

THE  
tastingpanel  
MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

A Gateway to  
SPAIN

FÉLIX SOLÍS AVANTIS AIMS TO  
CHANGE HOW AMERICANS VIEW—  
AND DRINK—SPANISH WINE



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Pictured at La Taberna in Napa, CA, from left to right: Liz Thach, Master of Wine; La Taberna owner Mick Saylor; Andrea Robinson, Master Sommelier; Pedro Garcia, managing director U.S. & Canada for Félix Solís Avantis; Tasting Panel contributor Chris Sawyer; Ellen Udoff, owner of Wine Buzz Marketing; La Taberna chef Armando Ramirez; and Boris Guillome, senior manager of wine sourcing at Vivino.



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## VENTURING BEYOND

# Vodka



To craft its Botanika Angelica line of liqueurs, Chopin Imports combines natural herbs, spices, and fruits with a base of Chopin Rye Vodka.

**CHOPIN IMPORTS** ADDS  
VERMOUTH AND LIQUEURS  
TO ITS PORTFOLIO OF  
COMPLEMENTARY BRANDS

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHOPIN IMPORTS





**Dos Déus is produced with grapes from the Spanish region of Priorat.**

**Chopin truly excels at its craft:** It's one of only a few vodka brands in the world that manages the entire production process from start to finish, sourcing its potatoes, rye, and wheat from farms within 18 miles of its distillery and then using traditional (read: painstakingly slow and laborious yet utterly worth it) methods that eventually transport the liquid into its frosted-glass bottles. But there is much to explore in the spirits world beyond vodka, so it only makes sense that the Polish company launched Chopin Imports as a way to expand its offerings, developing a portfolio of compatible boutique brands that span multiple categories.

"Our thought process was, why not go after the whole cocktail?" Chopin Imports COO Chuck Kane' says. Not that the company is collecting brands for the sake of collecting brands; Kane' is incredibly intentional about which products join their ranks. He and his colleagues have prioritized "working with like-minded, passionate producers . . . that, like [Chopin], are family-owned, family-farmed, and family-sold," he says, and using those criteria, they've curated a portfolio 17 brands strong, ranging from base spirits like tequila, rum, gin, and whiskey to vermouth and liqueurs. "While the brands aren't necessarily household names yet, our team believes they will be once we introduce them to the market," Kane' adds, noting that "first and foremost, it's the quality of the liquid" that earns them a spot in the portfolio. "We find that brand partners who are truly involved in their product are incredibly passionate about the quality, how their spirits are perceived, and even how it impacts their families and communities. It's a direct reflection upon them," he says. That confidence sells itself.

Another key consideration for Kane' is whether these superior liquids fit into a category relevant to Chopin Imports' other offerings. Take Spanish brand Dos Déus, for example: What could be a better companion for a world-class vodka than an equally well-crafted vermouth? "When I came on board to build the portfolio, I was excited to build the modifiers section, and I'm super-excited about this vermouth," Kane' says. He adds that it's especially important to have a top-caliber offering in this oft-overlooked category because consumers routinely choose a subpar product due to their lack of knowledge, "throw it into a Martini or Manhattan, and hope it doesn't ruin the drink." Recently, though, novice and experienced bartenders alike have started to demand better, and Kane' intends to meet their expectations with the U.S. launch of Dos Déus this fall.



**Dos Déus is macerated with Spanish botanicals and fruit.**



**Chopin founder Tad Dorda checks the Polish oak vats used for aging Botanika Angelica.**

But while Americans are conditioned to think of vermouth as a supporting character, in Spain it's often the star—which is why Kane' recommends drinking Dos Déus' three expressions on their own rather than in cocktails. Produced in Priorat with locally grown botanicals and fruit, they include a Macabeo-based dry white; a sweet white made from Muscat; and a red blend of Macabeo, Xarel-lo, and Parellada. "We were actually able to put our own twist on this brand," he says. "We wanted to capitalize on being in Spain's premier wine region, and we got to choose the grapes rather than using the standard grapes that vermouth is usually made from. The red, especially, has a really amazing flavor profile. It's aged separately in Sherry barrels and Priorat wine barrels for six months, then blended together. It makes one of the best Manhattans you'll ever try."

Another Chopin Imports product that's new to the U.S. is Botanika Angelica (for more, see page 116). Debuting with five flavors—Amaro, Bitters, Lemon, Orange, and Elderflower—these preservative-free, artisanal house liqueurs add natural herbs, spices, and fruits to a base of Chopin Rye Vodka and clock in at 25–40% ABV. "We put a lot of time and effort into creating these flavor profiles," Kane' says, and the results "are so good you can pour them on their own. For us it's so important that people understand the difference between chemical and natural flavors. If you taste our elderflower against other elderflowers on the market, we're not the cheapest, we're not the most expensive, but we're the best. Affordable luxury is important to us."

Equally important to Chopin is dessert, which is why it created its line of Dorda liqueurs—named after Chopin founder Tad Dorda, who's known for his sweet tooth. The decadent Double Chocolate expression blends melted dark chocolate with Chopin Rye Vodka; as it was well received upon release (no surprises there), the line expanded with more dessert-driven experiments. Double Chocolate, Sea Salt Caramel, and Coconut are the only flavors currently available in the U.S., but not for lack of success: Dorda experienced 47% growth in sales during the first half of 2021. "It's all liquid to lips," Kane' says of the surge. "People try it and realize it's amazing and they keep buying it. Seeing that organic growth with the Dorda line has been fun."

In short, Chopin Imports' scrupulous efforts to curate a portfolio of products that work together have ensured that crafting the perfect drink is now an effortless task. "We can partner with all our brands and make some really cool cocktails," Kane' says. Just maybe don't put them all in the same glass at the same time—but then again, hey, you do you. Because even with a product as celebrated as Chopin, thinking beyond the vodka just makes sense. **W**



PHOTO: AMANDA BIDDLE/STRIPED SPATULA

## THE EQUINOX

- 2 oz. Chopin Vodka
- ¾ oz. Botanika Angelica Elderflower
- ¼ oz. Botanika Angelica Bitters
- ¼ oz. Salsers Aperitif
- ½ oz. fresh lime juice

Add ingredients into a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake and strain over flower ice cubes (place pansies, baby's breath, and green buttons in an ice mold, gently pour water over the flowers, and freeze). Top with a splash of ginger beer.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHOPIN IMPORTS

## DOS DÉUS MANHATTAN

- 1½ oz. rye whiskey (or 1½ oz. mezcal for a White Manhattan)
- ¾ oz. Dos Déus White Vermouth
- 2 oz. Spanish cider
- 2 dashes orange bitters

Stir the whiskey/mezcal, vermouth, and bitters in a mixing glass, then strain and serve in an Old Fashioned glass with ice. Top with the cider and garnish with an apple slice.





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# contents

# 104



76

**cover story**

**A GATEWAY  
TO SPAIN**

Félix Solís Avantis  
Aims to Change  
How Americans  
View—and Drink—  
Spanish Wine

4

**up front**

**VENTURING  
BEYOND  
VODKA**

Chopin Imports  
Adds Vermouth  
and Liqueurs to  
Its Portfolio of  
Complementary  
Brands

80

**category  
report**

**WRAP IT UP**

These Giftworthy  
Brands Will Help  
You Tie a Bow on  
Q4



104

**category  
report**

**HAVE TASTE  
BUDS, WILL  
TRAVEL**

Backbar Brands  
That Pack a Punch  
on the Palate

72

**feature**

**A VIRTUAL  
LEARNING  
CURVE**

When the  
World Went on  
Lockdown, J. Lohr  
Went Into Digital  
Overdrive

95

**feature**

**A PEEK  
BEHIND THE  
GATES**

Heaven's Door  
and Redbreast  
Team Up to Create  
a Limited Master  
Blenders' Edition





# Wine nut? Butternut

**91 POINTS**

The Tasting Panel Magazine, July 2021 | 2019 Vintage



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Butter Yourself Up.

# departments



- 12** Industry Spotlight
- 16** Winning at Beverage
- 18** Capitol Chill
- 20** Dining and Drinking From A to Z
- 22** The Ransom Note
- 24** Wheying In
- 26** Q&A: Juan Coronado, Mijenta Tequila
- 28** Lone Star Libations
- 30** Fresh Voices
- 34** Taking Inventory
- 36** Scotch Report
- 38** A Voice Uncorked
- 40** Down the Aisle
- 46** Dive Bars
- 48** Blue Reviews

- 58** Beyond the Barrel
- 60** Publisher's Picks
- 88** Philanthropy: FLOurish
- 90** Appellations: Goose Gap AVA
- 92** Winery Spotlight: Imagery Estate Winery
- 94** Spain: Hammeken Cellars
- 98** Bartender Spotlight
- 100** Mixology
- 102** Partnerships: La Adelita Tequila and California Caviar Company
- 122** Destinations
- 126** Publisher's Picks EXTRA
- 130** Dear Emma

# 72

Wines set up for an online tasting at J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines in Paso Robles, CA.

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## The Napa Valley 750 Raises \$90,000 for the St. Helena Hospital Foundation

**St. Helena resort Harvest Inn** hosted the second Napa Valley 750: The Wine Country Road Rally on April 11–16, 2021. The 750-mile scenic driving experience had 25 registered participants, who traveled to the event from across the country with fellow guests and car enthusiasts and raised an impressive \$90,000 for the St. Helena Hospital Foundation. The limited-edition cars featured included a 1953 Porsche 356 Outlaw, a 1954 Austin Healey 100, a 1957 Jaguar D-Type, a 1967 Ferrari 330 GTC, and a 1970 Porsche 911S.

"This year has been extraordinarily trying . . . yet we saw the greatest of humanity right here in the upper Napa Valley and beyond," says St. Helena Hospital president and CEO Glen Newhart, MBA, CFRE, who notes that the Napa Valley 750 "helped provide a blanket of health security to our community. . . . We could not do it without generous donors' help and the [help of the] remarkable Harvest Inn team and [Napa Valley 750 director] Rick Kaufman."

The third annual Napa Valley 750 will take place April 3–9, 2022; the deadline to enter is February 17. For more information, visit [harvestinn.com](http://harvestinn.com) or call (707) 963-9463.



## Rhone Rangers Honor Gary Eberle With Lifetime Achievement Award

The national Rhone Rangers organization presented its sixth Lifetime Achievement Award in August to Gary Eberle, founder and owner of Eberle Winery. Honoring Eberle on behalf of the Rhone Rangers was guest moderator and journalist Matt Kettmann, joined by special guests Jason Haas of Tablas Creek Vineyard and Jerry Lohr of J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines.

One of the original co-founders of the Estrella River Winery, Eberle settled in Paso Robles, California, in the early 1970s. He made the first documented planting of Syrah in the state in 1975, along with the first commercially produced 100% Syrah wine in 1978. "Gary Eberle is known as the godfather of Paso Robles for his pioneering work here. But he should be equally famous for his early championing of Syrah," said Haas. In 1979, Eberle founded Eberle Winery with a focus on crafting premium, small-production wines.

"Introducing and propagating Syrah in the U.S. is still one of my proudest accomplishments, and it has been rewarding to see what other wineries have done with not only Syrah but also my other favorite Rhônes: Viognier, Grenache, and Mourvèdre," Eberle said. "I am honored to be recognized by the Rhone Rangers and I will cherish this award forever."



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# Wente Family Estates Announces New Sales Leaders and Chief Financial Officer



**Wente Family Estates** has appointed Steve Rinn as vice president of its Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits division and Kate Cavanaugh as its vice president of national accounts. Hans Hartjens, meanwhile, has joined the company as chief financial officer.



Rinn joins Wente Family Estates with more than 20 years of industry experience. In his time with Constellation Brands, he partnered with Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits in Florida, managing the off-premise business. Cavanaugh brings 19 years of wine industry experience to her role; during her time at Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, she managed an array of distributors and markets on the East Coast before transitioning to a leadership role in off-premise chain account sales. Over the past five years, she managed a high-performing team that worked directly with over 20 off-premise chain customers.



Hartjens, for his part, will oversee the overall financial success of Wente Family Estates and support the continued long-term growth of its portfolio. "I'm beyond excited to have Hans join our organization. His experience and leadership capabilities will contribute significantly to our senior leadership team, and he will be an essential partner as we continue to grow our portfolio of brands," says CEO Tyson Overton.

With 18 years of wine industry experience at E. & J. Gallo Winery, Hartjens brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise in winery financial oversight. He started his career leading E. & J. Gallo's capital planning and operation finance teams, and after years of growth, he progressed to the commercial side of the business in 2006 before taking a leadership role on the company's Corporate International Finance Team, managing financial operations for over 80 countries and 100 different brands. Most recently, he led the business and operation teams for the Asia region and was based in Hong Kong for the past five years.

# SGWS Promotes Laura DePasquale to New Role

**Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits** recently announced that Laura DePasquale, MS, has been promoted to the role of senior vice president, sales and commercial operations, Artisanal Wine Division. DePasquale's key responsibilities include building the support functions and managing the sales leaders essential to optimizing productivity across the Artisanal Wine commercial organization.

"Laura has always set the bar the highest imaginable," says Cindy Leonard, executive vice president and general manager, fine wine. "Southern Glazer's is extremely proud to have such a brilliant Master Sommelier and demonstrated leader among its ranks. Her level of knowledge and experience in the artisanal wine category is unmatched, and I know her expertise will bring great value to our suppliers and customers in this space."


Prior to her promotion, DePasquale was the vice president and general manager of the Artisanal Fine Wine Division at Southern Glazer's Wine

& Spirits-Florida. She is an engaging wine educator, speaker, examiner, and wine judge, conducting seminars and tastings at numerous high-profile events, as well as a regular lecturer and examiner for the Court of Master Sommeliers at all levels.



# Banfi Announces New Executive Director of National Sales

**Leading Italian wine producer** and importer Banfi has announced the appointment of Kory Kemp as executive director of national sales, USA. The selection comes less than two years after Banfi implemented a strategic approach to its ownership portfolio. Focused on growth and expansion, the company introduced line extensions for two of its core brands, Centine and Rosa Regale, earlier this year.

Based in Austin, Texas, Kemp will lead Banfi's U.S. sales force and be charged with strengthening on- and off-premise distribution for the luxury portfolio while working closely with Banfi's distributor partners across the country. An industry veteran with over 28 years of experience, he most recently served as senior sales director for Santa Margherita USA. "We are thrilled to welcome Kory to our team," says owner and family proprietor Cristina Mariani-May. "Beyond his numerous qualifications, Kory is well respected in the industry, and I am confident he will be a great fit for Banfi's culture." 

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# Snake Oil for Sale

## THE DIRTY BUSINESS OF CLEAN WINE

If you are active on social media and engage with wine-related accounts, you've doubtless been targeted by advertising from self-proclaimed "clean wine" companies. While their campaigns suggest that their products are better for you than "regular" wine because they are more concerned with your overall well-being than other producers, the fact is that they're engaging in deceit and scare tactics. These brands, which now command a multimillion-dollar segment of the wine market, are preying on consumers who may not understand that most of their claims are immaterial if not hyperbolic or even downright false. Ironically, while they disparage manipulation when it comes to production, they have no problem with it as a marketing strategy. Here are three of their most misleading tricks.

### MANIPULATION BY INSINUATION

A common ploy among these companies is to make true statements about their products that imply uniqueness, when the reality is that those statements can and do apply to most any wine. For example, many promote their wines as being low-carb with no added sugar; the problem is not that this is false but rather that this is true of virtually every dry table wine. Consumers

who don't know that, however, are bound to extrapolate otherwise; when they see an ad for a brand that claims to be low-sugar accompanied by a photo of a sugar-filled wine glass, they will infer that other brands are high-sugar.

Another example involves the suggestion that most wines are chock-full of all the different chemicals and other additives that are legally permissible in wine production. Some brands will reference these to imply that their use is common when in fact only a handful of high-volume, low-cost commercial brands use them. Just because something is legal doesn't mean that everyone is doing it. On the contrary, tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of family-owned, small-production wineries make fantastic wines without additives.

### MEANINGLESS TERMS

One of the worst offenders in the category is a brand whose slogan is absolutely meaningless: "Pure Natural Wine." It's all over the company's website, packaging, and social media feeds. It sounds great, but as every reader of this magazine surely knows, there is no legal definition for either adjective; marketers are free to use the terms "pure" and "natural" however they want with zero burden of proof. They can also fabricate sexy-sounding

statistics like this one, taken directly from the aforementioned site's landing page: "We estimate that less than 0.01% of the world's wines meet our strict criteria." What are those selection criteria, and how (and by whom) were they measured? That's anyone's guess.

### OBSCURING TRANSPARENCY

Though I completely agree that there should be more truth in labeling when it comes to the wine industry, these brands are hardly the models of open information and transparency they purport to be. To give an example, when I recently went to one company's homepage and clicked on sections labeled "Additive Free" and "Organic Farming," I was directed not to an explanation of these assertions with facts to back them up but rather to a sales page. I also found it impossible to locate tech sheets for many of these brands. In some cases, it wasn't even clear which grapes were in the wine or where they were grown.

Ultimately, it is up to individual consumers to make decisions that they feel are best for them. Unfortunately, the "clean wine" movement has done a stellar job of muddying the waters surrounding the concepts of transparency, accuracy, and integrity. Buyers beware: That "healthier" wine you're drinking may turn out to be snake oil. *LS*

Images like this stock photo echo the "clean wine" brand aesthetic.

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# Bouncing Back

TWO RESTAURANTS THAT LAUNCHED DURING THE PANDEMIC ARE REVEALING THE RESILIENCE OF THE WASHINGTON, D.C., DINING SCENE

**What's even more** impressive than a restaurant that's thriving after opening at the start of the pandemic? One that was also able to snag a Michelin star while doling out paella to go as it navigated capacity restrictions at best and dine-in bans at worst.

That would be Xiquet DL, the Spanish restaurant in Washington, D.C.'s Glover Park neighborhood helmed by executive chef and owner Danny Lledó, whose culinary program—inspired by his hometown of Denia—takes you on a trip to the Valencia Coast, no PCR test required.

Lledó popped in to say hello. For the record, the most-awarded paella chef in the United States told us he was not thrilled with the prospect of customers picking up containers of the saffron-infused rice, as it's always best enjoyed straight from the stove.

Unsurprisingly, an iteration of Spain's national dish made it to our table halfway through the evening, topped with lobster, cuttlefish, and prawns; our server thoughtfully reminded us to scrape up the *socarrat*, the crusty, crispy, caramelized layer at the bottom of the pan. It was hard

**The *arrós del senyoret* at Xiquet DL, a Michelin-starred Spanish restaurant that opened in Washington, D.C., at the onset of the pandemic.**

citrus, a showstopping dessert included oranges nine ways, from cake to custard to gelée. We ended the evening where we began, in the bar, nibbling on mignardises and sipping Madeira while plotting our return for Lledó's next act: a 14-course experience that includes time at the chef's counter.

Another flourishing restaurant that launched during the pandemic is Tiki Thai in the northern Virginia suburb of Reston, which melds the cuisines of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. During dinner on the patio, we tried the Chumphon pad thai (named for a city in southern Thailand) with jumbo lump crab, tiger prawn, chicken, lychee, banana blossom, cashews, and coconut milk; it not only elevated the ubiquitous noodle dish but proved a refreshing alternative to som tum.

Founder Jeremy Ross, who heads up the bar program here and at Sense of Thai St. in nearby Ashburn, told us that he didn't want the outside space to feel like an afterthought. Mission accomplished: If the AstroTurf, string lights, and potted palms weren't festive and fun enough, vessels for the authentic tiki cocktails added an element of whimsy, from a metal owl mug for the applejack-and Cynar-based Take Care to a bust of Hemingway for the Moveable Feast made with Cognac, Singani, and grapefruit. My palate was piqued by a clarified punch that mimicked a Piña Colada with pisco, rum, pineapple, coconut water, falernum and lime. Just like the liquid in my glass, it's clear that the DMV's dining scene is as vibrant as ever. **LT**



PHOTO: REY LOPEZ



PHOTO: KELLY MAGYARICS

**The Colada Punch at Tiki Thai in Reston, VA, features Chilean pisco, aged demerara rum, pineapple, coconut water, falernum, and lime.**

Before my companion and I headed to the small dining room's most enviable table overlooking the wood-fired stove and oven (the kitchen eschews gas or electric heat), we paused for a pre-dinner drink in the living room-esque mezzanine bar. As we lounged on a sofa sipping Champagne cocktails,



PHOTO COURTESY OF TIKI THAI

**Tiki Thai's Take Care combines applejack with Cynar, aquavit, elderflower, pomegranate, and lime.**

to pick a favorite from the ten-plus courses paired with Spanish wines, but velvety white asparagus soup with smoked English peas, tender rabbit with porcini mushrooms, and a *trompe l'oeil* presentation of baby eels that we mistook for linguine all linger in my mind. In a nod to the region's famous



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**Brent Karlicek is the beverage director for Postino WineCafé's parent company, Upward Projects.**

# Rise and Wine

**POSTINO WINECAFÉ** INTRODUCES A LINEUP OF BRUNCH COCKTAILS SANS SPIRITS

PHOTOS: GRACE STUFKOSKY

With the launch of its wine-based brunch cocktails, Postino WineCafé is building on a beverage program that already has a reputation for innovation in Arizona, Colorado, and Texas. Operating with beer and wine licenses in all three states, Postino's management team saw an opportunity to fill a niche. "We are without the ability to serve spirits, but there are so many different ways to explore cocktails through the lens of vermouths, apéritifs, and fortified wines," says Brent Karlicek, beverage director for Postino's parent company, Upward Projects.

In developing the new program, Karlicek and his team, which includes senior manager of beverage Jared Sowinski, considered the significance of brunch to Postino's brand and to its loyal clientele. "The brunch cocktail program was created out of a desire to enhance the [guest] experience and make people feel good through dynamic beverages," Sowinski explains. "We utilized a combination of still, sparkling, aromatized, and fortified wines to develop the layers of flavor and complexity we were striving to achieve."

The weekend brunch menu now features five cocktails: three Spritzes, a Sherry Mary, and a beer-spiked Mimosa. According to Karlicek, "We felt the Spritz would be the foundation for the cocktail program, and we

wanted to offer a spectrum of intensity and flavor. We also knew we had to have a Bloody Mary for our brunch, and when you think about it . . . wouldn't your [typical vodka-based] Bloody Mary be better fortified with some incredible wines?" To develop the recipe, the team tasted several types of Sherry and Madeira, landing on a blend of equal parts Rainwater Madeira and Oloroso Sherry that worked well with the acidity and spice of the tomato juice. Cocchi apéritif wines, meanwhile, are used in two of the Spritzes, while the third mixes Cappelletti with Dolin Blanc to create an "Aperol on steroids." And in the Mimosa—without which no brunch would be complete—the sour and saline qualities of Dogfish Head SeaQuench Ale balance the orange juice's tartness.

The cocktails complement a selection of brunch specials, including shareable small plates like the croque monsieur or madame, panettone French toast, and ricotta fritters as well as larger plates like meatball shakshouka and smoked salmon carpaccio.

Such creativity is not unusual from a brand whose ethos has been to push the boundaries of its beverage



**Postino's new lineup of brunch cocktails includes a riff on a Bloody Mary with Rainwater Madeira and Oloroso Sherry (right) and a Spritz featuring a Cocchi apéritif wine (left).**

selection. In addition to offering a vast array of craft beers, Postino has launched a proprietary wine program that now represents nearly 60% of its 30 offerings by the glass and bottle. "It is sometimes challenging to find the finesse and the balance we are seeking," Karlicek admits. "When we find a great producer who delivers that in a significant way . . . we have found that together we can tune the identity of the wine to really suit the Postino table."

So what's next for the continually evolving brand? "A late-night menu that could include some slightly more mysterious and brooding versions of these wine-based cocktails," says Karlicek. Count us in. **TD**

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

# Extending Summer's Bounty Into Fall

**Come September**, many of us writers start moving away from the light and crisp wines we typically focus on in warm weather. But in light of the seemingly endless summer this year—defined by triple-digit temperatures out West, recorded even north of the Canadian border, and practically biblical rains covering much of the East—my drinking habits are shifting a bit as I continue to reach for wines as well as ciders that provide refreshment. Here are a few finds to fill your glass in the most satisfying of ways.

On a recent road trip, I happened upon a fascinating producer in rural North Carolina, **Botanist & Barrel** ([botanistandbarrel.com](http://botanistandbarrel.com)); run by married industry veterans Amie Fields and Lyndon Smith and their partners, Lyndon's sister Kether Smith and Deric McGuffey, it focuses on natural wines, ciders, pét-nats, and piquettes. "We're definitely carrying the 'natural' torch in North Carolina," says Fields. Distributed mainly in the Southeast (North Carolina, South Carolina, and



Above, a tasting flight at Botanist & Barrel; at left, Botanist & Barrel partners Lyndon Smith and Amie Fields at their retail outpost in Asheville, NC.

PHOTOS: DAVID RANSOM



A few of the Italian rosés featured at the Istituto del Vino Rosa Autoctono Italiano tasting.

Georgia) for now and also available online, Botanist & Barrel has a production facility and tasting room just west of the Raleigh-Durham area in Cedar Grove and a retail store/wine bar across

the state in downtown Asheville.

Not to be left out of my extended summer regimen is a nice glass of rosé, or in this case rosato. I recently had the good fortune to try a variety of Italian rosés courtesy of a new consortium, the **Istituto del Vino Rosa Autoctono Italiano** ([rosautoctono.it](http://rosautoctono.it)), which is dedicated to promoting bottlings made with indigenous varieties from many of Italy's major rosé-producing regions, including Abruzzo, Calabria, Lombardia, Puglia, and the Veneto. What struck me most, other than the high quality of the winemaking, was not only how different they are from each other but how food friendly they

are. Whereas Chiaretto's Corvina- and Gropello-based wines presented fresh styles meant for sipping or pairing with appetizers and lighter meals, Montepulciano from Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo and Negroamaro from Puglia offered richer, more ageworthy wines built for drinking throughout a meal.

I've lauded the quality of Italy's pink wines for years, and the most recent vintages have continued to impress, with increased availability from producers north to south. With the rosé category continuing to hold year-round appeal for consumers, these wines are an excellent bet for increased bottle sales on-premise and in stores. **LT**

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PHOTO: JANET FLETCHER/PLANET CHEESE

# Cream of the Flock

MAKING CHEESE FROM SHEEP'S MILK IS AN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR

**Choosing a favorite** cheese would be impossible, but I have no hesitation about my favorite style: aged sheep cheese, from anywhere. I love the nutty, mellow wheels from Basque Country and the sharp, salty, piquant types from Southern Italy. Manchego makes the list, of course, but Spain offers so many dreamy sheep cheeses beyond that familiar one. Even the U.S. produces a handful of aged sheep wheels worthy of cheese boards.

The following sheep cheeses may take some searching to find but are worth the hunt. Any one of them would make an impression alongside a fine red wine.

**Carr Valley Cave Aged Marisa:** This Wisconsin producer makes dozens of cheeses, most of them from cow's milk, but Cave Aged Marisa is my favorite from cheesemaker Sid Cook's repertoire. (The goat's milk Billy Blue is a close second.) A semi-firm cheese with a natural rind, Cave Aged Marisa smells of brown butter, mushroom, and toasted hazelnut. It is creamier than Manchego or a Tuscan pecorino and

exhibits none of the wet-wool aroma that turns some people away from sheep cheese.

**Casa Madaio Paglierino:** Now in its fourth generation of family ownership, Casa Madaio specializes in *affinage*—purchasing young wheels from local producers and aging them in natural caves in the Cilento and Vallo di Diano National Park near Italy's Amalfi Coast. The 4-pound Paglierino is made with the milk of sheep that graze in the park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most environmentally pristine parts of Italy. Matured for two to three months, Paglierino is semi-firm with a natural rind; a grassy, lemony scent; and a sweet flavor.

**Finca Pascualete Pascualino:** From a centuries-old country estate (*finca*) in the Extremadura region of western Spain, this stunning, small, raw-milk cheese is a revelation, resembling no other sheep cheese from Spain that I know. The aroma is captivating—a mix of cream cheese, warm butter, mushroom, nuts, toffee, and damp

cave—while the semi-firm interior is unusually moist and creamy for the style. And what a backstory. Shortly after World War II, the Spanish count who owned the estate fell in love with Aline Griffith, an American spy working for the CIA. They married and launched commercial cheesemaking at the finca to keep the local artisan traditions alive.

**Secret de Compostelle:** Produced by Agour, a leading source of exceptional Basque sheep cheese, Secret de Compostelle (pictured above) references Santiago de Compostela, the Christian pilgrimage site in Spain. Many pilgrims begin their journey in French Basque Country, and Agour wanted to honor the centuries of open passage and exchange between France and Spain. Secret de Compostelle fills the gap left by the much-missed Abbaye de Belloc, which is no longer exported to the U.S. Aged seven to eight months, it is smooth and sweet, with a nutty, sour-creamy aroma and plenty of savory depth. If you like Ossau-Iraty, you will love this close cousin. **LT**



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# A Joyful Profile

AN ABRIDGED INTERVIEW WITH  
JUAN CORONADO, CO-FOUNDER OF  
**MIJENTA TEQUILA**

by Jessie Birschbach

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIJENTA TEQUILA



**Wearing an incredibly chic** bolo tie from Guadalajara and a white gaucho-esque hat, Juan Coronado very much looked the part of an authentic tequila producer during our recent Instagram Live interview—a title that now, to his own surprise, he can officially claim. “It just hit me last week, like, ‘Whoa, I make tequila,’” said the humble co-founder of Mijenta Tequila. But even before settling into his current role, Coronado earned more than 16 years of experience in the food and beverage industry, serving as a cocktail innovator for chef José Andrés’ ThinkFoodGroup, a Champagne sommelier, and a national brand ambassador at Bacardí, among many other positions.

As we spoke, I tasted both the Blanco with which Mijenta launched in 2020 and its Reposado, and what struck me most—aside from the extraordinarily viscous texture of each expression—was the heart Coronado showed. Read on for an excerpt of our Q&A.

## What was the impetus behind Mijenta?

Mijenta came from the idea of bringing traditional tequila back to the consumers. Somehow we’ve all forgotten what big, full-bodied tequila tastes like. But there’s a hefty amount of work you have to put into the process to create

this type of profile. I sat down with our maestra tequilera, Ana María Romero Mena, and we created a profile that’s meant to be joyful—not for [drinking in] shots—[and] that can handle any dish and any conversation. And so we started working within the land . . . and that’s sort of how Mijenta got its start. . . . We’re working on an añejo right now. We’re not exactly sure when it will be released because we can’t rush Mother Nature, but I’m very happy with the outcome so far, and it’s coming along very nicely. We’re estimating it will be here in the States the first week of December.

## Sustainability is paramount when working with agave; how is Mijenta doing its part?

All of our bottles include recycled glass. Our labels are made from the spent fibers of the maguey and so are the boxes. We’re also using vegetable-based inks, so we’re trying to be as sustainable as can be . . . and go beyond just caring.

## What can you tell me about the blue agave Mijenta uses in relation to the terroir of the Jalisco Highlands?

I’m in love with Los Altos due to the red color of the soil. It really enhances

the flavors of the magueys. I remember leaving a field . . . and my white Converse turned this sort of pink color. Los Altos is about 1,600 meters above sea level. . . . We source our agave from fields that allow at least 15% of the [plants] to keep their *quitoe* [or flower stalk, for the purposes of genetic variation and preservation].

## Romero Mena is one of the few female master tequila distillers—tell me about her process.

She happens to have received the title of “Best Maestra Tequilera” from *Tequila Aficionado* this year. Her tequilas are quite unique, and when I approached her, I told her I wanted to do something elegant but full-bodied that expresses the fruit. We take a culinary approach [and] cook our agaves very softly; Grandma’s food is always the best, and that’s because she cooks slowly with a low flame, so we went with low heat and low pressure. . . . We have a 96-hour temperature-controlled fermentation [and] we also control our pH. The barrels are rinsed in our own tequila[, which] we don’t filter or fine. Only the local well water we use is filtered via reverse osmosis. . . . Mijenta is made in small lots, but it’s a tequila with a big heart [and] lots of passion. **LT**



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# Dining and Drinking “With You” for a Decade

AUSTIN'S **CONTIGO** EVOLVES THROUGH THE SEASONS AS IT RESPONDS TO PANDEMIC-RELATED CHALLENGES


**A decade ago**, a restaurant called Contigo opened on the undeveloped outskirts of Austin's former airport, whose roughly 700 acres lay on the cusp of transformation. Though it was just a few miles north of downtown, few residents or tourists thought of this part of the city when seeking spots

I'd learned in fine-dining restaurants and translate it to this environment, serve it in a paper boat, [and] not charge as much," says Wiseheart.

