, floral, and gloriously appointed with violet-flavored licorice. There's an earthy side to this opaque black-red powerhouse, which is sweetened and softened by a core of dark chocolate. Expressive as all get out. **95**





**Faustino I 2010 Gran Reserva, Rioja, Spain (\$40)** This blend of 86% Tempranillo, 9% Graciano, and 5% Mazuelo makes a regal entry. Coffee-kissed oak and deep blue and black berries offer intensity and density as churned soil demonstrates terroir, unmasking the wine's earthy nature. Slate and sage partner up on the finish. **94**

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS



**Flora Springs 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$50)** Fruit sourced from two vineyards—one in Rutherford and one in Oakville—contributes prestigious terroir to this red, which aged 18 months in 70% French and 30% American oak. Notes of cigar leaf, black pepper, and bittersweet dark chocolate lead the way on the palate as black fruit weaves throughout with hints of cola and black coffee. The dry, dusty finish has a cedar twist. **92**



**Signaterra by Benziger 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sunny Slope Vineyard, Sonoma Valley (\$59)** Made with Demeter-certified Biodynamic grapes, the lushness of this wine is made up of peppered and spiced black fruit atop velvety tannins. What a glorious mouthfeel: Profound layers of tar, licorice, and black tea are sweetened by a glide of mocha and cedar. **94**



THE WINE GROUP



**Notre Vue 2019 GSM, Chalk Hill, Sonoma County (\$69)** Co-fermented in stainless steel, this blend of 51% Grenache, 20% Syrah, and 29% Mourvèdre offers up wild strawberry and tart cherry on the nose and palate. White pepper surrounds notes of milk chocolate. Bright and lit from within, it's a beautifully crafted red that displays delicate jasmine and cigar leaf on the finish. **93**



**Y. Rousseau 2018 The Musketeer Tannat, Napa Valley (\$75)** Embodying the cheerful pun "all for wine and wine for all," Yannick Rousseau's interpretation of this swashbuckling variety intrigues. Built with blocks of concentrated red cherry, new leather, violets, and licorice-bathed slate, it demands attention. *En garde!* **93**



**Acumen 2018 Mountain-side Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$65)** Bright blue fruit and tart dark cherry engage lavishly with spiced cedar and a hint of ginger and orange peel. The wine is youthful but easy drinking, with tannins that dry the tongue—a testament to an inherent minerality with a brushy heather note. **94**



**Round Pond Estate 2018 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$75)** From the winery's Rutherford and Oakville vineyards, this sturdy 90% Cabernet Sauvignon with Malbec, Petit Verdot, and Cab Franc showcases opulent black fruit and bright pomegranate. Espresso and a pop of black pepper weave through the curvaceous body. Jasmine-kissed cocoa pervades, leaving a persistent floral perfume and flavor. Aged 20 months in (65% new) tight-grain French oak. **96**



**Lorenzi Estate Vineyards 2017 The Swale Petite Sirah, Temecula Valley (\$75)** A depth of darkness shadows this big, bold red, in which wildflowers and plum are accented by a dash of black pepper. The fruit creates a chewy texture, and the tannins are sturdy and drying. A hint of tobacco leaf and cedar adds to the savory quality of this gorgeous wine, which saw the addition of 8% Zinfandel and spent 28 months in 100% French oak. **94**



**Rodney Strong Vineyards 2016 Brothers Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$75)**

The vineyard this wine hails from reaches elevations up to 1,030 feet above sea level. Scents of dried blackberry, black tea, mocha, and sandalwood lead to an impossibly satiny mouthfeel: It's dense and powerful yet opulent. Licorice and espresso make a fine pair with cherry-pith tannins. Aged for 26 months in French oak, the wine is round, not wound up. **95**



**Grieve Family Winery 2018 Double Eagle Red, Napa Valley (\$89)**

Winemaker Philippe Melka composed this powerful, elegant blend of 91% Cabernet Sauvignon and 9% Petit Verdot aged 18 months in 67% new French oak. It's tightly wound in its youth, with chalky tannins, black pepper, and spiced cedar defining its textured entry. On the palate, the fruit ripens and becomes more balanced as it's joined by melt-in-your-mouth chocolate. **94**



**Guarachi Family Wines 2017 G by Alex Guarachi Cabernet Sauvignon, Meadowrock Estate, Napa Valley (\$95)**

Spice; graphite; and dark, dense berries permeate this teeth-gripping, seductive 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from Guarachi's new high-elevation estate. Dried violets, crushed gravel, and boysenberry caress the plate, while red volcanic soils heighten the intensity of the wine's acidity as well as its tannic complexity. **98**



**Viña Almaviva Winery 2018, Puente Alto, Chile (\$150)** A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Carménère, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, this Franco-Chilean icon spent 18 months in new French oak and exhibits broad strokes of chocolate that melt across the palate, where they're spiced with cigar leaf and dried lavender. Elegant on all fronts: texture, balance, and luxury. **93**

JOANNE BORDEAUX-USA





Rusack Vineyards winemaker Steve Gerbac.

## A Spotlight on Rusack Vineyards

BALLARD CANYON IN THE SANTA YNEZ VALLEY is among my favorite places: I lived there for almost a decade and was able to appreciate the wines up close. They reflect the world-class status of this small AVA, with its rolling hills and pastoral setting in rural Santa Barbara County.

"At Rusack Vineyards, we like to let the vineyards speak for themselves," says winemaker Steve Gerbac. "Our estate vineyard in Ballard Canyon balances the cool marine and warmer valley influences, allowing us to create perfectly balanced wines with structure and finesse. These 20 acres of vines are divided into small lots so that each can be managed to produce the best grapes possible. Each lot lends unique character, resulting in unmatched complexity. In addition to our estate vineyard, we source Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from world-renowned vineyard sites that also capture the essence of their terroir. Our overarching goal is to allow the true expression of each individual site to shine through in our wines."



**Rusack 2018 Chardonnay, Bien Nacido Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$40)** Aged ten months in French oak, this white sees 100% malolactic. We pick up a thread of caramel that weaves through a stony persona with just a whisper of oak. Medium-bodied, it blooms with a sensational mouthfeel. **93**



**Rusack 2017 Reserve Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County (\$40)** Sourced from the John Sebastiano (70%) and Fiddlestix (30%) vineyards, this pedigreed red saw 11 months of aging in French oak. It's vibrant and fresh, with a hint of cinnamon and spice that keeps the liveliness going. A delicious floral tone of wild strawberry is unearthed on the finish. **94**



**Rusack 2017 Zinfandel, Ballard Canyon Estate, Santa Ynez Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$48)** With 9% Petite Sirah blended in and 16 months of French oak aging, this expression has an ABV of under 14% that keeps it tempered and elegant. Boysenberry and tart cranberry complement a dash of mocha and a kiss of mint. Seasoned by cool salinity, spicy floral notes chime in. **94**



**PaQui Silvera Tequila, Mexico (\$50)** The aromas that emanate from this complex and dynamic silver tequila made with 100% blue agave range from floral to tropical. While lilac perfumes sweetened scents of pineapple, a salty sea breeze adds to the allure. The luxurious entry on the palate begins with white-peppered vanilla bean followed by a twist of lime. Fresh agave flavors are surrounded by earthy clay and dark cherry skins. **96**



## SPIRITS



**Highclere Castle London Dry Gin, United Kingdom (\$40)** One of the best new gins to arrive from the U.K., this 87-proofer is one to watch. The nose tenders starbright aromas of lavender, tangerine, ginger, and jasmine before a coating of vanilla and marshmallow greets the palate. Exquisite floral notes are dotted with white pepper. **94**



**Brother's Bond Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$40)** A blend of three mash bills creates this four-grain straight bourbon whiskey, which actors Ian Somerhalder and Paul Wesley named for the bond they developed while working together on *The Vampire Diaries*. Scents of caraway, leather, and orange peel are inviting. Distinguished notes of brown-sugared peach and white pepper surround astringent tannins as a striking spiced-peach flavor is enveloped by maple richness on the oatmeal finish. **93**



**Stray Dog Wild Gin, Greece (\$40)** With a distinct nose of juniper, lavender, and anise, this 87-proof gin was created by third-generation Greek-American restaurateur Johnny Livanos (of New York's Oceana, Ousia, Moderne Barn, and City Limits) to show a clear affinity with ouzo, the iconic Greek aperitif. Its satin entry is memorable, mingling candied aniseed with touches of sage, black pepper, rosemary, cumin, bay leaf, and lemon. We love the pillow-like mouthfeel. **94**



The Medici  
Ermete estate in  
Lambrusco, Italy.

# CEASELESS EXPLORATION

WINES FROM URUGUAY, ITALY, AND  
CALIFORNIA CAPTURE OUR ATTENTION

Our exploration of the wide world of wine continues via the latest installments of Geographical Digest, an ongoing series produced by our sister publication, *The SOMM Journal*, in partnership with *National Geographic* and SommCon. In "Italy: North to South," our presenters valiantly dissected elements of the notoriously complicated terroir—not to mention rules and regulations—of one of the world's most famous winegrowing countries, while "Luxury From Remarkable Sites" lived up to the lofty expectations set by its title thanks to the inimitable expressions of its featured producers.

As a bonus, the cool-climate wines of Sonoma County's Aperture also made a strong impression on us recently, warranting a special appearance in these pages.