I've made many a memory at Contigo, so as the restaurant enters its second decade, I checked in with Wiseheart and managing partner Dana

and youthfulness," says Wiseheart with a laugh. "Who opens an outdoor restaurant in Austin, where it can be 100 degrees? It was tough at times. And then here comes the pandemic, and everybody wants to be outside."

When the venue briefly shuttered in spring 2020, "we had a chance to reevaluate what we were doing, what was working, [and] which of our needs had changed over the years," says Curley, a problem solver who came to Contigo in 2011 with a background in fine arts and years of hospitality experience. "A restaurant can create a sense of enjoyment for people in the same way that art does—in the way that we plate dishes, layer flavors, or [design] an environment," she adds. Anticipating the time when guests would be open to gathering inside again, the team extended the restaurant's roof to create its first fully indoor space while expanding the seating in the landscaped outdoor lounges to allow for social distancing. "People still aren't quite ready to return to communal seating," Wiseheart says, "but they're warming up to it."

Wiseheart, Curley, and their colleagues remain ready to respond to more change, whether it involves swapping out frozen drinks for hot toddies on the cocktail menu as the weather cools or finding ways to incentivize staff in such a volatile labor market, including wage increases, paid time off, referral bonuses, and health insurance for full-time employees. "Yet our philosophy behind both the kitchen and the bar hasn't changed," Wiseheart says. "We want to create something familiar enough to get our guests to try it but unfamiliar enough to excite them and create a memory." 



The team at Contigo, including managing partner Dana Curley and chef Andrew Wiseheart, expanded outdoor spaces and created a private-party room to accommodate their guests' changing needs.

for delicious dining and drinking. Yet owner-chef Andrew Wiseheart and co-owner Ben Edgerton decided to take a chance. They modeled Contigo (which means "with you" in Spanish) after Edgerton's family ranch, with seasonal food, communal tables, and an informal vibe enlivened by inventive cocktails, local beers, and wines prime for sipping on its patio. "I wanted to take what

Curley to hear what they're envisioning for the next ten years.

About that aforementioned patio: In a risky decision made feasible by a generous tree canopy and clever, shade-conscious architecture, Contigo's seating was, and still is, mostly outside, on picnic tables flanked by native plants in wooden planters. "We benefited from our inexperience, ignorance,

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# In Defense of Wine Influencers

LOVE THEM OR HATE THEM, THE SOCIAL MEDIA SENSATIONS ARE HERE TO STAY

story and photo by Paige Comrie

In 2018, according to the Digital Marketing Institute, 49% of consumers made purchases based on recommendations by social media influencers. Influencer Marketing Hub, meanwhile, indicated in its “The State of Influencer Marketing 2020” report that the marketing spend on influencer-led campaigns increased from \$6.6 billion in 2019 to \$9.7 billion in 2020; in 2021, that figure is forecasted to rise to well over \$10 billion. In short, the trend is here to stay.

distinct lack of regard for the data that says otherwise. There’s no true understanding for what partnerships with influencers should look like.

Now widely accepted in other industries, influencer marketing is a prime way to reach new audiences, benefiting from the trust and validation earned by real people who have worked hard to develop authentic relationships with their followers. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges to selling wine,

consumers why they should pick your wine over some other pretty label, and they instill confidence. They offer a glimpse into a brand more than mere tasting notes ever could.

When done right, influencer marketing provides unprecedented exposure for the cost: It’s like hiring a photographer, copywriter, model, stylist, and location scout all in one go. Not only do you reach thousands and thousands of people as a result, but the people you’re reaching are already highly engaged in the content and attuned to your brand’s vibe.

Or they should be, anyway. This is one of biggest mistakes you can make in dismissing wine influencers: They are often lumped in all together, when the reality is that there’s enormous diversity in the market. Educational, irreverent, luxurious, down-to-earth—you name it. It’s necessary to vet these potential partners and find ones that align with your brand identity.

Now, this isn’t to say that all brands should be working with influencers. That’s a choice to be made based on your current business goals and status. But if you’re looking for a fantastic way to get new eyes on your product or business for a generally low cost, influencer marketing is something I strongly recommend considering. The heart of the matter is this: Wine influencers are expanding the conversation and inviting new consumers to join the world of wine, and that’s something I think we can all agree is a good thing. **LV**

*Paige Comrie is the founder and author of Wine with Paige. For more information, visit [winewithpaige.com](http://winewithpaige.com).*



Author Paige Comrie turned her interest in wine into a full-time job as an influencer.

I come at this topic from a perhaps unique perspective: While being an influencer as the founder of the wine-lifestyle website Wine with Paige is my full-time job, I previously worked in the corporate world, doing digital marketing for several major e-commerce companies. I’ve sat on both sides of the conversations about influencers and know the drill inside and out. What I find fascinating is that all the complaints about them as an industry “plague,” as James Lawrence called it in a Wine-Searcher article, show a

especially in the digital marketplace, is awareness and trust. Why buy from a particular brand online when you can go to the neighborhood grocery store and pick up whatever they have on the shelves? This is where influencers can help: They share your story, they teach

---

*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 on Instagram.*



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## Vinho Verde's Next Chapter:

# AN OLD FAVORITE EVOLVES

One of the most widely admired and accessible categories of Old World white wine, Vinho Verde is enjoyed around the world for its vibrance, its vivid and crystalline minerality, and its versatility at the table. While it's true that every wine has its time and place, Vinho Verde is suitable for a range of occasions—from casual to elevated, across all four seasons.

A staple of al fresco summer parties and a popular occupant of any poolside cooler, Vinho Verde also shines year round in fine-dining settings alongside wines four times the price. Its ageworthy premium expressions are even winning cellar space from in-the-know collectors eager to see how these wines evolve over time. Wine directors, too, are championing premium Vinho Verde as terroir-driven and, often, even oaked and lees-aged to challenge the outdated notion of the wine as a simple or seasonal choice. After all, would a sommelier ever suggest drinking comparable wines like Chablis or Riesling only half of the year?

In an evolving marketplace where both emerging and once-overlooked regions are gaining recognition, one of Portugal's largest and oldest appellations stands at the ready to share the newest chapter of its millennia-old story. Rare native grape varieties, modern production techniques, and microterroirs similar in their specificity to the lieux-dits of Burgundy or the demarcated vineyard sites of the Mosel are driving a premium evolution for the wines of Vinho Verde. Let's take a closer look at what makes them so special.

## Vinho Verde's Varieties, A-Z

While many consumers understand Vinho Verde as a uniquely vibrant blend of largely unknown grapes unique to Portugal, there's more to the story of this iconic region than the simple shorthand used in retail shops. Like composers carefully selecting different instruments for a symphonic score, Vinho Verde's winemakers leverage their vineyards' diversity to accentuate the distinctive flavors, textures, and aromatics of their indigenous varieties. Where else in the world of wine can you find so many complementary varieties, with so many harmonious blending combinations, in just one area? Add to this the fact that Vinho Verde's prized subregion of Monção e Melgaço has been producing sought-after varietal Alvarinho for centuries, and a fuller portrait of one of the world's most exciting up-and-coming regions comes into focus.

The more we learn, the better we taste—so let's dive in and explore Vinho Verde's viticultural bounty from A to Z.

**Alvarinho**, the focal point of the region's ascendant premium category, yields layered, complex, and ageable varietal wines that impress in both oaked and unoaked styles; they also blend beautifully with nearly all of the region's other white grapes. Alvarinho shows a

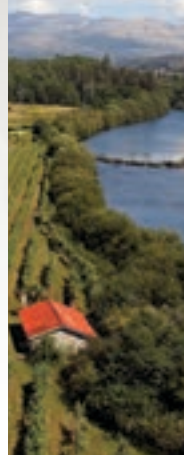
range of fruit characteristics from peach and lychee to quince and banana, which are elevated by secondary notes of orange blossom, violet, and hazelnut.

**Arinto** is fresh and mineral-driven, showing layers of citrus and growing in complexity with age, while **Avesso** is fruity, intense, full-bodied, and persistent. **Azal** thrives in inland areas where it can reach optimal ripeness and shows fruity aromas. **Loureiro**, which is cultivated across nearly the entire region, is deeply floral and can be identified by its notes of mint, honey, and green apple. Elegant **Trajadura** is soft and round on the palate, defined by flavors of ripe pear, peach, and apple.

But there's more to Vinho Verde than just whites, with **Padeiro**, **Espadeiro**, and **Vinhão** increasingly making their way to the U.S. market in the form of lively, full-bodied reds and nuanced rosés; there's even sparkling Vinho Verde, which is most often made from Alvarinho and offers a thought-provoking alternative to established categories like Prosecco and Cava.

Intrepid growers and winemakers are writing the next chapter of Vinho Verde's long-running story, and new plot twists and premium styles have sommeliers paying close attention. It just might be time to forget everything you thought you knew about this iconic region, pull a few corks, and write some tasting notes—because every wine lover's perspective has a place in this story.

*Where else in the world of wine can you find so many complementary varieties, with so many harmonious blending combinations, in just one area?*



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# TAKING INVENTORY YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR VOICES

## What was the aha moment that led you to become a beverage professional?



### RAY SHOLES

SOMMELIER, MICHAEL'S GENUINE FOOD & DRINK, MIAMI, FL

There wasn't really one particular moment; there were three. First, I was denied for a job. I had recently graduated from Johnson & Wales University with a bachelor's in food service management and restaurant management. I wanted to work in fine dining, and it was a corporate [position] for a place that was opening in Coral Gables. I went for an interview and thought I did a wonderful job. But the chef said I didn't have [enough] experience. I started to go into a whirlwind depression. I was working at the time as a pool boy—22 years old and I was handing out towels, not even drinks.

So I said to myself, "OK, what are you going to do about it?" I went to my mentor, [Florida International University Bacardi Center of Excellence director] Brian Connors, and said, "I want to be a somm. I want to be undeniable when I go for a job." He gave me a book by Kevin Zraly. I read it back and forth every day at the pool; I was relentless until I knew it back to front. Then I went and applied for a server job, and [the interviewer] asked me, "How's your wine knowledge, from one to ten?" I told him three. He said, "Why would you ever say three?" I said, "Listen, the world of wine is ever-growing, always changing. There's no way I could be an eight, let alone a ten. At three, I'm really getting into it, I know quite a bit, but I also realize everything I don't know." He said, "That's the best answer I've ever heard."

Second was when I moved to Houston and got connected with the Houston Sommelier Association. They met once a week, and it was all about education: Sometimes we'd taste, sometimes watch a documentary or [attend] a presentation with producers or suppliers, who would teach us about their products not for sales but just to learn as much as we could. I'd never felt so welcomed as I had in this group. "Hey, have you tried this? Hey, have you checked out this conference?"

Which brings me to three: Volunteering at TEXSOM. With that came another set of family I didn't know I had. I helped polish glassware or whatever else they needed, and everyone was just super-helpful; I felt confident enough after a couple of days to start asking questions about things I didn't know, and it was like the velvet ropes just opened up for me. I was welcomed into the world of wine. After that I went every year, to the point where now I'm in a head volunteer position and part of that culture of making everyone feel welcome.


But one more thing catapulted me to where I am now. In 2019 I decided to leave the restaurant floor, and I was recruited to work at Carisan, a duty-free supplier to the cruise industry. It was a wonderful time, but then COVID hit and I was furloughed. [Meanwhile] an organization called The Roots Fund was starting to change the culture of wine and make sure that people of color—Black, Latin, indigenous—could climb these ladders through mentorship and scholarships. It gave out maybe 30 scholarships in 2020, and [those of us who got them] had a Zoom happy hour. None of us thought that we would have such an emotional experience, being able to share our experiences virtually with people who looked like us; we were online until the wee hours of the morning, crying and laughing and encouraging each other to push forward on this journey. Prior to that I [still sometimes] questioned whether I belonged in this industry, but then I realized I belong wherever I want to belong. Sheer representation is one of the most powerful things that any of us can imagine. That empowered me to really be where I am, and at Michael's Genuine Food & Drink, I'm looking forward to curating a list of underrepresented wines geared toward multicultural consumers. 

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL'S GENUINE FOOD & DRINK

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# Scottish Craft Whiskies Come of Age

**It's hard to believe**, but when the Kilchoman distillery was founded in 2005, it was the first built on Islay in over 124 years—and the only one to establish a farm that enabled it to grow its own grain. Later that year, another farm-distillery hybrid, Daftmill, opened in Fife. Initially, these lonely pioneers were greeted with some scepticism.

However, not only have both operations defied the odds, they've encouraged others to follow. As a result, Scotland—hitherto dominated by large-scale production—has begun to develop its own craft distilling scene. Those whiskies are now maturing and reaching the market; here are three to look out for.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDORES

The earliest records of Scotch whisky production can be traced to

**Lindores Abbey** in Fife in 1494. But after the Abbey was destroyed in 1559, no whisky was made

there until the current landowners, Drew and Helen McKenzie Smith, became determined to begin again in a brand-new distillery. Raising the necessary \$15 million in capital and thoroughly assessing the property—which involved extensive archaeological digs—took four years, but by December 2020, the first spirit was three years old and thus legally Scotch whisky. Partly because of the pandemic and partly to allow for additional aging, the first bottles have only just been released and are being distributed in the U.S. by ImpEx Beverages.

Scotland is not known for making rye whisky. Yet archival research by **Arbikie Distillery**—which began distilling in late 2015, though old maps show a distillery operating on the same spot in 1794—revealed that rye was used



PHOTO COURTESY OF ISLE OF RAASAY

The Isle of Raasay, which harbours a distillery of the same name, is accessible only by ferry.

in Scotch whisky production until the late 19th century. Arbikie is now reviving the practice; the field-to-bottle distillery claims to produce the world's only Scotch rye whisky. Today we can enjoy releases of its 1794 Rye (no age declaration) or its four-year-old Arbikie Highland Rye, which is distilled from a blend of estate-grown Arantes Scottish rye, wheat, and malted barley—making it single grain Scotch whisky, as it's produced at a single distillery. Maturation combines charred American oak casks and ex-Armagnac barrels. (Distribution via [libdib.com](http://libdib.com) and others.)



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARBIKIE DISTILLERY

Surprisingly, the small Hebridean island of Raasay, which is accessible only by ferry, had never harboured a distillery—or at least not a legal one, though the Gaelic names of various locales within its borders hint at a rich bootlegging tradition—until **Isle of Raasay Distillery** (U.S. distribution via Total Beverage Solution) began operations in 2017. The aim is for future production to use barley that's not only grown and malted onsite but dried using local peat—resulting in a 100% Isle of Raasay single malt. Notably, it will be the first barley grown on the island in a generation and represents a notable step toward a true farm-to-bottle operation.

The distillery itself, though compact, can produce just under 200,000 litres annually; the current practice is to mature all output in adjacent warehouses, where it has a considerable variety of casks available for finishing.

Stay tuned: In the next issue, I'll feature three more distilleries rewriting the Scotch whisky story. **EW**



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BY PARIS VASSER

# Building a Blueprint

WITH KUMUSHA WINES,  
**TINASHE NYAMUDOKA** IS  
REPRESENTING ZIMBABWE  
ON THE WORLD WINE STAGE



**Despite the recent** reckoning of the wine world with its lack of diversity, things might not be as bad as we've long perceived them to be. Bright minds (and palates) are burgeoning in every part of the world, creating legacies from grapevines; among them is Zimbabwean native Tinashe Nyamudoka, who fled to South Africa in 2008 as a refugee and found himself joining the hospitality industry, starting as a waiter before working his way up to sommelier, beverage director, and wine judge.

But how does one find one's footing in an industry that still doesn't readily make room for those who've historically fallen outside the perimeter of traditional membership? South Africa's wine industry, as in many other parts of the world, is predominantly white. "The struggles are within you," Nyamudoka explains. "You are trying to feel that inclusion [and] . . . you have to create a space where you feel comfortable." He did just that by joining a tasting club with colleagues, which laid the groundwork for the first-ever team of Zimbabweans to compete in the World Blind Wine Tasting Championships. It's a prestigious affair in which teams from around the world, though primarily from European countries, are put to the ultimate test: deciphering the country and region of origin as well as the grape variety, the vintage, and the producer behind a series of wines.

Released earlier this year, the documentary *Blind Ambition* follows Nyamudoka and his teammates—Joseph Dhafana, Marlvin Geese, and Pardon Taguzu—as they use their roots to defy the odds. While they didn't do as well as they'd hoped at their first competition in 2017, Nyamudoka recalls sampling hundreds of wines in the week leading up to the 2018 event, devising a unique memory-based approach to tasting that would help propel them to an improved result: "We started associating our tastes with things we grew up with, [like] herbs and fruits native to home, [and] incorporating that into tastings, which allowed us to do better," he explains.

Nyamudoka is now fulfilling his goal to build a winemaking legacy through his label, Kumusha Wines, which launched in the U.S. in 2020. "Kumusha came about to give me a voice so I could reach out to many people with my convictions and with my ideas," says the first-generation business owner. Showcasing what South Africa has to offer to global consumers, he currently collaborates with a producer there to craft a palate-pleasing Cabernet Sauvignon; a distinctive blend of Cabernet and Cinsault; and a Sauvignon Blanc from a farm in Sondagskloof, a little-known region off the tip of South Africa from which only two other producers source.

Nyamudoka hopes he can become a full-time winemaker down the road. But for now, he is set on giving back to his community by passing down knowledge to up-and-coming wine professionals in Zimbabwe and South Africa alike. He sees Kumusha as a "blueprint" his peers can build upon as well as a unifier: "It's amazing how wine brings people together," Nyamudoka adds. "You don't see any race, color, religion—it's just what's in the glass."

**Zimbabwean sommelier Tinashe Nyamudoka**  
launched his Kumusha Wines label in the U.S. last year.

# SEAGLASS

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2019 VINTAGE, OCTOBER 2020 ISSUE

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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.



**Elementalist 2020 Pinot Grigio, California (\$7)** Clocking in at 12% ABV, this mineral-driven Pinot Grigio blended with 17% French Colombard is reminiscent of the Northern Italian style. Lithe and lean notes of white pear, crushed stone, and vanilla are joined by melon and lime, which weave through fine acidity. **89**



FETZER VINEYARDS



**Faustino Art Collection 2020 Viura-Chardonnay, Rioja, Spain (\$13)** This Viura-dominant blend is surrounded by a perfume of pear blossom. It’s mineral-rich and clean, with a coating of white flower petals on the palate. Crisp pear and apricot persist through the finish. **90**

PACIFIC HIGHWAY WINES & SPIRITS



**Tattoo Girl 2020 Riesling, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$13)** Wahluke Slope and Snipes Mountain fruit (96% Riesling and 4% Chardonnay) make a magical connection in one of the best Washington State Rieslings we’ve tasted. Aromas of honeyed apple and lemon meringue give way to a luscious palate of peach nectar and magnolia blossom. Lithe viscosity is matched by fine acidity, and apricot and tangerine have staying power thanks to underlying minerality. **92**

WILLIAM WEAVER WINE



**Da Luca NV Prosecco DOC, Veneto, Italy (\$13)** Easygoing bubbles reveal peach tart, salted lemon, and keen minerality. **90**

ACCOLADE WINES



**Three Pears 2020 Pinot Grigio, California (\$14)** As predicted, aromas of sweet summer pear develop quickly on the nose, met by a whiff of magnolia blossom. The zippy, clean, and crisp mouthfeel travels along a path of more pear and stone fruit, with an added bonus of honeyed white flower petals. **90**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



**Mina Mesa 2018 Hazeline Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$15)**

“Hazeline” refers to the blanket of fog cooling the vines that produced this big, ripe red, which aged in French and American oak for 18 months to reveal distinct notes of cherry licorice, black tea, and plum brandy.

The opulent, seamless texture moderates the wine’s boldness, and the sandalwood-and-clove finish is savory and refined, with a backdrop of spearmint. **91**

SCHEID FAMILY WINES



**Ryder Estate 2019 Pinot Noir, Central Coast, California (\$15)** From the Scheid family’s sustainably farmed estate vineyards, this bright ray of sunshine features high-toned notes of raspberry and Rainier cherry. Cedar and cocoa keep things intriguing on the finish. **90**



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**J. Lohr Estates 2019 South Ridge Syrah, Paso Robles (\$15)** Winemaker Brenden Wood must truly love this variety. Taking fruit from three of Paso's sub-AVAs—the Estrella, Adelaida, and Creston districts—he has composed a generous and luxurious red that overdelivers for the price. The addition of Grenache Noir, Viognier, and Mourvèdre adds complex layers. A juicy wash of blueberry, plum, and espresso comes in on the seamless entry with a woody tea note. Cured meats leave salinity behind as spiced cedar and rhubarb enhance the finish. **92**



**Butternut 2020 Rosé, Paso Robles (\$15)** This clean and well-balanced blend of 81% Grenache, 14% Syrah, 1% Viognier, and 4% other varieties exudes fragrant notes of watermelon and peach that bring summertime to the senses. The slightly creamy palate shows a dusting of strawberry and cashew atop striking minerality. **89**



MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



**Osmosis 2021 Sauvignon Blanc, Mendoza, Argentina (\$15)** The fruit was sourced from a family-owned, sustainably farmed estate situated at 3,440 feet above sea level in the foothills of the Andes. Boasting only 9% ABV and zero sugar, this is a clean, lighthearted, “better-for-you” wine with aromas of grapefruit and papaya. White pear, wet rock, and honeysuckle add character. **90**

VINO DEL SOL



**Sean Minor 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, California (\$16)** Grapefruit peel and kiwi intertwine with oregano and tarragon on the juicy, crisp entry. Fresh with racy acidity, the wine has a finish of salted cashew, summer peach, and bright pear, and its clean lines are as distinct as the modern label. **90**



**Bonterra 2020 Rosé, California (\$16)** This organic blend of 48% Grenache, 11% Nebbiolo, 10% Malbec, 8% Mourvèdre, 9% Zinfandel, 8% Carignan, 4% Sangiovese, and 1% other reds is packed full of flavor: A burst of raspberry, watermelon, and salty wet stone brings forth a juicy, mouth-puckering finish. With great acidity, it's a treat that makes for easy sipping. **91**

FETZER VINEYARDS



**Guinigi 2020 Prosecco DOC Rosé Spumante Brut, Treviso, Veneto, Italy (\$17)** Persistent bubbles burst with flavors of fresh peach, red berries, and rose petals in this blend of Glera and Pinot Noir. Sweetened by a delicate kiss of strawberry, minerality lingers on the palate. **91**

3 BADGE ENOLOGY



**Andover Estate 2019 Pinot Noir, Arroyo Seco, Monterey (\$17)** This silky expression from the Scheid family's estate-grown label brings in energetic aromas of cherry and tilled soil as well as balanced acidity. Sweet tobacco carries notes of wild strawberry and a touch of toastiness. **90**



**Dixie & Bass 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Horse Heaven Hills, Washington (\$19)** Starting with a nosing of lemon meringue, this cheerful, stainless steel-aged white is lithe and ethereal. Basil, grassy tones, and a dappling of papaya lift the palate on a stream of cooling citrus. **90**



**Nino Negri 2016 Quadrio Valtellina Superiore DOCG, Lombardy, Italy (\$20)**

Quadrio, made from 90% Nebbiolo (locally known as Chiavennasca) and 10% Merlot, is named after the Castello Quadrio in Chiuro, which was built in the 15th century and houses the Nino Negro winery. It's armed with a bottle necker that's the first of its kind: A QR code guides viewers through an augmented reality experience that includes a tour of the winery. Aged for 20 months in Slavonian oak, it opens up with a spark of red cherry, tomato leaf, oregano, and rose petals. High-toned acidity and a dry palate make for great food pairings, which the QR code also provides education on. **92**

FREDERICK WILDMAN & SONS



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**Frey Vineyards 2018 Biodynamic Petite Sirah, Mendocino (\$20)** This variety can be over the top, but at 13.3% ABV, it produces a balanced, if not big, red. Ripe plum and mocha scent the glass as dark cocoa-powdered tannins and ripe black fruit converge with earth and soy sauce. Seasoned with a touch of mountain sage, this is a great value with tons of personality. **91**



**Skyside 2018 Red Blend, North Coast (\$20)** This blend of 43% Merlot, 39% Syrah, 14% Cabernet Sauvignon, and some Petite Sirah and Malbec is sourced from Mendocino, Sonoma, Lake, Solano, and Napa counties. Spiced red fruit develops well across the palate as frisky notes of plum pudding, cocoa, heather, and sweet tobacco combine with rounded tannins and balanced acidity. **90**



**Post Summit 2019 Chardonnay, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$25)** This wine is named for Monterey County's Post Summit, which, at over 3,500 feet high, features a view of the Pacific Coast. Blended with 4% Viognier and aged 12 months in barrel, it exudes stunning aromas of honeyed papaya, pea tendrils, and thyme that sing on the nose. Arriving on a lovely wave of vanilla cream, basil, and tangerine, notes of wet stone envelop the mouth along with a generous, honeysuckle-tinged sweetness. The salty frame leaves the palate begging for that next sip. **92**



ASV WINES



**Agricola Punica 2020 Samas Isola dei Nuraghi IGT, Sardinia, Italy (\$22)** This tropical adventure of 80% Vermentino and 20% Chardonnay offers aromas and flavors of kiwi and pineapple that meander with wet stone and searing acidity. Cashew, key lime, and grapefruit peel add to the texture and flavor profile. **93**



KOBRAND



**Faire La Fête Crémant de Limoux Brut Rosé, Languedoc-Roussillon, France (\$23)** Flavors of Rainier cherry and grapefruit peel open up with verve in this blend of 65% Chardonnay, 20% Chenin Blanc, and 15% Pinot Noir. Rose petals, brioche, and stark minerality strike a balance with fine acidity. **92**



FIRST GROWTH BRANDS



**Craggy Range 2020 Chardonnay, Kidnappers Vineyard, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$23)** The glass is filled with sunshine: fresh-squeezed lemon, tangerine sorbet, and an inner brightness. Honeyed stone fruit, clean lines, and superb acidity make this a sublime, food-friendly sipper. **92**



KOBRAND



**Double Canyon 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Horse Heaven Hills, Washington (\$25)** Bold and rustic, with notes of tobacco, leather, and graphite. Blackberry and black plum ride in on a line of mocha espresso before structured tannins and a dry, dusty mouthfeel leave a lasting impression on the finish. **92**

CRIMSON WINE GROUP



**Sculpterra Winery 2020 Héroie Viognier, Paso Robles (\$25)** The name Héroie is a salute to the hard-working team who hand-harvests the two vineyards that contribute to this perfectly balanced white. Following delicate scents of white flowers, pear, and lime, the palate shows some creamy aspects as it releases more aromatics. Flavors of white melon, peach, and honeysuckle pour out before a finish of salty minerality. **92**



**Pike Road Wines 2019 Chardonnay, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$20)** Sourced from four vineyards in the Yamhill-Carlton AVA, this Chardonnay from the sister label of Elk Cove possesses keen acidity and an angular body; our definition of modern. It's a ray of sunshine that shows fresh-squeezed lemon, tart pineapple, and wet stone, which keep it dynamic while adding textural dimension. **91** *W*

96 POINTS

THE  
tastingpanel  
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The Shakey is the signature drink at A Great Notion in Fort Worth, TX.

## FORT WORTH, TX, INSTITUTION **A GREAT NOTION** MORE THAN LIVES UP TO ITS NAME

*Editor's note: What follows is an exclusive adapted excerpt from Texas Dives by author Anthony Head and photographer Kirk Weddle (to be published by Texas A&M University Press in 2022).*

In 1991, Sylvia Donovan arrived in Fort Worth after a successful real estate career in California. Her intention was retirement—but she really wasn't the retiring type, and so she bought a tiny bar in the Ridgmar neighborhood called A Great Notion. Sylvia passed away in 2018; by then, the Notion had grown to more than three times its original size, and day-to-day operations had been turned over to her daughter, Gail Oshier.

"We've tried to improve things around here," Gail explains, "but we don't make changes for change's sake."

In fact, I'm sitting in the part of the establishment that contains the

original bar from 1972, when the place first opened. Somebody took the time to craft it with inlaid stained glass on top that is lit softly from within. The blue, yellow, pearl, red, and green floral design adds luminescent enjoyment to the practice of staring at bar tops, day after day, contemplating life's complexities.

A fella named Clint, with long hair and a profound salt-and-pepper beard, takes a sip of his Jim Beam and Coke and leans toward me. "We always compare ourselves to *Cheers*," he says. "Everybody knows your name. Everybody's got their own idiosyncrasies, but we all get past it. Why? I don't know. I'm not a trained psychiatrist. Maybe it's the alcohol. Maybe it's just the mix of people. I guarantee you, if I was in trouble, there's not a person sitting at this bar right now that wouldn't come out and help me."

What about when a stranger walks in?

"They ain't a stranger very long," answers Rusty, sitting next to Clint. "Location will get you in the first time, but it won't keep you coming back."

Which is why everyone agrees there is a general state of pleasantness at A Great Notion. For civilians who claim dives are lonely places, populated with despair and solitude, the Notion breaks their argument in half.

When Gail calls for a round of "Shakies," hands shoot up. The Shakey is famous here. It's essentially a Kamikaze, made with vodka, triple sec, and lime juice, and it's traditionally poured in a rocks glass and stirred with ice. "I guarantee you that we do them the best," says Gail, over the sound of the shaker. "We try them everywhere we go. Ours are different. We call them 'Shakies' because they have to be shaken a lot. The more you shake it, the better it is."

Served neat, it's delicious. Cheers. **TL**

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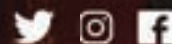
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# Anthony Dias

## BLUE *REVIEWS*



by THE TASTING ALLIANCE

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

**96** **Gamble Family Vineyards**  
**2020 Sauvignon Blanc,**  
**Yountville, Napa Valley (\$33)** Aromas of spiced apple and a silky texture, with notes of juicy citrus and green apple. Elegant, expressive, and long; loaded with character and depth.



**94** **Sonoma-Cutrer**  
**2019 40th Anniversary**  
**Winemaker's Release**  
**Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast**  
**(\$70)** Rich, toasty nose and a lush, creamy texture. Classic, complex, and refined, with lovely balance.

BROWN-FORMAN

**92** **Morgan Winery 2018 Double L**  
**Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia High-**  
**lands (\$65)** Ripe ruby color and a luscious spiced nose. Crisp, spicy, and lean; fresh, long, and charming. This winery has a way with Pinot Noir.

**94** **Sequoia Grove Winery 2018**  
**Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa**  
**Valley (\$50)** Rich nose of plum and spice; a velvety texture; and intense flavors of ripe plum, blueberry, licorice, and chocolate. Stylish, with a lasting finish.

KOBRAND



**93** **Atlas Peak Vineyards**  
**2018 Cabernet Sau-**  
**vignon, Napa Valley (\$50)** Fragrant nose of plum and berry; ripe fruit and tangy acidity as well as good depth, complexity, and a smooth texture. Balanced and long.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



# UNLEASH THE GNARLY

90 POINTS

TASTING PANEL  
2019 OLD VINE ZIN





# BLUE REVIEWS



**95** Atlas Peak Vineyards 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$80) Dark garnet color and a ripe berry nose; smooth and chewy, with lush plum and vanilla. Layered but seamless, this is an exceptional wine.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

**94** Heitz Wine Cellars 2016 Lot C-91 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$100) Rich plum nose; velvety, ripe, and elegant. Complex, dense, and classic; balanced and long.

**93** Gamble Family Vineyards 2017 Paramount, Napa Valley (\$80) Deep garnet color and an inviting nose. Silky, rich, and dense with plum, chocolate, mocha, and spice.

**93** Shafer Vineyards 2019 Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$52) Yet another winner from this winery, with a golden color and a rich, complex nose. Deep, balanced, and juicy, with lovely fruit and elegant flavors that linger.



**96** JUSTIN Vineyards & Winery 2016 Platinum Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$170) Rich, fleshy nose and a concentrated, intense palate of blackberry, blueberry, vanilla, and chocolate. Juicy and exceptional.

**93** Testarossa 2016 Single Vineyard Series Cabernet Sauvignon, Black Ridge Vineyard, Santa Cruz Mountains (\$97) Tangy and bright, clean and balanced, with fine acidity and toasty notes of plum and spice; long and impressive.

**95** Mail Road Wines 2016 Pinot Noir, Mt. Carmel Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills (\$100) Deep ruby color; fresh yet lush with smooth, integrated flavors of sweet, ripe cherry. Elegant, with great depth.

**94** Talisman 2016 Pinot Noir, Gunsalus Vineyard, Los Carneros, Napa Valley (\$45) Medium ruby color and a spiced cherry nose; juicy and ripe, lush and mellow, with good acid structure.



**94** Domaine Della 2018 Pinot Noir, Earl Stephens Vineyard, Russian River Valley (\$78) Silky and smooth, with lovely notes of ripe cherry and good balance; elegant and long.

## IMPORTED



**93** Georges Duboeuf 2019 Moulin-à-Vent, France (\$30) Sleek and juicy, with ripe notes of cherry and plum; deep and long. The rare Beaujolais that would benefit from time in the cellar.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**97** Pascual Toso 2018 Magdalena Toso, Mendoza, Argentina (\$130) A stunning blend of 67% Malbec and 33% Cabernet Sauvignon from Paul Hobbs with a deep garnet color and a rich berry nose. Blackberry, plum, spice, and vanilla reveal incredible depth on the palate.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

**90** Netofa 2018 Tel Qasser Rousanne, Galilee, Israel (\$33) Spicy nose and a creamy texture; lush yet balanced, minerally, and long. Kosher.

ROYAL WINE CORP.



**93** Kay Brothers 2018 Amery Vineyards Hillside Shiraz, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$60) A classic wine with a spice-driven nose; dense flavors of blackberry, cherry, and plum; and good acidity.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**95** Kay Brothers 2018 Amery Vineyard Block 6 Shiraz, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$117) Opaque color; spiced, velvety, and balanced, with ripe notes of blackberry and blueberry joining toast and a firm acid structure.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

**93** Psâgot NV The Land Red Blend, Jerusalem, Israel (\$28) Rich garnet color and a toasty nose; smooth, lifted, and long, with bright plum and spice. Kosher.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

**94** Amichai by Shiloh 2018 Solomon, Judean Hills, Israel (\$40) A ripe red blend of mostly Syrah with a spicy nose; luscious notes of blackberry, plum, and boysenberry; and soft tannins. Kosher.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

**92** Louis Jadot 2020 Pouilly-Fuissé, France (\$31) Crisp, fresh, and minerally, with great citrus fruit and racy acidity. A lovely Burgundy at a good price.

KOBRAND

**93** Tenuta di Capezzana 2015 Trefiano Carmignano DOCG Riserva, Italy (\$59) Rich ruby color and an earthy berry nose. Dense, ripe, and juicy, with toasted oak and spice; balanced and long. 80% Sangiovese.

DALLA TERRA



2018  
**90**  
POINTS  
THE **tastingpanel**  
MAGAZINE

2017  
**91**  
POINTS  
THE **tastingpanel**  
MAGAZINE

2016  
**90**  
POINTS  
THE **tastingpanel**  
MAGAZINE

# ONE GOOD SIN LEADS TO ANOTHER

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# BLUE REVIEWS



**90** Gustave Lorentz 2018 Crémant d'Alsace Zéro Dosage, France (\$44) Clean, fresh, and ripe, with dry, juicy fruit and exuberant bubbles; bracing yet smooth. 74% Pinot Blanc, 21% Chardonnay, and 5% Riesling.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**93** Pascual Toso 2019 Alta Barrancas Syrah, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50) Deep opaque color and a spicy nose; smooth, tangy, and long, with juicy, bright blackberry flavors.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**93** Two Angels 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, High Valley (\$25) Smooth, rich, and lush, with tangy, citrusy acidity and excellent depth of flavor.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

**92** Gustave Lorentz 2017 Riesling Altenberg de Bergheim, Alsace Grand Cru, France (\$80) Deep golden color and scents of spice and toast. Rich, creamy, and smooth, with a core of firm acidity; minerally and long.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**94** Pascual Toso 2019 Alta Barrancas Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50) Refined, complex, and bursting with black raspberry and tangy spice. Dense, long, and complete.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**94** Enzo Bianchi 2018 Gran Corte, Mendoza, Argentina (\$70) Intense berry color and a velvety texture; toasty and balanced, with notes of ripe plum, blackberry, and spice. 43% Malbec, 37% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, and 5% Cabernet Franc.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**93** Mud House 2019 Pinot Noir, Central Otago, New Zealand (\$20) From the best Kiwi area for Pinot Noir; this wine is earthy and complex, with dry notes of cherry and spice. Serious and intense, not to mention available at a very good price.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



**94** Domäne Wachau 2020 Grüner Veltliner Federspiel Terrassen, Wachau, Austria (\$18)

Classic, balanced, and stylish, with a bright mineral nose that joins citrus on the fresh and crisp palate. People need to pay attention to these wonderful and reasonably priced Austrian wines.

GONZÁLEZ BYASS USA



**93** Gustave Lorentz 2015 Gewürztraminer, Alsace Grand Cru, France (\$74) Rose-petal nose; sweet and silky, rich and intense. A charming wine to drink with Asian food.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

**96** Vincent Girardin 2018 Les Vieilles Vignes Chambolle-Musigny, France (\$100) Complex nose, velvety texture, and a lovely acid structure. Rich and long, with intense notes of cherry and boysenberry and considerable aging potential.

VINEYARD BRANDS



## VALUE

**92** Berton Vineyards 2019 Metal Label The Black Shiraz, Limestone Coast, Australia (\$14) Minty nose and an explosion of chocolate and black fruit—blackberry, plum, and cassis—on the palate.

CABERNET CORPORATION

**91** Berton Vineyards 2020 Metal Label Moscato Frizzante, Big Rivers, Australia (\$14) Slightly fizzy, fresh, and spicy; sweet and juicy, with good acid balance and a long finish.

CABERNET CORPORATION

**91** Berton Vineyards 2020 Metal Label Sauvignon Blanc, Limestone Coast, Australia (\$14) Aromatic and fruit-forward, with ripe yet fresh notes of lime, green apple, and peach; balanced and long. A great value.

CABERNET CORPORATION



**97** Vincent Girardin 2018 Corton Perrières Grand Cru, France (\$126) Pure and powerful yet elegant and refined, with a rich nose giving way to ripe black cherry and blackberry within a classic structure.

VINEYARD BRANDS

**92** Morgan Winery 2019 Tempranillo, Arroyo Seco (\$25) Medium ruby color; clean, crisp, and juicy, with fresh black raspberry. Delicious and long, this is a unique and exceptional wine.

**92** Niner Wine Estates 2018 Bootjack Ranch Estate Red, Paso Robles (\$20) This delightful and eclectic blend of nine varieties is smooth and seamless, with rich, spicy notes of plum, blackberry, chocolate, and toast that lead to a long, tangy finish.

**91** Mendi by Mendieta Osaba 2020 Tempranillo, Rioja, Spain (\$17) Lush berry nose and a smooth texture; clean and juicy, with chewy, likable flavors. A very good value.

GRAPEJUICE GROUP

# THREE FINGER JACK

Outlaw by Nature



91

POINTS

Tasting Panel

2018 EAST SIDE RIDGE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

*"With a small amount of Petite Sirah and Malbec, this big-shouldered Cab offers up cedar, Worcestershire, and tarry notes of blackberry preserves...Tannins are plush and go deep."*



92

POINTS

Tasting Panel

2019 RUM BARREL AGED RED WINE BLEND

*"Unique use of rum barrels used for this well-structured, dark fruited red. Butterscotch and molasses, with baking spices and sandalwood is well defined on the nose...This blend of Merlot, Syrah, and Petite Sirah is a tremendously pleasurable experience."*



# BLUE REVIEWS

**92** **Osaba Mendi by Mendieta**  
**Osaba 2018 Tempranillo,**  
**Rioja, Spain (\$22)** Spiced berry aromas;  
smooth, luscious, and long, with black rasp-  
berry, blackberry, and good balance.

GRAPEJUICE GROUP

**90** **Ramon Cardova 2020 Rosato,**  
**Rioja, Spain (\$15)** A fresh, pale-  
pink blend of 80% Grenache and 20% Viura  
that's bright and crisp, with juicy fruit and  
balanced flavors. Kosher.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

**90** **Domaine du Vallon des**  
**Glauges 2020 Coteaux d'Aix-**  
**en-Provence Rosé, France (\$25)** Very  
pale color; dry and clean yet juicy; smooth,  
tangy, and long. A kosher blend of 60%  
Grenache and 40% Counoise.

ROYAL WINE CORP.

**88** **The Seeker 2020 Rosé, France**  
**(\$13)** This decent blend of 70%  
Grenache, 25% Syrah, and 5% Cinsault is dry,  
juicy, and fresh, with assertive acidity. ☺

KOBRAND

**91** **Poggio del Moro 2019 NU Chi-**  
**anti, Italy (\$20)** Medium ruby color  
and a spicy nose; clean and racy, with a hint of  
violets, a silky texture, and good balance.

GRAPEJUICE GROUP

**89** **Risata 2020 Moscato d'Asti,**  
**Italy (\$15)** Fresh and sweet, with  
a spicy nose. Spritzy yet smooth; clean, bal-  
anced, and bright. A very good value. ☺

PRESTIGE BEVERAGE GROUP

**91** **Tabor Hill NV Blueberry**  
**Demi-Sec, Michigan (\$15)** Me-  
dium pink color and a fresh, fruit-driven nose.  
Juicy, tangy, and long.



**92** **United Ink 2019**  
**Red Blend, Co-**  
**lumbia Valley, Washington**  
**(\$18)** Smooth, meaty nose;  
bright and tangy, fresh and  
charming, with lively berry fruit,  
good balance, and a long finish.  
60% Merlot, 20% Syrah, and  
20% Cabernet Sauvignon. ☺

**91** **United Ink 2020**  
**Riesling, Columbia**  
**Valley, Washington (\$12)**  
Clean and juicy, with bright lime  
and peach flavors around a core  
of racy acidity—and what a  
price! ☺

## SPIRITS

**93** **Belvedere Lemon & Basil**  
**Vodka, Poland (\$35)** Aromatic  
scents of lemon rind; floral and smooth, with  
authentic citrus notes; balanced and long.

MOËT HENNESSY USA



**95** **Del Maguey Vida**  
**Vida de Muertos**  
**Mezcal Artesanal, Mexico**  
**(\$50)** From legendary mezcal  
producer Paciano Cruz Nolasco  
and his family, this creation is  
made with extra-fine agave at  
a high ABV. Grassy, herbal, and  
complex; remarkably smooth  
and long.

DEL MAGUEY CO.

**93** **Belvedere Blackberry & Lem-**  
**ongrass Vodka, Poland (\$35)**  
Fresh blackberry nose; smooth, spicy, bright,  
and exotic, thanks to the interesting flavor  
combination. Try it neat or on the rocks.

MOËT HENNESSY USA



**94** **Takamine 8 Year**  
**Old Koji Fermented**  
**Whiskey, Japan (\$99)** Bright  
amber color and an elegant  
nose. Smooth, refined, and styl-  
ish; silky, bright, and spiced, with  
a lasting finish.

WINEBOW



THE **tastingpanel**  
MAGAZINE

**94**  
POINTS

BARNACLES  
SIGNATURE  
BLEND RUM

THE **tastingpanel**  
MAGAZINE

**96**  
POINTS

BARNACLES  
GRAN RESERVA  
RUM

*"Absolutely exquisite, beautiful,  
captivating, and rich with story"*

(Beverage Testing Institute)



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# BLUE REVIEWS

**92** **Evan Williams 1783 Small Batch Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$20)** Aromatic nose of vanilla and oak and a deep amber color. Toasty and rich, with notes of sweet oak and dried flowers followed by a long, balanced finish. A remarkably good bourbon at an excellent price.

HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY

**94** **Larceny Barrel Proof Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey Batch No. B521, USA (\$42)** This spirit shows a deep amber color and a nose of toasted white oak when watered. Floral, spicy, and elegant, with vanilla and cinnamon; silky, long, and lovely.

HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY

**93** **The Busker Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey, Ireland (\$30)** Smooth and balanced, with sweet oak and soft toast. Mellow and stylish but retaining a hint of fire and spice; long, rich, and charming. A double gold medal winner at the 2021 San Francisco World Spirits Competition.

**95** **Santo Tequila Reposado, Mexico (\$55)** Smoky agave nose; sweet and spicy yet clean and mellow, with rich earthiness; toasted, balanced, and delicious.

PARK STREET IMPORTS

**91** **Gin Lane Cucumber, Watermelon, & Mint Gin, England (\$38)** Aromatic, spicy nose and a pleasant combination of flavors; smooth, clean, and long.

M.S. WALKER

**92** **Somrus Coffee Cream Liqueur, USA (\$25)** Creamy, with notes of toasted coffee bean and exotic spices; rich and charming. If you like cream liqueurs, you're sure to enjoy this one.

**93** **Flecha Azul Tequila Blanco, Mexico (\$48)** Earthy, dense, and smooth; smoky, spicy, and rich, with lots of character.

FLECHA AZUL TEQUILA



**94** **Cocalero Negro Picante South American Herbal Spirit, South America (\$30)** Silky and lightly sweet, with notes of chocolate, coffee, and spice plus a boost of pepper on the finish.

LEVECKE CORPORATION



**100** **The Perfect Fifth Highland Park 31 Year Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$3,000)** Rich amber color and creamy notes of vanilla and buttered popcorn. Toasty and intense as well as elegant and balanced, it's everything you could ever want in a Scotch—and worth saving up for.



**96** **The Perfect Fifth Cambus 42 Year Single Grain Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$1,250)** Rich, mind-blowing aromas of spice and tea emerge from this kick-ass spirit. Powerful, transporting, and long.



**99** **The Perfect Fifth Springbank 25 Year Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$1,500)** Deep golden-amber color and a smooth vanilla nose. Lush, rich, and intense, with notes of honey, toasted caramel, and nougatine.



**98** **The Perfect Fifth Glen Scotia 27 Year Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$850)** Rich, toasted nose; smooth texture; and mouth-filling flavors of sweet spice, treacle, and dried flowers. A very special experience. **VE**

# TIME BUILDS CHARACTER



## ANCIENT VINES ZINFANDEL

Our historic vineyards in Contra Costa County are an endangered species. The soil and topography have been likened to a sandy beach. Vines planted over a century ago are head-pruned and dry-farmed, yielding small berries with amazing flavor. The resulting wines are soulful evidence that time does indeed build character.





# 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.



**Bar Box Negroni (\$25/1.75-L box)** Bulk purchases tend to be both economical and eco-friendly, and Bar Box's ready-to-drink cocktails are no exception. There are 14 4-ounce cocktails per \$25 box, which (if my math serves me correctly) amounts to less than \$2 a drink. The bag in the box is made with recyclable and biodegradable materials, and the corrugated cardboard used for the box itself is a combination of virgin fibers from sustainably managed forests and recovered fibers from recycled paper. The cocktails within, meanwhile, combine premium artisanal spirits handcrafted by Kozuba & Sons Distillery in St. Petersburg, Florida, with all-natural ingredients. Of Bar Box's growing lineup, its balanced play on a Negroni—made with gin, bitter liqueur, white wine, and cochineal extract—is most notable. Designed to pour straight from the spout into ice-filled glasses, this is a convenient, cost-effective, and green way to serve drinks.

**Fun Wine Cappuccino Chardonnay (\$7/750-mL bottle)** As the name suggests, this Miami-based producer of flavored wine is not the most serious brand on the market; featuring labels adorned with lively art from NYC graffiti artist Miguel Paredes, its expressions are ideal for people who may not love wine but still want to join their friends in the celebratory act of sharing a glass. The Cappuccino Chardonnay has aromas of freshly brewed espresso and campfire. On the palate are notes of salted coffee beans, steamed milk, and s'mores. [LE](#)



## Drink For Joy OG Hint of Sweet (\$48/case of 414-mL bottles)

There is a touch of sweetness to this iced tea infused with hemp extract, but it's also leathery, smoky, and piney, with a fair amount of spice rounded off by orange peel and blackberry. The 2 grams of organic cane sugar don't show through on the palate—rather, they just help bring together the unorthodox blend of ingredients to make for a refreshing alcohol-free option with no shortage of refined flavors.



## Besa Mi Vino All Day Rosé (\$5/250-mL can)

With 0 grams of sugar, this organic rosé is vegan, gluten-free, and low in sulfites—but at 12.5% ABV, it still has some heft. Expect delicate, vibrant notes of raspberries and strawberries on the palate along with freshly picked thyme and sage and a crisp finish; the result is proof that rosé drinks as well in October as it does in May (at any time of day).



... CALIFORNIA GROWN ...

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## THREE PEARS WINES

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

Three Pears founders Randy and Megan Mason have always understood California's inherent gifts: sun-drenched vineyards, coastal air and remarkable soil. Since 2004, they've crafted bright, expressive wines that faithfully convey their varietal character and embody the mix of sun and soil that makes California's vineyards like no other. Discover what makes these food-friendly wines unique.



*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



## WINES



**J. Lohr Estates 2019 Los Osos Merlot, Paso Robles**

(\$15) The Merlot came from the Creston Vineyard in Paso's prestigious El Pomar District, while the 14% Malbec blended in is from the Shotwell Vineyard. Blue-floral aromas are dotted with mocha, and on the palate, ripe boysenberry and candied violets meet up with supple, cocoa-powdered tannins. The blue fruit weaves through nutmeg and cinnamon as more floral tones progress across the finish. **92**



**Château La Nerthe 2020 Les Cassagnes de la Nerthe Rosé, Côtes-du-Rhône Villages AOP, Rhône Valley, France**

(\$16) This blend of 40% Grenache, 30% Cinsault, and 30% Mourvèdre is among the darlings of southern France's rosés. Lively aromas of strawberry lead to a generous fruit salad of flavors: watermelon, peach, and papaya. Steely undertones of wet river rock keep the palate lean and a bit dusty. **92**

KOBRAND



**Roaming Dog 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon Rosé, Columbia Valley, Washington**

(\$15) This dog has a great nose. Red-berry sweetness and watermelon converge with fine mineral tones. Ripe strawberry and sugared tangerine show well within a frame of bright acidity. **91**



**Louis Jadot 2020 Chardonnay, Mâcon-Villages AOC, Burgundy, France**

(\$16) This balanced and classic wine is creamy, with an abundance of citrus accents from lemon curd and lemon blossom to tangerine sorbet. Minerality plays a starring role alongside fine acidity. **91**

KOBRAND



Worthy of a smooch.



French-style double bizou.



Wildly infatuated.



Seriously smitten.



Head over heels in love.



**Concha y Toro 2019 Gran Reserva Chardonnay, DO Litueche, Colchagua Valley, Chile (\$17)** The fruit for this wine was sourced from the Ucuquer Vineyard, which is located over 550 feet above sea level on the Rapel River's southern bank, 9 miles from the Pacific. Drawing from the influence of the coastal climate, the river, and the granite soils, the expressive nature of the Chardonnay shows in extroverted aromas of ripe pear and cashew. Sumptuous and satin-lined, the palate stays fresh thanks to minerality, and notes of fig and baked apple ride on a juicy wave midway. Aged 12 months in French oak. **92**  
FETZER VINEYARDS



**Rural Wine Company 2020 Zosia Carbonic Maceration, Mendocino (\$20)** Pinot Noir from the Masút Vineyard and Grenache, Carignan, and Barbera from the Casa Verde Vineyard's old vines were handpicked and went to tank whole cluster for 14 days under a blanket of carbon dioxide. The result is as lively as it is irresistible: Candied Red Delicious apple comes to mind. It's also food friendly, with notes of cherry ice seasoned by a dash of oregano.

Brothers Ben and Jake Fetzer made only 300 cases, for which Jake's 5-year-old daughter, Zosia, designed the label. **91**



**Frey Vineyards 2018 Biodynamic Merlot, Mendocino (\$20)** In 1996, Frey Vineyards produced the first certified Biodynamic wine in the U.S. Given its pioneer status, one would expect exceptional fruit—and we found it here. Following energetic aromas of ripe mulberry, dark chocolate, and mountain brush, dry, dusty tannins capped with espresso and graphite make the first impression on the palate. As the wine gradually opens up, ripeness emerges through juicy, extroverted notes of boysenberry. **90**



**Napa Cellars 2019 Chardonnay, Napa Valley (\$20)** This white offers up incredible value; scintillating aromas of jasmine, patchouli, and fig; and a captivating, creamy mouthfeel. Toffee, key lime, and toasty oak come in first, followed by tropical notes of coconut and banana. It's all held together by vibrant acidity. **93**  
TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES

Rob & Bonnie Lloyd



Winemaker Rob Lloyd crafts luscious, beautifully balanced California wines

*The Lloyds invite you to connect with Director of Sales Greg Moore to explore opportunities*

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 <b>2018 Chardonnay Clarksburg</b> SRP: \$20	 <b>2019 Chardonnay Carneros</b> SRP: \$40	 <b>2018 Pinot Noir Sta. Rita Hills</b> SRP: \$50
<b>92</b> points	<b>94.5</b> points	<b>94</b> points
tastingpanel MAGAZINE	tastingpanel MAGAZINE	tastingpanel MAGAZINE
<b>LLOYD</b> BY: Rob Lloyd		<b>PRESCRIPTION</b> 





**Fetzer 2020 Chardonnay, California (\$8)** This blend of 75% Chardonnay, 12% French Colombard, 6% Viognier, and 7% other grapes is beautifully balanced, with scents of melon and lemon meringue and mouth-filling flavors of honeyed pear and garden herbs. It's unctuous but not too rich thanks to its fine acid structure. **90**



**Tattoo Girl 2020 Rosé, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$13)** A thrilling, delicious, and expressive rosé of 100% Syrah, with aromas of pink grapefruit and pomegranate. A harmonious gathering of salted red berries and minerality is sweetened by a garden of roses. **93**

WILLIAM WEAVER WINES



**Butternut 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$15)** It's rare that a value-priced red tastes as delicious as this one does: It's equal parts ripe, juicy, glossy, and meaty on the palate, with notes of blackberry and a mocha finish. **90**

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



**Faire La Fête Crémant de Limoux Brut, Languedoc-Roussillon, France (\$20)** Produced via the traditional method, this blend of Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, and Pinot Noir spent 15 months sur lie before disgorgement. It stirs the senses with aromas of pear, vanilla wafer, and lemon peel as bubbles dissipate into

a creamy texture. Notes of fresh linen, apple, and white flowers come through in a delicate manner. **91**

FIRST GROWTH BRANDS



**Folie à Deux 2018 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$23)** This well-balanced red is earthy, with sensual aromas of dark plum and roasted coffee that lead to a palate brimming with wild strawberry, mocha, cedar, and salted minerality as well as savory black olive and Italian herbs. **92**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES



**Elouan 2018 Pinot Noir, Oregon (\$25)** Lush, earthy, and packed with juicy cherry and plum, this is an exquisite expression of Oregon wine country at a great price. It's a big, bold style, but it delivers superb acidity and a deep, rich concentration of ripe summer berries. **92**

COPPER CANE WINES & PROVISIONS



**Penfolds 2018 Max's Chardonnay, Adelaide Hills, Australia (\$25)** From 1948 to 1975, Max Schubert gained global recognition for Penfolds while serving as its winemaker. This tribute to him in the form of a French oak-aged Chardonnay has aromas of cashew brittle, baked apple, and lemon blossom. High levels of brightness show on the palate with lime zest and white cake. Marvelous acidity keeps it fresh. **93**

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



**Sean Minor 2019 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$25)** Aromas of chocolate-covered cherry lead to deep, mouth-filling notes of Luxardo cherry, milk chocolate, roses, and spiced root beer. A seamless and juicy combination of plum pudding and earthy notes takes you to the finish. **92.5**



**Silverado 2019 Miller Ranch Sauvignon Blanc, Yountville, Napa Valley (\$27)** Anjou pear, fresh linen, pink grapefruit, and candied ginger generate a bounty of aromas and flavors in this crisp and energetic white. Midway, lovely notes of banana, kiwi, and white melon weave around a line of minerality that persists through the finish. **93**



**Peju 2020 Legacy Collection Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley (\$28)** Light and crisp, with notes of lime ice, peach, and a coating of dusted white flower petals. Wet stone cleans the palate, leaving lively, refreshing, tropical fruit-accented crispness on the finish. **93**



**Gehricke 2020 Rosé, Los Carneros, Sonoma County (\$29)** Bright notes of watermelon and wet stone lilt on the palate of this 100% Pinot Noir, which demonstrates its racy side through notes of key lime, ripe strawberry, fresh linen, and rose petals. **93**

3 BADGE ENOLOGY



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FOR GENUINE  
CHARACTER**



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# Publisher's PICKS



## **Minus Tide 2019 Carignan, Feliz Creek Vineyard, Mendocino (\$30)**

Carignan is known as one of the heritage varieties of Mendocino County; the dry-farmed, head-trained, organic Feliz Creek Vineyard was planted in 1908. The use of 40% carbonic maceration offers high-toned appeal to

this juicy, bright red. Aromas of red flowers, milk chocolate, and rooibos tea are cheerful, and on the palate, white pepper sparks tart cherry and blueberry. Tongue-coating herbs and red licorice come to light midway, paving the path for a parade of beets, basil, and mountain brush. **91**



## **Elk Cove Vineyards 2019 Estate Grown Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$32)**

A light sprinkle of white pepper settles on dusted rose petals and tobacco leaf within a strawberry patch. The wine is bright yet earthy and spicy, with high-toned acidity and just the right balance of fruit tones to keep it fresh. **92**



## **Silverado 2019 Estate Grown Chardonnay, Carneros, Sonoma County (\$38)**

This angular, mineral-driven wine sings with white flowers on the nose and palate. Seasoned with thistle, a path of toasty, creamy lemon curd and crisp apple leads to a long finish. **94**



## **Sculpterra 2019 Pinot Noir, Paso Robles (\$38)**

We don't get to taste a lot of Pinot Noir from Paso, but this one is proof that it can be a charmer. Winemaker Paul Frankel created a juicy, jammy red with fruit grown on the valley floor of the Frankel Family Estate in the El Pomar District. Gorgeous aromas of dusky red

cherry and mocha lead to an earthy palate of wet leaves, rhubarb, and white-peppered plum. It's silky, with a dusting of seashell and a toasty cedar finish. **93**



## **Chappellet 2019 Mountain Cuvée Proprietor's Blend, Napa Valley (\$39)**

Blended from 44% Cabernet Sauvignon; 36% Merlot; and smaller amounts of Petit Verdot, Malbec, and Cab Franc, this red is angular and quite focused. Concentrated tarry notes arrive early with a swath of blackberry preserves and

brown-sugared apple skins; as the wine opens up, it remains sensationally plush while bringing in flavors of clove and sage. **93**



## **La Scolca 2019 Gavi dei Gavi Black Label, Piedmont, Italy (\$40)**

This is the Gavi that sets the standard for all others. Thyme and pine nut lead on both the nose and palate, and on the latter, green apple sharpens the senses with a burst of lime zest, orange blossom, and keen minerality. **95**

SHAW-ROSS INTERNATIONAL IMPORTERS



## **Argyle 2018 Reserve Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$40)**

Selecting the best lots of Pinot Noir from each of Argyle's vineyards—mostly from the volcanic red soils of the Dundee Hills and Eola-Amity Hills—winemaker Nate Klostermann has imparted plenty of character to this spicy, expressive red.

Prickly pepper surges forward with cherry, plum, and pomegranate while hibiscus and cactus flower bloom. **92**



## **MacRostie 2018 Chardonnay, Sangiacomo Vineyard, Carneros, Sonoma County (\$46)**

Sourced from two blocks of the renowned Sangiacomo Vineyard, this eloquent white aged in 16% new and 28% one-year-old French oak barrels. Says winemaker Heidi Bridenhagen, "I love how once-filled barrels accentuate the texture of the wine while allowing the more subtle elements to remain vivid and enticing." Notes of salty lemongrass and Asian pear as well as a delicate, creamy middle of vanilla showcase the wine's richness and energetic nature. Tangerine sorbet is dotted with fine minerality, accenting the aligned acid structure. **94**

ate the texture of the wine while allowing the more subtle elements to remain vivid and enticing." Notes of salty lemongrass and Asian pear as well as a delicate, creamy middle of vanilla showcase the wine's richness and energetic nature. Tangerine sorbet is dotted with fine minerality, accenting the aligned acid structure. **94**



## **Fringe Collective 2019 Seafall Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$50)**

Grapes grown on well-drained, low-nutrient Goldridge soils aged in mostly neutral and second-use French oak. Following resounding aromas of buttered pecan and lemon curd, the creamy mouthfeel brings in ripe

banana and coconut threaded with stoniness and a hint of charred oak. Spiced sandalwood courts a spark of orange peel and a soft finish of vanilla wafer. **94**

FETZER VINEYARDS

# we know zin



we know where to grow it;  
we know how to grow it;  
and we know old vines make the best wines.

"Old Zin Vines" represents the literal and figurative roots of the Lodi appellation and the Maggio family. Crafted from our oldest Zinfandel vines, these wines exude the unique character of the Lodi terroir and honor a long wine-growing heritage.