**Bodega Garzón 2018 Balasto, Maldonado, Uruguay (\$120)** Grown in the Uruguayan region of Maldonado on the Atlantic coast, this blend of Tannat, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Marselan is remarkably aromatic, with a perfume of chocolate, gingerbread, and plum. Roasted coffee and spiced blackberry are enhanced by a dry tannin structure. The boldness of the wine is tempered by an earthiness on the blackberry-washed mid-palate. Slate and salinity appear on the finish. **95**

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS

**San Polo 2018 Rubio, Montalcino, Toscana IGT, Italy (\$25)** Composed primarily of hillside-grown Sangiovese, this stainless steel-aged red presents as dense and juicy, with high acidity and notes of concentrated dark plum. Soy sauce and olive tapenade add dimension to its freshness. The mouthfeel is silky, leaving a touch of salinity on the tongue. **91**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES HERITAGE COLLECTION

**San Polo 2015 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Tuscany, Italy (\$70)** At 1,476 feet above sea level, soils rich in calcium and clay underlie the two vineyards on the San Polo estate that impart character to this masterpiece, aged in barrel for 30 months and in bottle for six. Aromas of dried blue and red fruits signal the wine's high-powered energy. Fine acidity, tart cherry, and cinnamon lead the way, followed by sweet rose petals and tomato leaf. Sandalwood, balsamic, and earthy tones join in midway to reach the full finish. **95**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES HERITAGE COLLECTION

**Concha y Toro 2019 Terrunyo Carménère, DO Peumo, Cachapoal Valley, Chile**

**(\$40)** This seamless blend of 95.4% Carménère, 4.3% Cabernet Franc, and 0.3% Cabernet Sauvignon fermented in stainless steel and aged nine months in French oak. Its aromas of brush, oregano, and dill with blackberry accents are breathtaking; on the palate, it's juicy and balanced, with clean herbal notes and vivid flavors of ripe summer plum. Floral notes persist through the finish. **94**



CONCHAYTORO

**Penfolds Bin 704 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley**

**(\$70)** Streamlined and showing dusty tannins, this 100% Cabernet Sauvignon is 100% Napa Valley, with a winemaking signature that's 100% Penfolds. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak, it shows a sleek mouthfeel in which lavender and peony converge with plum skin and jasmine. A few extra days of skin contact allow beefy, concentrated notes of cherry liqueur and dark chocolate to surface. Marked by spiced cedar, the finish is a satisfying immersion of power and elegance. **96**



TREASURY WINE ESTATES

**Serego Alghieri 2013 Vaio Armaron, Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG, Veneto, Italy (\$119)**

Aged in cherrywood casks, Corvina, Rondinella, and the Serego Alghieri clone of Molinara are classic Amarone varieties. Earthy and spiced with both fresh and dark chocolate-covered cherry, this upright and regal wine offers additional notes of dates and plum liqueur; armed with elegance and strength of character, it shows a white-peppered depth. **97**



VINEYARD BRANDS

**Renato Ratti 2016 Conca Barolo DOCG, Piedmont**

**(\$120)** From the winery's La Morra property, this single-vineyard Barolo offers ecstatic notes of brown-sugared cherries—tart, vibrant, and washed in earthy notes of balsamic. Dried roses and chalky minerality run with fine acidity uplifted by jasmine. **97**



LUX WINES

**Medici Ermete Concerto Lambrusco, Reggiano DOC (\$20)** Not only is this the world's first vintage Lambrusco, but Concerto is also the first single-vineyard expression of the dry sparkling red. Fresh from the start, the almost chalky entry is packed with dark fruit as well as bright pomegranate and strawberry. A hint of white pepper shows itself, and the harmonious balance of acid and tannins makes the wine's name well deserved. Concerto has been honored with the Gambero Rosso Tre Bicchieri award for over a decade. **91**

KOBRAND WINE & SPIRITS



**Weed Cellars Sparkling Rosé, Italy (\$13)** Bubbles are light and airy on a lovely and delicate mouthfeel. Raspberries and brioche combine on the dry palate of this blend of 80% Glera and 20% Pinot Noir, with notes of orange zest and minerality coming in for an energetic finish. **92**



**Masseria Altemura 2018 Sasseo Primitivo, Salento IGT, Puglia (\$17)** Rich and rustic, with identifying notes of cigar leaf, tart cherry, and Italian herbs. Tannins are round and smattered with mocha and cedar. **91**

1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS



**Masseria Altemura 2018 Fiano, Salento IGT, Puglia (\$17)** This crisp, linear, and dry white is blessed with delicate white floral notes and a sensation akin to a sea breeze that softens its angular character. Just-ripe pineapple, flint, lemon, and a rich texture make for an exceptional wine. **92**

1821 FINE WINE & SPIRITS



**Tenuta Sette Ponti 2017 Oreno, Tuscany IGT (\$115)** Upright and austere, this blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot matured in new French oak for 18 months. Chocolate adds seamless dimension, while slate and balsamic place aromatics and a rich mouthfeel against a velvety tannin backdrop. **95**

KOBRAND

## SHINING A LIGHT ON APERTURE

PHOTO COURTESY OF APERTURE



Aperture takes its name from the term for the opening of a camera lens that allows light to pass through—drawing a fitting link between winemaker Jesse Katz and his father, renowned photographer Andy Katz. Over the years, the pair traveled together and visited some of the world's most famous vineyards, providing Andy with plenty of material; each label of Aperture shows off one of his photographs.

**Aperture winemaker Jesse Katz.**

Since 2009, Jesse has crafted cool-climate wines in Sonoma County's top growing regions. His expressions show silky tannins and a defined freshness. Here are some of our favorites.

PHOTO: AUBRIE PICK



**Aperture 2019 Chenin Blanc, North Coast (\$30)** Old-vine Chenin Blanc is grown on rich clay loam in a coastal climate, defined by the Delta Breeze coming in from the San Francisco Bay. Aged for six months in half French oak (used) and half stainless steel, it's glassy and glossy, with white flower-kissed pears and white peach. Linen, lanolin, and lilting notes of lime and melon are charmed by a touch of toast. **92**

**Aperture 2018 Red Blend, Sonoma County (\$55)** Spiced cedar, blackberry-tinged earthiness, and coffee liqueur combine in this heady, shadowy blend of 39% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, and 22% Malbec with small percentages of Cab Franc and Petit Verdot. Stunning and generous, it shows a Port-like intensity of fruit, while savory notes of dried fruits and espresso keep things lively. **94**

**Aperture 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$70)** Lush and round, this is a luxury sip that exhibits mouthcoating, generous notes of licorice-washed slate and black plum with chalky tannins. The lathered and opulent fruit pops. **96** *W*

# MEMORIAL

## *in a Bottle*

### DUKE SPIRITS

INTRODUCES A LINE OF ULTRA-PREMIUM TEQUILAS AGED IN FRENCH OAK BARRELS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DUKE SPIRITS



BY STEFANIE SCHWALB

**Though remembered for his commitment to the craft of acting,**

Hollywood icon John Wayne was equally passionate about wine and spirits. The Duke, as he was widely known, is often quoted as saying that if he was going to have a drink, it had better be a good one. From whiskeys to brandies to tequilas, his personal liquor collection was quite impressive—as was his desire to develop his own spirits, crafting and aging them in a style that was no-holds-barred authentic, just like him.

Sadly, that dream went unfulfilled—until his son, Ethan Wayne, collaborated with industry vet Chris Radomski to create Duke Spirits. Due to his movie legacy, John Wayne’s name was perhaps most synonymous with whiskey, so they started with that category, believing it best suited to the tastes of American consumers at the time. In 2013, they released their Kentucky Straight Bourbon, followed in 2018 by their Grand Cru Kentucky Reserve Bourbon and Grand Cru Double Barrel Rye, to critical acclaim. But they also knew that The Duke had a history with and strong connection to tequila—and the introduction of Duke Spirits’ new Grand Cru Tequila to the market is ready to prove it.

“What many people may not know is that the majority of John Wayne’s movies were filmed in Durango, Mexico, and he had a profound love of Mexico and its people,” says Radomski, who notes that some small tequila producers there even furnished him with exclusive bottlings. “So when we were thinking about creating a tequila to honor this, Ethan and I knew it had to be unique.”

For several years, Radomski searched for just the right producer to partner with on the project. He found a lot of factories that sold



Duke Spirits founder  
Chris Radomski.

contract tequila, but he didn't think that was the right way to go. Then, "[about] six or seven years ago, I met a gentleman in Miami from Mexico City—a perfectionist," he says. "He owned a boutique distillery and exquisite plantations where they farm high altitude, [and] he allowed me to go in there and do a piña-by-piña harvest. When I had access to such an amazing place, I started conceiving what would make sense, and it would have to be something that was consistent with The Duke's history and tastes while also relating to the bourbon line."

Hence the decision to finish aged tequila in the same French oak barrels Duke uses for its Grand Cru whiskeys. "I started sending the wine barrels [from] Kentucky . . . down to Mexico and experimenting by taking three-, four-, or five-year-old tequilas and putting them in there," he says. "Some of the results were incredible. We got to a recipe and a timeline [for aging] that we really loved, so the tequila really is an extension of the Grand Cru whiskey line. We also decided it would be great to release a commemorative line of limited[-edition] Duke tequilas

with a higher purpose: to say thanks and pay homage to John Wayne's respect of the Mexican culture and its people for what they gave him and allowed him to do, and [also to realize] his desire to help cure cancer by raising money and awareness for the John Wayne Cancer Foundation. John Wayne died of cancer, so that was a really strong motivation."

The line launched in late May with a 1,000-bottle release of seven-year-old Grand Cru Tequila (\$250), which Duke Spirits will sell online to most states where shipping is permitted; from the proceeds, it will donate approximately \$50,000 to the foundation. It will then release a Grand Cru Reposado (\$65) and a Grand Cru Extra Añejo (\$150), donating additional dollars for every bottle sold online or in the five states where they will be available at retail. Traffic will primarily be driven through Duke Spirits' own social media channels as well as John Wayne fan clubs—and once the allocation is out, it's out. "Obviously,



Duke Spirits' tequilas wear their inspiration on their back label.

I'd love to see people embrace it and love it. There's always a bit of trepidation, because I don't know of a whiskey brand that's also released a tequila," Radomski admits. "But I think there's a special connection, and the [main] reason for doing it is because of John Wayne's love [for] and true ties to northern Mexico—not to mention that I feel all these expressions are incredible."

The team has chosen not to produce any standard-tier well tequila because they wanted to focus on ultra-premium craft. "I'm not about additives; I'm not about altering formulas or anything like that. I wasn't when I was in the wine industry, and we certainly aren't in the spirits industry," says Radomski. "For me in business, it has always been about authenticity and not cutting corners, and I think the consumers have become very exacting and precise in what they want to see—very educated." What they will see, he adds, is that "the distillery where we produce Duke is truly an estate operation, from the farming to the production. There are very few tequilas in Mexico that can say that. There's probably 1 or 2% of [product on the market] that you could call true estate tequila. And that was really the driving factor." **LZ**

# Nick McClure

WHISKY SOMMELIER, HUNTRESS, SAN DIEGO, CA



by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO: MICHELLE WING



**Like many people in the industry,** Nick McClure has been in hospitality his entire career. From bussing tables at a small country club to serving, bartending, managing, and taking on line-cook duties, he has been around the proverbial block. We chatted with him about his current role as whisky sommelier at Huntress, the newly opened dining concept from chef James Montejano in San Diego's historic Gaslamp Quarter.

**Q Tell us about Huntress and your position there.**

I bartend at Huntress and have become the onsite whisky guy to help people navigate our massive list. We're a modern steakhouse in the Gaslamp built around the vision of our chef, James Montejano. The menu reads like [that of] a classic American steakhouse, but with an Asian influence. Chef James has a great relationship with our suppliers, and we source as much as we can locally—from oven-roasted fennel-pollen chicken raised by Three Sons Farm in Ramona to tuna tartare caught off the Baja coast by our friends at Bluefina. We carry prime steaks as well as wagyu from the U.S., Australia, and Japan. We have tons of whisky, and though we're happy to sell you Pappy Van Winkle, we'd rather showcase one of our many Japanese whiskies.


**Q What kind of training has gone into your knowledge of the spirit? How do you educate your guests?**

A whisky sommelier is the same as a wine sommelier—it just implies the person is an expert in their spirit of choice. I find the term a bit pretentious, though I'm always flattered that people think I deserve that title. A number of our servers at Huntress are certified wine sommeliers, so I just call myself the resident whisky nerd. My whisky knowledge comes naturally from a desire to learn. I have watched too many YouTube reviews to count and I purchase books on the subject (*Whisky Rising: The Definitive Guide to the Finest Whiskies and Distillers of Japan* by Stefan Van Eycken is my favorite). If I see an affordable whisky I'm unfamiliar with, I try it! You can study all you want, but there's nothing as helpful as grabbing a dram and tasting.

**Q With COVID-19 protocols lifting in California, what are you seeing regarding guests returning to restaurants?**

At Huntress, we have taken the COVID protocols very seriously and have taken extra precautions to ensure the safety of all our guests. In that regard I've noticed people feel more comfortable once they actually arrive, and business is starting to really come back to the San Diego Gaslamp.

**Q You have ten minutes and one drink. What are you drinking and who are you with?**

I'll take the oldest Miyagikyo single malt available, and off top, I'd have a drink with Donald Glover. He's an actor, director, rapper, and comedian, so it'd be a good conversation . . . plus I've heard enough of his lyrics to know he likes whisky. 



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# Retail Rainbow

## WINE THAT SHINES ON SUPERMARKET SHELVES

During the great pandemic-shopping panic of spring 2020, grocery stores from coast to coast were stripped clean of most so-called essentials as Americans snapped up every last loaf of bread, stick of butter, and, yes, roll of toilet paper they could. But it really didn't matter to those of us who could make do with very little so long as there were bottles of wine to be had. Here are a few labels, established and emerging, that warrant consideration as true supermarket staples.

### POURING GOOD INTO THE WORLD:

## NOBLE VINES

Stars and stripes will adorn the labels of Noble Vines' flagship 337 Cabernet Sauvignon and 446 Chardonnay for a limited time this summer as part of the top-50 wine brand's "Of Noble Spirit" marketing platform. While the campaign has helped Noble Vines grow at three times the pace of the premium category, it also encourages consumers to find the best in themselves; for example, where legal, Noble Vines' "Shop, Snap, Give" retail program provides the public a chance to donate to Operation Homefront—a nonprofit that provides aid to military families.

Here's how it works: Shoppers will be offered a rebate of \$3 per bottle. Then, using their phones, they can scan a QR code on point-of-sale materials that will give them the option to either redeem their rebate or donate it to Operation Homefront.

Regarding the labels, the winery has already seen a positive response, according to Noble Vines brand manager Ashley Larson. "We're thrilled with the enthusiasm we've seen from retailers for our first-ever limited-time packaging," she says, adding that the "Shop, Snap, Give" program, which will run from July through August, "provides an easy way for consumers to give back to those who serve others."

PHOTO COURTESY OF NOBLE VINES



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WONDERFUL WINE CO.

### ONE GIANT LEAP FOR ORGANIC WINE:

## THE WONDERFUL WINE CO.

One only needs to take a fleeting look at The Wonderful Wine Co.'s iridescent labels to grasp that the brand is changing consumer perceptions around vegan and organic wines. Its five expressions—Chardonnay (awarded 90 points by *The Tasting Panel*), Malvasia Bianca (90), Cabernet Sauvignon (89), Rosé (89), and Syrah (90)—are emblazoned with slogans like "Tastes like shooting stars, long naps, and finding twenty bucks," leaving the distinct impression that the better-for-you category isn't nearly as rigid and self-serious as it used to be. It's also reflecting a larger trend: According to Nielsen data, sales of organic wine in the 52-week period ending March 20, 2021, increased 21% by value and nearly 17% by volume over the previous year.

The Wonderful Wine Co.'s transparently labeled wines are made with minimal additives and no animal byproducts, and thanks to its expanding retail footprint in chains like Walmart—which sells its Cabernet and Chardonnay in 550 stores as of this month—as well as Hy-Vee, Earth Fare, and Natural Grocers, the brand is projected to sell 25,000-plus cases by the end of 2021 despite being just over a year old.

Of the plentiful feedback The Wonderful Wine Co. has received, multiple consumers have praised the distinct lack of a hangover after a night of enjoyment due to its lineup's low sugar content. Similarly appealing is the company's focus on sustainability: Using lightweight glass bottles has reduced its carbon emissions throughout production and transport by roughly 26%. Meanwhile, its natural corks are 100% renewable, recyclable, and biodegradable, and its boxes are made from 70% recycled material and are 95% compostable.

If another one of its slogans, "Tastes like being promoted to head astronaut," is any indication, The Wonderful Wine Co. has nowhere to go but up.



## THE CABERNET COMPETITION:

# J. LOHR

When it comes to Cabernet sold in grocery and retail stores, you'd be hard pressed to find a producer offering better quality and value than J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines. After all, the winery has been growing Cabernet Sauvignon in Paso Robles since 1986, before most consumers had even heard of it; today, it sustainably farms 2,700 acres of estate vineyards in the AVA, now celebrated for its world-class yet still affordable Cab.

The family-owned winery is perhaps best known nationally for the iconic J. Lohr Estates Seven Oaks Cabernet found on virtually every wine shelf, but it also elevates its portfolio by crafting highly rated limited-production Cabernet varietal wines and blends with retail prices ranging from \$35 to \$100. So to say it's gotten a leg up on the competition is an understatement: J. Lohr is the competition.

It's this history of trailblazing on California's Central Coast that became the impetus for the inaugural 2017 release of the winery's estate-grown red blend, J. Lohr Pure Paso Proprietary Red Wine. "Jerry Lohr and his team were some of the first pioneers in the area that saw the potential of what has now become a premier AVA. We felt that it was fitting to continue to tell the story, decades later, directly in a wine and on the bottle," J. Lohr VP of marketing Rhonda Motil explains. The label combines Cabernet Sauvignon with a healthy dollop of Petite Sirah (plus a small percentage of other varieties). "What you taste is a layering of two unique flavors, more so than a blending of flavors: the savory varietal character of Cabernet Sauvignon with the unctuous blackberry of Petite Sirah," says director of winemaking Steve Peck.

But before Pure Paso, there was J. Lohr's Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon. Originally sourced from a single vineyard in the Estrella District, it has evolved since 1998 to include fruit from the most elevated sites throughout J. Lohr's Paso Robles properties.

Both wines continue to perform incredibly well in retail despite the pandemic, says J. Lohr VP of sales Steve Doyle: "For this past year [Pure Paso] outdistanced initial rollout by 178%." And sales of the Hilltop, though a higher-priced offering at \$35, are up 38%, according to CEO and co-owner Steve Lohr, who adds that "consumers are definitely taking some of the money that they might have spent going out to dinner and creating a fine-dining—or at least a fine-drinking—experience at home!"



**J. Lohr 2018 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$35)** The majority of grapes for this blend, which includes some Petit Verdot and Malbec, were sourced from the relatively cool El Pomar District, with an additional selection from a 1,700-foot-high site in the warmer Creston District. Scents of blackberry preserves, pepper, and tobacco are at the forefront. Polished tannins and a juicy mouthfeel meld with notes of tilled soil, black olive, and black currant. One of the deeper and darker vintages, the wine shows a maturity and more finesse than we have ever experienced from it, revealed in balanced acidity and fruit that's bright and poignant—intense but not overbearing. **94** —*Meridith May*



**J. Lohr 2018 Pure Paso Proprietary Red Wine, Paso Robles (\$27)** Composed primarily of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah, the second vintage of this tremendous blend delivers a rich, bright perfume of boysenberry preserves, cashew, and milk chocolate. Licorice, leather, and slate are indulgent flavors that add to the round body, while the distinctly satiny mouthfeel is balanced by the sleekness of black-tea tannins. Power meets poise. **93** —*M.M.*



PHOTO: WILLIAM BUCCOLINO

## A PRESCRIPTION FOR GROWTH: LLOYD CELLARS

Lloyd Cellars' Greg Moore, Bonnie Lloyd, and Rob Lloyd.

A little word of mouth can go a long, long way for a small producer. Just ask Rob and Bonnie Lloyd, who can count both the wines in their portfolio and the members of their team at Napa's Lloyd Cellars on one hand: For all the potential demand based on Rob's reputation from prior winemaking stints at La Crema and Rombauer, the law of supply still holds.

But even mom-and-pop operations eventually make room for growth. And with the organic success enjoyed by not only their eponymous brand but also its offshoot, Prescription Vineyards, the founding couple is finally doing just that.

From the winery's establishment in 2008 until 2016, Lloyd Carneros Chardonnay and Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir were primarily distributed in California; as director of sales Greg Moore explains, the label "was always meant to grow more incrementally—it tends to really do well in the independent grocers and concierge stores" as well as in the on-premise space, which represents roughly half of its placement. Prescription, by contrast, "was built to be off-premise." Featuring a Clarksburg Chardonnay and an Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, it has been living up to that promise since its launch in 2015; it's currently distributed in 20 states, with 90% of its sales going to retailers.

On the West Coast, Lloyd Cellars' buyers include Albertson's Companies stores, Whole Foods, and Gelson's. Among newer markets, says Moore, "We do quite well in traditionally smaller markets like Iowa, Oklahoma, and Arizona"; meanwhile, recently appointed director of marketing communications Joel Quigley is designing campaigns to coincide with such events as Tampa Bay Restaurant Week in Florida and the Austin Food & Wine Festival in Texas—and using all the tools at his disposal, from geotargeting and store-locator technology to partnerships with celebrity chefs and local influencers, in the process. May the supply keep up with the imminent nationwide demand. (For reviews of a few recent releases, see pages 94, 95, and 115.)



## ALL THE COLORS: WEED CELLARS PRIDE WINE

Pride Month is here, and Weed Cellars Pride Wine is positioned to be its champion in the wine industry. Retailing at a recommended price of \$13, this premium California wine features a rainbow label to evoke a feel-good vibe wherever it's sold—one that will only be enhanced by a colorful campaign built on “consumer-facing digital advertising that will announce our parade sponsorships across the



country,” according to chief operating officer Joseph Curtis; this will be heavily supported at the off-premise level through case sleeves, case cards, flags, and merch.