**90** tastingpanel  
**POINTS** 2019 OZV OLD VINE ZINFANDEL - June 2021



# Publisher's PICKS



**Turnbull 2020 Josephine Sauvignon Blanc, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$50)** Winemaker and 14th-generation winegrower Peter Heitz does about 20 fermentations using multiple vessels, including concrete, neutral French oak barrels, and terracotta amphorae, after picking from several different levels of

ripeness. Pink grapefruit peel is sweet and expressive, and honeysuckle shines through with ripe peach, augmenting the luscious palate. A note of gravelly minerality keeps pace with the superb acid structure. **96**



**Reptil 2017 Malbec, Valle de Uco, Argentina (\$50)** The Uco Valley's semi-desert climate is home to this well-structured red sourced from elevations exceeding 3,000 feet; unfinned and unfiltered, it aged for 18 months in French and American oak. Spicy cured meats and violets weigh in with an overtone of boysenberry as peppered cocoa accents the round and juicy palate. Beautifully balanced, it possesses that "delicious factor." **93**

VIÑA COBOS/PAUL HOBBS SELECTIONS



**House of Arras NV Brut Elite, Tasmania, Australia (\$50)** This creamy, layered sparkler shows notes of fresh croissant, mandarin orange, mushroom, and pine nut. Dry and elegant, its rippling bubbles burst with aromas and flavors of jasmine. **93**

ACCOLADE WINES



**Pago de Carraovejas 2018, Ribera del Duero, Spain (\$55)** A blend of 93% Tempranillo with small amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, this dynamic red sings of violets and crushed rock. Wild raspberry and cranberry give way to a floral presence of dusty lilac and sturdy tannins. Spiced plum and cedar

are divine on the finish. **94**

ALMA CARRAOVEJAS



**Peju 2019 Legacy Collection Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$65)** Aged in French and American oak, this dynamic blend of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Merlot, 6% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec offers up scents of huckleberry, dried herbs, and vanilla. An incredibly silky entry of ripe blueberry preserves captivates

with a luxurious mouthfeel. The textural sensations continue with melting dark chocolate, graphite, and a coat of anise. **95**



**Canvasback 2018 Syrah, Funk Vineyard, Walla Walla Valley, Washington (\$70)** Located in The Rocks District at an elevation of 1,000 feet, the Funk Vineyard is known for its structured Syrahs. Think of a field of lavender: That's what emerges from this charming red. Sweetened by mulberry and blueberry,

mocha and salinity find their way in before graphite and cured meats come into play with balsamic on the finish. **95**

THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO



**Beau Vigne 2018 Legacy Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$75)** Blended with 10% Cabernet Franc and 5% Petit Verdot and aged 20 months in 50% new French oak, this Cab exudes a plethora of floral notes, with dried violets and earth at the forefront. Bold, generously built, and elegantly appointed,

it has a grand presence, showing off graphite and espresso integrated with teeth-coating plum-skin tannins. **95**

ATC WINES



**Canvasback 2018 Grand Passage Red Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon, Washington (\$84)** Angular and robust, this wine is grand indeed, with layers of flavors and depth of character. Tobacco and espresso dust the palate as inky black fruit is sheathed in graphite and mountain brush. **96**

THE DUCKHORN PORTFOLIO



**Lydenhurst 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$85)** This label from Spottswoode is produced by the Novak family and winemaker/vineyard manager Aron Weinkauff. The blend of 80% Cabernet Sauvignon with some Malbec, Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Cab Franc features notes of powdered violets

that converge with graphite, drying the palate while also providing intense aromatics. Dense and tarry blackberry appears amid a grapey boldness that proves sturdy. Mouth-coating tannins whet the palate. **95**

# PATA NEGRA

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96  
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# Publisher's PICKS



**Alea Fina 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford Bench, Napa Valley (\$125)** With consultant Paul Hobbs, Chilean winemaker Sebastian Donoso has crafted a masterpiece from Napa Valley as part of a new Viña Concha y Toro project. The name Alea Fina is inspired in part by the Chilean expression *hilar fino*, which means an obsessive attention to finer details. In Latin, meanwhile, *alea* translates as "chance": As with any terroir, climate and soil are key and can certainly dictate the wine's outcome. The use of clone 337 aged for 18 months in new French oak ensures richness and ripeness in every complex layer of this wine; blackberry, dried fruit, and soil dusted with teeth-gripping plum-skin tannins make for an exquisite mouthfeel. Licorice and heather come in midway with dense notes of dark chocolate that extend through the finish. **97**

ORIGINS COLLECTION  
BY FETZER VINEYARDS



**Umani Ronchi 2016 Campo San Giorgio Conero Riserva DOCG, Marche, Italy (\$87)** Showing excellent acid structure and ageability, this breathtaking 100% Montepulciano is awash with concentrated and tarry notes of black-peppered blackberry. Anise wraps around espresso as a shadow of black cherry

descends on the creamy palate alongside allspice and dried herbs. **96**

VINEYARD BRANDS



**Eileen Hardy 2016 Shiraz, McLaren Vale, Australia (\$100)** Red fruit melds with cocoa and spiced nutmeg in this round, well-developed red, which features defined flavors of grilled meat, dried lavender, and new leather. The fruit is not jammy—instead, it lends a refined note to plum and boysenberry, which also sees a touch of vanilla. **94**

ACCOLADE WINES



**Schramsberg 2012 Reserve, North Coast (\$120)**

This Pinot Noir–dominant (88%) sparkling wine was released nine years after the fruit was harvested. Notes of cashew, vanilla, and lemon chiffon are subtle, and the creamy mouthfeel is fine-tuned and exquisite. Bursting with chamomile and summer pear;

the bubbles are light and lively. **96**



**Akatombó 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain, Napa Valley (\$150)**

Fleshy and broad, this dynamic, precision-driven red has a magnetic presence. Joined by dark chocolate, balsamic, black olive, and espresso, the fruit emerges in the form of plum skin and a layer of inky blackberry, adding to the textural appeal. **95**

WESTLIFE IMPORTS



**Corison 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sunbasket Vineyard, St. Helena, Napa Valley (\$195)** Corison has sourced fruit from the alluvial gravelly loam of this vineyard for over 25 years; known as "the bench," it was originally planted in the early 1950s by André Tchelistcheff, who referred to it as a "sun

basket" because of the amount of sunshine it received. High-toned boysenberry and blueberry sidle up to firm tannins. Great acid structure and a gossamer finish are hallmarks of the vintage. **96**

## SPIRITS



**New Amsterdam Vodka, USA (\$14)**

One of the creamiest and roundest vodkas on the market, this 80-proof spirit offers blue fruit and vanilla on the nose. A spark of white pepper and a clean mouthfeel cinch the deal. **93**

E. & J. GALLO



**Chelly Lemon Liqueur, USA (\$20)**

The recipe for this delicious 80-proofer crafted from all-natural Arizona ingredients and bottled in Tempe was handed down by three generations of an Italian family. Zippy lemon zest comes through with a touch of sweetness; the palate feel is unctuous and the finish is long

and luxurious. **92**



**De Muller Vermouth Reserva, Spain (\$25)** Over 150 botanicals are used in this Old World stunner made in Catalonia from a 70-year-old recipe and a base of white wine. Produced in the solera method and aged for one year in neutral oak barrels, it exudes aromas of cinnamon, ginger, and pekoe tea that

invite a palate full of flavor: Date, fig, salted hazelnut, orange peel, and chamomile coat the tongue. **93**

THE ARTISAN COLLECTION



**Yebiga Bela Rakija od Sljiva, Serbia (\$30)** A perfume of plum blossom wafts out of the glass of this exquisite plum brandy. Floral tones on the palate coincide with a bounty of fresh-tasting blue and purple fruit marked by vanilla and a soft sprinkle of white pepper. **93**



**Death's Door Gin, USA (\$30)** The defined nose of this 94-proof spirit, which was produced in Cambridge, Wisconsin, features coriander and juniper plus a hint of lavender. Fennel seed leads on the palate with dusky minerality and pine before clean and tongue-coating notes of chocolate

mint come in midway. **93**



**Sixty Men Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$32)** With just a hint of tobacco, the nose is sweetened by caramel and apricot. Flavors of caramel apple, graham cracker, and a pinch of white pepper smooth out on the palate as viscous notes of maple, peach, and guava

come in midway. This is a divinely elegant 90-proof sipper. **93**

SOUTHWEST SPIRITS



**Anteel Reposado Tequila, Mexico (\$42)** This elegant blend of highland and lowland agave is aged for eight months in Tennessee whiskey barrels, which impart defined character. The nose of brown-sugared agave and Rainier cherry is superb; on the palate, yellow sweet pepper leads with sage, caramel, fresh agave, and salted grapefruit zest. **94**

TEEQ SPIRITS



**Ammunition Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$40)** Produced in Sonoma, California, this 90-proof whiskey is finished in Cabernet Sauvignon barrels. Aromas of orange peel, almond brittle, and cedar are intriguing. Flavors of mocha, sandalwood, and bacon appear upfront, while the mid-palate shows charred date, cigar leaf, and orange zest. **92**

DAYLIGHT WINE & SPIRITS



**1509 Mezcal El Principio del Fin, Mexico (\$50)** This 100% Maguey Espadín from Oaxaca is a nod to an Aztec myth that tells of Montezuma's sense of foreboding when he saw a comet cross the sky in the early 16th century. Sure enough, the Spanish were making their way to conquer his empire; *el principio del fin* translates as "the beginning of the end." Aromas of choco-

late and peach open up as the initial smoke dissipates. Brown-sugared peach and baked apple make the first impression on the palate as cigar leaf is enlightened by an earthy clay minerality. Charred tangerine peel adds to the lengthy finish. **94**

TRINITY BAY



**Bespoken Spirits Rye Whiskey, USA (\$49)** Following arresting aromas of brown-sugared walnut, coffee, and peach nectar; the sumptuous, melt-in-your-mouth texture and flavors of milk chocolate, ripe apricot, and oiled saddle leather are divine. The finish of charred orange peel lasts impressively long. 100 proof. **97**




**Appleton Estate 15-Year-Old Black River Casks Single Estate Rum, Jamaica (\$65)** Harmonious scents and flavors of black cherry, walnut, sassafras, and mocha cream exude from this 86-proof spirit, which warms the palate with subtle notes of a cedar-burning hearth. Its mineral tonality is tempered by a finish of coffee, nougat, and cherry pie. **96**

CAMPARI GROUP



**Courage & Conviction Sherry Cask Single Malt Whisky, USA (\$85)** This 92-proof whisky exudes sumptuous aromas of ripe tropical fruit. On the unctuous, peppery palate, apricot, chamomile, and ripe guava notes meld with molasses-

kissed fig. Three different Sherry casks are used in the spirit's production: Fino, Oloroso, and Pedro Ximénez. **92** 

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# a virtual LEARNING CURVE

WHEN THE WORLD  
WENT ON LOCKDOWN,  
**J. LOHR VINEYARDS  
& WINES** WENT INTO  
DIGITAL OVERDRIVE TO  
CONNECT WITH TRADE  
AND CONSUMERS

by Jonathan Cristaldi

J. Lohr CEO and co-owner Steve  
Lohr raises a toast to the audience  
who virtually attended the 2020  
fundraising event Cuisine & Cuvée.

PHOTO COURTESY OF J. LOHR VINEYARDS & WINES





J. Lohr marketing manager Joshua Baldovino co-hosted the virtual event “Pinot on the Patio” on Father’s Day, when attendees shared tales of parenthood.

**In March 2020**, marketing departments across the U.S. wine industry were starting to see the fruits of their Q1 labor: Wintertime retail campaigns and promotions were in high gear, spring events were gaining momentum, and tasting rooms were full of visitors. Then, suddenly, everything changed—and so did the way that marketers connected to consumers and the trade in the high-touch, experiential world of wine.

The brands that succeeded during the pandemic were the ones that took a strategic approach to digital marketing, e-commerce, and virtual event planning. J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines, along with like-minded partners such as the California Wine Institute and Sonder Los Angeles, had the foresight to pivot in an often-collaborative manner that has made them thought leaders in the evolving online space.

#### ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT

When the lockdown took effect in California, Joshua Baldovino had been serving as J. Lohr’s new marketing manager for all of two weeks. “In-person tastings and sales meetings were the norm for us,” Baldovino explains, “so we started asking immediately how we could continue to engage at a high level with our trade and media partners.” Luckily, his previous position had been with a digital and broadcast agency, which meant he was familiar with online capabilities and could test the technological waters straightaway. He and the rest of the J. Lohr team began researching the consumer- and trade-facing digital platforms that would be best suited to sustaining the deep relationships formed over the winery’s nearly 50 years in business. Vimeo, YouTube Live, Facebook, Instagram Live, “and even several third-party platforms like Switcher Studio” were considered, he recalls. “We were not hesitant to make sure that we had explored all paths.”



Erica Meier, J. Lohr’s sponsorship and donations coordinator, shows her work during the virtual event “Paint & Sip: Celebrating Chardonnay Day.”





One of J. Lohr's online events demonstrated the art of assembling a charcuterie platter with Sonder Los Angeles' Alfred cutting board.

They eventually opted for Instagram, Facebook, and Zoom as the primary channels for engagement on the grounds that they were the most familiar to their winemaking and sales teams as well as to consumers and the trade. "We knew that getting consumers into the funnel of participation was key during this early adoption phase," says Baldovino. It has all seemed to work quite well: As of August 2021, J. Lohr's virtual tastings were booked solid for the foreseeable future.

But that's not the only secret to the company's success. At the beginning of the pandemic, chief brand officer and co-owner Cynthia Lohr championed the principle that "less is more." As early efforts to achieve the best picture and sound quality met with more technical snags than anticipated, she and the marketing team determined that they needed to "meet the consumer where they were"—at home on the couch, in the kitchen, or on the patio. The focus of the initiative, then, had to be less on the audiovisual spectacle and more on the value of the content provided. To that end, Lohr suggested the name "At Home with J. Lohr." It launched in May 2020 with a schedule of virtual events that, under the direction of J. Lohr VP of marketing

Rhonda Motil, continues to showcase the team's creativity and understanding of the consumer experience today.

Meanwhile, Lohr found herself inspired by new opportunities for collaboration. She points to an Instagram Live event, "How to Build the Perfect Holiday Charcuterie Board," with kitchenware brand Sonder Los Angeles as an example. Co-founder and designer Tiffany Yu launched the company in 2017 out of necessity; living in a 740-square-foot apartment in Los Angeles with limited cabinet space in the tiny kitchen "left us empty-handed when shopping for the perfect cutting board," she explains. Lohr and Baldovino saw her handiwork as something J. Lohr fans would love and partnered with Yu on the best way to showcase it: by demonstrating to viewers how to prepare a brilliant charcuterie platter. They ran a holiday charcuterie giveaway, which included Sonder LA's Winsome acacia cutting board, two J. Lohr-branded wine glasses, and a \$100 gift card. Nearly 2,000 entries were received and over 1,200 views were recorded.

The success of the event convinced both the J. Lohr team and Yu that partnerships with lifestyle brands could inspire deeper connections among

their loyalists while improving outreach to a new clientele. "A virtual event allows for agility, puts a human face and personality to the brand, and is accessible to anyone with a phone," Yu says. In short, it was a win-win for all.

## ON THE INTERNATIONAL FRONT

When J. Lohr's VP of international sales, Shaune Zeleny, returned home from tastings in Europe on Friday, March 13, 2020, business closures were underway across the country. "Upon return, everyone was bracing for a two-week lockdown," she says. After learning that it would continue into April (thus ruling out a trade-show tour across Canada), Zeleny thought to herself, "Oh my goodness, this is going to be one long month!"

More than a year later, communication with J. Lohr's global customers continues in a hybrid fashion, with emails and phone calls supplemented by Zoom meetings and virtual tastings—including those arranged by the California Wine Institute, of whose export program the winery is a member. "As the months wore on, video tastings were developed in order that we could at least 'see' and taste with one another, even if not in person," recalls Zeleny, "allowing us to continue



**Kasey Martin, J. Lohr's member services and wine club director, films a segment for the YouTube series "At Home with J. Lohr," which showed consumers how to host home tastings using such digitally downloadable assets as tasting mats, recipes, and shopping lists.**

to share our wines and our stories."

One of the most memorable examples, she adds, was hosted for sommeliers in Japan who had entered a California Wine Institute contest and won a trip to California. Due to the travel ban, a virtual tour was planned for them instead. "The sommeliers were safely gathered in a Tokyo hotel where samples were poured," Zeleny explains, "and we were able to share our stories, pictures, and maps and taste the wines together."

Along with many of her colleagues, Zeleny believes that the export business will continue to rely more heavily on video conferencing than it did before the pandemic. Despite the restrictions on international travel, she and her team have managed to open

new markets while strengthening existing ones. "I'm not sure that we will ever travel to the extent we did before," she asserts, but "relationships and connections have to be made nevertheless."

#### **NO TRADE PARTNER OR CONSUMER LEFT BEHIND**

Having helped to develop e-commerce platforms for the U.S. Department of Defense early in her career before working with tech startups in Silicon Valley, Motil is bullish about providing clear and easily accessible digital assets for all of the winery's partners. "The winners in the evolving wine business will be the ones who had their online marketing efforts included in their long-term marketing plan. We spent the last year researching and investing



**Rhonda Motil is J. Lohr's vice president of marketing.**

in resources like Salsify, a platform that allows on- and off-premise buyers to 'embrace the brand' by downloading tech sheets, shelf talkers, bottle shots, logos, and other assets from a central repository." That the third-party site hosts multiple wine and spirits brands is a bonus. "Trade partners are overextended now more than ever before; brands that commit to offering a single-stop shop full of assets will be the ones that restaurants, retailers, and the media are drawn to in today's digital age," says Motil.

But perhaps the most obvious reason for J. Lohr's continued success is that its goal has always been to give the consumer and trade what they want and what they need. "At Home with J. Lohr," for instance, recently received some of the highest website traffic to date. And just what was the most visited page there? A lifestyle-oriented "how-to" on making succulent-topped cork magnets. "People were looking for activities and things to do at home that could allow them to stay engaged," says Motil. "Our social media and website photos and videos that were planned for the 12 months of 2020 were not related to staying at home, so we had to quickly morph to keep the consumer and the trade connected to us. The past year has certainly evolved our thoughts on innovative approaches to marketing in the wine industry, and we're seeing the results of our efforts." **LT**



# A GATEWAY TO

# Spain

**FÉLIX SOLÍS AVANTIS AIMS TO  
CHANGE HOW AMERICANS VIEW—  
AND DRINK—SPANISH WINE**



Pictured at La Taberna in Napa, CA, left to right: Liz Thach, Master of Wine; Tasting Panel contributor Chris Sawyer; Andrea Robinson, Master Sommelier; Pedro García, managing director U.S. & Canada for Félix Solís Avantis; Boris Guillome, senior manager of wine sourcing at Vivino; and Ellen Udoff, owner of Wine Buzz Marketing.





STORY BY CHRIS SAWYER / PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RUBIN

## "WE'RE TALKING ONE GRAPE, SIX NAMES, **ONE COUNTRY**,"

said Pedro Garcia, U.S. managing director of Spain's number-one wine exporter, Félix Solís Avantis, during a recent tasting in reference to the national "passion" for Tempranillo. To illustrate his point during our small gathering—which included Master Sommelier Andrea Robinson, Master of Wine Liz Thach, Vivino senior manager of wine sourcing Boris Guillome, Wine Buzz Marketing owner Ellen Udoff, myself, and hosts Mick Saylor and Armando Ramirez of ZuZu Kitchen and La Taberna in Napa—he presented Félix Solís' flagship red wine, Viña Albali Gran Reserva Selección Privada.

The expression is crafted with handpicked estate fruit in the Valdepeñas region of southern Spain, where the grape is commonly called Cencibel. While it may also be known as Tinta del País, Tinta de Toro, and Tinto Fino, among other synonyms, depending on the area in which it's grown, this early-budding, thick-skinned variety has a special historical link to Valdepeñas, which lent its own name to the grape in 1888 when budwood from the region was propagated at the famous Sierra Foothill Research and Extension Center near Jackson, California, in Amador County.

As a Gran Reserva, the wine is cellar-aged 36 months in oak and 24 months in bottle, a regimen most commonly associated with Rioja to the north. But it has its own regional identity and charming character, driven by its brilliant combination of deep, ripe, and rich fruit flavors; spicy



**Proprietor Mick Saylor and chef Armando Ramirez of Spanish-inspired restaurants ZuZu and La Taberna in Napa, CA.**



**Guillome sniffs Mucho Más Red, a multiregional, multivarietal blend that has caught fire among Vivino customers.**





Garcia and Robinson share in a lively discussion over tapas at ZuZu.

nuances; smooth texture; and underlying notes of wild herbs and minerals, such as graphite, that are reflective of both the sunbaked growing conditions and the special mixture of rocky red volcanic and concentrated clay-based soils that have become the trademarks of Valdepeñas (which translates as “Valley of Rocks”). The result is a stylish, modern benchmark for the region that overdelivers at \$16.

“In my opinion, a lot of Spain is still hunkered down in traditions,” said Garcia. Valdepeñas, by comparison, “[has] got to be constantly in motion, changing, improving, and using [its] advancements to create wines that favor quality over price.”

### BUILDING A NAME BRAND

Located at the midway point between Madrid and the southernmost region of Andalusia, Valdepeñas and its 22,000 hectares of vineyard are nestled on the southern edge of the larger and more arid growing region of Castilla-La Mancha. Even before it became Spain’s second official Denomination of Origin in 1932, Valdepeñas was achieving international success in the trade, shipping wine to South America and the Philippines by sea as soon as the

railroad to the coast was completed in 1861. Its domestic reputation for producing world-class red wines with rich, powerful, and opulent flavors likewise increased when the “Wine Train” (*Tren del Vino*) began to carry wine to Madrid in 1895.

Prior to launching Viña Albali in 1962, Félix Solís Fernández and his wife, Leonor Yañez, spent ten years honing their skills in the vineyards and the cellar to create quality wines that would appeal to a broad spectrum of consumers. In conjunction with the inaugural release, they purchased a bottling company and storage facility in Madrid, which allowed them to hand-deliver wines to restaurants, bars, and retail outlets. Six years later, they broke ground at the site a few miles north of downtown Valdepeñas that is now Félix Solís Avantís’ home base and one of the world’s largest and most high-tech winemaking facilities.

Today, Viña Albali is Spain’s top-selling value and volume brand, and Félix Solís Avantís is the seventh-largest producer of still wines on the globe. The third-generation family owners’ steady focus on making the best wines for the price has made Félix Solís a household name not only in Spain but across the 122 countries to which it exports.



A dish of king salmon with the Pulpo 2019 Albariño from Rías Baixas. Pulpo is “octopus” in Spanish.

### A STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

Despite being the country with the most surface area under vine, Spain ranks behind Italy and France in both wine production and sales. That is particularly evident in the U.S., where Spanish wine represents only 1.6% of the market, with most of that share claimed by sangria and sparkling wine brands. When Garcia joined the team five years ago, he saw a golden opportunity for Félix Solís to champion Spanish wines stateside by marketing them in ways that would allow them to outshine foreign and domestic competitors in both the \$11-and-under bracket and the popular premium category of \$12–\$18.

“Let’s face it, while Viña Albali is a genuine brand from an incredible DO that is very popular in many different countries, we’re not even scratching the surface in the U.S.,” said Garcia. “That’s why we developed a comprehensive strategy that is focused on promoting consumer awareness and cultivating the U.S. market for long-term growth.”

The foundation for the first marketing phase started in 2002, when the company began purchasing properties and developing new winemaking



**From Valdepeñas, Viña Albali Gran Reserva Selección Privada was first released by Félix Solís in 1962 and is now Spain's number-one value wine.**



**The Arnegui 2016 Rioja Crianza became part of Félix Solís' Pagos del Rey program in 2006.**

“TO ME, THESE ARE GATEWAY WINES THAT ARE RELEVANT AND ACCESSIBLE AND THAT REPRESENT THE PURE FLAVORS OF SPAIN IN EACH GLASS.”

—ANDREA ROBINSON, MS



facilities in Spain's premier DOs for its Pagos del Rey brand, which now includes Pulpo Albariño from Rías Baixas; Sentero Tinta de Toro from Toro; Condado de Oriza Reserva from Ribera del Duero; Arnegui Crianza from Rioja; and two wines from La Mancha, Prospero Secco Gran Selección and Viña San Juan Sauvignon Blanc. To make it easier to get these wines in front of U.S. consumers, the Solís family started their own winery-direct import and distribution companies in Napa in 2012. Over time, this one-stop-shop model has allowed Félix Solís to eliminate the middleman and pass the savings on to wine buyers, thus giving them more access to more Spanish wines.

Having gained ground in the premium price category thanks to Pagos del Rey, the company recently launched a series of blends that cross regional boundaries while showcasing the strengths of both Spain's native grapes and its approach to growing international varieties. “If we are ever going to get more U.S. consumers to identify and enjoy Spanish wines, then we need to be disruptive in nature and step outside restrictions,” explained Garcia, who noted that the wines are


built to compete with brands like 19 Crimes and Apothic.

The first is FYI, a lively blend combining 30% Tempranillo and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon from Valdepeñas with 30% Tinta de Toro and 20% Garnacha from Toro; the result crosses the former region's balance between tradition and modern style with the natural intensity and rustic charm of the latter. With a catchy name that invites consumers to interpret it in multiple ways (“For Your Information,” “Free Your Inhibitions”), this rising-star label is powered by dense dark-fruit flavors and complementary hints of licorice, cocoa, vanilla, and spice. It's a great value at around \$11.

To satisfy the growing demand for fresh, fruity modern wines from a broad spectrum of regions, Félix Solís has also created Mucho Más (“Much More” in Spanish). Packaged in a sleek but simple bottle and priced at \$11 to attract the attention of curious consumers, the red blend is composed of Tempranillo and Garnacha from Toro and other regions in northern Spain along with a smaller portion of Syrah from Castilla-La Mancha. Its counterpoint is the Mucho Más White, a signature blend of 70% Verdejo—a

Spanish grape known for its fresh fruit aromas and expressive flavors of ripe melon, tree fruits, and fresh herbs—with Chardonnay (20%) and Sauvignon Blanc (10%) also sourced from multiple regions. The result is a fragrant wine with notes of fresh melon, citrus, apricot, ripe peach, and a hint of smokiness.

Darren Rothenberg, director of sales for the wine division of Empire Distributors in Knoxville, Tennessee, credits the special partnership between his team and Félix Solís with the 13% increase in Spanish wine sales during the pandemic. But, he says, “I don't think that tells the whole story of what's going on with Spanish wines. While we do great in grocery stores, where we're really seeing signs of success is in our independent package stores and on-premise as well. When it comes down to it, it's all about value.”

Back in Napa, Andrea Robinson would have agreed. Noting that she felt lucky to be introduced to the compelling wines that Garcia shared at our festive gathering, she added, “To me, these are gateway wines that are relevant and accessible and that represent the pure flavors of Spain in each glass.” 



# Wrap It Up

THESE GIFTWORTHY BRANDS WILL HELP YOU TIE A BOW ON Q4

**This fall perhaps more than ever**, wine and spirits buyers will be on the hook for helping to spread some holiday cheer. Between the porch-pounding traditions and bartending skills that consumers developed throughout the pandemic and the not-remote possibility of yet more lockdowns, there's no doubt that booze will be at the top of many customers' gift-shopping lists; here are a few brands to build bang-up seasonal store displays around.

*A Spooktacular Display:*

## GNARLY HEAD



**G**narly Head wines are instantly recognizable by their orange labels, which feature an illustration of the heritage vines that are the backbone of the brand's bestselling Old Vine Zinfandel. The thick, twisted vine not only speaks to the history of the Lodi grape-growing region but also lends itself perfectly to the spooky motif of Halloween—so it's no surprise that Gnarly Head's display contest for retailers has become such a hit over the holiday.



For more than a decade, the Delicato Family Wines sales force has worked with its distributors to activate these super-fun, supernatural displays and bring them to life (or should we say "death"?). According to Gnarly Head brand manager Ashley Larson, the producer typi-

cally experiences a 35% increase in dollar sales whenever its wines are on display, and over the years the Halloween POS in particular has gained incredible traction and visibility off-premise. "There are a lot of retailers that look forward to Halloween program and the great success they've had in past years," she says. "The contest has a great track record with our trade partners and the team has a ton of fun with the displays."

For over 16 years, Delicato has built the Lodi-based Gnarly Head into a label that today ranks among the top 20 domestic brands in the premium (\$8–\$11) segment. And thanks to Halloween displays like the one pictured above, its hair-raising success is sure to continue.



*Holidays in Jalisco:*

## ESPANITA TEQUILA AÑEJO

**T**hanks to her background in spirit imports, Marina Wilson saw the need for a well-made tequila at a reasonable price, particularly for a younger demographic—so in 2020, she founded Espanita Tequila. With SRPs that hover around \$35, depending on the expression, the brand's Reposado, Añejo, and Blanco tequilas are made with hand-selected 100% Blue Weber agave sourced from the higher elevations of the Jalisco Highlands. After baking for 72 hours in a traditional stone oven, the piñas are crushed to yield juice that ferments in small batches before it's double distilled in alembic pot stills. Given these efforts, it's no surprise the brand has garnered numerous awards and accolades, including "Tequila of the Year" and a gold medal for the Espanita Añejo as well as "Importer of the Year" for its import company, Double Eagle Imports, at the 2021 Bartender Spirits Awards.

Although the Añejo, which ages in ex-bourbon barrels for 18 months, would shine in rich cocktails like a Tequila Old Fashioned, its smooth, nougaty character makes it equally well suited for sipping. Either way, its honeyed silkiness will undoubtedly transport your customers to warmer climes come winter.

**Espanita Tequila Añejo, Mexico (\$35)** Earthy scents of mushroom and dried leaves lead to a dusky, brooding palate. Cigar leaf, caramel, and sandalwood inform a woody profile that persists without overpowering the heady agave notes. **93** —*Meridith May*

## Remixing the White Russian:

# DISARONNO VELVET

A blend of Disaronno Originale and cream, Disaronno Velvet might retain the signature nutty and floral character of the flagship expression, but it's enabled Disaronno International to make a bold foray into new territory while appealing to the modern spirits drinker since it launched last year. The burgeoning liqueur category has opened up fresh opportunities for not only collaborations with other beverage brands but special-edition gift packs tailor-made for the holiday season.

These include the recently unveiled 750-milliliter Disaronno Velvet gift pack with two branded glasses, built for enjoying the smooth and sophisticated liqueur, which has an ABV of 17%, on the rocks or as a touch of Italian elegance in your favorite cream cocktails. Fittingly, that's where the collaboration piece comes in. Disaronno is partnering with Russian Standard Vodka, the world's bestselling premium Russian vodka, this September to create a distinctive twist on a familiar drink: the Velvet White Russian, which combines

one part Disaronno Velvet, one part Russian Standard Original Vodka, and two parts cream in a rocks glass over ice to meld the silken mouthfeel of Disaronno Velvet with the rich and complex taste of traditional Russian vodka.

"It's the perfect drink to enjoy as we transition to cooler weather," says Ignacio Llaneza, vice president of brand and trade marketing for Disaronno International USA. "Consumers are constantly looking for cocktail ideas that are easy to make and will add fun and excitement to their at-home drinking occasions. The White Russian is once again rising in popularity, and we are excited to offer a unique take on the drink to a national audience."

In addition to the Russian Standard

partnership, Disaronno International recently launched its "The New Dolce Vita" media campaign showcasing Disaronno Velvet, which aims to garner millions of impressions, primarily among millennial consumers, through a \$2.5 million advertising spend in the United States (for more on the campaign, see page 112).

Though it's packaged in a stylish opaque white bottle, Disaronno Velvet bears a close resemblance to the Originale that's sure to help it stand out on shelves, with its instantly recognizable faceted glass crafted in Murano, Italy, and the brand's signature square cap—leaving little need to waste time on gift wrap.

### Disaronno Velvet Cream Liqueur, Italy (\$30)

The fresh, milky creaminess gently subdues the intensity of Disaronno Originale's perfume, but the almond aromas gracefully peek through. Rich and sparked with a touch of baking spice, this 34-proof liqueur is classy yet decadent. **93**—M.M.





Experience Is the  
Best Teacher:

# HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY

by Kelly Magyarics

For bourbonites seeking to immerse themselves in their beloved brown liquid, all roads lead to Kentucky. And one newly reimagined, expanded space in the heart of Bourbon Country aims to take those aficionados on a whiskey-soaked journey from barrel to bottle.



The façade of the newly reopened Heaven Hill Bourbon Experience in Bardstown, KY, replicates that of the original distillery, built in 1935.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY



Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, Heaven Hill president Max Shapira, and Jeff Crowe, Heaven Hill's director of Kentucky visitor experiences, at the grand reopening.



This past June marked the grand reopening of the Heaven Hill Bourbon Experience in Bardstown, where as many as 900 visitors at a time can come to learn about a major player on the American whiskey landscape that boasts an 85-year history; the state-of-the-art facility, which first opened its doors in 2004, has more than tripled its footprint to 30,000 square feet thanks to a \$19 million upgrade. It wasn't an easy feat to undertake a project of this scale, especially during a pandemic—as Jeff Crowe, Heaven Hill's director of Kentucky visitor experiences, points out, even more challenging than closures, supply-chain issues, and health and safety considerations was not being able to welcome bourbon newbies and experts alike during construction. But that all changed when company president Max L. Shapira and Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear cut the ribbon on June 14.

The first thing visitors may notice about the exterior of the center is its retro design, as the façade is meant to replicate that of the original distillery, built in 1935. Inside, they can embark on an interactive tour that covers bourbon history, distillation, maturation, and mixology. “Guests are welcome to explore the history of the Shapira family, who have owned and operated the company since 1935; the legacy of iconic brands like Elijah Craig and Larceny; and the historic moments and decisions within Heaven Hill that influenced the industry forever,” Crowe explains.

One guided tasting, dubbed You Do Bourbon, is followed by the chance to bottle and label a personalized whiskey blend using custom-designed filling machines—a rare opportunity on the region's Bourbon Trail. Here, attendees can also play the role of quality technicians, nosing several mash bills to assess their integrity. “Heaven Hill Distillery is lauded for its consistency of quality across its American whiskey portfolio,” Crowe says. “The new You Do Bourbon tasting . . . offers guests an inside look at some of the key moments where our production team guarantees this quality.”

Also noteworthy is the 1935 Distillery Theater, in which up to 40 viewers can watch an 11-minute show on seven moving screens that recaps the history of the Shapira family, from their immigration from Lithuania and their foray into spirits to their position as leaders of the largest independent family-owned and -operated distillery in the U.S. “It's a true American success story filled with moments of resiliency and perseverance that still define the company to this day,” Crowe says.

Heaven Hill is the only heritage distillery that offers every major category of American whiskey. To call attention to that achievement, visitors at the new Bourbon Experience will have the chance to sample five expressions through the Magic of the Mashbill, a 45-minute tasting offered hourly.

The company's newest expression, Five Brothers Small Batch Kentucky



**Heaven Hill mixologist Karla Green, who conceptualized the menu at Five Brothers Bar & Kitchen inside the Heaven Hill Bourbon Experience, makes a cocktail with the new Five Brothers Small Batch Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey.**

Straight Bourbon Whiskey, is an homage to the solidarity and tenacity of the founding brothers: David, Ed, Gary, George, and Mose. A blend of spirits aged five to nine years, it's bottled at 90 proof—just like the whiskey made in the distillery's early years—and the vintage-style label features a black-and-white photo of the siblings as young men. Crowe describes the bourbon as “sweet and smooth, with notes of vanilla and sugar cookie; the finish is long yet subtle, making for an easy sipper.” Visitors can buy a bottle of it or any of the other spirits they've learned about during their visit to take home or try them shaken or stirred into a cocktail on site at the Five Brothers Bar & Kitchen. That concept's menu, created by Heaven Hill mixologist Karla Green, features such twists on the classics as a Paloma that eschews tequila for whiskey; there are plans to add a restaurant component next year.

The Heaven Hill Bourbon Experience and Five Brothers Bar & Kitchen are both open daily, and reservations for tours and tastings can be made online. Crowe says he's immensely proud of the team, who worked diligently over the span of four years to bring the Shapiras' legacy to life: “[It] celebrates both the historic roots of Heaven Hill and the innovative tourism opportunities that offer a new experience every time a guest walks through our doors.”



**During the You Do Bourbon tasting experience, visitors can bottle and label a personalized whiskey blend using custom-designed filling machines.**



## Fateful Detour:

# LARSEN AQUA IGNIS COGNAC

Jens Reidar Larsen wasn't planning on going into the Cognac trade, but in the early 20th century, fate led him to the Bordeaux region, where he planned to earn some money before resuming his travels from Norway to the Americas. Not only did he end up falling in love with and marrying a local woman, he also fell head over heels with the town's eau-de-vie, which led him to establish Larsen Cognac in 1926.