Partnerships with digital- and print-media companies EDGE Media and Blade Media “have been meaningful to the brand in reaching our goal, which is to support LGBTQ accounts in particular with Weed Cellars Pride Wine during this important and iconic month of June,” adds Curtis. “The point-of-sale tools we’ve made available look great and serve to support the LGBTQ community while doing the job of capturing customer awareness.”

His point reflects the reality that, due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, many cities will be playing their Pride Month rollout by ear this year, with parades and other gatherings being rescheduled for July and August in some parts of the country. The extended time period gives licensees more opportunity to take advantage of the impressive POS support campaign Weed Cellars has orchestrated.


*To locate a distributor in your state, contact Jim Moeller at 516-817-1977 or email jim@weedcellars.com.*



## BOND OF BROTHERS: TRIBUTE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Born the youngest of seven children into one of the pioneering winegrowing families of Sonoma, Chris Benziger introduced Tribute Wines as an homage to his family, particularly his four older brothers. Its first two releases, available nationwide as of late summer 2020, were the Tribute 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon and 2018 Sauvignon Blanc, both of which were sourced from certified-sustainable vineyards.

The rich and robust Cabernet is a blend of fruit from San Benito County, Paso Robles, and San Lucas Vineyard in Monterey County. The current vintage, 2018, continues to live up to the brand’s promise—“Bold flavors. Strong bonds.”—as the dry yet cool growing season provided ideal conditions and allowed for an extended hang time. The result offers notes of dark berries, dark chocolate, and earthy tea notes wrapped in velvety tannins.

Last year, Tribute ranked as the bestselling new brand and number-one-selling \$11-plus Cabernet Sauvignon at Harris Teeter Supermarkets, which was one of a few regional chains that brought Tribute in early prior to its national launch. Although Benziger’s older brothers might still give him a hard time simply for being the youngest, Tribute proves he’s a worthy contender in the sibling rivalry. 



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# An Honorable Pinot Noir

**EMERITUS VINEYARDS' HALLBERG RANCH IS A MAGIC CARPET OF ESTATE-GROWN FRUIT** by Meredith May

In the same week that Brice Cutrer Jones sold his famous Sonoma-Cutrer vineyards in 1999, the opportunity arose for him to purchase Hallberg Ranch, a ridgetop site in the cool Russian River Valley sub-AVA of Green Valley. It was there that Emeritus Vineyards was born with a pedigreed head start, boasting closely spaced vines whose roots reach deep into Goldridge soil and an array of clones from which to choose for texture, aromatics, and flavor profiles.

Dry farmed by a 20-person year-round crew since 2011, Hallberg Ranch yields a most labor-intensive Pinot Noir that continues to impress. I recently tasted through four vintages with Brice's daughter Mari Jones, who has taken over as president of Emeritus; joining us with wit and wisdom was winemaker Dave Lattin.

The wines show a common thread of concentrated depth thanks to the small berries harvested by the team of dedicated eyes, hands, and noses who nurture the property with daily attention to detail. Yet they remain elegant, without any excess weight. **LV**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF EMERITUS VINEYARDS



Mari Jones, president of Emeritus Vineyards, refers to the topography of Hallberg Ranch as a "magic carpet."

**Emeritus 2015 Hallberg Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)** The most floral of the four we tasted, this vintage shows jasmine and violet water on the nose, along with tea leaf and plum on the palate. It's still very fresh; winemaker Dave Lattin pointed out an orange-rind element that I picked up on in the younger wines as well. **95**

**Emeritus 2016 Hallberg Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)**

Lattin picks at lower sugar levels, and it shows in an acid structure that remains high-toned from vintage to vintage. Composed of 11 different clones, this wine comes in on the lower end of ripeness, with bergamot and earth joining the fruit. The spice is augmented on the palate, with deep-dish cherry pie and marzipan on the finish. **94**



**Emeritus 2017 Hallberg Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)**

The current vintage is an earth mother, bequeathing notes of bright cherry, beetroot, and soy sauce. Elegant, with a slightly chewy mouthfeel, it brings tangerine peel in on the mid-palate, and dried flowers are exotically spiced on the finish. **96**

**Emeritus 2018 Hallberg Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)**

The floral aromas and rustic earthiness of next year's release bound out of the glass; Lattin compares its nose to a faded bouquet as it starts dropping petals. A sweet loamy quality joins notes of bluebell and apple blossom for a more savory than sweet experience. This wine has room for development and will surely prove as worthy as its older siblings. **93**

Hallberg Ranch is blessed with Goldridge soils over iron-tinted clay loam. Its vines dig 20 or more feet into the earth in search of water; this enables them to adapt to major weather changes such as high heat or drought.

# Rice, Spice, and Everything Nice

**SMOKE LAB** MARKS INDIA'S  
FORAY INTO THE PREMIUM  
VODKA CATEGORY

by Allyson Reedy

**India may not be the first country**

that comes to mind when you think of vodka, but Varun Jain is out to change all that: As the founder and CEO of Smoke Lab, he wants to share its dazzling craftsmanship with the world, one stunning bottle at a time.

Touting itself as India's first premium vodka, the brand merges quality and style with sustainability—a trifecta that Jain hopes will speak to U.S. consumers conscious of their drinking choices. "Smoke Lab is a world-class, homegrown-in-India vodka with a highly innovative mindset, a craft-oriented approach, and a modern perspective that can take on any other ultra-premium brand in taste, quality, and story," he says proudly.

The spirits business is nothing new to Jain; his father is chairman of Smoke Lab's producer, the NV Group, which is one of the largest distilled-spirits companies in India. After realizing how much untapped potential the company had in expanding beyond India, he set out to show the world what

Varun Jain is the founder and CEO of Indian vodka brand Smoke Lab.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SMOKE LAB

his home country has to offer via the Smoke Lab portfolio, of which the vodka is the inaugural release.

"I saw an opportunity to explore new ideas that would take our company to greater heights—to evolve with the changing marketplace," Jain says. "Smoke Lab is our company's experimental lifestyle-brand platform that marries the traditional DNA of the NV Group with the innovative global edge of the future it's headed toward."

It was important to Jain that the vodka reflect the people and natural resources of India, so he started with pure Himalayan spring water and locally grown basmati rice, selecting the latter for its distinctive floral aromas and crisp, slightly nutty flavor as well as because, in his words, "basmati is intrinsically linked to our homeland."

Once harvested, the rice is steeped in the spring water before it's distilled five times in stainless-steel column stills to achieve an exceptionally smooth yet complex flavor profile. Next, the liquid undergoes a two-step filtration process through traditional carbon-charcoal filters and the more modern, silver-added sparkle filters to extract any impurities. It's then poured into a super-sleek two-tone bottle, and, as of October 2020, shipped to the U.S. (it's also exported to Singapore).

Perhaps the most distinctive products Smoke Lab will produce are its vodkas flavored with quintessentially Indian



**Try This:**  
**BLACK MIST**

- ▶ 2 oz. Smoke Lab Aniseed Vodka
- ▶ 2 tsp. dried cranberries
- ▶ 3 drops orange bitters

In a tumbler, combine the vodka and dried cranberries and muddle until the flavors are released. Add the bitters, then squeeze a fresh orange wedge and drop it in. Overfill the glass with crushed ice. Garnish with dried cranberries and a dehydrated orange slice.

herbs and spices, starting with an already available Aniseed expression that will be followed by another release, Saffron, this summer. Jain calls the former "a playful exploration of a much-loved Indian herb" that's loaded with aromas and flavors of fennel and licorice. Almost creamy and slightly sweet, it's great served on the rocks or mixed in cocktails, he says.

Besides flaunting India's incredible palette of flavors, adhering to

sustainable production practices is another priority of Jain's. Using his "live responsibly" philosophy as a guide, he says, "We are continuously experimenting with resources to actively pursue an aggressive environmental and civic-minded approach to producing our vodkas." To help fulfill that mission, Smoke Lab is made at India's first carbon-neutral distillery: Steam generated from the plant is converted into water and back again, a cycle that produces energy while ensuring that the water is continuously reused. What's more, Jain adds, "Our commitment to responsibility and sustainability also extends to the local community. Smoke Lab sources all ingredients from within India and supports the sustainable farming and sourcing of basmati rice, water, spices, and packaging materials."

And this is just the beginning: Jain hopes to launch an entire portfolio of Smoke Lab spirits crafted and sourced with care—including gins, rums, and whiskies—to help put India on the map as a spirits powerhouse. "Making Smoke Lab Vodka is a passion and journey that will continue," Jain says. "We are preparing to launch additional flavors in the coming year that showcase India's finest ingredients and skilled craftsmanship on the world stage." **TE**



**Smoke Lab Vodka, India (\$20)** This five-times-distilled vodka offers up clean aromas of vanilla, cashew, and citrus. Silky soft, the basmati-rice foundation shows through in the flavor profile as the spirit coats the mouth. A touch of white pepper dissipates, leaving behind white tea flowers and lime blossom. 80 proof. **93** —*Meridith May*

**Smoke Lab Aniseed Vodka, India (\$20)** Clean and sweet anise aromas are dotted with a perfume of mocha and bluebell flowers. Round and sumptuous on the palate, the 75-proof spirit spreads with a generous flow of licorice, which is tempered by more blue floral tones and vanilla bean. Marvelous. **94** —*M.M.*

# Turning Over a New (Maple) Leaf



**SAP56** TAPS INTO CANADIAN TRADITION FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT





**The next generation of Canadian whisky is here—and it's already making a splash: SAP56 Maple Flavored Whisky was named Best Canadian Flavoured Whisky at the 2021 World Whiskies Awards.**

Steeped in Canadian heritage and traditionally crafted with the utmost respect for the legacy of the country's distillers and sugarers alike, SAP56 is a premium five-year-old whisky whose mash bill of 85% corn, 10% rye, and 5% barley makes for an adaptable spirit that allows creativity and versatility in mixing while appealing to both connoisseurs and casual drinkers. Infused with Grade A syrup from the great maple trees of Quebec, it's not only 100% natural but contains 50% less sugar than standard flavored whisky.

The time is right for the launch of SAP56, as demand for naturally flavored spirits is on the rise, according to the folks at website The Whiskey Wash: "Flavoring agents and specifically natural ones have an expected market growth at over 5% from 2019 to 2025, including those used for alcoholic beverages." What's more, as *Forbes* reported in early 2020, "Canadian whisky remained the bestselling imported whisky by volume [in 2019], with 17.9 million cases/\$2.13 billion."

Add to that the fact that Canadian whisky production has a rich history that dates back to the 18th century, and its underappreciation as a category seems all the more baffling. That's why SAP56 owner and creator Adam Duhamel is committed to ensuring that it finally gets its due. The born-and-bred Quebecois says that "the greatest memories of my childhood are when dear family friends would bring me to their sugar

**With a mash bill of 85% corn, 10% rye, and 5% barley as well as half the sugar of most flavored whiskies, SAP56 makes for a versatile mixer.**



**A riff on an Old Fashioned featuring SAP56.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SPEAKEASY WINE & SPIRITS



shack. I felt so privileged to be able to contribute and [had] so much fun making the maple syrup. It was incredible." Fast-forward 35 years, and he has now encapsulated those memories in a bottle with profound heart and soul. As he explains, "As part of SAP56's special formula, our passionate artisans oversee a 56-day [period of] harvesting and processing pure maple water, resulting in Grade A maple syrup with a robust taste and deep amber color." That, in turn, results in a distinctive, sophisticated flavored whisky that does Canadian craftsmanship proud.

Duhamel says he feels fortunate to have grown up in an environment where "morals and honest values were the norm. SAP56 has been a labor of love, and we are excited to introduce our passion to the U.S. market and global retailers in 2021."

Launching through online craft-spirits marketplace Mash and Grape ([mashandgrape.com](http://mashandgrape.com)), SAP56 Maple Whisky is also available direct to consumers in states where legal at [sap56.com](http://sap56.com). 

**SAP56 Maple Flavored Whisky, Canada (\$35)** Using 50% less sugar than traditional flavored whiskies, this 61.6-proof, five-year-aged spirit uses pure Grade A Canadian maple syrup to create a delicate and delicious sipper. Scents of maple cream are elegant, while the whisky is unmasked through aromas of peach and orange peel. Luxurious on the palate, it wears a coat of maple-kissed apricot, sugared pecan, and dusted cocoa that makes it memorable. **94** —*Meridith May*

SPEAKEASY WINE & SPIRITS, LLC

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 supplementing the traditional rating system with our “Talkie” rating system to assess retail wines/spirits/beers based on the aforementioned factors—and, of course, taste!

#### 1 TALKIE

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

#### 2 TALKIES

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

#### 3 TALKIES

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

#### 4 TALKIES

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

#### 5 TALKIES

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



**Oak Grove 2020 Family Reserve Pinot Grigio, California** (\$9) Light and clean, with surprisingly expressive aromas and flavors. White tea flowers appear on the nose with flavors of sugared pear and wet stone. Lemon ice reveals a wonderful crispness. **89**



**Fetzer Riesling, California** (\$10) Offering immediate pleasure, this nonvintage, semi-dry Riesling with small portions of French Colombard and Pinot Grigio comes in at 12% ABV and has a honeyed nose that maintains its staying power through each sip. Apricot and wildflowers are a lovely match with mouth-coating lychee and white pear. **90**



FETZER VINEYARDS



**Angelini 2020 Pinot Grigio, DOC delle Venezie, Italy** (\$11) Fragrant and charming, with floral notes on the nose and palate as well as well-defined flavors of sweet summer pear and high-toned lychee. Lemon verbena lingers as minerality plays a key role on the finish. **90**



**Concha y Toro 2019 Casillero del Diablo Reserva Chardonnay, Chile** (\$12) Accents of vanilla wafer and lemon cream may seem indulgent, but they’re reined in by fine acidity. Salinity plays a part in the wine’s freshness. **91**



FETZER VINEYARDS



**Concha y Toro 2019 Casillero del Diablo Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon, Valle Central, Chile** (\$12) Juicy and robust, with cinnamon-coated red berries and a light dapple of oak. There’s no attitude in this fruit- and floral-forward wine: It’s extroverted and cheerful, with a wash of mocha and an underlying salinity that bring it all together. **91**



FETZER VINEYARDS



**McManis Family Vineyards 2019 Estate Grown Pinot Noir, Lodi** (\$13) Luxardo cherries and cassis make for dramatic aromas, and the palate is ripe and dense, with rich and compelling notes of spiced strawberry, pomegranate, brown sugar, and cinnamon that pave the way for a long-lasting finish of toasty vanilla. **92**



THE WINE GROUP



**Barón de Ley 2020 Rosado de Lágrima, Rioja, Spain** (\$13) Garnacha grapes hail from the winery’s estate vineyard in the Rioja Oriental subregion. The florals and stone fruit that emanate out of the glass are lively and suggestive of a lovely taste profile. Peach and rose water dot the palate, intermingling with minerality on the dry finish. **91**



**Plungerhead 2018 Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi** (\$14) We love the new label design on this bottle, which houses a generous wash of bramble and dark chocolate and big notes of spiced boysenberry and tobacco. A splash of black pepper enlivens the finish. **89**



DON SEBASTIANI & SONS



**Butternut 2019 Pinot Noir, California (\$15)** Spiced red berries merge with black tea and sage, bringing the palate to life. Orange peel and plum strike a chord with savory notes of balsamic and cherry-vanilla liqueur. Yummy! **91**

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



**Ant Moore 2020 Signature Series Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$17)** Herby aromas greet the nose alongside grapefruit zest and tarragon. Tart green apple aligns with guava on the palate before the salty, mineral-rich finish. **92**



**Smashberry 2019 Chardonnay, Paso Robles (\$15)** Blended with 5% Viognier, this 100% stainless steel-fermented white is clean, crisp, and mineral-driven, with a bouquet of honeysuckle, ginger, and sweet basil on the nose and palate. White melon, peach, and tangerine linger on the finish. With so much going on, it's a "smashing" success! **91**

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



**Prescription 2019 Chardonnay, California (\$20)** Zingy and vibrant notes of tart lemon meringue seek out vanilla and pineapple. The wine is modern and clean, with a food-worthiness that shines through its mineral finish. **92**

LLOYD CELLARS



**Oak Ridge Winery 2019 OZV Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi (\$15)** This estate-grown red offers up bramble and blackberry accompanied by black tea, vanilla, and beetroot. Multidimensional character from mature vines shows on the alert, fruit-forward palate, whose freshness is defined by great acidity. **90**



**Tenshen 2019 Red Blend, Santa Barbara County (\$25)** This great Rhône-style blend from the Central Coast has an avid following. The presence of Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Petite Sirah, and Merlot is amplified by white-peppered black cherry, balsamic, and bittersweet dark chocolate. **92**

GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS



**Le Grand Courtâge 2020 Très Chic Rosé, Pays d'Oc IGP, Sud de France (\$17)** Created by an American woman who moved to France, this blend of 70% Grenache and 30% Cinsault offers up raspberry and pink grapefruit with a touch of a salty sea breeze. Rose water sweetens the palate, but the wine finishes crisp and mineral-dry. **92**

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINE & SPIRITS



**Schild Estate 2018 Grenache/Mourvèdre/Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia (\$30)** Chocolate-covered cherry in an earthy core makes for a graceful and delicious first impression by this layered red. Acidity has verve, lifting ripe cherry and plum with a graceful sprinkling of white pepper. Tannins are easygoing but present, building the wine's exceptional frame. **93**



**4 Gatos Locos 2018 Malbec, Gualtallary, Mendoza, Argentina (\$42)** The founders of Argentine winery Chakana created the 4 Gatos Loco project in the Mendoza subregion of Gualtallary. On a site that exceeds 4,000 feet in elevation, arid conditions and calcium-rich soil impart a keen mineral component to this fresh and vibrant red that stands out from most Malbecs. Flavors of dark fruit, tart cherry, and orange peel are interspersed with herbal notes on the high-toned palate. **91**

KYSELA PÈRE ET FILS, LTD.



**Berne Inspiration 2020 Rosé, Côtes de Provence, France (\$20)** The aptly named salmon-pink liquid (50% Grenache Noir, 30% Cinsault, and 20% Syrah) in the square-shouldered, statuesque bottle is truly inspiring. Notes of wet stone, thyme, and basil season wild strawberry, and watermelon and a hint of peach make a lovely appearance on the finish. **92**

PROVENCE ROSÉ GROUP

# Rum Amok

GO WHERE THE SPIRIT TAKES YOU

As a sailor's staple, a pirate's treasure, and the key to a tiki lover's heart, rum—perhaps more than any other category—has the ability to whisk you on an overseas voyage with a single sip. The brands featured on the following pages speak to its geographical range, from Barbados and Belize to Puerto Rico and the Philippines to Venezuela and Hawaii; they also showcase its versatility as both a sipping and mixing spirit, set to grace those snifters and Singapore Slings alike.

## An Asian Mainstay Goes Global:

# TANDUAY RUM

Established in the Philippines' capital of Manila in 1854, the historical Tanduay Rum distillery was acquired early on by Ynchausti y Compañía, a nationally based conglomerate led by the Ynchausti family, whose crest still remains on the label today.

In 1876, the company won a gold medal at the Exposition Universelle in Paris—the first of many accolades to come over the next century and a half. It managed to survive Japanese occupation, celebrating the Philippines' liberation in 1945, and in 1954, the country's most popular rum brand kicked off its centennial birthday with the hiring of master blender Señor Faustino Munarriz. "El Maestro," as Munarriz was affectionally called, helped the brand to gain international acclaim once again by earning medals for its five-year-old rum at the Monde Selection in 1971 in Brussels.

Tanduay would also transition through a few more exchanges of ownership, the most significant taking place in 1988 when the Lucio Group of Companies secured the company in one of the biggest acquisitions that had ever occurred in the Philippines at the time. Savvy Chinese-Filipino businessman Dr. Lucio Tan led the way in modernizing and expanding the distillery, helping it ultimately to become one of the world's largest rum producers. Today its spirits are made with hand-harvested heritage sugarcane grown in the volcanic soils of the Philippines, column distilled, blended with local water, and aged in charred barrels at various lengths depending on the label designation: Tanduay Asian Rum Gold, for example, is a blend of spirits aged up to seven years. And unlike many of the gold rums on today's market, it earns its color from its aging regimen—no caramel coloring added here.

Though it has been distributed in Asia for over 100 years, the brand wasn't introduced to the North American market until 2013; for this reason, its team refers to it as "one of Asia's best-kept secrets." Rum connoisseurs stateside will no doubt be grateful that the word is officially spreading.