After gleaning expertise from a few authorities in the region, Larsen developed his proprietary "steam-fire process," in which a 225-liter barrique is submerged in hot water and then toasted over fire three times. The technique extracts more complexity from the wood and results in a distinctive style of Cognac—the first of its kind in the world—with an ABV of 42.3%. Aqua Ignis, meaning "water" and "fire" in Latin, is a spirit created at the limits of each element.



**Larsen Aqua Ignis Cognac, France (\$45)** Rich and full-flavored, this dynamo offers hallmark notes of roasted mocha and vanilla derived from a proprietary barrel-toasting process. Hearty aromas of dried fruit go deep, and the palate is balanced and broad. Saddle leather and oak form a foundation for intensified notes of mocha on the finish. 84.6 proof. **94** —*M.M.*

MARUSSIA BEVERAGES



## Intersection Perfection:

# 135° EAST JAPANESE ARTISAN GIN

In 1917, the Yonezawa family established Kaikyo Distillery in the Japanese city of Akashi; over 100 years later, master distiller Kimio Yonezawa carries on the family tradition, honoring his ancestors by crafting a traditional London Dry gin with locally sourced botanicals, including yuzu, sencha, shiso leaf, sansho pepper, and ume. Named for the meridian that crosses Akashi, it's finished with a touch of saké, while the inclusion of juniper, coriander, and angelica serve as a nod to London—placing 135° EAST squarely at the intersection of East and West.

## 135° East Japanese Artisan Gin, Japan (\$29)

Following a perfume of black and red pepper, orange peel, coriander, juniper, and red fruit, the unctuous liquid coats the mouth with a wave of vanilla. Lemongrass and green tea are subtle, while a kick of red pepper contributes an underlying earthiness. 84 proof. **93** —*M.M.*

MARUSSIA BEVERAGES



## Cold-Weather Confections: MOZART CHOCOLATE LIQUEURS

Based in Salzburg, Austria, the birthplace of its namesake composer, the Mozart Distillerie was named Liqueur Producer of the Year in 2017 and 2020 by the International Wine & Spirit Competition. Launching this fall is the newest addition to the brand's popular line of handmade chocolate liqueurs: Mozart Chocolate Cream Pumpkin Spice, which joins seasonal expression Mozart Chocolate Coffee Liqueur.

**Mozart Chocolate Coffee Liqueur, Austria (\$25)** Blending fudgy Belgian chocolate, cream from the Netherlands, high-quality Arabica coffee beans, and other all-natural, gluten-free ingredients results in this symphony of rich, bittersweet, and roasted flavors. **93** —*M.M.*

**Mozart Chocolate Cream Pumpkin Spice Liqueur, Austria (\$25)** This fall-favorite premium chocolate liqueur consists of milk chocolate, caramel, natural pumpkin juice, cinnamon, clove, and a hint of vanilla. As usual, the liqueur is packaged in a chocolate praline-shaped bottle to make consumers feel as if they're unwrapping a special confection from Austria. **93** —*M.M.*



### Chocolate Cappuccino Martini

- ▮ 1 oz. Mozart Chocolate Coffee Liqueur
- ▮ 1 oz. Mamont Vodka
- ▮ 1 oz. espresso
- ▮ 2 oz. cold steamed milk

Mix all ingredients except the milk with ice cubes in a cocktail shaker or screwtop jar. Strain into an ice-filled tumbler, slowly add the milk, and top with ground coffee.

### Mozart Pumpkin Spice Eggnog

- ▮ 1 oz. Mozart Chocolate Cream Pumpkin Spice Liqueur
- ▮ 1 oz. Larsen Aqua Ignis Cognac
- ▮ 2 oz. eggnog

Mix ingredients with ice cubes in a cocktail shaker or screwtop jar, then strain into an ice-filled tumbler. Top with whipped cream, ground nutmeg, and chocolate flakes.





# A Toast to Mistakes: **CAMPARI**

Whether you're cooking, writing a song, or drawing a picture, making a mistake can prove to be serendipitous. As art instructor and television host Bob Ross optimistically says of errors that occur when painting, "We don't make mistakes, we just have happy accidents." The same can be said of any creative medium, including mixing cocktails. Case in point: the Negroni Sbagliato.

*Sbagliato* translates as "wrong" or "mistake." As the story goes, in the late 1960s or early '70s, a man named Mirko Stocchetti added sparkling wine rather than gin to the mixing glass when making a Negroni at his Bar Basso in Milan and, without acknowledging the misstep, served the drink. The guest voiced approval, and the Negroni Sbagliato was born. (It is, of course, entirely possible that Stocchetti intentionally used sparkling wine as a nod to the popularity of Spritzes and simply gave the drink a playful name.)

Thanks to its herbaceous and bitter flavor profile, Campari has earned a reputation as the consummate ingredient in aperitif cocktails like the Americano as well as the Negroni. That "mouthwatering" bitterness affects our palates in ways we might not consider, Campari brand ambassador Daniel Warrilow points out: "It's something that brings refreshment without us even really knowing it," especially when melded with slightly sugary and acidic sweet vermouth and effervescent Prosecco with a touch of residual sugar. When you imbibe a Negroni Sbagliato, he adds, "You're not just getting the sweet components. . . . Campari brings in that austere backbone and bitterness that's long lasting." And the addition of bubbly makes for a quaff that's leaner than a Negroni to appeal to lighter tastes.

Where the Sbagliato falls on the aperitif timeline evinces its role in the evolution of the category, and perhaps more relevantly the evolution of the Negroni, of which there are always new variations emerging. To make a Negroni Sbagliato, mix an ounce of Campari with an ounce of sweet vermouth in an ice-filled glass; top with an ounce of Prosecco, stir again, and garnish with an orange slice. And feel free to play around: For a holiday twist, try mixing in some freshly grated cinnamon and add a few cloves. It's OK to experiment in the name of happy accidents. —Eric Marsh



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAMPARI

## The Bold Business of Blending:

# RED EYE LOUIE'S WHISQUILA

Now here's something truly innovative that's a family affair to boot: Whisquila, the world's only blend of rye whiskey and tequila. It's the latest offering from Birmingham, Alabama-based Red Eye Louie's Inc., founded by Chander Arora with his daughter and son, Nina and Romie Arora, who together launched their vodka/tequila blend Vodquila in their home state in September 2012, followed by Rumquila in 2018. Today the company's products can be found in more than 30 states, with national distribution anticipated by the end of this year.

Trade and consumer reaction has been highly favorable, with more than 100,000 cases shipped to prove that the brand's appeal to spirits enthusiasts to "live the blended life" is a compelling one, promising that they needn't choose between being "naughty or nice" and "mild or wild" when they can have the best of both worlds. Indeed, Whisquila takes the technique known as thermal blending into new territory, combining rye whiskey with premium tequila from the Jalisco Highlands and bottling the results in an eye-catching package guaranteed to stand out on store shelves and dimly lit backbars alike. Perhaps another brand slogan might be "expect the unexpected," as open-minded consumers are inspired by Whisquila's distinctive blend of flavors to live life on the blended side. —Ian Buxton



### Red Eye Louie's Whisquila, USA (\$25)

The dulcet aromas of this 80-proof merger of rye whiskey and tequila are defined by caramel and peach nectar with a gentle woodsiness. Agave notes are unmasked before the rye comes to the fore with an oatmeal-apricot presence; cedar and dusky vanilla integrate on the silken finish. This combination works. **91** —M.M.



## The Noble Nature of Cognac:

# NAUD

Surrounded by willow trees on a small river island in the Cognac region of France stands a limestone-walled 19th-century grain mill. Complete with a paddle wheel, it couldn't be a more picturesque site for the distillery housed there since 1923. Here, father-and-son team Jean-Michel and Pierre Naud have been producing a quartet of Cognacs as striking as the pastoral setting itself since the 1980s. The NAUD Cognac VS offers fresh notes of pear, peach, almond, and honey; the supple VSOP, meanwhile, shows a softer profile redolent of dried fruit and sweet spices. As for the XO and Extra Fine expressions, see our reviews below. **77**



**NAUD XO Fine Cognac, France (\$180)** This 80-proof spirit exhibits scents of dried fruit and new leather. Dark chocolate and white-peppered cherry meet notes of cinnamon and cedar, while orange peel and tobacco connect on the mid-palate with fine, drying tannins. **94** —M.M.

### NAUD Extra Fine Cognac, France (\$285)

Warm aromas of banana bread, walnut, peach, and orange peel announce this nectar of the gods, which offers notes of peach pie, caramel butter, vanilla, and pecan within a luxurious mouthfeel. 84.6 proof. **96** —M.M.

M.S. WALKER



# Giving With a FLOurish

**MAST-JÄGERMEISTER** GIVES DREAM BIG DARLING AND THE MILLINGER GROUP'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM A MULTIYEAR BOOST

**In August, Mast-Jägermeister US** announced its plan to invest \$340,000 over the next six years to bolster a new scholarship program, FLOurish. The brainchild of Dream Big Darling and The Millinger Group, FLOurish will mentor emerging women leaders in wine and spirits through personalized assessments, insights, coaching, and mentorship.

The inspiration behind the initiative is longtime human-resources executive Florence Pramberger. Pramberger mentored Rona Millinger, the founder and president of full-service human-resources consulting firm The Millinger Group, throughout her career. After Pramberger lost her battle with cancer last year, Millinger decided to create a professional development program in her memory. "I wanted to continue giving what Florence no longer can: coaching, development, and guidance for women looking to contribute, progress, and advance in work and personal lives," she says.

Through her research, Millinger was introduced to Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, the founder of Dream Big Darling (DBD), a nonprofit dedicated to fostering the success of women in the wine and spirits industry through education, life enhancement, mentorship, and professional retreats; *The Tasting Panel* and its sister publication, *The SOMM Journal*, serve as the organization's media sponsors. "I'm a big proponent of women supporting women, which is why I started Dream Big Darling," says Wittstrom-Higgins. "When I heard Rona and Florence's story, I was inspired. Together we developed a powerful program to help women identify their strengths and accelerate their professional success, something I wish I had access to early in my career."

Pramberger spent the last eight years



of her career with Mast-Jägermeister US, so when news of FLOurish reached executives at the company, they were immediately on board.

"When word got back to us that our darling Flomeister had inspired such a wonderful cause, we knew we had to be involved," says Mast-Jägermeister US CEO Jeff Popkin. "I especially love how personal these scholarships are, as mentoring is an integral part of the program, [and] I will personally donate my time and resources to the mentoring portion of FLOurish scholarships."


FLOurish was originally open to five women per year thanks to DBD and The Millinger Group, but through the contribution of Mast-Jägermeister US, an additional 85 women will benefit from the program over the next six years. "This injection of funds will allow FLOurish to really blossom. By elevating 85 women, we are actually elevating hundreds of women, as our graduates [will] flourish and bring other women along," says Wittstrom-Higgins. "We couldn't be happier

Longtime human-resources executive Florence Pramberger was the inspiration behind the FLOurish scholarship program.



**Mast-Jägermeister US is investing \$340,000 in FLOurish over the next six years.**

Mast-Jägermeister decided to come on board, and we look forward to working closely with them in the years to come."

"Every woman is unique in their strengths and skills; therefore each individual will receive a personalized program through the FLOurish Scholarship," adds Millinger. "However, our goal is universal: female guidance and empowerment in the workforce. I hope Florence can see the good she has inspired." 

For more information on these companies, visit Dream Big Darling at [dreambigdarling.org](http://dreambigdarling.org), The Millinger Group at [themillingergroup.com](http://themillingergroup.com), and Mast-Jägermeister at [mastjagermeisterus.com](http://mastjagermeisterus.com).

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# A Gosling Hatches in the Columbia Valley

WASHINGTON'S **GOOSE RIDGE ESTATE VINEYARD & WINERY** CONTINUES TO GROW AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF THE NEW GOOSE GAP AVA

by Mark Stock and Ruth Tobias

PHOTO COURTESY OF GOOSE RIDGE ESTATE VINEYARD & WINERY



PHOTO COURTESY OF GOOSE RIDGE ESTATE VINEYARD & WINERY



The **Columbia Valley** is home to most of Washington State's best-known appellations, including the Walla Walla and Yakima valleys. But an aura of potential still surrounds this arid, sagebrush-speckled expanse, as new varieties are planted and sub-AVAs continue to be established that encapsulate its vast variations in soil, climate, and other winegrowing conditions. The most recent of these, officially established on July 1, is the Goose Gap AVA—much to the pride and delight of the Monson family, who owns and runs one of the only two commercial wineries here, Goose Ridge Estate Vineyard & Winery. "We're very excited about it," says VP of sales and marketing Molly Monson-Stutesman. "The family has been working hard on the petition, being the majority landholders in the AVA, and we're excited about what it can do for our brands."

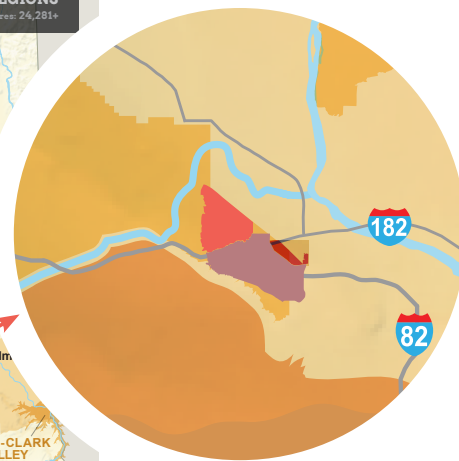
The Monsons settled here four generations ago and began building a massive estate devoted to diversified agriculture, complete with a cattle ranch, orchards, and what now amount to some 2,200 acres of vineyard. But prior to becoming one of the largest family-run operations in the region, the Goose Ridge property was open country—an untamed stretch of land nestled among topographical outcroppings that served as goose-hunting ground for the local old-timers; hence the name of one of its most prominent features, Goose Mountain, and of the winery and the new appellation in turn.

Whereas most of the mountain ranges in the Columbia Valley run in a northwest-to-southeast direction, Monson-Stutesman explains, Goose Gap "is one of the only AVAs [in the area] that has an east-west orientation." Most of its vineyards are planted accordingly on gentle north- and northeastern-facing slopes, which offer less sun exposure to lengthen the growing season. The soils here also differ from those of neighboring AVAs, she notes, consisting primarily of Warden series loess and silt "that's very generous, so we're able to grow everything from Cabernet to Chardonnay to Merlot."

**The Goose Gap AVA is a sub-appellation of the Yakima Valley, which is in turn a sub-appellation of the Columbia Valley in Washington State.**

PHOTO: DARREN ZEMANEK





The Goose Gap AVA.

While some of that fruit goes into custom-crush wines, there's more than enough remaining for Goose Ridge to maintain a wide-ranging portfolio under the umbrella of Destination Brands, which includes StoneCap; Tall Sage; g3; Cascadian Outfitters, representing the winery in the canned market; and a vodka, VIDO, made with estate-grown Cabernet grapes. Two new labels will be joining them this fall. The first is Among the Giants, named in honor of the new designation that will appear on the bottle: "We're very proud of it and feel that [Goose Gap] is among the giants of the American AVAs," says Monson-Stutesman. Slated primarily for on-premise and indie retail accounts, it consists of a "buttery" French oak-aged Chardonnay and a "rich, full-bodied Cab" that sees 18 months in barrel. In addition, she notes, "We're launching a new canned wine in a 250-milliliter format called Escape Room," starting with three expressions—a Chardonnay and two Syrah-based rosés, one still and one sparkling. "We're going to have a QR code on the can that you can scan to take you to different games you can play with other people, so when you gather together you can have fun and enjoy each other."

In short, Goose Ridge winemaker Andrew Wilson has his work cut out



The Monson family owns and operates Goose Ridge Estate Vineyard & Winery.

for him. Good thing he's up for the task: He has been part of the Pacific Northwest wine scene since 2003, doing stints at lauded producers like Long Shadows and Forgeron Cellars and serving as general manager at Artifex Wine Company in Walla Walla before landing at Goose Ridge, where he's supported by winemakers Casey Cobble and Maurine Johnson as well as consulting winemaker Peter Devison. As for the rest of the Monsons' team, they too have their hands full, with four tasting rooms to run in Walla Walla, Richland, Woodinville, and Leavenworth on top of overseeing a distribution chain with placements all over the country. Given

that Goose Ridge planted its first vine as recently as 1998 and debuted its maiden vintage the following year, the scale of its growth is impressive.

Yet Monson-Stutesman is rightly confident in her family's ability to handle steady expansion. "We feel that we're coming out of COVID very strong, with Destination Brands spreading the word and getting more points of distribution," she says. "We're going to be entering a lot of sets this fall [across] the West Coast; it's important that we have a strong presence in what we call our backyard. We really took this time during [the pandemic] to get very organized, and now we're just executing on our goals."





Imagery Estate Winery  
is welcoming visitors  
for tastings and seated  
experiences.



PHOTO: ERIKA COLE



**Jamie Benziger is winemaker at Imagery Estate Winery in Sonoma, CA.**

## Breaking the Mold

**IMAGERY ESTATE WINERY** MAKES A BOLD IMPRESSION

by Wanda Mann

**Jamie Benziger has fond memories** of rollerblading in her family's wine caves and spending Sundays helping her dad pump over tanks. Maybe she didn't realize it at the time, but those formative years paved the way for her role as winemaker at Imagery Estate Winery in Sonoma, California. "I had no idea what I was a part of growing up," Jamie says of what it was like to be a third-generation member of the respected Benziger winemaking family, who in 1980 purchased the historic Wegener Ranch on Sonoma Mountain in Glen Ellen and blazed a trail as leaders in Biodynamic, sustainable, and organic winemaking at their eponymous estate.

In 1986, Jamie's father, Joe Benziger, founded Imagery, fueled by what she describes as his "larger-than-life personality" and a desire to create his own label. "Imagery was such a hidden gem. We didn't advertise—we piggybacked off Benziger. When people would go [there], [the team] would send them to Imagery for a tasting too, just five minutes away," Jamie says. When Joe retired in 2017, Jamie was well prepared to take over winemaking duties from her father, as she not only had valuable hands-on experience in various aspects of the family business but had also honed her skills during harvests and spent time in cellars and wine labs in California and New Zealand.

Today, Imagery is no longer a well-kept secret; its wines are available across the country in wine shops and grocery stores as well as through its wine club. "Coloring outside the lines and not sticking to traditional methods" is the essence of the Imagery style, explains Jamie, who was recognized as "Best Woman Winemaker" in the 2019 International Women's Wine Competition. "Our wines are bold, fruit-forward, luscious, and complete. They have a beginning, middle, and end. They are bursting with flavor and true to the varietal."

PHOTO COURTESY OF IMAGERY ESTATE WINERY

Blended with 5% Petit Verdot to add body, the **Imagery 2019 Pinot Noir (\$20)** is a perfect example of Jamie's bold winemaking style. She acknowledges that Pinot Noir purists might initially be taken aback by this unconventional blend and could even consider it "a Pinot crime," but "it's a risk that I took, and I'm glad I did." The winery's tasting notes describe the wine as "balanced and smooth, [with] layered notes of jammy strawberry, cherry, and boysenberry. The fruit flavors are enriched by well-integrated oak."

The **Imagery 2020 Sauvignon Blanc (\$17)** also breaks with tradition, this time through the addition of 5% Dry Muscat. Jamie describes it as a "go-to summer wine" that's "nice and refreshing, with great citrus notes and lots of complexity."

Members of Imagery's aforementioned wine club, meanwhile, can take a deep dive into unique varietals and single-vineyard wines at a preferred rate. Current selections include the winery's flagship expression, the **2018 Pallas Estate Red (\$65; \$52 for club members)**; a blend of estate-grown Malbec (27%), Cabernet Sauvignon (27%), Merlot (22%), Cabernet Franc (19%), and Petit Verdot (5%), it's described as having "distinct flavors of dark cherry, with nuances of cocoa and herbs."

The **2018 Tempranillo (\$45; \$36 for club members)**, meanwhile, is crafted with grapes from Imagery's Upper Ridge Vineyard on Pine Mountain,



Browsing the on-site art gallery.

which boasts some of the highest vineyards in northern California at elevations reaching 2,600 feet. A rich and full-bodied wine crafted for aging, it offers an intriguing medley of sweet dried cherry and tobacco spice.

True to its name, Imagery's commitment to treating winemaking as an art extends to its labels. For its estate wines, it commissions artists to create unique works; 500 pieces by over 300 artists have been commissioned so far, and around 60 are currently on display in Imagery's on-site gallery.

Painting a picture of Imagery's culture, Jamie partially credits the support of Glen Ellen's residents for the winery's success (most of the Benzigers live within the town's borders, and one local bar even has drinks named

after some family members). But even during tough times, Imagery moves forward with crafting unique and compelling wines; citing the resilience of her family and her team, Jamie says, "We've survived a couple of fires [and] the pandemic, and we'll make it through the drought."

Although she and her colleagues became quite savvy at hosting virtual tasting events over the past 18 months, Jamie was elated when California lifted social-distancing requirements earlier this year, allowing guests to return for in-person tours and tastings. "We love to entertain, throw parties, and have people come over and have fun," she says. Readers inclined to take her up on that offer can visit [imagerywinery.com](http://imagerywinery.com) for more information. *LM*

## Tasting Notes

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IMAGERY ESTATE WINERY



**Imagery 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, California (\$17)** Honeyed pears and sweet lime perfume the glass with subtle charm. The delicate flavor lineup of tangerine and vanilla cream is delightful, while the addition of dry Muscat shows itself in the midst of a floral arrangement of honeysuckle and gardenia. Crisp and clean. **91** —*Meridith May*



**Imagery 2019 Pinot Noir, California (\$20)** With earth and wild strawberry on the nose, this red contains 5% Petit Verdot for added color and body. Its forest-floor effect is lightened by fine acidity as savory notes of chestnut, nutmeg, and characteristic black cherry emerge. Aged four months in (20% new) French oak for outstanding texture and supple tannins. **92** —*M.M.*



# Everything Old World Is New Again

**HAMMEKEN CELLARS** CREATES SPANISH WINES FOR THE MODERN PALATE **by Paris Vasser**

The Hammeken Cellars team includes six classically trained winemakers.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HAMMEKEN CELLARS

**Both the scent** of orange peels and the breeze of the Mediterranean are captured inside a glass of Piquitos (“Little Kisses”) Moscato—making it a fitting ode to the Valencia region, which is known for its sprawling orange groves. It’s but one expression that pays homage to the wine regions of Spain in the portfolio of the Alicante-based Hammeken Cellars, led by founder, director of innovation,



**Director of winemaking Marcelo Morales, winemaker Patricia Lozano, and head of quality control Carlos Orgilés in the vineyards.**

and 25-year industry veteran Nicholas Hammeken. Hammeken Cellars is not your typical Spanish wine company in that it relies on long-held partnerships with top growers in over 20 regions to source its grapes as well as a team of six classically trained winemakers who are constantly on the move, overseeing vineyard and cellar facilities to choose the best fruit of the harvest and produce their wines on location.

Their eagle-eyed approach to sourcing is fully realized in Piquitos, which comprises 100% Muscatel from the Valle Valentino and Alto Turia

vineyards in Valencia to exemplify one of Hammeken Cellars’ core tenets: respecting the personality of the fruit. “What we wanted to do with this [wine] is show the fantastic floral and orange-blossom notes from these [sites],” says Hammeken, adding that it contains a little carbon dioxide for a refreshing fizz. “If you want to know how Muscatel should taste, Piquitos is a pretty good place to start.”

With over 30 wines for every occasion, the rest of Hammeken Cellars’ lineup likewise invites consumers to explore the diversity of Spain. The 2020 Gotas de Mar Albariño, for example, highlights the cool Atlantic terroir of Rías Baixas, while Tosalet (meaning “hill” in Catalan) offers Garnacha Blanca from the lesser-known northeastern region of Terra Alta as well as elegant Garnacha and Carignan from Priorat. And Radio Boka reflects the company’s knack for appealing to an emerging generation of wine drinkers with a classic Tempranillo packaged both in bottle and in a bestselling 3-liter bag-in-box designed to resemble a vintage radio.

Hammeken Cellars’ dedication to delivering quality wines for modern tastes at a range of price points stems from a deep appreciation of Spain’s viticultural history. “The sheer variety of wines the country now exports has allowed [it] to establish an identity well beyond Tempranillo and Rioja,” Hammeken says, singling out the “mind-blowingly good” rosés from eastern Spain and fresh, bright Albariños with acidity and sea salt from cooler climates in the northwest. His team is currently experimenting

with Monastrell; a recent tasting of the results showcased the progress they have made in elevating its typically bold and rustic profile. “You have a wine coming from a nearly desert climate in Yecla and Jumilla, yet it shows freshness and bright, accessible fruit,” he notes. “It was a very proud moment for our team.” **91**

## **Hammeken Cellars 2019 Piquitos Moscato, Valencia, Spain (\$12)**

At 11% ABV, this lighthearted white delivers fizzy notes of apricot and lime meringue. The sweetness is not cloying but clean as it makes its entry with mouth-watering notes of tangerine, honeysuckle, and peach blossom. **91**—*Meridith May*

## **Hammeken Cellars 2020 Gotas de Mar Albariño, Rías Baixas, Spain (\$22)**

Fruit from 15- to 25-year-old vines spends six months aging sur lie. A sea breeze of salted pear and white flowers accents this high-toned white that engages in a graceful, linear dance, with lychee and peach sweetening its underlying stony nature. **92**—*M.M.*

## **Hammeken Cellars 2019 Tosalet Garnacha Blanca, Terra Alta, Spain (\$29)**

Dry-farmed fruit from northeastern Spain partially ages in oak for four months to create this wine. Aromas of vanilla and wispy kiwi and lime are delicate on the nose. Flavors of apricot sorbet, wet stone, lemon blossom, and white tea combine within a gossamer mouthfeel. The thyme-citrus finish is lovely. **93**—*M.M.*



*A Peek Behind the*

# GATES

HEAVEN'S DOOR AND REDBREAST  
TEAM UP TO CREATE A LIMITED  
MASTER BLENDERS' EDITION

*by Eric Marsh*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEAVEN'S DOOR

In addition to being an iconic singer-songwriter, Bob Dylan is a Nobel laureate, *New York Times* bestselling author, visual artist, and co-founder of whiskey brand Heaven's Door.



# BOB DYLAN

isn't widely known for his acting, but he has appeared in a handful of feature films, including *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. He also wrote the soundtrack, which features "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," a classic track for its haunting simplicity. It's also the song after which the whiskey brand Heaven's Door, co-founded by Dylan in 2018, is named—but its spirits are anything but simple. In fact, "I Contain Multitudes,"

the name of the first song on his 39th studio album, *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, might be the more appropriate way to describe them—in particular the recently released Master Blenders' Edition produced in collaboration with legendary Irish distiller Redbreast.

Named for a line in a Walt Whitman poem, "I Contain Multitudes" references another renowned American poet, Edgar Allen Poe, and alludes to Irish poet Anthony Raftery, all of whom Dylan has clearly pulled inspiration from over the years. It seems both countries have similarly informed his view of whiskey, if founding an American whiskey brand that has gone on to forge a partnership with a reputable Irish distiller can be taken as a testament to his thoughts on their spirits. According to Heaven's Door co-founder and master blender Ryan Perry and Redbreast master blender Billy Leighton, Dylan joined them in tasting over a dozen blends before ultimately deciding on what would go into the Heaven's Door Master Blenders' Edition.

## THE WHISKEY

Due to the pandemic, those tastings couldn't be conducted in person, so "we had a monumental FedEx bill [from shipping] samples between the U.S. and Ireland," says Perry, who notes that they chose the ten-year aged version of Heaven's Door



Heaven's Door co-founder and master blender Ryan Perry.

Straight Bourbon for the Master Blenders' Edition because its maturity "best highlighted the richness" of the casks. "We sampled the finished ten-year bourbon quarterly until it hit one year in the Redbreast barrels, then tried it biweekly until we hit the sweet spot," he explains, adding that they didn't want to rush things: "Billy and I agreed [that] it was crucially important to make sure the straight bourbon had enough time in the . . . barrels to extract some of those key Redbreast [characteristics]."

Although Redbreast uses both

bourbon barrels and Sherry casks to age its 12-year-old Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey, the latter were used exclusively to finish the Master Blenders' Edition. "The casks are made [with] European oak; seasoned for two years with Oloroso Sherry in Jerez, Spain; then filled with new-make pot still distillate in Midleton Distillery in County Cork, [Ireland,] and left to mature for 12 years," says Leighton. Because European oak tends to be more open-grained than American oak, its flavor compounds are transferred more easily to the spirit it's housing. "There is a

combination of flavor contributors that transfer from the Redbreast casks to the Master Blenders' Edition," he notes. "From the wood itself, you get some deep nutty notes like walnut or bitter almond, [and] from the pot still distillate, some light herbal notes and peppery spice. From the Oloroso Sherry seasoning, [there's] lots of rich, ripe fruit; some citrus; and a touch of licorice."

Leighton hand-selected the barrels in County Cork and then shipped them to the U.S., where they were used in what was ultimately a 15-month vatting process. "The barrel finishing was done in Tennessee, where we got a nice hot summer and two above-average spring seasons, so the . . . extraction was above expectations," says Perry.

## THE PACKAGING

You can add the intricate artwork that appears on Heaven's Door's bottles to the list of Dylan's creative undertakings. In addition to acting, he also paints and sculpts, and the gates on the brand's packaging are depictions of iron gates he created at his metalworking shop, Black Buffalo Ironworks, out

of objects collected from farms and scrapyards across the U.S.—everything from kitchen implements to chains and wheels. Perched atop the gate on the Master Blenders' Edition bottle is Redbreast's iconic robin.

Though Heaven's Door is still a young brand, it's growing fast, seeing a 69% increase in volume between May 2020 and May 2021. And its core lineup of Straight Bourbon, Double Barrel Whiskey, and Straight Rye boasts a likewise growing stack of accolades. The Master Blenders' Edition is following suit: Released in spring, it has already taken home a double gold medal from the 2021 San Francisco World Spirits Competition. The expression will be made available as a limited release in the U.K. and Ireland in September.

As for future enterprises of a similar nature, Perry says that he and the Heaven's Door team are in the discussion stage with potential partners but that the collaboration with Redbreast "is going to be a tough act to follow across the board. . . . Maybe there will be a round two someday." His only lament: "I wish we had more bottles to share." *LD*



### Heaven's Door Redbreast Master Blenders' Edition Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$100)

Aged for ten years and finished in Redbreast casks, this 100-proof whiskey emits a rapturous perfume of maple and oatmeal with dried cherry and dark chocolate. The dark cherries are mirrored on the palate, where they're encompassed by cedar spiked with black pepper, cumin, and walnut. The intensity of apricot tart, honeyed tangerine, and a copper-penny effect puts us on Cloud Nine. Showing perfect pitch, this chorus of flavors finishes with a coda of cassis, orange peel, and licorice.

**97** —Meridith May

PHOTO COURTESY OF REDBREAST



Redbreast master blender Billy Leighton.



# Fellow Feeling

U.S. BARTENDER OF THE YEAR **ADAM FOURNIER** ON BUILDING A BRIGHTER, GREENER, BETTER INDUSTRY

by Ruth Tobias

PHOTOS: MATIJA BLAZIC/CAMINO INDUSTRIES



There aren't many bright spots in the big, bleak picture of the hospitality industry these days. But Adam Fournier is one of them. Named 2021 U.S. Bartender of the Year at the Diageo-sponsored United States Bartenders' Guild Presents World Class competition in April, he signed on shortly thereafter as bar director at Fellow in Los Angeles, joining a crackerjack team whose collective resume includes The French Laundry, The Restaurant at Meadowood, Eleven Madison Park, Maude, and the NoMad Los Angeles.

Fournier, for his part, arrived in L.A. about 12 years ago as a classically trained actor—"which is why I'm a bartender now," he jokes—and has since worked everywhere "from dive bars to high-end hotels," landing at Faith & Flower, The Chestnut Club, and Nueva as well as the NoMad along the way. It's this diversity of experience that colors his approach to both cocktails and customers at Fellow.

"When I started, [the rule of bartending] was, you pour stuff into a glass

until it's the right color," he says, this time only half-kidding. But the burgeoning craft beverage movement soon inspired him to educate himself. Hired at the now-closed beer bar Steingarten, he recalls, "I was like, 'OK, I need to know all this: What is a gosse? Why does this bourbon cost \$20 and that one \$12?'" Two months later they gave this 26-year-old kid the keys to the place." The business has changed a lot since then—so while "our primary philosophy is always that flavor is king," as Fournier puts it, a whole host of interrelated concerns factor into the development of his cocktail program.

A drink as seemingly simple as the Bilbao serves to illustrate the point. Closed during much of the pandemic, Fellow reopened before capacity restrictions were lifted in June, so Fournier sought to streamline operations accordingly, building the list around twists on classics that were "flavorful and recognizable but that [guests] wouldn't make at home." The Bilbao represents "a cross between a traditional and a dirty Martini," he

explains: "Tanqueray N°TEN already has a fruity quality to it, so an olive oil wash gives it a little weight and viscosity," while infusing the vermouth with rosemary and lemon lends "an herbal quality. It's like drinking liquid tapas." The olive garnish is stuffed with lemon peel, which brings Fournier to another section of the modern bartender's playbook, namely reducing waste—for instance by repurposing spent citrus in stocks and cordials. And the fact that the Bilbao contains only two ingredients fulfills a third focus of most programs today: speed.

Yet if guests "don't want to wait 15 minutes for a cocktail anymore," they still expect a show, which is where Fournier's dramatic training comes in. "Rehearsal is all of the prep work behind the scenes, but when you [present a drink,] you give a little extra theater," he explains, be it the addition of liquid nitrogen or of a strawberry daiquiri-flavored ice cube.

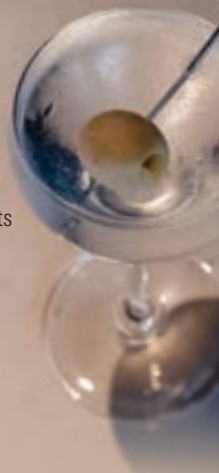
Finally—and as such forethought suggests—"a big conversation for us is mindful drinking," says Fournier, so Fellow also offers nonalcoholic cocktails. After all, making room for everyone at the bar is the future of the industry, in his view. "I think of this as a very interesting inflection point, almost like Prohibition was," he muses. "So many people are leaving, and so many are coming in to fill the void; it's important to give them a voice and a seat at the table and find a way forward." **LT**

## BILBAO

► 2½ oz. olive oil-washed Tanqueray N°TEN Gin

► ¾ oz. rosemary- and lemon-infused dry vermouth

Combine ingredients in a mixing glass. Stir with ice. Strain into a stemmed cocktail glass and garnish with a lemon rind-stuffed olive.



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# LIQUID SCIENCE

PHOTOS: JACQUELINE HANNA



At cocktail bar Alias in Phoenix, AZ, Richie Moe serves his Mojito on an LED light pad.

**RICHIE MOE** EMBARKS ON A NEW CHAPTER OF INNOVATION AT CHARACTER AND ALIAS IN PHOENIX, AZ **by Christina Barrueta**

**R**ichie Moe, co-owner of Character Distinctive Dining and cocktail bar Alias in Phoenix, Arizona, once had his sights set on being a Hollywood pyrotechnics engineer before one major obstacle dissuaded him: the years of required studies in chemistry. Now he's lighting up the local beverage scene instead with his ingenious cocktails. "Chemistry got a lot more interesting when booze was involved," Moe says with a laugh.

The Jell-O shots at Alias are made in rotating flavors with clarified citrus and Tito's Vodka.



**A riff on a Bloody Mary, Alias' Italian Fog cocktail is topped with arugula crema and cucumber "dots" plus a sprinkling of black lava sea salt and Aleppo pepper.**

For his newest venture, Moe joined forces with his onetime employer, friend, and now partner, Peter Kasperski, a renowned wine expert and restaurateur. Time spent under Kasperski's tutelage at Cowboy Ciao and Kazimierz World Wine Bar served as a springboard for Moe's career, and in the ensuing years he founded or oversaw acclaimed cocktail programs at establishments such as Citizen Public House and Citizen R+D (where he was a partner), Binkley's Restaurant Group, and Square One Concepts. He also went on to earn prestigious awards, from a win at a Patrón Tequila competition in Scottsdale to the U.S. title at the Finlandia Vodka Cup in Finland.

Fast-forward to the opening of Character, whose kitchen is helmed by chef Justin "Red" Hauska, and Alias, the cocktail lounge hidden away behind the restaurant. At Alias, Moe rules a realm where a Bloody Mary becomes an Italian Fog topped with arugula crema and cucumber "dots," handmade absinthe candy is part of an innovative

take on the Sazerac, and liquid nitrogen transforms a Mojito served on an LED light pad.

We spoke with Moe to learn more about his inspirations, his approach to molecular mixology, and his ambitious plans for Alias.

#### **How did you get your start?**

Peter had worked for my dad and took me under his wing at Cowboy Ciao. I mean, how many kids were learning about Chateau Musar wines, Armagnac, and aquavit in 1997 in Arizona? Later, when Peter opened Kazimierz, I had full control as the bar manager with very loose reins. Another huge influence was Marko Karakasevic from Domaine Charbay, one of the coolest individuals in the world. He and Peter knew each other and he would do these cool frozen drinks and use ingredients like weird juices and vodka infusions.

#### **Where do you get your inspiration?**

Absolutely everywhere. Peter taught me to always be conscious of my surroundings—sights, smells, and flavors. Ideas come to me all the time. If I think of something in the middle of the night, sometimes I can't sleep. I have to get it out of my system and drive to work, even if it's just to get a start and see what the next steps in my weirdo vision are going to be.

#### **Some of your cocktails are chef-inspired.**

Chef Red is so talented. One day a buddy said, "This tomato sauce is so good, I want to drink it." So I turned it into our Bloody Mary. Sometimes it's just as simple as that. Another example is Chef's octopus dish with slow-roasted pineapple that he makes with Sriracha, clove, and cinnamon. He gave me the rendered pineapple juice and we turned it into our Oaxacan Fire House with Mezcal Naran.

#### **What is your R&D process like?**

Balance is so important. We're measur-

ing in grams and using test tubes to balance acid and sugar. I have a setup with ascorbic acid, tartaric acid, citric acid, lemon juice, and lemon crystals, along with cane sugar, simple syrup, demerara, muscovado, and agave. For example, I know I'm not going to like a dark, raisin-y muscovado sugar with a bright, vibrant coconut-blueberry foam. There's a lot of deductive reasoning that goes into it first.

#### **Talk about your Jell-O shots.**

Years ago I made three-layer tequila Jell-O shots served in hollowed-out eggs. The bottom layer was tomato and watermelon, the middle layer was sugar and citric acid, and the third was lime Jell-O and lime. I wondered if I could get the middle layer clarified enough to make clear Jell-O shots, and then I started injecting flavor and color. I did 2,000 of those for Arizona Cocktail Week one year and they became really popular. At Alias, they're made with clarified citrus and Tito's Vodka [in] rotating flavors like pink lemonade and watermelon.

#### **But there's a method to your molecular madness.**

It has to have an application. As showy as the liquid nitrogen in our Shattered Mojito is, it serves a purpose. Flash-freezing the mint pushes all the essential oils out and intensifies the flavor. I've done a lot of trial and error with liquid nitrogen and use it quite a bit. "Molecular" is a very general term—pretty much, if you're using any sort of manipulation or science, it's molecular.

#### **What's next for Alias?**

We have six seats at the bar, and I've always wanted to do an omakase-style tasting menu for cocktail dining. I'm planning a menu called Sounds with sound-wave manipulations. I've already been experimenting with frozen olive juice; as it defrosts, I set up a subwoofer outside and the vibrations make the oil rise to the top and the sediment drop to the bottom. And I'm working on activated ingredients that I can magnetize to move around in a cocktail glass for a future dinner. **LT**

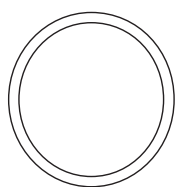


*Pursuit of the*

# Purists

JOINING FORCES FOR A SPECIAL COLLABORATION, **LA ADELITA TEQUILA** AND **CALIFORNIA CAVIAR COMPANY** HAVE MADE MAGIC HAPPEN

by Amanda M. Faison



ftentimes, when you're on one trajectory, you encounter others who are tracing a similar arc. That was the case for Chris Radomski of La Adelita Tequila and Deborah Keane of the Sausalito-based California Caviar Company. Both are relentless in their quest for purity—be it in the distillation of Blue Weber agave or the farming of sturgeon for roe—and that's where their journeys intersect.

Radomski comes from a fine wine background; as the co-founder of a luxury Napa brand, he was steeped in “white-glove, amazing experiences,” he says. So when he began exploring the prospects for developing an estate tequila brand, he already knew what he was looking for: “Terroir is important, [as is access to] a boutique facility [that grows] its own plants,” he says. After much searching, he found a farmer in the highlands of Jalisco, Mexico, who treated the production of agave as an art and a passion, not just a business. La Adelita Tequila (named for the fearless women who fought in the Mexican Revolution) represents the journey of honoring the

## Doing the La Adelita Bump.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LA ADELITA TEQUILA

agave with “proper farming, the best soil, and the correct time to harvest,” Radomski explains. “[We] pick piñas . . . for the right sugar content,” quickly debunking what has become all too common in the gangbusters tequila market: growing large plants for weight and harvesting them whether they’re ready or not. Radomski also eschews the use of color and additives in his spirits. “We don’t cut corners,” he asserts, to ensure that “you get the pure nuances of agave that’s grown, . . . processed, and aged properly.”

And because La Adelita is such a special product, Radomski knew it would provide an excellent opportunity for pairings. For help with that, he reached out to his friend Matt Zubrod, culinary director of The Little Nell hotel in Aspen, Colorado. “[Tequila] is the most wine-like spirit, so what about evolving the old-school combination of salt, lemon, and tequila?” Radomski says. “Let’s see if we can pair certain levels of caviar with tequila.”

“Chris did his homework,” says Keane. “He’s fastidious in his search for . . . quality, [and] he was looking for a like-minded partner. And that’s how we came together.” Keane, who was the first to bring sustainably farmed caviar to the marketplace, has become known as the Queen of Caviar for exclusively breeding pure-stock sturgeon. “My farmer that I brought the farm from was [among] the original fishermen who caught broodstock for [the University of California,] Davis. I have the papers for the pure line—it’s not from another farm, not from a farmed sister or a farmed brother. . . . It’s a pure strain, and that makes a difference.” Keane is just as meticulous as Radomski (maybe even more so, thanks to her background as a neonatal nurse). She controls the production process from the spawning of her fish to—ten years later—the harvesting and packing of the eggs. “Every single egg is taken off by hand,” she explains. “All the eggs from each fish go into clearly marked tins traced back to the fish, the farm, and the tank.”

Keane is all in on pairing her products: “Anytime I can push the envelope, I’m thrilled.” So when Radomski and Zubrod came calling, she welcomed the challenge, especially knowing that not all tequilas are created equal. Tasting La Adelita’s Blanco, Reposado,



**La Adelita recommends pairing its Blanco with California Caviar Company's White Sturgeon, its Reposado with Siberian Osetra, and its Cristalino with Kaluga.**

and Cristalino expressions, she found all three to be smooth and clean—perfect foils, in short, for her caviar. She’s quick to explain that imported caviar has likely been sitting in transit for a while, adopting aggressive flavor profiles that practically demand vodka or Champagne to clean up the muddiness. But the hallmark of a good pairing is balance and elegance, she asserts. “When [two things] come together and create a third flavor, that’s what you’re looking for.”

Zubrod has had fun playing in that realm. With the release of three private-label caviars from California Caviar Company, La Adelita has come up with a recommended pairing for each: White Sturgeon with the Blanco, Siberian Osetra with the Reposado, and Kaluga with the Cristalino, also

known as the La Adelita Bump. Perhaps not surprisingly, it’s the Bump that’s getting the most attention. “It’s a bump of Kaluga on the hand, followed by a shot of Cristalino,” Zubrod says. Lick the caviar, shoot the tequila, and experience a pop of minerality and tobacco married with white pepper and nectarine zest. “Tequila lovers want to taste the pepper and sweetness, and the Cristalino carries that,” Keane explains.

The pairings debuted in Miami at a private kick-off event in June, but the fun continues in Aspen at the Food & Wine Classic September 10–12, when Radomski, Keane, and Zubrod will host a La Adelita Bump party. Didn’t get an invite? The Bump is also on the menu at The Little Nell’s restaurants, Element 47 and Ajax Tavern. **LT**



HAVE TASTE BUDS,

# Will Travel

BACKBAR BRANDS THAT  
*PACK A PUNCH*  
ON THE PALATE

by Daniel de Oliveira

PHOTOS: KATIE RENSHAW



#### SOUR CHERRY BUCK

- 1½ oz. Luxardo Sour Cherry Gin
  - ½ oz. Licor 43
  - ½ oz. fresh lemon juice
  - ½ oz. simple syrup
- Shake ingredients and strain into a Collins glass. Top with Fever-Tree Ginger Beer and garnish with a mint bouquet.

**Though people have been making and drinking** them for hundreds of years, this may be the most exciting time for flavored spirits since the 1980s—or what some of us call the dark ages of the American cocktail. Back then, it seemed that producers were simply trying to one-up each other with the craziest concoction they could come up with, but now, they're focusing on the most important factors: quality and good taste.

As a young mixologist, I was taught that flavored spirits were bad. Why would you use peach-flavored whiskey when you could use a real peach? But I later discovered that the reasons were obvious: seasonality, accessibility, and the hardest thing to nail down in any bar—consistency. Meanwhile, the category has come a long way since ABSOLUT Peppar was launched in 1986. Sure, we've seen vodka artificially flavored with everything from Fruit Loops to glazed doughnuts, but we have also seen a massive growth in products containing real ingredients. And we've seen a surge in other flavored spirits as well, including whiskey, tequila, and, most recently, gin.

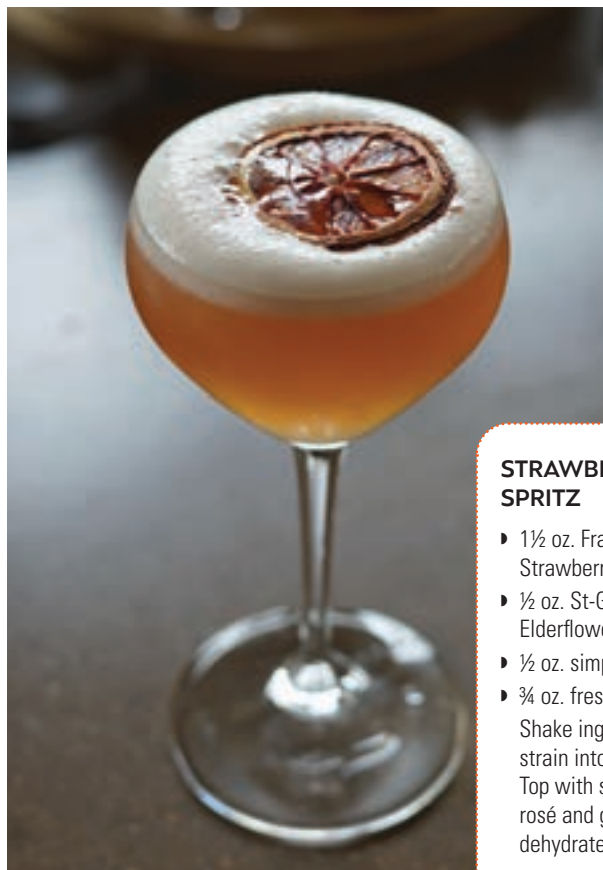
More and more, consumers want to know what's in the alcohol they're drinking as well as the food they're eating. Austin-based company Frankly launched in 2018 with a simple mission—to create something real. Using organic ingredients and no refined sugars, it's the first vodka brand to not only list its contents on the bottle but also include a nutritional facts label.

Then there's 21 Seeds Tequila. Founder Kat Hantas started by making infusions in her kitchen with the fresh ingredients she had on hand: cucumbers, jalapeños, grapefruits, and Valencia oranges, to name a few. She wanted what a lot of people want—a no-fuss drink with a fresh profile. After taking her creations to dinner parties, her friends began asking her to produce bottles for them, and the rest is history: Hantas teamed up with her sister Nicole Emanuel and friend Sarika Singh to launch the brand.

And as for gin, though you might call it the original flavored vodka, it's exciting to see the category evolve—even if it seems that everyone decided to start with a strawberry expression. (Don't get me wrong, I love strawberry gin, but let's see some variety!) An exception to that rule is Luxardo. The company took its proprietary gin and added Marasca cherry juice to yield its new Sour Cherry expression. The result is a tart, slightly bitter yet balanced juniper spirit destined for cocktail making. It works just as well in a Gimlet as it does in a Martinez.

No matter how you look at it, flavored spirits are here to stay—and I, for one, am eager for what's to come. Here are three recipes incorporating some of my favorites. 🍹

*Daniel de Oliveira is a mixologist at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits.*



#### STRAWBERRY SPRITZ

- 1½ oz. Frankly Organic Strawberry Vodka
  - ½ oz. St-Germain Elderflower Liqueur
  - ½ oz. simple syrup
  - ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
- Shake ingredients and strain into a coupe. Top with sparkling rosé and garnish with dehydrated citrus.

#### SPICY CUCUMBER MARGARITA

- 1½ oz. 21 Seeds Cucumber Jalapeño Tequila
  - ½ oz. Anchos Reyes Verde
  - ½ oz. fresh lime juice
  - ½ oz. agave nectar
  - 3 pineapple chunks
- Muddle the pineapple and add it with the other ingredients to a rocks glass. Fine-strain over a large ice cube and rim with Tajín.





# THE BRIGHTEST DARK: RHUM BARBANCOURT

Established in 1862 by Dupré Barbancourt, a French immigrant from Cognac, Rhum Barbancourt is an institution in Haiti, where it makes the country's oldest and most beloved rhums. Today, it also has a significant following stateside, with its dark expressions shining brightest: Available nationwide, Rhum Barbancourt represents roughly 20% of the dark rum sold in Florida and 5% of the category's sales in the U.S., according to estimates by its import company, Crillon Importers.

It's likely that Rhum Barbancourt's popularity and worldwide recognition are due partly to the fact that its rum-agricole base experiences *élevage* akin to that of Cognac. Most commonly produced in the Caribbean, rum agricole is defined as a style of rum distilled from fresh sugarcane juice as opposed to molasses. Those who prefer rum agricole argue that it offers higher levels of aromatics and complexity and can even be a better representative of *terroir*.

Barbancourt buys around 40,000 tons of the sugarcane cultivar *Saccharum officinarum* from roughly 3,000 farmers annually in addition to farming its own plants. These modest organic farms don't use insecticides, resulting in lower yields and sugarcane that imparts layers of intense flavors into the finished rhums.

After the juice ferments for three days to about 7% ABV using a 150-year-old proprietary yeast strain that optimizes the fruit-driven flavor profile, it undergoes double distillation—a practice used in Cognac—with the second taking place in a copper still, resulting in a smooth, light-bodied rum.

The similarities to Cognac continue with Barbancourt's oak regimen: The producer imports oak staves from the Limousin forest, 80 miles east of Cognac, and its team assembles the 200-liter casks by hand at the distillery. This coveted, slow-growing oak is said to impart a more distinct wood character that further contributes to the rum's refinement.

## **Rhum Barbancourt 8-Year-Old Réserve Spéciale, Haiti (\$28)**

Made with 100% sugarcane, this 86-proof rum agricole features a superb perfume of honeyed wheat and ripe peach as well as flavors of cinnamon-spiced baked apple that bathe the mouth. The convergence of chamomile, white pepper, and fig is like a warm summer sunset on the palate. **94**

—Meridith May

CRILLON IMPORTERS



Barbancourt CEO Delphine Nathalie Gardère represents the fifth generation of her family at the helm of the distillery. She's the second woman to run the business after Nathalie Gardère, founder Dupré Barbancourt's wife, who inherited the company after his death in 1907.

That history, in combination with its approach to production, makes Rhum Barbancourt's trio of dark rhums sweeter than Haitian sugarcane, as does its accessible pricing. Its 5 Star rum, aged eight years, has an SRP of \$24–\$30, depending on the state, while its 15-Year-Old Estate Reserve retails at \$50 or less and its four-year-aged 3 Star is as little as \$22.

# A TASTE OF OPULENCE: GRAND MARNIER



You're surely already familiar with Grand Marnier Cordon Rouge: In a Cognac still-shaped bottle adorned with a red ribbon and a wax stamp, the orange liqueur has been a backbar staple as long as any of us have been old enough to drink. The French brand was founded by Louis-Alexandre Marnier Lapostolle in 1880, and the recipe—a blend of refined Cognacs sourced from premium crus and melded with a base liqueur derived from orange zest—has stayed the same since its creation.

What makes its legacy so lasting? According to Alejandra Peña, senior category marketing director, European Icons at Campari Group, “Grand Marnier produces powerful, complex aromas and flavors that have remained timeless for more than a century. The refined nature of Cognac gives the liquid its distinctive flavor, while the intriguing essence of green *Citrus bigaradia*

oranges imparts a unique bitter flavor and alluring aromas.”

Unlike many other fruit liqueurs, orange liqueurs are typically made from the peel, Peña says. What's more, “while there are two primary orange varieties used in orange liqueurs—bitter and sweet—Grand Marnier uses only bitter oranges, which is one of the keys to its signature flavor.” In addition to the bright and bitter components that the citrusy distillate contributes, Cognac-derived notes of vanilla, hazelnut, and toffee make for a dynamic yet delicate spirit.

Grand Marnier drinks well in a snifter or on the rocks, but it also takes cocktails to another level. For instance,

it enhances Margaritas with a subtler character than that of triple sec, which can be cloying and chemical-tasting. And it works great in a play on the lemony French 75: When used in place of straight Cognac, its bitter and acidic flavor profile brings the cocktail to

## GRAND 75

- 1½ oz. Grand Marnier Cordon Rouge
- ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
- 1 barspoon simple syrup
- 2 oz. dry Champagne

Combine the Grand Marnier Cordon Rouge, simple syrup, and lemon juice in a shaker tin; add ice and shake. Fine strain into a chilled flute or coupe, top with the Champagne, and garnish with an orange twist.

heights so lofty that the brand named the drink Grand 75.

This winter, as part of its holiday marketing program, Grand Marnier will invite shoppers to “give Grand” by offering value-added packaging featuring glass flutes perfect for the Grand 75. But you don't have to wait for the promotion to live opulently, of course—give the cocktail a whirl today (see recipe above).



## THE BEST KEPT SECRET IN BEVERAGES:

# CREAMY CREATION

BY KELLY MAGYARICS

Since 1979, Creamy Creation has been at the forefront of all things emulsified, from cream liqueurs to iced coffees to nutritional beverages and everything in between. Yet you won't find mention of the company on a label: Using state-of-the-art technology, food science, and its team's keen knowledge of current and future market trends, Creamy Creation's pair of production facilities in Rijkevoort, the Netherlands, and Batavia, New York, creates customized, high-quality

products for *other* brands.

One of its latest is a direct response to hard seltzer's enduring status as the must-have summer sipper. A creamy, foamy, luxurious treat that also happens to be light, thirst-quenching, and low in alcohol, the Hard Shakes concept straddles the line between RTD milkshakes and fizzy soda-based drinks. "People still like to treat themselves but don't want to feel guilty. In today's world, technology is so advanced that you have a solution for that," explains

global innovation manager Jeroen Huiskes, who points out that Hard Shakes fills a void that the hard seltzer category was lacking: so-called "brown flavors" like chocolate and coffee.

The nostalgia factor of Hard Shakes also appeals to millennials thirsting for adult versions of their favorite childhood beverages, so the sky's the limit when it comes to customization of the product (just as it is for the rest of the company's portfolio). Not only can Hard Shakes be made with spirits, wine, or malt depending on client preference, but the ABV level can be raised or lowered from the standard 4%, while the amount of cream can be increased for added indulgence or decreased to heighten refreshment. Infusing the drinks with nitrogen and



Jeroen Huiskes is global innovation manager of Creamy Creation.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CREAMY CREATION



adding just enough cream lends them a smooth mouthfeel not unlike cold brew coffee or nitro stout, yet they clock in at a surprisingly low 65–80 calories per 200-milliliter can. To get its customers’ creative juices flowing, Creamy Creation offers six sample flavors designed for year-round sipping: Dutch Silk, Chai Latte, Chocolate Milk, Pineapple Ginger, Passionfruit, and Dalgona Espresso Martini, the latter being an homage to the pandemic-era viral trend of whipped coffee.

Another new offering is inspired by an increasingly popular option in the supermarket dairy section. “Within plant-based milk alternatives, oat is the fastest growing and most popular, with a nice, smooth, and indulgent flavor and body,” Huiskes says. Taste and consumer demand were the most important factors in the development of Creamy Creation’s Oats Liqueur, closely followed by sustainability: It’s made with real oats, which generally require fewer resources to produce than other ingredients in the category. The gluten-free beverage is thus a considerate option for vegetarians, vegans, and anyone who is lactose-intolerant or adhering to a dairy-free diet. The company is presenting to customers four initial sample flavors: Classic Oats, Coffee Caramel Fudge, Orange Blossom, and Cinnamon Sugar Cookie.

Continuing its innovation streak, Creamy Creation recently launched Vegan Creamy Liqueur. This two-

pronged product line solves the biggest challenge most plant-based beverage producers face, according to Huiskes, which is to impart a taste profile that will appeal to flexitarians accustomed to the flavor of cream while not being off-putting to those who eschew dairy. “We made it really as smooth and indulgent as a real cream liqueur,” he says. “We are very proud of it and it’s

Though these liqueurs can easily be enjoyed straight, chilled, or on the rocks, the Mixable versions can also be incorporated into cocktails, including those featuring citrus juice, thanks to a production method that prevents curdling—a distinction that sets them apart from other manufacturers in the industry. Communication manager Georgia Dina Konstantopoulos says



been well received by our customers.” Four sample flavors comprise the Mixable line: Pink Grapefruit Gin & Rosemary, Piña Colada, Passionfruit Lime & Rum, and Smokey Pineapple Tequila Cream—all of which can be blended seamlessly with coffee, juice, or even tonic; the soy-free line, meanwhile, consists of Dutch Silk, Brandy Alexander, Coffee and Tequila Cinnamon, and Blood Orange.

that consumers, especially millennials, have responded enthusiastically, as they’re continuing to seek versatile cocktail ingredients for home use.

As for the future of the creamy beverage space, Huiskes and his colleagues continue to monitor the latest trends through the lens of versatility, offering a world of intriguing ingredients and crossover options that go well beyond the expected.



FLAVOR THAT CAN'T BE CONTAINED:

# DASHFIRE

Founded in 2013 by Lee and Dawn Egbert, Dashfire has grown from its beloved original product, Vintage Orange Bitter—Minnesota's first and only barrel-aged bitters—to a line of 21 different bitter varieties along with RTD cocktails and hard coffees. The well-traveled Lee, who has lived in China and visited other parts of Asia as well as South America and Europe, has leveraged his worldly knowledge of flavors in crafting Dashfire's portfolio, meticulously selecting each ingredient while striving first and foremost for balance.

For instance, Lee and the Dashfire team sampled 24 different types of Sichuan peppercorns before finally deciding on a supplier that met their high standards. Using only fresh botanicals, they also incorporate a high ratio of plant-derived components to alcohol, which results in a more intensely flavored product.

The brand's catchphrase, "Find your fire," not only conveys its passionate approach to crafting its products but also encourages mixologists to create their cocktails with the same sense of excitement. In fact, the slang term "dash-fire," which was used in the 19th century to convey vigor, inspired its name.

During the first half of 2021, the small family-owned company has made significant headway in expanding its distribution. Currently available in Alaska, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Indiana, New York, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin as well as in Washington, D.C., it's looking to the future with its signature fervor.

## COMBUSTION IN A CAN

For its innovative lineup of six RTD cocktails, Dashfire takes advantage of its extensive library of bitters and extracts by combining them with super-premium and natural ingredients to create a Bourbon Old Fashioned, Fig and Cascara Manhattan, Chai White Russian, Lemon and Lavender Martini, Elderflower Martinez, and Pomegranate El Presidente. Available in both 100-milliliter cans and 750-milliliter bottles, they stand out in the canned crowd by packing a punch, with all but the Chai White Russian (17% ABV) clocking in at 38% ABV.

Each is crafted with care. The Bourbon Old Fashioned blends bourbon whiskey with cherry juice, a mix of five Dashfire bitters, and cane sugar, while the Fig and Cascara Manhattan melds rye whiskey with Cream Sherry and a proprietary botanical blend of Black Mission fig, cherry, vanilla, rhubarb root, and cascara, or dried coffee-cherry skin. The Chai White Russian and the Lemon and Lavender Martini use vodka as their base, adding Wisconsin cream, Dashfire Chai Bitters, and cane sugar to the former and



Sherry, Dashfire Lemon Bitters, and Dashfire Lavender Bitters to the latter. Finally, the Elderflower Martinez is a blend of Dashfire's proprietary gin, Cream Sherry, elderflower liqueur, and Dashfire Grapefruit Bitters, and the Pomegranate El Presidente features white rum, dry vermouth, Curaçao, and housemade grenadine.

**Dashfire White Russian Cocktail, USA** All six Dashfire RTDs warrant high scores for creativity as well as taste. This one is a well-made vodka-based expression with an authentic, creamy character defined by mocha, ginger, and espresso. The chai bitters make it unique. **92** —M.M.

**Dashfire El Presidente Cocktail, USA** Using rum as its base, this bold drink partners pomegranate with a peppered middle. Notes of tropical fruit and burnt orange peel add more oomph. **90** —M.M.

**Dashfire Old Fashioned Cocktail, USA** Cheery and bright notes of cherry are spiced up by a blend of Dashfire bitters. The whiskey shines through as tangerine and vanilla bring life to this super sipper. **93** —M.M.

**Dashfire Martini Cocktail, USA** Vodka and Sherry combine with lemon and lavender bitters for a tremendous and highly original flavor profile. Lemon zest gives the savory and perky palate a spiced-floral bath. **92** —M.M.

**Dashfire Martinez Cocktail, USA** This riff on a classic gin cocktail sees the addition of Cream Sherry, grapefruit bitters, and elderflower, which contribute incredible dimension. We'll take another, please! **93** —M.M.

**Dashfire Manhattan Cocktail, USA** Dried fruit, chocolate, and walnut are backdrops to this cheeky rye whiskey cocktail. Honeyed fig and cherry linger on the finish. **91** —M.M.

## THE HOTTEST (COLD) COFFEE

Created in partnership with Five Watt Coffee in Minneapolis, Café Dashfire comprises Bourbon Cold Brew, Rum Café Mocha, and Rum Golden Latte hard coffees in 200-milliliter cans. They separate themselves from the competition through the use of high-quality, locally sourced ingredients as well as comparatively high levels of alcohol and caffeine at 14% ABV and 11–83 milligrams per serving, respectively.

To make the Bourbon Cold Brew, the roasted coffee rests for 14 days to maximize flavor before it's blended with bourbon and a hint of sugar. For the Rum Café Mocha, cacao, chicory, vanilla, and currants are macerated together and then blended with espresso, rum, and Wisconsin cream. And in the Rum Golden Latte, espresso and rum see the addition of turmeric, nutmeg, and ginger.



**Café Dashfire Rum Golden Latte, USA** A botanical garden of flavors merges with rum and espresso from Minneapolis' Five Watt Coffee in this delicious, milky concoction with nutmeg and ginger. **92** —M.M.



**Café Dashfire Rum Café Mocha, USA** Chocolate lovers unite! Cacao, chicory, and Wisconsin cream melt in the mouth as notes of dried fruit make a memorable appearance on the finish. **93** —M.M.



**Café Dashfire Bourbon Cold Brew Coffee, USA** The deepest and boldest of coffee flavors sees a hint of bourbon and is sweetened to perfection. Notes of walnut, cedar, and vanilla add even more complexity. **92** —M.M.

*Editor's note: These scores reflect the RTD category and should not be compared to scores for wines and spirits.*





A still from Disaronno International USA's "The Endless Dolce Vita" campaign, which launched in 2020. A new campaign focused on Disaronno Velvet (inset), "The New Dolce Vita," followed this summer.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DISARONNO INTERNATIONAL USA

## ENDLESSLY EVOLVING: DISARONNO INTERNATIONAL

If any brand can incorporate the word “endless” into a media campaign, it’s Disaronno. Last year, it made a massive investment in the launch of “The Endless Dolce Vita,” a commercial that brings a fun, elegant, and modern feel to the iconic **Disaronno Originale**, the bestselling Italian liqueur known for its fruity and nutty character that has remained sought after for centuries. And while its recipe has endured virtually untouched, its parent company’s portfolio has expanded in recent years to encompass

seven distinct brands, proving that Disaronno International is hardly averse to changing with the times to appeal to a fresh generation of new consumers—those considered to be the ambassadors of “The Endless Dolce Vita.”