For more information, visit [global.tanduay.com](http://global.tanduay.com) or follow them on Instagram at [@tanduayasianrum](https://www.instagram.com/tanduayasianrum) and on Facebook at [facebook.com/TanduayIntl](https://www.facebook.com/TanduayIntl).



**Tanduay Asian Rum Silver, The Philippines (\$20)** A light nosing of brown-sugared cedar leads to a round and creamy palate. Vanilla bean, café au

lait, oatmeal, and dried peach are pleasant and soft. 80 proof. **90**  
—Meridith May

**Tanduay Asian Rum Gold, The Philippines (\$20)** Aromas of fig, date, and resin make for a warm and welcoming start. Peach and baked apple are coated with brown sugar, while notes of white pepper and cedar combine with a nice body weight. A touch of pecan and floral notes appear on the nicely balanced finish. 80 proof. **93** —M.M.



**Tanduay Double Rum, The Philippines (\$50)** This sleek, sultry blend of 16- and five-year-old rums ages an additional two years in bourbon

barrels. The sumptuous perfume of resin and Luxardo cherry is stunning. Sensuous notes of sassafras, yellow raisin, plum pudding, dried apricot, and date layer the complex profile. 80 proof. **95** —M.M.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TANDUAY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RON AÑEJO CARÚPANO



*The Complete Package:*

## RON AÑEJO CARÚPANO

Quality aside, what makes a beverage brand stand out in the marketplace? For some, it's history—and Ron Añejo Carúpano has that, produced as it is at Hacienda Altamira, which was founded in Venezuela's Macarapana Valley in 1762. For others, it's progressive vision; Ron Carúpano has that too, with the only female master blender in the nation, Carmen López de Bastidas, at its helm. Still others go for gorgeous looks: Ron Carúpano's got them in spades, its luxe packaging nothing if not eye-catching.



**Ron Carúpano master blender Carmen López de Bastidas.**

But quality can't ultimately be put aside, of course—and it's on that score that this rum brand really delivers. With countless international competition awards to show for its efforts, its Ron de Venezuela—appellated spirits are made from high-sucrose sugarcane and fresh spring or well water, resting in American white oak barrels for a minimum of two years in a warm, humid microclimate that accelerates the

maturation process. Then López de Bastidas works her magic on a lineup that ranges from Ron Añejo Carúpano 6 and 12 through super- and ultra-premium expressions all the way up to the Prestige Collection, consisting of Zafra 1991, X.O., and Legendario, the only rum in Venezuela blended from 25-year-old single-barrel stock. Talk about the complete package—and as of October 2020, it's all available here in the U.S.

**Ron Añejo Carúpano 21 Reserva Privada, Venezuela (\$60)** Aged in American oak barrels, this 80-proof South American spirit aged up to 21 years shows heady scents of new saddle leather, burnt orange peel, cedar closet, and apricot. It's most engaging on the palate—spiced and exotic with gingerbread and Brazil nut. A note of mocha bean rounds the liquid out further, while the cigar-leaf finish is sweetened by peach nectar. **95** —*M.M.*

CHOPIN IMPORTS

PHOTO COURTESY OF KASAMA



*Showing Pirates the Plank:*

## KASAMA RUM

Alexandra Dorda may have the advantage of being born into spirits-industry royalty as the daughter of Chopin and Belvedere Vodka co-founder Tad Dorda, but she's proving herself fit to rule in her own right with the incredibly savvy launch of Kasama Rum in February of this year.

When the self-professed rum lover began to navigate her way through the ocean of sailors, pirates, and sea animals that typically mark brands within the category, Dorda discovered a large gap in the market: The nautical motif wasn't speaking to her millennial demographic. So she took a more personal touch by creating a brand that pays tribute to her family.

Kasama, meaning "together" in Filipino, is a "love letter to the Philippines," her mother's homeland as well as one of the best rum-producing countries in the world. The golden rum is made from noble sugarcane, and after aging seven years in bourbon barrels, it's sent to the family distillery in Poland to be bottled in a package designed to catch the eye of every tropical jet-setter—without a seafaring swashbuckler in sight.

Since its release, Kasama Rum has sold out of its first run, so it's substantially increasing production from 12,000 to 72,000 bottles.

**Kasama Small Batch Rum, The Philippines (\$30)** Made in the Philippines and bottled at her family's distillery in Poland, this 80-proof rum pays homage to brand founder Alexandra Dorda's Filipino-Polish heritage. Aged seven years in ex-bourbon oak barrels, it begins with mesmerizing aromas of peach, apricot, toffee, and orange cream. Exquisite notes of black cherry, jasmine, oatmeal, and nougat converge on the palate. A dreamy mocha finish also offers a dollop of orange chiffon and banana. **95** —*M.M.*

CHOPIN IMPORTS

## Charting a Course to Success:

# KIRK AND SWEENEY RUM

Once the name of a wooden sailing ship that smuggled rum from the Caribbean to the East Coast during Prohibition in the 1920s, Kirk and Sweeney today refers to a beloved Dominican-style rum under the captainship of 3 Badge Beverage Corporation, which cleverly sources it from one of the oldest operating distilleries in the Dominican Republic.



Perhaps the most impactful course bearing Kirk and Sweeney has taken is its recent label redesignation. Kirk and Sweeney's blackstrap molasses-based core lineup now consists of a Reserva blended from rums aged 3 to 14 years; a Gran Reserva made from 5- to 20-year-old rums; and a Gran Reserva Superior containing rums aged 6 to 25 years. (A limited-release fourth expression, the XO, is aged in American oak and bottled at barrel strength, resulting in a 65.5% ABV spirit.)

The change is all thanks to the brand's popularity: In 2020, every Kirk and Sweeney expression ranked within the top 20 ultra-premium rums, according to off-premise Nielsen data. "These new designations are due to the fact that the demand for Kirk and Sweeney rum has exceeded our expectations," says 3 Badge president August Sebastiani. "For more flexibility, we crafted consistent flavor profiles through a blend of variously aged rums that were hand-selected to improve the [final] product—at no additional cost to the consumer."

Meanwhile, plotting a marketing strategy with its usual savvy, 3 Badge has created such national promotional campaigns for the brand as the Set Sail sweepstakes, which both consumers and trade members can enter before August 1 to win a schooner trip for two through the Long Island Sound. The company has also expanded Kirk and Sweeney's armada to include a partnership with SoundWaters, an organization dedicated to protecting the Long Island Sound via educational initiatives and programs with local businesses; the brand is donating 50 cents to SoundWaters for each bottle purchased in the Northeast region through July.



**Kirk and Sweeney Gran Reserva Superior Dominican Rum, Dominican Republic (\$59)**

This 80-proof spirit offers aromas of mocha latte, toffee-coated coffee bean, and tangerine peel. Nougat notes envelop peach, apricot, and cinnamon stick. Piquancy on the mid-palate is soothed by tones of Sherry and cedar. **95**—*M.M.*



**Kirk and Sweeney Gran Reserva Dominican Rum, Dominican Republic (\$49)**

Orange peel, honeyed oatmeal, and walnut are sumptuous on the nose. Notes of deep-dish pecan pie and brown-sugared peach surge forth on the palate as orange zest spices the silky mouth-feel, awakening the senses before a vanilla-oak finish. 80 proof. **94**—*M.M.*



**Kirk and Sweeney Reserva Dominican Rum, Dominican Republic (\$39)**

Warming scents of molasses-sweetened black tea, milk chocolate, and dried apricot introduce this 80-proofer. Following a silky entry of white-peppered hazelnut, tobacco leaf kicks into gear and dries the palate. Vanilla bean and peach distinguish the finish. **94**—*M.M.*

3 BADGE BEVERAGE CORPORATION



**Niche No More:**

## RUMCHATA

Placement on backbars and retail shelves across the country is proof enough that RumChata has single-handedly expanded the market niche occupied by cream liqueurs. “RumChata is different from the rest of the category,” says Britt West, vice president and general manager of E. & J. Gallo Spirits. “[It’s] the more flavorful, more fun, and more modern cream liqueur.” It’s that playful profile that’s driving sales for the brand, West explains: Not only is it the leading rum-based liqueur, but it’s outpacing the category as a whole, growing 37.5% in dollar sales in 2020 according to IRI data.

Another factor in RumChata’s success is an engaged consumer base. On social media, the brand recently “gained momentum with a viral shot featuring equal parts RumChata and cinnamon whiskey,” says West, who points out that such ease of mixability also gives it legs on-premise.

So does continued flavor innovation. Last year, RumChata Limón launched as a standout new SKU “combin[ing] five-times-distilled premium Caribbean rum with real dairy cream and a hint of vanilla and lemon for a sweet, smooth cream liqueur with a bright lemon finish,” in West’s words. An ideal product for summertime, it’s bookended by the brand’s limited-edition holiday release, Peppermint Bark, to ensure that consumers have a RumChata for every season. —*Rachel Burkons*



**Stamping Your Ticket  
to World-Class Rum:**

## KULEANA RUM WORKS

The first spirits producer to open on Hawaii’s Big Island, Kuleana Rum Works has built a portfolio of distinctive rums with three requirements at its heart: None of its expressions—whether they’re produced with estate-grown heirloom sugarcane or comprise blends of different rums from all over the world—“can be colored, flavored, or sugared,” according to founder/CEO Steve Jefferson. It’s a lofty standard in a category that largely revolves around these practices. But when your mission is to elevate said category by “treating it like a world-class spirit,” Jefferson says, adulteration is not an option.



Kuleana’s newest expressions will certainly do just that. Later this year, it will launch an aged version of its flagship Hawaiian Rum Agricole, the unaged version of which just won a gold medal at the 2021 San Francisco International Spirits Competition. But first, the new release will appear as a blending component in Kuleana’s Hokulei Rum, set to debut at its in-house bar and restaurant, the Rum Shack, in July before expanding to eight states. Featuring the brand’s new label design, Hokulei also contains two- to three-year-aged rum from Panama; five- to eight-year-aged rum from Nicaragua; three- to eight-year-aged and 15-year-aged rums from Barbados; eight-year-aged rum from Venezuela; and 18-year-aged rum from Trinidad. Together, they produce an extraordinary nose and palate that Jefferson likens to a “flavor bomb”: On the former, tobacco, toasted demerara sugar, clove, nutmeg, vanilla, and Caribbean jerk spices appear, and on the latter, mangosteen, Medjool date, and spiced banana bread lead to a finish of Sherry- and rum-soaked raisin with toasted oak and koji mushroom.

Prime for sipping, Hokulei is intended to take the consumer on what Jefferson calls “a complicated journey of awesomeness”—and for a brand content to chart its own course, “it’s the journey itself that makes things really interesting.”

Handwritten distilling records like those pictured here reflect the lengthy rum-making traditions of Destilería Serrallés, whose history in Puerto Rico dates back to the 1800s.

# Rum

## DONE RIGHT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DESTILERÍA SERRALLÉS

**DON Q** IS HERE TO HELP YOU SET YOUR SUMMER COCKTAIL MENU

by **Kate Newton**



By the time Ramón “Monchito” Marrero poured Don Q Gold into the original Piña Colada while working behind the bar at the Caribe Hilton in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1954, the brand had been around for 22 years, though the family behind its producer, Destilería Serrallés, had been tirelessly perfecting their craft since 1865. Marrero was similarly meticulous, revising his recipe for months before placing its final formulation on the bar—and in that moment, cocktail history was made.

But as the Piña Colada has inspired innumerable interpretations the world over, the rum that formed its foundation has sought to “follow the formula created by our founders,” according to Destilería Serrallés master blender and senior VP of manufacturing Silvia Santiago, whose 48-year tenure with the company began in fermentation. There, she was able to utilize her skills as a microbiologist while serving as the first woman to work in production at the company, eventually working her way up the ladder to her current role of overseeing the entire manufacturing process from sourcing to bottling—and, of course, blending and tasting distillates and aged products every step of the way. “The styles of our rums maintain the same DNA from our inception through today—elegant, balanced, and [showing] real rum character,” adds Santiago. “My emphasis and legacy throughout the years has been to respect the aging and mixing processes that maintain [that] distinct character—we do not cut corners or sacrifice quality.”

Naturally, she attributes Don Q’s global reputation for consistency, particularly among bartenders, to that unwavering approach. “Mixologists have always appreciated the quality of our rums and have favored us by using them in their drinks,” says Santiago, noting that even as consumers look to Don Q for creative expressions that satisfy changing tastes and market trends—exemplified through its flavored rum lineup made with natural fruit flavors—they also know they can always count on their non-flavored favorites.

Among the most recognizable ambassadors of the latter camp are the Cristal and Gold expressions from Don Q’s traditional range as well as the Reserva 7 from its Serrallés Collection; all three are also particularly prime for featuring in simple yet classic rum-based cocktails that get special attention during the summer season. “We have a line of rums for all occa-





**Destilería Serrallés master blender and senior VP of manufacturing Silvia Santiago has been with the company since 1973.**

sions,” says Santiago, “but summer is the ideal time for cocktails. These aged rums are opening up a world of mixing possibilities because their flavor does not overshadow the other ingredients in the cocktail. They mix very well and do not overpower the palate.”

The “wonderfully clear, smooth, and balanced” flavor profile of the Cristal makes it a go-to for traditional drinks like Daiquiris and Mojitos, yet it can “mix with everything,” she says, “giving you the soft note of rum with some wood from aging” one and a half to five years in American white oak barrels. Meanwhile, the Gold, a blend of rums also aged one and a half to five years, has a beautiful light golden color and aromas of vanilla and nuts; it’s the rum “synonymous” with not only the Piña Colada but with Puerto Rico and its legacy on the global rum stage, according to Santiago, who notes that Destilería Serrallés continues to “let people know about the recipe and even hosts contests to find the best Piña Colada.” And finally, the Reserva 7 is “a wonderful blend of rums [with] a soft beginning followed by the most robust flavors” indicative of aging for a minimum of seven years; like the Gold and the Cristal, it can be mixed into Cuba Libres and other carbonated drinks where it can effortlessly showcase its character. Together, “these three products represent what proper aging and the correct blend [can do] to a rum,” Santiago says—and we’ll take it from the expert.



### **Piña Colada**

- 2 oz. Don Q Gold
- 1½ oz. fresh pineapple juice
- 1 oz. sweet coconut cream
- 1 dash Angostura bitters

Blend ingredients with a half scoop of cubed ice until light and frothy (aerated, not thick). Pour into a tulip glass and garnish with a cherry.



### **Traditional Cuba Libre**

- 1½ oz. Don Q Cristal
  - 3 oz. cola
  - 1 squeeze lime
- Add ingredients into a Highball glass with ice and garnish with a lime wedge.



### **Mojito**

- 1½ oz. Don Q Cristal
  - 1½ oz. fresh lime juice
  - 1 dash sugar
  - 5 mint leaves
- Crush the mint with the sugar, rum, and lime juice. Shake well, pour into a Highball glass, and add a splash of chilled club soda. Garnish with a fresh mint sprig.



### **Don Q Daiquiri**

- 1½ oz. Don Q Cristal
  - 1½ oz. fresh lime juice
  - ¾ oz. simple syrup
- Shake ingredients with ice and strain into a chilled coupe glass. Garnish with a lime wheel.



### **Beau Thai**

*Created by Trey McCutcheon, beverage manager at The Ordinary in Charleston, SC, who says: “We fancy ourselves a rum bar, [so,] staying true to our roots, rum was the guiding force in developing the Beau Thai. Don Q was our first choice because of its aptitude to absorb and enhance other flavors, with the goal being to celebrate the unique qualities rum can bring to the table. As a seafood hall inspired by coastal regions like our own, we want to celebrate this Caribbean-born spirit while breaking free of a cocktail comfort zone.”*

- 2 oz. Don Q coconut-washed Cristal\*
- ½ oz. fresh lime juice
- 3 oz. mix\*\*

Shake ingredients and serve in a Collins glass. Garnish with a celery stalk.

\*Wash Don Q Cristal with coconut oil (introduce hot coconut oil into room-temperature rum). Refrigerate to remove oil; this “fattens” the rum and gives it a coconut flavor.

\*\*Combine strained tomatoes, fresh carrot juice, red curry paste, Thai chilies, Worcestershire sauce, and coconut oil and cook for about an hour.



**Tiburón Rum Company**  
**White Tip Overproof White Rum, Belize** Exuding savory aromas of vanilla, clay, and brine, this 92-proof white spirit casts a tingling sensation on the tongue that soon subsides as toffee; blood orange zest; and a minty, terroir-driven earthiness take over—creating a cross of sand and sea. **92.5** —*M.M.*  
 SHARK BAIT CO.

*A Belizean Treasure:*

# TIBURÓN RUM CO.

When Basil DeStefano, president of Tiburón Rum Co., went to Belize on a scuba-diving trip in 2006, he fell so in love with the Caribbean nation that he put an offer in on a property. He and his then-girlfriend—now his wife, Elizabeth DeStefano—felt an instant connection to the beautiful blue waters, friendly locals, and, of course, ample supply of rum. “I was on a quest to find the perfect aged rum,” he says, “and when we went to Belize, I knew I wanted to make it there.”

To fulfill his vision, he found a local distiller, Travellers Liquors, with a respected reputation as well as existing infrastructure and partnerships across the country. It took some effort, as most distillers he spoke to were insistent on making unaged rums—but DeStefano’s persistence paid off, and Tiburón Rum was born. Made from a blend of aged rums, it’s finished in oak barrels that previously contained Kentucky bourbon to achieve a rich, exotic flavor

profile prime for savoring neat and showcasing in cocktails.

Tiburón has since grown to become the number-one luxury product from Belize across all categories. “The support of the country has been incredible,” says DeStefano. Meanwhile, he and his team have been “proud to represent Belize” in the two dozen international spirits competitions they’ve participated in since its launch. Clearly, “the rum speaks for itself,” in DeStefano’s words, as it has medaled in every single one of them.

As a fixture on the backbars of restaurants, bars, and high-end resorts across its home country, Tiburón is in a unique position for American tourists to discover the brand—and to take bottles home with them as souvenirs. “People always want to try local products on vacation,” DeStefano notes, adding that duty-free shops in Belize are another key outlet for the label. But as Tiburón makes inroads in

the U.S. market, he’s observed another side effect of being a “vacation brand”: “People will walk through the aisles and say, ‘Look, honey! Isn’t this that rum we had in Belize?’” It’s these memories of basking near the sparkling shore with a cocktail in hand that help drive consumers to seek out the brand when they return home.

Named for the Spanish word for shark, Tiburón features an image of the animal on its label as well as a real shark tooth wrapped around each bottle neck. But its connection to the ocean goes deeper than its packaging; according to DeStefano, who’s still an avid scuba diver, it’s a key piece of the brand’s ethos. “We really care about conserving coral reefs and protecting the oceans,” he says, so the company has partnered with Oceana to preserve Belize’s aquatic ecosystem by committing \$1 from every bottle sold to the organization and by helping to fund the cost of one of its marine vessels. —*Rachel Burkons*

## A Triumph of Transparency:

# THE REAL MCCOY RUM



**The Real McCoy 12 Year Aged Rum, Barbados** Celebrating the 100th anniversary of Prohibition, this 100-proof rum settles in with scents of pekoe tea, oatmeal, walnut, and peach. Apple tart holds up a ladder of flavors—coffee bean, peach, apricot, and ginger root—with each step ascending toward greater richness. The finish of root beer and sandalwood is blissful. **95** —*M.M.*


FOURSQUARE DISTILLERY

The request sounded like a simple one. Bailey Pryor, founder and CEO of The Real McCoy Rum, wanted to list the ingredients used in his rums on their back label along with the nutritional information in the same format found on food and nonalcoholic beverages sold in the United States. “I thought it was important to provide real transparency to our consumers, so we voluntarily went to the TTB [the U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, which governs alcohol packaging] and said we want to list ingredients and serving facts on our bottle labels, just like all other food and drinks in the USA. I mean, why is it that all prepared foods and beverages are required to list ingredients and serving facts on their labels, but alcohol is not? But the TTB wouldn’t let us do it,” he says.

Pryor pushed on, eager to understand why something as simple as transparent labeling was not allowed—and, more importantly, what he could do to change that. He learned that the reason food and nonalcoholic beverages must list this information is because they’re regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), not the TTB—which doesn’t itself write laws; rather, its job is to monitor and enforce existing regulations. As these currently do not specifically address allowing alcohol companies to list ingredients and serving facts on their bottles, the TTB has interpreted them to mean that such labeling practices are disallowed. So it wasn’t intentionally trying to withhold information from consumers—its agents were just doing their jobs.

But the issue was personal for Pryor, who discovered his allergy to propylene glycol, a synthetic additive widely used in spirits, after taking a sip of alcohol at a party. “My allergic reaction was so bad that it became difficult to breathe,” he says. “I think it’s really unfair to have additives in beverage alcohol that are known allergens that are not called out on the label. I have to find out which alcohol I can drink by being the guinea pig.”