Of course, the events of the past 18 months have demanded a malleable approach that places additional emphasis on the off-premise sector, driving the company to “launch new brands, line extensions, and commercial innovations through cross-promotional partnerships at retail” that have

helped drive growth, says Ignacio Llaneza, vice president of brand and trade marketing for Disaronno International USA. That includes the April 2020 debut of the innovative **Disaronno Velvet** cream liqueur (see more on page 81); bottled at 17% ABV and with an SRP of \$29, it boasts a floral, almond-driven character with nuances of chocolate and vanilla, all while providing the quintessential amaretto flavor profile of Disaronno. Earlier this year, Disaronno Velvet received a gold medal at the 2021 San Francisco World Spirits Competition (SFWSC)

**Tia Maria Matcha Cream Liqueur**, which features Japanese matcha tea extract, debuted earlier this year and aims to capitalize on the rising popularity of matcha beverages among young consumers.



**Tia Maria Cold Brew Coffee Liqueur's** new label is designed to highlight the cold-brew method used to blend 100% Arabica coffee beans and Madagascar vanilla.



and was featured in a cross promotion, Velvet Fire, with Jack Daniel's Tennessee Fire; another promotion for the Velvet White Russian with Russian Standard Vodka will follow in September.

Portfolio fellow **Tia Maria Cold Brew Coffee Liqueur (\$28)**, which relaunched with refreshed

packaging earlier this year alongside the new RTD **Tia Maria Iced Coffee Frappè (\$2.79/200-milliliter can or \$11/four-pack)**, also earned a gold at SFWSC, as did **Tia Maria Matcha Cream Liqueur (\$29)** before it made its official debut this summer. With an ABV of 26.5%, the Cold Brew Coffee Liqueur melds 100% Arabica coffee beans and Madagascar vanilla, striking a balance between subtle sweetness and refreshing acidity while exuding hints of chocolate and pipe tobacco on the nose. Though its character is complex, employing it as a staple ingredient certainly is not, as it mixes effortlessly with easy-to-make cocktails like the Espresso Martini, White Russian, and Irish Coffee.

"The coffee liqueur category is a robust but very concentrated market in the U.S.," says Llaneza. "Tia Maria has been around for a long time, but with very small market share. We have a huge opportunity to leverage the quality of the product and the story behind it . . . [so] our goal is to revitalize

the brand and gain significant ground . . . in the U.S., particularly with innovation items" like the Iced Coffee Frappè. Employing the same technology used for nitro beverages, the canned blend of Tia Maria and coffee with a hint of milk morphs into a velvety foam once opened, making it smoother and lighter than its competitors. Finally, Llaneza says they plan to "reach new consumers and create exciting buzz for the [Tia Maria] brand" with the Matcha Cream Liqueur by capitalizing on the growing popularity of matcha beverages among young consumers; the new release is slightly caffeinated due to the inclusion of natural Japanese matcha tea extract and has a floral and herbal palate with a tinge of bitterness.

That brings us back to the aforementioned global campaign, "Disaronno: The Endless Dolce Vita," which similarly set out to capture the attention of young drinkers when it debuted in fall 2020 on social media channels and streaming platforms. Set in Rome, the black-and-white commercial showcased Disaronno Originale as an enduring symbol of Italian sophistication that "embodies a

modern and aspirational way to enjoy life, as we all know Italians do so well," Llaneza says. "The lifestyle promoted by 'The Endless Dolce Vita' [helped] us revitalize and refocus the image of our brand to be relevant to younger generations of consumers in the U.S. Since its launch, we have seen great reception from consumers." That compelled the brand to invest in a follow-up campaign, "The New Dolce Vita," starring Disaronno Velvet: In its

final moments, the spot transforms from black and white to full color, blending timelessness with modern sensibility—not unlike the product it's showcasing.

"The New Dolce Vita" represents just a quarter of Disaronno International USA's \$10 million advertising investment for 2021. "That puts us in the top tier of industry suppliers in terms of media spend," Llaneza says. "For a company of our size, we are clearly punching above our weight and looking to drive aggressive market-share gains as we continue to innovate." Considering that it's building on the foundation of a 500-year-old product, it has a considerable head start.



**Disaronno Originale, Italy (\$27)** On the heels of intense aromas of marzipan and honeyed peach follows one of the silkiest mouthfeels imaginable, with a weighty caress of cocoa and almond on the palate that lingers until the next sip. 56 proof. **95** —*M.M.*





## LIGHTNING IN A CAN: OLE SMOKY

BY ALLYSON REEDY

There are stories to be told in the Appalachian Mountains, legends to unfold. Whether they're apocryphal or historical doesn't even matter anymore—it's their common denominator that sparks our interest, rooting them so strongly in their corner of the world. That denominator is moonshine, which virtually defines the region. The fiery, fable-making white whiskey still feels like a shared secret, even though Tennessee legalized its

production in 2010.

The first brand to legally distill and sell moonshine in the state was Ole Smoky, and it has been shaping the narrative behind the spirit ever since. Its 100-proof White Lightning' and 128-proof Blue Flame expressions, packaged in Mason jars, have carried the promise of wild adventure they contain far beyond the South to all 50 states and more than 20 countries around the world, as have such popular products

as the Blackberry and Apple Pie moonshines and whiskeys in flavors like Salty Caramel and Mango Habanero.

And thanks to Ole Smoky's ready-to-drink moonshine cocktails, it's now even easier for consumers to capture lightning in a bottle (almost literally). "As a company, we have a long history of constant innovation and constant flavor development, and the RTDs are no exception," says Will Ensign, Ole Smoky's vice president of marketing. "We looked at a number of different options, but ultimately we based them on our four bestselling cocktails at our distillery in Nashville. It's a great testing ground to see which flavors have the most appeal."

With feedback from the thousands of thirsty fans who came through their Nashville tasting room in 2019—the year they began developing the RTD line—the Ole Smoky team had a solid rationale for settling on Apple Pie Ginger, Blackberry Lemonade, Mountain

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OLE SMOKY

'Rita, and Mountain Mule. So they were more than ready for the COVID-induced home drinking trends of 2020. It was undoubtedly a bonus that, at 9% ABV, the 12-ounce cans are on the higher side of potency.

"As a moonshine company, we felt it was important to deliver a little more of a kick, so that's what you'll find," Ensign says. "We're the only brand that uses real Tennessee moonshine, and all of it comes from our small craft distilleries. We made a conscious decision to not be another hard seltzer—to deliver a true cocktail experience in a can. We feel we pulled that off."

They certainly have, separating themselves from the bigger names on the market by sticking to the spirit they know best rather than vodka or malt alcohol. In short, they view their RTDs as just another way for fans to enjoy their moonshines as well as an opportunity to tap into a new cohort of drinkers who may

never have encountered the brand before. Capitalizing on the uniqueness of the product within, the cans are even designed to look like those iconic Mason jars. They're also vibrantly illustrated to reflect their

**"AS A COMPANY, WE HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF CONSTANT INNOVATION AND CONSTANT FLAVOR DEVELOPMENT, AND THE RTDS ARE NO EXCEPTION."**

—WILL ENSIGN, OLE SMOKY VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING

fruity flavors, with Ole Smoky's logo front and center.

Consumers have responded as positively as expected, eagerly buying into that southern Appalachian lore. Launching in Tennessee and Georgia smack-dab in the middle of the pandemic, the RTD line is currently in 23 states, with more markets to come. "The reception

from distributors and consumers has been tremendous," Ensign says. "We're really just trying to keep up with demand—to roll out to as many states as we're able while still delivering the highest

product quality and good customer service. It's been an all-hands-on-deck effort."

Though there's no timeline yet for making the cocktails available in all 50 states, the company will be evaluating its manufacturing capabilities for potential expansion in 2022. That may include the introduction of new expressions. "It's worked out well so far, but we're

always looking out for what's next," Ensign explains. "As we look to next year, we have a list of 20 different flavors we're considering. We'll do tastings and fine-tune those as we go, always looking at Nashville as inspiration. The timing is still up in the air, but we'd love to have a new flavor in the market by spring."





THE NOSE KNOWS:

## BOTANIKA ANGELICA

When the Chopin Distillery in tiny Krzesk, Poland, is making its small-batch amaro, the whole village knows it: As they're blended with Chopin Rye Vodka, all 16 of the herbs and spices used in the recipe perfume the air, betraying the not-so-secret operation unfolding inside. And now their scent has wafted to the U.S., where the full line of Chopin Imports' Botanika Angelica artisanal liqueurs—not only Amaro but also Bitters, Lemon, Orange, and Elderflower—launched this summer.

"They're not new, but they're new to the U.S.," Chopin Imports COO Chuck Kane' says. "[The Amaro, Elderflower, and Lemon] have been around in Poland for more than 50 years. We've put a lot of time and effort into creating these flavor profiles." All five expressions are preservative- and artificial flavor-free; they're also so "amazingly good" that you can sip them on their own, according to Kane', though they're built for showcasing in cocktails as well. The delicate Elderflower, made with flowers picked by hand near the distillery and air-dried, has the lowest ABV at 25%, while the herbal Amaro and the Orange, made with citrus peels that macerate for nearly four months before they're blended with the rye vodka, have the highest, clocking in at 40% ABV. For tasting notes, see page 120. —Allyson Reedy



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHOPIN IMPORTS



OUTRIGHT INDIANA:

## WEST FORK WHISKEY CO.

Owned by three Indiana natives, the Indianapolis-based West Fork Whiskey Co. makes its spirits solely with locally sourced ingredients. From its rich 100 Proof Single Barrel expression, made sweeter by the corn that dominates its mash bill, to the Bourbon Peach Tea—an RTD created to satisfy consumers seeking a great whiskey cocktail in a canned format—West Fork Whiskey Co. offers something for everyone, even non-Hoosiers.

**Old Hamer Single Barrel Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$33)** The nose of this 100-proof spirit reflects the sweetness of the mash bill—99% corn, 1% malted barley—with scents of butterscotch and pekoe tea. As the bourbon warms in the mouth, notes of new saddle leather, pistachio, cigar leaf, and apricot combine for a pleasure ride. This young buck is aged for at least three years. **92** —M.M.

**Old Hamer Cask Strength Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$40)** A perfume of cocoa and peach meets flavors of peppered apricot and caramel that hinge on walnut astringency. The palate smooths out on the finish with a sweeter note. 119 proof. **91** —M.M.

**Cold Hamer Bourbon Peach Tea, USA (\$12)** This ready-to-drink sparkling tea delivers delicate peach notes that reveal a floral quality. 14 proof. **90** —M.M.

# Apéritifs, RTDs, and Liqueurs. Oh, My!

OUR LATEST **BACK TO  
{SPIRITS} SCHOOL** SESSION  
COVERED A TRIO OF TASTE  
SENSATIONS

by **Stefanie Schwalb**

In the post-pandemic world of spirits, a few tantalizing trends have emerged and continue to evolve based on demand from consumers who built up their home bars under lockdown. “The Pleasure Principle: Liqueurs, RTDs, and Apéritifs”—the latest installment of our educational webinar series Back to {Spirits} School in partnership with the Florida International University Bacardi Center of Excellence, co-sponsored by Lyre’s Spirit Co.—took a deep dive into three categories currently making their mark on the market. Moderated by *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht with the assistance of Bacardi Center director Brian Connors and adjunct lecturer Gabriel Urrutia, the panel featured six knowledgeable brand representatives who offered their insights.





## E. & J. GALLO WINERY, SPIRITS DIVISION

To can or not to can? It's a conundrum for some spirits companies in the era of RTDs, but for E. & J. Gallo Winery, the answer was obvious. According to senior director of marketing Kimberly Roberts, after developing High Noon vodka in 2017, Gallo tested three flavors in three markets, and they did remarkably well. "Around the same time, [however,] we saw trends on hard seltzer brands, especially Truly and White Claw," she said, and "we [also] learned that

the primary way consumers were drinking High Noon was mixing it with soda water." What's more, it seemed "they'd be willing to pay a little bit more to have an option that was vodka-based and made with real fruit juice. . . . It was at that point we decided to pivot the brand into the RTD canned format that's in the marketplace today."

Launching in the summer of 2019, High Noon Sun Sips also hit the right notes among increasingly health-conscious drinkers at just 100 calories per can, with no sugar added. Encompassing seven gluten-free flavors—Black Cherry, Grapefruit, Lime, Pineapple, Peach, Watermelon, and Mango—it's ably "meeting consumer needs," noted Roberts, "help[ing to] fulfill [demand] for something a little bit more sessionable that's lower in alcohol, unlike other canned cocktail offerings coming into the marketplace."

But that's not all Gallo has in store. In partnership with Steve Grasse of Quaker City Mercantile, the company has also developed a Dry Vermouth, Sweet Vermouth, and Gentian Amaro crafted with California wines, natural herbs, and botanicals under the brand name Lo-Fi. "We're finding

it's versatile and works in many different cocktails," said Roberts, "and because consumers were forced to learn to make cocktails at home due to COVID, the timing couldn't be better."

Three key differentiators boost Lo-Fi in the marketplace, she added. First, the brand contains no artificial colors or flavors. Second, it's wine-based, which aids placement in accounts that spirit-based amaros can't enter: "Those beer- and wine-only licenses are starting to build cocktail menus [around products] like Lo-Fi because it gives them another tool to [do so]," Roberts explained. And third, it's made in California, which consumers associate with a rich viticultural heritage. Meanwhile, the introduction to that market of the Lo-Fi Spritz, made with ginger amaro, sparkling wine, and soda water, brings the apéritif and RTD trends together in a single-serve can.



## LYRE'S SPIRIT CO.

When it comes to nonalcoholic spirits, Lyre's national marketing manager Kyle Billings said, it's all about options. "There's so much innovation and so many fun things happening," he noted. "We don't want to preclude anybody from having a good time—from drinking the drink they want the way they want to drink it." That sentiment was echoed by brand ambassador Tobias Schopf, who was so impressed by his first experience with the Lyre's product line that he joined the company. With "an incredible range that goes from an amaretto to a coffee liqueur to a triple sec," he explained, "we tried a very different approach: We tried to mimic the flavor of alcoholic beverages on the palate and nose while having no alcohol in the bottle."

The result, he added, is that "nobody is excluded," no matter the style or the proof of the cocktail they're looking for—ensuring that bartenders in turn stand "to make a lot of profit [with] nonalcoholic option[s]." In addition to apéritifs akin to vermouth and liqueurs like the aforementioned, Lyre's offers an array of products mimicking such classic spirits as rum, whiskey, and gin. "The lineup is pretty big, but one of our very proud variants is Apéritif Rosso," said Schopf. "This is a sweet vermouth, and there are a bunch of amazing cocktails you can create with it—the most popular ones are the Negroni, the Americano, and the Boulevardier." He also highlighted the Italian Orange, which is essentially the equivalent of Campari. "We created these variants because you can make a lot of cocktails, and that's





what bartenders are looking for," he added. "When they have someone sitting in front of them who asks for a low-ABV cocktail, bartenders have to change the recipe very quickly if they don't have real options—but we give them alternatives."

The company also recently launched a line extension of RTDs, including an Amalfi Spritz, which Schopf describes as the Lyre's version of Aperol; a G&T; and an alternative to Prosecco called Classico. As he introduced them during the session, Schopf showcased their carbonation level and detailed how well balanced they are. "The Amalfi Spritz is a home run. It's really refreshing," said Schopf. "It's all about getting a little bit of the sweetness, the orange peel and bitter notes. If you're not a bartender and you don't know how to make a Spritz at home—or you don't have all the ingredients—this is your [alternative to] take home, to the beach, [or to a] sporting event."

Schopf concluded by noting that "RTDs are booming, and now you can just pop the can, put it over ice, garnish it up a bit, and you have a cocktail that's literally ready to drink." For inspiration, you'll find plenty of recipes at [lyres.com](http://lyres.com), including riffs on an Old Fashioned, a Manhattan, a G&T, a Negroni, and more, plus products sold as sets to make at-home bartending a breeze.



## MOZART CHOCOLATE LIQUEURS

Everything is better with chocolate—including liqueurs, of course. In his sweet introduction to Mozart Chocolate Liqueurs, international sales director Holger Huegelsberger provided details on the luscious line of products that includes Cream Chocolate, White Chocolate, Dark Chocolate, Strawberry, Pumpkin Spice, and the recently released Coffee. Based in Salzburg, Austria—the birthplace of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart—the Mozart distillery is living up to its namesake's legacy by crafting wonderful compositions made from all-natural ingredients that are ideal to enjoy on their own or in a decadent cocktail. (For our reviews of two expressions, see page 85.)

In fact, Huegelsberger noted, the brand experienced sales growth of 40% in 2020 and 60% for the first half of this year: Due in part to the pandemic, "we found out people are more interested in what they drink. They are mixing at home, and in our case, they're even using our products for baking. We're seeing an incredible development." No doubt that's because "we combine the best of two worlds . . . chocolate and spirits," he added. "It's important to remember we're not a cream liqueur—all we're doing is creating a liquid chocolate experience. . . . Whatever flavor we do, the main base is always chocolate."

Founded in 1840 in Steinhoff, Germany, the company moved to Salzburg in 1954, and in 1979, its distillery team started to use their knowledge of spirits to produce their first chocolate liqueur. More than four decades later, Mozart is still going strong: It's available in 60 countries worldwide, with its biggest markets being the U.S., Japan, Russia, and, of course, Austria and Germany. And it continues to handcraft all its products, right down to the foil on every bottle. The maceration process can take up to four months; the blending phase remains a secret, even to Huegelsberger; and vacuum distillation is required because excessive temperatures burn the cocoa, making it bitter.

While Huegelsberger prefers to drink Mozart neat, he recommended trying the cocktail recipes on the brand's website because, he asserted, chocolate works with everything from herbs to fruit to spices like chili.







## CHOPIN IMPORTS

“U.S. consumers want real ingredients—they want to know what’s in their bottles,” said Bryan Tilbury, senior division vice president of Chopin Imports, “and that’s important to us.” Using no preservatives and no artificial flavors, Chopin’s distillery in Poland has long been accustomed to doing things the right way; in the current market, the company decided, the timing couldn’t be better to launch a new line of artisanal liqueurs called Botanika Angelica. “The idea is versatility, right? We think we’ve got some interesting things to offer,” he explained. “Whether it’s . . . on the rocks, with soda, or [in] a cocktail, we want to be a part of elevating [the consumer] experience.”

The Chopin distillery, which was founded in 1896, has been making vodkas, liqueurs, and other spirits for more than 100 years. Originally owned by the Polish government, it is now owned by CEO Tadeusz Dorda, who began importing the brand’s potato vodka to the U.S. in 1993. Chopin also makes a rye, which serves as the base for all five of Botanika Angelica’s flavored, small-batch, handmade expressions: Amaro, Bitters, Orange, Lemon, and Elderflower, which range in ABV from 25% to 40%. The herbs, spices, and fruit they contain macerate separately in large clay pots from two to seven months. After a meticulous blending process, all but the Orange and Lemon rest in 50-year-old Polish oak vats before bottling.

The Amaro is macerated for an average of eight weeks and features 16 herbs and spices. “I feel it’s the perfect balance between pastry and medicinal flavors,” said Tilbury. The Bitters is made with orange peel, blood oranges, and eight herbs. “What I like about this is it’s a perfect balance between the bitterness of Campari and the smooth fruitiness of Aperol,” he observed. “Both are incredible spirits, but this kind of plays in between.” For the Elderflower, the namesake ingredient is air-dried on linen sheets for two months, macerated in clay pots for another two months, and then rested in oak. “With this one, you get sweet floral notes in the nose, like a Sauternes,” Tilbury noted, “but then it just kind of explodes into this beautiful floral finish.” The Lemon is similar to limoncello but fresher and brighter, he added: “It’s a good balance between the alcohol, the sugars, and the acidity.” The Orange likewise begins with the maceration of orange peels for four months in clay pots. Tilbury described it as “not overly orange . . . with a little bit of bitterness because of the peels. It has some cool depth to it—something unique that’s great for cocktails or to have on its own with some soda water.”



### Botanika Angelica Amaro, Poland (\$40)

Nutty, with a medicinal mid-palate. Caramel, espresso, coriander, cinnamon, and a hint of thyme represent just some of the layers of flavor derived from a recipe containing 16 herbs. 80 proof. **92** —*Meridith May*

### Botanika Angelica Bitters, Poland (\$30)

A bevy of fruit and eight herbs make up this intense liqueur. Standout flavors of watermelon, raspberry, vanilla, orange peel, and clove lead to a dry mouthfeel. 60 proof. **92** —*M.M.*

### Botanika Angelica Orange, Poland (\$35)

Authentic notes of orange and orange peel come from maceration in clay pots for four months; dark chocolate notes come into play with the tart citrus. Concentrated and clean. 80 proof. **93** —*M.M.*

### Botanika Angelica Lemon, Poland (\$30)

Delicious from start to finish, with notes of key lime pie, meringue, and a hint of graham cracker. 70 proof. **93** —*M.M.*

### Botanika Angelica Elderflower, Poland (\$35)

Elderflowers are air-dried for two months and then macerated in clay pots for two months. Aromas are floral and sweet, with defined notes of chamomile, honeysuckle, guava, and peach nectar. Complex, with a lovely aftertaste. 50 proof. **94** —*M.M.*



## MARTINI & ROSSI

Based in Torino, Martini & Rossi is one of the oldest producers of vermouth and aperitivo in Italy, according to North American brand manager Fabio Raffaelli. “I think we were the first vermouth ever imported [to the U.S.], and we’ve been in this country for more than 120 years,” he said with pride. While the company’s core products—Bianco, Rosso, and Extra Dry vermouth—remain backbar stalwarts stateside, Raffaelli chose to focus on some of its more innovative offerings, including its two premium Riserva Speciale vermouths—Rubino and Ambrato—as well as its Fiero L’Aperitivo. “First off, I just want to reiterate exactly what vermouth is,” he said, suggesting a mnemonic device as “a beautiful way to remember it, which is the word ‘wash’: wine, alcohol, sugar, [and] herbs and spices.” European vermouth, he added, has to contain the *Artemisia* genus—of which there are more than 200 varieties worldwide (most notably wormwood).


Raffaelli said that his team is seeing a global boom in apéritifs, especially as Italian and French companies are starting to invest in premium-tier vermouth. “The number-one thing I want to highlight is that [the color of most] sweet vermouth . . . is brown, but when you buy a Riserva Speciale Rubino, the color is ruby red,” he said. That’s because most sweet vermouth contains white wine and caramel coloring; the Rubino, by contrast, is made with 2–6% Nebbiolo. As for the drier Ambrato, Raffaelli said that the addition of Moscato Bianco gives it its beautiful pale-yellow color. The zesty and citrusy Fiero, meanwhile, was created especially for mixing with tonic into Spritzes.



## ST-GERMAIN ELDERFLOWER LIQUEUR

“We know low-ABV is booming right now, but what you may not know is [that] liqueurs are actually the fourth highest-growing spirit since the pandemic began,” said Earlecia Richelle, North American brand ambassador for St-Germain—perhaps one of the best-known brands in the category.

Made in France from elderflowers sourced both there and in Hungary, St-Germain undergoes a meticulous, time-sensitive production process called dynamic maceration. “Elderflowers are quite delicate; as soon as we pick them, they start to wilt,” explained Richelle. “We have to think about the details and how to keep [the fresh flowers’] integrity so we can get the maximum flavor profile. That’s what makes St-Germain so evocative—it goes through an incredible amount of quality checks.” Once picked, the flowers are immediately refrigerated and macerated in warm water within 24 hours to capture their concentrated essence. The liquid is then taken to the Palais Bénédicte distillery (home of the world-renowned Bénédicte liqueur) and blended with eau-de-vie de vin, water, sugar, and neutral grain spirit to bring up the ABV.

“The thing about the blossoms is they have this incredibly delicate aromatic nuance [and] a unique flavor profile that pairs with every spirit you can think of,” asserted Richelle, “and it was certainly created with bartenders in mind” by St-Germain founder Robert Cooper “during what I call the second golden age of cocktails of the late 2000s, where we saw a return to fresh ingredients. We [had] bartenders who [were] approaching cocktails with this culinary sense, and this whole professional career developing. . . . Rob wanted to create a liqueur [they] could use to push their creativity and flavor profiles to the next level.” While Richelle recommended using the brand first and foremost in a Spritz “because you get to taste the flavor of St-Germain,” she added that it serves as an incredible base for virtually any mixed drink: “We offer versatility you can’t always get with other bitters, amaros, or liqueurs on the market.” 



ONE  
LANDMARK  
BEGETS

# Another

The Christopher's tasting menu might feature the likes of a roasted corn croquette served atop a 3D print of owner Jamie Hormel's hand.

A LOOK INSIDE PHOENIX'S  
NEW **CHRISTOPHER'S AT THE  
WRIGLEY MANSION**

story by Marci Symington  
photos by Grace Stufkosky



The view from the dining room at Christopher's at the Wrigley Mansion.





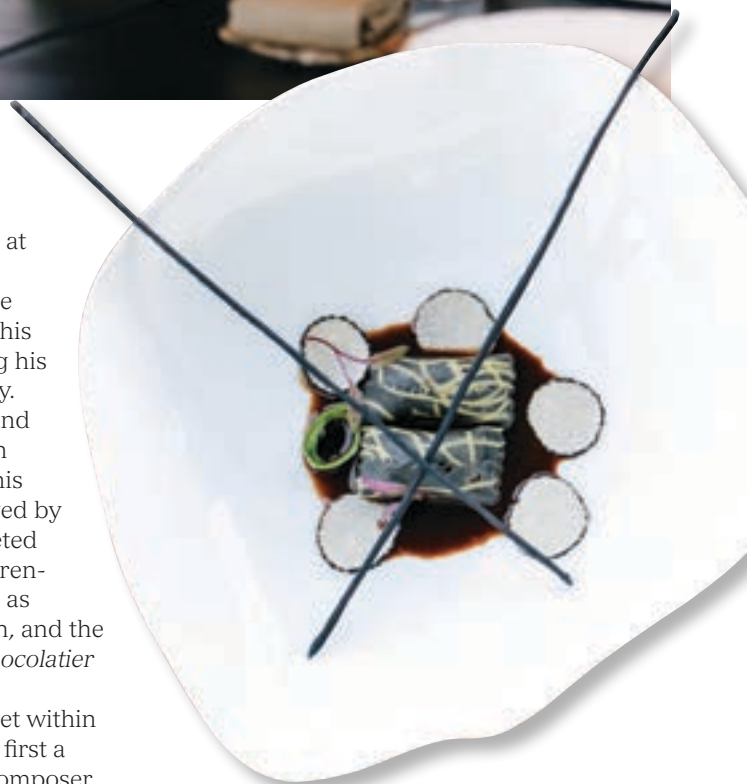
Phoenix, AZ, native Christopher Gross is one of the city's most celebrated chefs.

Opened in spring of this year, Christopher's at the Wrigley Mansion is the crowning glory of one of the Valley's most celebrated chefs, Christopher Gross. Located adjacent to the Phoenix, Arizona, landmark built for William Wrigley Jr. in 1932, his latest endeavor is an amalgamation of past and present, honoring his impressive 40-year career while reflecting the future of hospitality.

Gross, who was raised in Phoenix, worked abroad in London and Paris before establishing himself at the prestigious L'Orangerie in Los Angeles. Returning to his hometown, he opened the first of his namesake restaurants at 24th Street and Camelback Road, followed by a location at the Biltmore Fashion Park mall, and earned the coveted James Beard Award for Best Chef of the Southwest in 1995. A perennial Valley favorite, Christopher's served such now-classic dishes as roasted red bell pepper soup, smoked truffle-infused filet mignon, and the Parisienne Chocolate Tower, which received coverage in both *Chocolatier* and *Beard House* magazines.

In 2018, Gross became executive chef at Geordie's Restaurant, set within the Wrigley Mansion. The historic property has a glorious past as first a private home and then a VIP corporate retreat, but it was music composer and Spam heir Geordie Hormel and his wife, Jamie, who saved it from the hands of developers in 1991. Together they opened the mansion to the public as a top dining destination and special events venue.

After Geordie's death in 2006, Jamie Hormel, committed to carrying on her husband's legacy, invested in extensive renovations of the restaurant lounge and the kitchen while adding Jamie's Wine Bar and a new wine cellar. She hired Paola Embry as CEO and wine director, tasking her with developing and managing what would soon become the largest wine list in Arizona.



Roasted parsnip agnolotti in sauce meunière with summer truffles.



**French Negronis  
made with G'Vine  
Gin, Lillet Rouge,  
Antica Sweet  
Vermouth, and  
Dubonnet Rouge.**

**Gross himself created the  
whimsical sketches that grace  
the ceramic dishware.**



The ever-innovative Gross suggested building a greenhouse and small restaurant adjacent to the mansion. He and Hormel selected Wendell Burnette, known for designing the Phoenix Central Library and the Amangiri resort in Utah, to serve as architect. The result of three years of construction is nothing short of stunning. Built of black steel and glass, the modern structure is completely different from that of the Wrigley Mansion, which mixes the Spanish Colonial and California Monterey styles. Explains Gross, "If you are adding on to something historic, it has to be noticeably added on. You can't replicate the original. People would wonder if it has always been there."

The restaurant itself exudes elegance, with zinc panels, black Venetian plaster walls, and a retractable roof that takes advantage of cool evenings. An open kitchen with a custom-built wood-fired oven overlooks the 1,500-square-foot, 26-seat dining room lined with floor-to-ceiling glass windows; an outdoor patio, meanwhile, welcomes diners with unparalleled views. In short, it's a fine-dining establishment to be sure—yet the experience it offers is anything but stuffy. Its custom-built tables set with delicate Zalto crystal wine glasses, for example, contain hidden drawers

filled with utensils, encouraging guests to set their own places. And, in a break from French tradition, the staff is trained in all aspects of hospitality, working both the front and back of the house. "I want them to know how to serve a table, to learn about wine and about the other half of the business," Gross says. "Many will eventually own their own place one day, so it makes sense."

Gross personally sketched the whimsical designs on the ceramic plates custom-made by Blue Door Ceramics and brought in local artisans like Arcosanti to make windbells for use as plate covers. Surprises lurk everywhere; not to give too much away, but keep an eye out for the table lamps and the bathroom.

The seasonally driven eight-course tasting menu with optional wine pairings is inspired by Gross' love of French cuisine and wine. Prohibition-style cocktails are also part of the tasting experience, manager Matthew Harden says, noting that the bar team "distill[s] different essences of orange, lemon, lime, [and] strawberry to put in itemized sprays. Sometimes we will experiment with mezcal, incorporating the theme of wood fire into some of the drinks—[for instance by] creating a plug on the perfect Martini with mezcal

and fresh lemon juice, which is a nice starter drink to pair with gougères."

With Ashley Goddard now serving as chef de cuisine of Geordie's, Gross is free to focus entirely on his new concept, offering "Christopher's Classics" on Sundays and Mondays as well as a lighter tasting menu for lunch Tuesday through Saturday. According to Gross, "The tasting menu inspires us to do other things. Our Classics menu includes all we have done in the past, and the [lunch menu] is what we eat every day."

At a time when many expected Gross to retire, he's proving that there's no end to his creativity. A sketchbook he carries around is replete with ideas for dishes and presentations, many of which have come to fruition. Among the most notable recent examples is the "roasted corn croquette from the owner's hand," served artfully upon the 3D-printed hand of Jamie Hormel. At this rate, it seems, the chef is just getting started. **E**



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# Angels in Red Cloaks

## GUARACHI FAMILY WINES' NEW RELEASES REVEAL SENSATIONAL TEXTURES AND FLAVORS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GUARACHI FAMILY WINES



**Guarachi Family Wines winemaker and "grape interpreter" Julian Gonzalez.**

Those who aren't yet familiar with the name Guarachi Family Wines should know that the producer is a revered contributor to the world-class category of wines from Napa and Sonoma, and here's why: Its pair of estate properties—Meadowrock Vineyard in Napa Valley's Atlas Peak AVA and Sun Chase Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast—speaks volumes when it comes to gleaning expression from terroir. And who's the interpreter? Winemaker Julian Gonzalez, whose global winemaking experiences and access to skilled mentors put him on our A-list the first time we tasted his wines.

Gonzalez comments on the newly released 2018 and 2019 vintages: "The 2018 growing season was exceptional from the beginning. Stable temperatures throughout the spring allowed us to have uniformed flowering. Continuous days of sunshine and mild temperatures throughout the summer delivered uniform vines and even cluster growth. Cooler temperatures allowed for longer hang time without having to compromise the acidity and sugar. Optimum ripeness delivers pure, concentrated wines [that don't have] to be overextracted.