His own experiences made his mission to allow distillers to voluntarily disclose their ingredients all the more urgent, and after spending three years going back and forth with the TTB, it finally agreed to allow The Real McCoy to list its ingredients and nutritional information in accordance with FDA regulations. In 2020, The Real McCoy’s Prohibition Tradition 12 Year Aged Rum became the first spirit ever to do so, and going forward, all of the brand’s new expressions will include that information on the back label.

“It’s a watershed moment,” Pryor says. “Since [the TTB] set the precedent by allowing The Real McCoy to do this, they now have to allow other producers to do the same. . . . We really need to have a collective industry push to do the right thing and provide people with real transparency as to what’s in these products.” —*Allyson Reedy* 

# disrupting EXPECTATIONS

NO LONGER  
SATISFIED WITH  
SCRATCHING THE  
SURFACE, **FÉLIX SOLÍS  
AVANTIS** UPS THE  
ANTE FOR SPANISH  
WINES STATESIDE

by **Lars Leicht**

**With COVID-19 restrictions slowly beginning to lift**, wanderlust was palpable in late April as panelists and attendees gathered for our virtual voyage of the terroir of Spain. Pedro García, managing director, U.S. and Canada, for Spanish producer and importer Félix Solís Avantis, took the proverbial wheel as sommelier Christopher Sawyer acted as vinous tour guide across six different Iberian regions.

Founded in 1952, Félix Solís Avantis is now in its fourth generation of family ownership; it produces over 400 million liters of wine annually from the fruit of 5,000 farmers at its state-of-the-art wineries, making it Spain's largest still-wine producer and seventh in global wine sales. It's also the country's top exporter, selling to 115 countries. Yet while Félix Solís Avantis has become a household name in many European countries, Spanish wine's share of the U.S. market is less than 2%—meaning there's a wide-open frontier that García is intent on conquering.

**Félix Solís Avantis' winemaking facility in Rioja.**





Harvesting Tempranillo in Valdepeñas.

“Spain has done a horrible job in marketing to the U.S.,” he said, noting that that 2% share is dominated by sparkling wines and sangria. “We need to do better at getting more U.S. consumers to try our still-wine offerings from across our diverse country’s regions and subregions.”

He also blames Spanish producers for getting, in his words, “hunkered down” on traditional winemaking instead of keeping pace with contemporary consumers. “Traditions are extremely important because that’s what started the producers in the first place, but like any good business plan, it has to be constantly in motion, changing and improving,” he declared. “I think that today there’s really a disruptive movement going on in Spain, kind of a guerilla-warfare direction toward getting outside of the DOs and developing Spain in a more boutique way to showcase alternative regions and styles.”

To illustrate his point, one of the wines presented during the webinar—intended to compete in the red-blends category—particularly stood out for its taste profile as well as its packaging, designed to be decidedly more appealing to stateside consumers. Retailing for around \$11 to \$12, FYI, a multiregional blend of Tempranillo, Garnacha, and Cabernet Sauvignon sourced from Valdepeñas and Toro, was described by García as “modern [in] style and fruit forward,” with packaging “that looks nothing like Spain”: a seemingly hand-drawn logo standing out against a white background, the “i” punctuated by a drawing of a grape bunch. He added, “If we really want to grow Spain in the U.S., we have to think outside of the box. What are you willing to do that’s exciting and disruptive?”

Sawyer, for his part, was quick to proclaim his enthusiasm for FYI: “It’s giving you a lot. The use of oak here is so in balance, so minimal, that you get to taste the fruit. It’s very fresh, very exciting, delicious.”

Both Félix Solís and its sister winery, Pagos del Rey, reflect a house style that respects traditions yet readily reacts to market demand. “Consumers are looking for more approachability; more fruit-forward, easy-drinking wines; and less oak,” noted García. For example, Félix Solís’ flagship Viña Albali Gran Reserva from Valdepeñas reflects a softer style than most Tempranillos from Spain. Sawyer



Verdejo on the vine in Valdepeñas.

compared the subregion—named for its soil type, which translates as “valley of rocks”—to Châteauneuf-du-Pape, noting the preponderance of river stones atop heavy clay soils that retain water during the arid growing season. The wine shows elegance, depth, acidity, and soft but lingering tannins. “This is Tempranillo in a different form” than classic Rioja, said Sawyer. “I get a lot of graphite out of it—I love the texture of this wine.”

The Félix Solís Arnegui Crianza, which hails from the Rioja Alta subzone and ages for 12 months in American oak, is also atypically fruit forward. “It’s got a softness to it . . . [and] a lot of fruit—especially dark fruit, including a pomegranate component,” said Sawyer. “You can sip it and enjoy it; there’s nothing hard about this wine. It is perfectly made and as silky as you can get,” which is all the more impressive given its SRP of just under \$10. García, meanwhile, described it as the kind of bottling he wants to sip while visiting Madrid at night, “bouncing from bar to bar and tapa to tapa and having a great time with friends.”

García then presented the Pagos del Rey Sentero Tinta de Toro, which is made with fruit sourced from 80- to



**Félix Solís vineyards in La Puebla (above) and Ribera del Duero (below).**

100-year-old vines that are bush trained and own-rooted; phylloxera couldn’t survive in these sandy, rocky soils. Sawyer described it as an expression of “the generosity of what Tempranillo tastes like without the oak” as well as “a great example of why Spain is so different.” Concurring with the somm’s praise of the wine’s red-fruit components and juiciness, García gave Sawyer a friendly tip: “If you say Tempranillo in Toro, they will get upset with you—it’s Tinta de Toro,” he said of the grape, which goes by various

names depending on the region. García also noted that Toro is known for incredibly hot days and cold nights, yielding grapes with thick skins that in turn lend an enviable mouthfeel to the wines despite their lack of oak aging.

Shifting focus to Ribera del Duero, García showed off the Pagos del Rey Condado de Oriza Reserva—also made from Tempranillo, which in this area is called Tinta del País. Sawyer pointed out that the area’s sandstone soils impart great minerality as well as added complexity from vines that are 30–35 years





**Félix Solís Avantis' impressively sized winemaking facility in La Mancha.**

old. “They are so clean, even perfumy, on the nose, with an element of freshness that is distinctive,” he added. “The minerality yields to [flavors of] ripe, dark fig and raspberry balsamic.”

The winery rounded out its selection with a sparkler as well as two white wines. First, the Prospero Sparkling Rosé, also made from Tempranillo in the Charmat method, was compared texturally by Sawyer to a Crémant and singled out as a party starter sure to please through its fresh and vibrant flavors; García noted that it makes for a great

pairing with shellfish and spicy foods.

Finally, the whites both showed beautiful aromatic freshness: floral notes accented by white pepper and pear in the case of the Viña San Juan—a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Airén, and Viura from La Mancha—and, in the Pulpo Albariño from Rias Baixas, outstanding salinity as well as notes of apricot and tart apple. “If you haven’t paired Albariño with a paella just yet, I ask you to please go do so ASAP,” García implored the audience, declaring the grape the “queen of

Spain” alongside its king, Tempranillo.

García and Sawyer were joined on the panel by buyers from three U.S. regions. Pablo Perez, vice president of sales for Mexcor in southern Florida, said he was raised drinking Spanish wines yet remains amazed by how they’ve continued to evolve in terms of quality and style. Darren Rothenberg, sales director for the wine division of Empire Distributing in Knoxville, Tennessee, marveled at the trending popularity of Spanish bottlings in his region, especially in independent stores and on-premise accounts where “it’s all about value.” And Stephen Beckner, wine and spirits buyer for Grocery Outlet in California, Oregon, Nevada, Washington, and Idaho, shared his belief that the “quality-to-price ratio of these wines is unparalleled.”

“We’re seeing massive success in the U.S. market,” concluded García, “but we are still scratching the surface. We are ready to do business with anybody we can [and] looking to nurture long-term relationships—and we have a genuine desire to grow Spain in the U.S., because Spain, I think, is still the hidden gem for quality-to-price ratio and overdelivering.” **LV**



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*“Change has to come from the top in order to really make a difference, so we frequently train restaurant, bar, and brand owners on how to foster a healthy work environment.” —Kristine Bocchino*

# Sustainability From the Inside Out

**Building a sustainable business from the inside out**—from the back to the front of the house, that is, with a focus on helping one another as well as the earth—is key to long-term success. For global bartending superstar Bad Birdy (*badbirdy.us*), this concept is extremely important, influencing her decisions when it comes to both partnerships and purchases: She favors brands that maintain zero-waste programs, reusing or recycling nearly all of their materials, and that ensure safe, fair working conditions for their employees.



Follow food and beverage consultant Kristine Bocchino on Instagram @calfresco for more on her work with Healthy Hospo.

and regenerative methods, Birdy grows her own fruits, vegetables, and herbs and dehydrates the scraps for use as garnishes and snacks. She also makes various flavored salts from scraps—celery, cilantro, and rosemary, to name a few—and syrups from leftover citrus peels, extracting the oils with sugar.

“Restaurants and bars could even go to greater lengths by implementing composting waste bins,” she says. “I would love for this to be something that is practiced throughout the nation. All scraps of food could be collected and then converted into composting materials that enrich soils for farmers. The enrichment of our soils will be vital to reversing the economic impact we have created on the earth.”

U.K.-based nonprofit Healthy Hospo (*healthyhospo.com*) shares Birdy’s mission of creating a healthier, happier industry lifestyle. In Los Angeles, food and beverage consultant Kristine Bocchino serves as the U.S. representative for the organization, partnering with it to host seminars and workshops covering everything from improved sleep habits to nutrition and cooking to fitness programs. According to Bocchino, “Change has to come from the top in order to really make a difference, so we frequently train restaurant, bar, and brand owners on how to foster a healthy work environment, which not only makes for a more sustainable business but supports career longevity



PHOTO: JESSE RICHMOND, @JESSE RICHMOND

Star bartender and sustainability advocate Bad Birdy can be found on Instagram @bad\_birdy.

for its employees.” By way of example, she says, “We worked with one of the largest bar groups in Los Angeles to create a series of monthly workshops to help support their employees, covering subjects such as substance abuse, mental health, stress and anxiety, healthy meal prep, and so on.”

What environmental or social sustainability measures are you implementing in your restaurant or bar? Reach out and let me know. [📧](#)

Comments or general life questions?

Send Roberts an email at [100proofemma@gmail.com](mailto:100proofemma@gmail.com) or reach out to her through her YouTube channel, 100 Proof Emma, or Instagram @100proofemma.



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