"The 2019 growing season was mild overall, with few heat spikes. Bud break was delayed due to late rain in early spring; however, ideal weather during flowering led to great fruit set. The mild weather provided a long growing season and longer hang time, allowing the fruit to develop more concentrated flavors." Here are my notes. —Meridith May

**Meadowrock Vineyard sits high above the fog line in the Atlas Peak AVA.**



**Guarachi Family Wines 2019 Pinot Noir, Sun Chase Vineyard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma Coast (\$75)** This high-elevation site experiences a maritime climate and wind but plenty of sunlight above the fog line. Despite its high ABV of 14.8%, this red comes off as balanced, with a generous entry to full-bodied elegance exhibited by notes of dark cherry and chocolate. The

mouthfeel defines sexiness as it romances the palate with fine-drawn viscosity. As the wine spreads out across the palate, minerality acts as a bridge to dark fruit and savory notes of soy sauce and earth. **96**



**G by Alex Guarachi 2018, Napa Valley (\$80)** From the volcanic soils of Meadowrock Vineyard, Guarachi Family Wines' property in Atlas Peak, this blend of 92% Cabernet Sauvignon and 8% Malbec offers chewy, teeth-coating, dusty tannins. Graphite is altered with melted dark chocolate and blackberry preserves. Thanks to the lack of heat spikes in this vintage, the long hang time revealed

a balanced red that is tarry and meaty, with a finish of coffee and sweet tobacco. Aged 18 months in French oak. **95**

**Guarachi Family Wines 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Meadowrock Vineyard, Atlas Peak, Napa Valley (\$95)** Concentrated with spiced black and red fruit. Tight-fisted tannins broaden by the minute as the dry, dusty mouthfeel is held together by the fine structure. Drenched with coffee and sandalwood, an underlying flow of juicy black fruit wraps around the palate. **98**

**Guarachi Family Wines 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$295)** From its fruit-forward nose of boysenberry and violets to its dry, dusty, and meaty palate, this seamless and utterly dignified red is a classic from one of Napa Valley's most pedigreed vineyard sites. A cranberry middle makes for a sweet surprise midway, but the fruit becomes darker and more concentrated toward the finish. **97**

# The Lost Explorer:

## FINDING A FINE NEW MEZCAL

**Handcrafted in Oaxaca**, these artisanal mezcal are standouts from a brand that protects the biodiversity of Mexico.

**The Lost Explorer Espadín Mezcal, Mexico (\$80)** Espadín is the most commonly used agave variety for mezcal. It takes at least five years to reach maturity; here, it's matured for eight years. At 84 proof, this joven offers heady aromas of smoke and clay, with dusky floral undertones. Lavender and spiced orange peel merge with peach and earth as cigar leaf floats atop a base of vanilla and cedar. **93**



**The Lost Explorer Tobalá Mezcal, Mexico (\$150)** Tobalá is a quite rare wild agave that grows in dry, high-altitude environs in the shade of oak trees. With a ten-year age statement, this 84-proof mezcal has a smoky perfume that's impacted by sweeter notes of chocolate, walnut, and jasmine. Its unusual flavor profile brings cigar leaf and violets together with stunning notes of ripe pineapple and lemon verbena. **95**



**The Lost Explorer Salmiana Mezcal, Mexico (\$180)** Made from Salmiana—a large, wild, high-altitude agave variety—this 12-year-old, 84-proof spirit exhibits an herbal personality, showcasing aromas of celery root, salted orange peel, and jalapeño. There's a freshness to the liquid, with notes of tobacco sweetened by red cherry and agave. Savory yet ethereal. **96**



# The Clover:

## A TRIBUTE TO GOLFING GREAT BOBBY JONES

**This collection of single-barrel whiskeys** produced in partnership with North Carolina's Piedmont Distillers pays homage to one of the most respected golfers of all time, Bobby Jones, who was born on March 17—St. Patrick's Day. Although Jones always competed as an amateur, he remained a champion of champions.

**The Clover Single Barrel Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$50)** Aromas of banana, coconut, and maple syrup lead to a flavor lineup of orange peel, honeyed apricot, and cashew. On the palate, wildflowers merge with a mouth-coating nectar of toffee and orange marmalade. **92 proof. 96**



**The Clover Single Barrel Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$50)** Oatmeal, lilac, and candied almond converge on the nose. Warm notes of spiced orange zest spread across the palate with honeyed apricot, and buttered pecan is deliriously appealing, balanced by an edge of pepper and a long finish. **91 proof. 94**



**The Clover Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$70)** Aged ten years, this bourbon offers a stunning perfume of orange blossom honey and peach pie. A quick nip of pepper and charred oak appears on entry but soon transforms to honeysuckle and summer peach. A backdrop of juiced orange and vanilla is lovely on the finish. **90 proof. 97**





# Mind the Gap

A LOOK AT THE LATEST FROM  
**WESTWOOD ESTATE**

photos by Clara Rice

**Westwood Estate's new releases** speak not only to the character of its Annadel Gap estate vineyard but also to the winery's commitment to sourcing exclusively from sites that are Biodynamic, organic, and/or sustainably farmed.

**Westwood 2019 Chardonnay, Sangiacomo Roberts Road Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$55)**

This vineyard, located in the Petaluma Gap AVA, sits on well-drained soils of silty gravel. The wine is barrel fermented and aged sur lie in French oak in small lots. Mouth-filling notes of lemon curd, honeyed apricot, and peach blossom meet layers of vanilla meringue that soak up a brioche toastiness. **94**

**Westwood 2018 Estate Pinot Noir, Sonoma County**

**(\$52)** Sourced from the estate's Annadel Gap Vineyard as well as parcels in Petaluma Gap vineyard Terra de Promissio, this wine was aged 18 months in (41% new) French oak and bottled unfiltered. Aromas of fresh red cherry, chocolate, and cinnamon lead to a palate that is juicy to its core. Caramel apple, tomato leaf, lavender, and cranberry are vibrant and the mouthfeel generous, opening up to baking spices backed by beetroot and rhubarb. Complex and delicious. **95**



**Westwood 2018 Legend Proprietary Red Wine, Annadel Gap Vineyard, Sonoma Valley (\$65)**

In its third vintage, this superbly expressive red blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Mourvèdre was fermented by winemakers Philippe Melka and Maayan Koschitzky in closed-top stainless-steel tanks as well as a French oak upright tank and was aged in (30% new) French oak for 20 months. Scents of

jasmine, plum blossom, and mocha are mirrored on the palate, which adds a graceful array of floral notes while ascending to heavenly levels with robust flavors of black raspberry, coffee, and dots of white pepper that cause the mouth to salivate. **97** *LT*

David Green is  
managing director of  
Westwood Estate.



# United Sommeliers Foundation

## Many Sommeliers, One Community

Founded during the COVID-19 crisis in response to the nationwide shuttering of businesses, the United Sommeliers Foundation aims to provide immediate financial assistance to sommeliers who are experiencing a pause or termination of their employment due to circumstances beyond their control.

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PHOTO: BENEDICT WEST PHOTOGRAPHY

# Grit and Growth

FROM COAST TO COAST, HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONALS ARE CONSTANTLY EVOLVING

**The people I consider** successful in the hospitality world all have one thing in common: grit. Although we're not saving the world, our jobs are not for the faint of heart—they not only require endurance and strength but precision when preparing meals or cocktails that meet guests' high expectations.

At Otium in downtown Los Angeles, chef Timothy Hollingsworth's menu is rustic yet elegant, consisting of dishes like grilled Maine lobster with sweet corn and tomato chowder and braised lamb neck with trahana and dill. Finding wines that complement Hollingsworth's dishes while still maintaining balance can be tricky, but sommelier Chris Webb told me his biggest challenge has been immersing himself in the wines of Burgundy, a region he had little knowledge about when he started at Otium but one its guests gravitate toward. "Learning the difference between the appellations, designations, and producers can be quite a lot of information to absorb," Webb said, calling it "a labor of love." He continues to find joy in conceptualizing new wine pairings with Hollingsworth's dishes.

While pairing may not be Billy Cuerto's focus, he has plenty else to keep him occupied in his role as resort manager at the Four Seasons in Palm Beach, Florida. When he graduated from Texas A&M University with an art degree over 20 years ago, he never expected to enter the hospitality industry but needed a job, so he joined the Four Seasons Chicago team. Fortunately, he's found that his background in visual art, design, and composition comes in handy. "I am happy I studied art prior to entering into hospitality," he said. "It has given me a different perspective on various aspects of hospitality in general."

While it's clear Cuerto loves his

job, I was curious what he does to decompress, so I asked him who he would switch jobs with for one shift if he could. "I love to cook, and having access to all of the ingredients we have, coupled with the amazing equipment, would be so much fun," he responded. "In fact, I might never leave again!" (Chef, don't say I didn't warn you when he takes over your kitchen!)

change, then that is wrong decision making. The same opportunities are almost never coming back to you, so why not?" he told me.

All three men raised a great question: Why not challenge yourself to

PHOTO: CAROLINE HOLLINGSWORTH



**Chris Webb is the sommelier at Otium in Los Angeles, CA.**

The last person I spoke to, Masa Shimakawa, ascended from humble beginnings to become executive sushi chef/restaurant chef at the Fairmont Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica in July. Having worked at a string of successful Japanese restaurants, Shimakawa shared his thoughts on the risks he's taken in seeking out new experiences. "Three, five, or even ten years from now, if I will regret not making that



**Billy Cuerto is resort manager at the Four Seasons in Palm Beach, FL.**

learn new skills within your trade? Why not synergize what you already know with what you're experiencing now, finding a way to artfully connect worlds that once seemed unrelated? And why not take some calculated risks when faced with opportunities you aren't likely to see again?

After all, that's what gritty people do: They stay open to possibility and adapt accordingly. What they don't do is settle. **17**

*Comments or general life questions?*

*Send Roberts an email at 100proofemma@gmail.com or reach out to her through her YouTube channel, 100 Proof Emma, or Instagram @100proofemma.*

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PRESIDENT OF RNDC'S WEST  
REGION, WITH A LIFETIME  
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



From the entire J. Lohr family and team, our heartfelt congratulations to Jay Johnson on a well-deserved honor.



Congratulations, Jay, on your Lifetime Achievement Award!

Jay and his RNDC associates' commitment to service mirrors our own – to our valued customers and accounts, as well as to the communities in which we live and work. J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines is proud to partner with Republic National Distributing Company in the business of fine wine and the business of life.



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# A LETTER FROM KANDACE



BIG PHARMA IS PLAYING  
GAMES WITH MY LIFE  
AND YOURS.  
WILL YOU HELP US  
STRIKE OUT MEDICAL  
FINANCIAL TOXICITY ONE  
PATIENT AT A TIME?

## *DEAR READERS,*

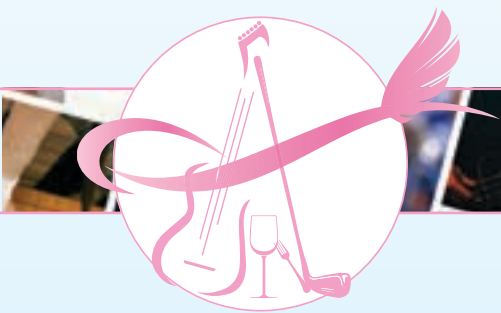
It is an absolute honor for Bret and me to welcome you to our First Annual SabesWings Strike Out Medical Financial Toxicity. We hope our event will bring a great deal of awareness to our cause, highlighting why we developed it and how you can become more involved. Thank you for supporting us. Below is my story, which fueled our passion for and dedication to others.

Looking back . . .

Shellshocked, I kept staring down at the lanyard that the doctor's office gave me to wear during my consultation. It was my badge of diagnosis. It was purple. Purple meant the staff gave you a head bow with a half-smile of encouragement. Purple gave them a focus for doing their jobs. Clearly, I knew what it meant even before the words came out of my doctor's mouth. I'd met this diagnosis before, twice, and had thought I was in the clear—on to a life that was going to be much easier. The thought of facing it again made me tired. Weak. I had felt the lump just a week before and it was already ruining my life. How could something so small make such an impact?

I sighed and lost my ability to focus on what the doctor was saying. The last thing I'd heard was about the oncology department's success rates. I wasn't a success. I wasn't part of those statistics. I left feeling numb and remained that way for several days. I remember going through the motions of work, travel, child care, and my life with Bret, knowing I wouldn't want him to feel trapped into staying in our relationship out of pity for a stupid diagnosis of cancer. I thought maybe if I ignored everything for long enough, it wouldn't exist. But in the middle of the night, the panic attacks came. I'd wake up in





what felt like a sauna-induced sweat. My subconscious finally forced my conscious mind to see reality and be scared of it.

Working in the medical field for years, I learned that traditional practitioners seldomly think outside the box and that there are other treatment options—but they come at a cost that makes them unavailable to most people. I was driven to find those options. I advocated for myself, fighting for what I knew was better for my body. Medicine has a way of grouping people together according to their disease rather than focusing on individual pathology. Funny that I am nothing like you or you me, and yet the chances of us sitting in the same chemo boat, receiving the same medicine, are pretty high.

I was given an additional opportunity to take an adjacent medication multiple times a day; it was experimental, so it was not covered by insurance, but it was considered effective. It cost \$700 a pill. I didn't qualify for assistance with my C-level position; I felt blessed that I could afford to take it anyway. In the meantime, Bret and I followed the strict protocols we had developed for diet and lifestyle—drinking alkaline water exclusively; eating organic, plant-based foods and proteins; and eliminating sugar (including wine . . . GAHHH!).

After six months, I finished what I thought would be my last chemo treatment. But while our efforts had significantly reduced the size of my tumor, it wasn't gone. I felt defeated, like I had just run a marathon but couldn't quite reach the finish line. What else could I do? My entire treatment plan was increased: more chemo, more pills, more everything. Now my prescriptions cost \$22,000 a month. What's more, I could no longer juggle running successful companies and being well; I had to leave behind a career I'd worked hard to attain. Still, Bret and I dug deep and managed to

make it all work. And in the end, with the help of a fusion of Eastern and Western medicine, my margins were finally clear. We made it, and we did it very untraditionally. We didn't follow any one particular doctor's orders but rather looked to a wide range of health practitioners.

Our experience left me thinking: What about the people who didn't have savings, who could not afford medications they'd benefit from? What about people who didn't even know those options existed? Was medicine really a class-based system? What about all the money donated to research and nonprofits—was it making a difference? We might be closer to a cure for some cancers. We all saw firsthand what happens when scientists come together to solve a problem: A vaccine can be developed in only nine months. Could the same happen for the Big C? Would Big Pharma allow it?

Left with a sour taste in my mouth and wanting to give back, I dove into research. I learned that medical financial toxicity (MFT) is a rampant phenomenon that affects thousands of people daily. Yes, daily. It is defined as the circumstance in which patients cannot pay for medical bills due to subpar insurance coverage or no coverage at all. Resources quickly diminish when a patient has to balance life-saving modalities and everyday expenses such as a mortgage, child care, or education; some choose to skip months of treatment to pay for household expenses. And patients diagnosed with cancer twice are 50% more likely to claim bankruptcy from overwhelming medical expenses. In the pursuit of profit, Big Pharma is playing games with my life and yours.

Will you help us Strike Out medical financial toxicity one patient at a time?

To better health,

*Kandace Sabershagen*

OUR EXPERIENCE  
LEFT ME THINKING:  
WHAT ABOUT THE  
PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T  
HAVE SAVINGS, WHO  
COULD NOT AFFORD  
MEDICATIONS THEY'D  
BENEFIT FROM? WHAT  
ABOUT PEOPLE WHO  
DIDN'T EVEN KNOW  
THOSE OPTIONS  
EXISTED?





TRINCHERO  
*Family Estates*

CONGRATULATIONS  
TO JAY JOHNSON ON HIS  
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD







LETTER FROM THE **PUBLISHER**

# THE ENERGY OF *TOGETHERNESS*



**O**n behalf of *The Tasting Panel* and *The SOMM Journal*, I want to say how humbled we are to be the media sponsor of such an esteemed and relevant event.

It has always been important to me, as owner and publisher of these publications, to connect with the wine and spirits industry. But this new bond strengthens our ties to the trade and to a most worthy cause with which we will stay connected and hopefully continue to serve.

I want to thank all of our advertisers—and RNDC's top suppliers—who have added so much gravitas to this cause through their heartfelt messages. Fifty percent of all the proceeds from the full-page ads in this 48-page insert are going to SabesWings, and I can't tell you how quickly the response to our call to take part was; we sold out the space within two weeks. That support for SabesWings; Jay Johnson; his wife, Dewi; the Saberhagens; and all their good work should make everyone involved feel that dynamic connectivity: an energy of togetherness.

*Meridith May*  
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

*Meridith May*

THE  
**tastingpanel**

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL



# CONGRATULATIONS JAY JOHNSON REGION PRESIDENT, RNDC WEST

## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2021



BROWN-FORMAN





# BRET SABERHAGEN'S STATS *OFF THE MOUND*



**F**or years, Bret Saberhagen has been involved in acts of charity. In addition to founding and operating the Bret Saberhagen Make A Difference Foundation—through which he brought inner-city children to baseball games, raised money for equipment, and built new baseball fields for high school students—he has raised awareness for juvenile diabetes, worked with children diagnosed with cancer, and traveled to various charity events to assist others with their fundraising efforts. He is also a dedicated sponsor of people struggling with various addictions. Compelled by the stories and experiences of others, he long ago made giving back his passion.

But no experience would prepare him for what happened when he met the love of his life. After getting multiple cancer diagnoses prior to meeting Bret, Kandace set out to battle the disease yet again during their courtship. “I remember meeting her at the airport in Chicago for a Susan G. Komen event she was invited to,” he recalls. “She had known for a week of her reoccurrence. She had tear-stained cheeks and I knew then that I was going to fight with her and that I couldn’t live without her.” The very next day in the Diamond District in downtown Chicago, Bret knelt on one knee in a crowded jewelry store and proposed.

Bret is now the president and co-founder of SabesWings, a nonprofit providing financial assistance to cancer patients who are forced to choose between paying their household expenses and medical bills. Together with Kandace, two of the couple’s sons, and their board members, they are raising awareness of the silent plague known as medical financial toxicity (MFT). “MFT creeps up on you. You can have the best insurance, a savings account, and the best doctors, but sometimes it is not enough,” Bret says.

As for Bret’s stats on the mound, his notable Major League Baseball career spanned 18 years. Coming straight out of high school, he was selected in the 19th round by the Kansas City Royals and made his Major League debut at 19 years old. In his second year in the league, Bret went 20–6 to lead the Royals to their first World Series championship in 1985, where he was named MVP. Additionally, he was awarded the first of his two Cy Young Awards.



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Santa Margherita USA is proud to congratulate

*Jay Johnson*

for his exemplary commitment to the wine industry.

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## SABESWINGS EVENT SCHEDULE

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

#### GUYOMAR WINERY DINNER, LIVE MUSIC | SILENT & LIVE AUCTION AND AWARDS

- 4:30 p.m. .... Guest arrival and registration
- 4:30–5:45 p.m. .... Cocktails and appetizers
- 4:30–6:30 p.m. .... Silent auction (ongoing)
- 6:30–7:30 p.m. .... Dinner (presentation streaming) with emcee Mike Golic
- 7:30–8 p.m. .... Live auction
- 8–8:30 p.m. .... Awards
- 8:30–10 p.m. .... Singer/songwriters concert

### MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

#### HUNTER RANCH GOLF EVENT AND CELEBRITY COOKING CLASS

- 7–8 a.m. .... Vendor setup
- 8–9 a.m. .... Registration and continental breakfast with Mimosa and Bloody Mary bar
- 9 a.m. .... Shotgun start
- 9–10 a.m. .... Cooking class registration with Mimosa and Bloody Mary bar
- 10 a.m.–12 p.m. .... Cooking class
- 3 p.m. .... Golf commences
- 3–3:30 p.m. .... Golf awards

THE **SOMM** JOURNAL **tastingpanel**

# CONGRATULATIONS

*Jay Johnson*

SabesWings and the Tasting Panel could not have selected a better person for their lifetime achievement award. This honor is much deserved and we are proud of our affiliation with both Jay and RNDC.

*Cheers to you,*

-Georges Daou, Daniel Daou & Team

DAOU



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## ABOUT THE EMCEE MIKE GOLIC



**E**mcee Mike Golic is a former National Football League defensive lineman and television host. Golic worked as an ESPN College Football analyst and as co-host of ESPN Radio programs *Mike & Mike* and *Golic and Wingo* from 1995 to 2020. He dedicates his time to several nonprofits throughout the country.

"There was no question I would be involved with SabesWings," Mike says. "Kandace and I have worked on several boards together over the last 15 years. She has helped thousands of NFL and NHL players heal from their long-term injuries. This was my time to give back. Cancer doesn't affect just the body; it hurts the wallet and family too. Medical financial toxicity can be stopped with education, awareness, and our help."



## ABOUT TULLY KENNEDY

LEAD BASSIST OF THE JASON ALDEAN  
BAND AND SABESWINGS BOARD MEMBER

**T**ully Kennedy knows firsthand the tremendous toll cancer takes on families: As an 11-year-old, he lost his grandmother to the disease, and the tragedy has remained with him throughout his life. Tully and his wife have been active with St. Jude's for many years, and joining the board of directors for SabesWings has served as an important next step for them in fulfilling their pledge to help families suffering from medical family toxicity—because no patient should have to choose between paying for medical therapies and family expenses.

"Bringing awareness to the forefront of what medical financial toxicity is and how it impacts so many people is the focus of SabesWings and our board of directors," he says. "We are trying to bring relief to individuals who shouldn't have to stress about how they are going to afford their medical care or household bills."

A native of upstate New York, Tully moved to Nashville in 1996. As a session player, he's played bass on over 30 number-one hits and has appeared on numerous artists' albums; he's also produced seven top-ten hits, including three number ones, in addition to writing three top-five hits, with two reaching number one. Tully has been country star Jason Aldean's recording/touring bassist, musical director, and collaborator since 1999.



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Jay Johnson  
President,  
RNDC  
West Region







Jay Johnson with his wife, Dewi, at home in Southern California.

# LEADING BY EXAMPLE

RNDC EXECUTIVE

**JAY JOHNSON**

REFLECTS ON HOW GIVING  
BACK HAS MADE HIS CAREER  
ALL THE MORE FULFILLING

BY RUTH TOBIAS

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON

# CHEERS TO JAY JOHNSON!

*For a well-deserved lifetime  
achievement award*



O'Neill Vintners & Distillers was founded in 2004 by industry veteran and entrepreneur Jeff O'Neill. The vertically integrated winery is one of the fastest-growing wineries in California with a reputation for producing premium-quality wines from the North Coast, Central Coast, and Central Valley. The company's national brands portfolio includes Line 39, Robert Hall, Harken, Day Owl Rosé, Game Box, Rabble, and Charles Woodson's Intercept. For more information, please visit [ONeillWine.com](http://ONeillWine.com).







PHOTO: RAPHAEL PETERSON

**U**pon receiving an Honorary Award for lifetime achievement from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 2019 at the age of 71, Cherokee actor Wes Studi gleefully proclaimed, “It’s about time!” Jay Johnson doesn’t quite share that sentiment. Though the region president of Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC) West/Young’s Market Company will be presented with the First Annual SabesWings Lifetime Achievement Award this September in Paso Robles, California, he points out, “I’m only 57; I’ll be 58 this year. So as I think about my career, first of all, I’m not done. [Second of all,] I’m sure there are a lot of people in the industry who are heck of a lot more deserving than me.”

Of course, those who know, respect, and love Jay would no doubt argue that such protests serve as evidence of some of the very traits that qualified him for commendation in the first place: a tireless work ethic, conscientiousness, humility. Among them are the founders of SabesWings, Bret and Kandace Saberhagen, whose nonprofit organization will be hosting the two-day fundraiser, SIPS • SONGS • SWINGS • SAVOR, where the award ceremony will take place. It’s their mission to combat medical financial toxicity on behalf of cancer patients that inspired Jay to accept the honor despite his modest inclinations. “I’m happy to do it, because I’m hoping we can raise some money for a really great charity—that’s my thinking on this event,” he says.

The National Cancer Institute defines “financial toxicity” as the threat of insolvency that can loom over families

struggling with the out-of-pocket costs associated with treatment. As a breast cancer survivor herself, Kandace Saberhagen recognizes just how lucky she was that, as she writes on SabesWings’ website, “There were therapies available to me that yielded great results with a plethora of supporting data, [but] they came with a hefty price.” Recognizing as well that others aren’t so lucky, she and her husband, a former Major League Baseball player, decided to put their resources and connections in service of helping them through the worst of times.

Jay can relate all too well: His own wife, Dewi, is also a cancer survivor. With her, Jay marked a major personal milestone this year in addition to the professional one—the couple celebrated their 25th anniversary in August—so it’s a heady time to reflect on the past three decades.





Delicato Family Wines sends its warmest  
congratulations to Jay Johnson for  
receiving the First Annual SabesWings  
Lifetime Achievement Award.



**DELICATO**  
*Family Wines*





▲ Jay (right) with RNDC VP Leon Cikota on a trip to Australia during the early years of his career.

## The Makings and Highlights of a Fruitful Career

Jay received his bachelor's degree in marketing at Florida State University, where, he says with a laugh, "I was president of my fraternity, so I had a lot of on-the-ground training" in alcoholic beverages. Joking though he may be, he apparently showed enough promise to be hired as a field marketing manager by E. & J. Gallo immediately after graduating in 1987. While it was admittedly "just happenstance that I ended up in the business," then, he took the vote of confidence to heart. "They just struck me as a great company," he says. "They have the reputation, and rightly so, as one of the best trainers in the industry, and I got a lot of great training. They provided me a lot of opportunities to grow."

Most notable among them was no doubt the decision in 1990 to transfer Jay to San Antonio, Texas, where he found himself "calling on a company called Block Distributing, which was a small wholesaler back then." Recognizing in him the same initiative that Gallo had, the Block family offered him the chance to run one

▼ Dewi and Jay at the beginning of their life together.







*Congratulations*

to **Jay Johnson** for his  
Lifetime Achievement Award  
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▲ Jay (right) and RNDC COO Bob Hendrickson having fun in Louisville, KY.

▼ Jay and the RNDC team deliver a check to Habitat for Humanity.

of their wine divisions—and he lived up to that potential by completing the MBA program at the University of the Incarnate Word while on the job full time. Promotions soon followed; in fact, explains Jay, “I was the first non-family member to become president of Block Distributing Company before we did the mergers and acquisitions that then turned into Republic Beverage Company,” which itself finally merged in 2007 with National Distributing Company to become what we know today as RNDC, the second-largest wine and spirits distributor in the U.S.

In the summer of 2019, RNDC entered into a joint partnership with the Underwood family of Young’s Market, and—nearly 30 years since relocating halfway across the country to build his career—Jay moved across the other half, arriving in Southern California to help oversee the merger while assuming his new role as region president. “We really needed to have



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**JAY JOHNSON**  
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT  
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▲ The RNDC team celebrating with partner Alan Dreeben. ▼ RNDC associates Pape Swanson, Jay, Don Wolz, and Tom Morgan raise a toast to success.

a broader footprint across the U.S. If our biggest competitor is in the major areas, we've got to be there too; we had to be in California to provide that supplier network with another option," he notes. "[But] there was a lot of work that needed to be done, [as is the case] whenever you're bringing two companies together, two cultures together. We've done a lot of reorganization, reinvesting from a chain perspective and on-premise perspective."

Granted, that's exactly the kind of the work Jay's cut out for: After all, he points out, "I've been involved in these types of pieces before. As we went from just being in the Southwest to expanding into places like Indiana and Kentucky, taking our culture of family, execution, and accountability and moving it into these new markets [counts among] my [career] highlights—adding value not only to our shareholders but hopefully to our supplier partners." With respect to this latest acquisition, he adds, "We're working hard on ensuring we're doing everything we can to maintain all the great parts of the company. The great thing is you've got two family companies, so we're able to maintain that family feel."

Take, for instance, the scholarship program RNDC extends to all employees. "Anybody who has a dependent in college, if [the student] maintains a C average, then they can apply for

the scholarship, and they get \$2,000 a semester," says Jay. "It doesn't matter if they're a truck driver, a merchandiser, a salesperson, a manager, or me." Another example would be the RNDC relief fund, designed to provide aid to team members in times of crisis: "Think about stuff like the wildfires."

Proud as he may be of the company he helps lead, however, Jay is adamant about spreading the credit for his own success far and wide. "It's always the great people around me that have helped me accomplish anything and everything that I've accomplished," he insists. "Anybody who thinks differently is sadly mistaken. We would not have been as successful as we've been with this merger if it wasn't for all the other people—finance, accounting, operations—who have jumped in to help."

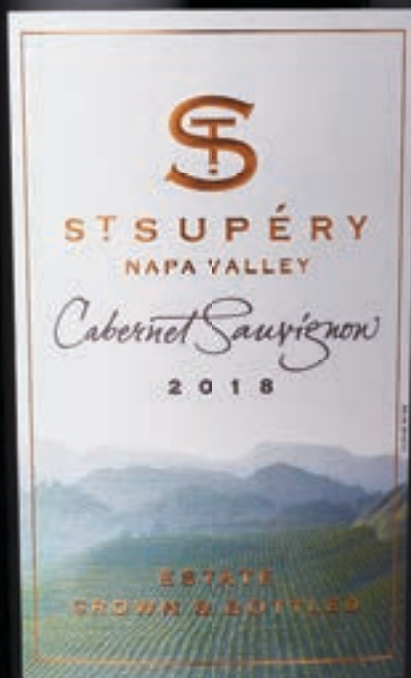
True to form, then, he's all about giving back. "I've always been involved





*Congratulations  
Jay Johnson*

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT  
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in charitable [as well as professional] organizations,” he explains. “I was on the board of the United Way in San Antonio; I was on the board of development of the University of the Incarnate Word, where I got my MBA. I’m currently on the board of the Dedman College of Hospitality at Florida State; I just got on the board of the Sonoma State Wine Institute here. These are important things [to me]; I want to try to give back where I can, use whatever little talents that I have to try to help”—be it the hunger-relief programs he’s worked with or, of course, SabesWings.

## Family Matters

“We met in San Antonio and all the rest is history,” Jay says of his life with Dewi. “My wife is from Thailand; she and her mother had a store at the big



▲ Jay with the RNDC team at the Ryder Cup in Ireland.



▲ Jay and MMA fighter Conor McGregor share a dram of whiskey.

mall there, where they did these floral creations. I asked her out, and we dated for four or five years before we got married—so we’ve been together a long time.” They have two daughters, Nicole and Lauren, both graduates of Texas A&M University; the youngest has just entered the workforce, “which means I’m not only an empty nester but soon to have everybody off the payroll,” Jay jokes. “So it’s all good.”

But it hasn’t always been. In 2008, Dewi “went through a very rare cancer called rhabdomyosarcoma,” he says. “They removed her jaw; they took a bone from her leg and reconstructed her entire face. There were times when it was touch and go, really.” As if his family’s pain and suffering weren’t enough to deal with, he continues, “I remember one time the insurance company denied one of our payments. I have a direct line to HR; I was able to go directly to HR and they helped me navigate through the insurance company. But I thought to myself, what happens if someone doesn’t have that? What a terrible thing, because you’re already going through this heavy stress, managing a sickness. I mean, I fed my wife through a feeding tube for a year. Think about somebody going through that and not having money.”



# CONGRATULATIONS TO JAY JOHNSON

on this Lifetime Achievement Award.

Cheers to a gentleman who truly embodies what it is to Take Life by Storm.

---

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▲ Jay and Dewi celebrate their daughter Nicole's wedding with her groom, Daniel, and their younger daughter, Lauren.  
▼ The Johnson family on vacation at Grayton Beach in Florida.



Thus the commitment to SabesWings, Jay explains with a sense of empathy as palpable as the emotion in his voice. "I met the Saberhagens, and they said, 'Look, we've heard a lot of great things about you, we know a little bit of your history, and everybody we've talked to in the industry speaks highly of you.' And I said, 'Well, you must've talked to about two people.' But [then] they told me about the organization, [and] if you think about somebody who's going through cancer and they have a choice between 'do I make rent this month, or can I pay for my medication?'—for me, that had a lot of meaning." So while "normally I probably would have said no to this, just because I try to be a humble guy," Jay admits, "if I can help the charity raise money through my connections in this industry, I'm happy to do that."

In the meantime, however, nothing makes him happier than "continuing to help my wife transition into California after a year. She's getting there, [but] she's been in Texas most of her life," he says. "And watching my girls be successful as they transition into the real world." Well, they certainly seem to have two exceptional role models for that. ♦



# PASO ROBLES DEFINED

Jay Johnson- Congratulations on all your success! We are proud to know you, and to have you as a partner over all these years. Your support is truly appreciated and we wish you the best for the future.

*Austin Hope*



*Austin Hope*

PASO ROBLES



The *SOMM Journal*, in association with  
National Geographic and The New  
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# Winery CLOSE-UPS



In partnership with **SommFoundation**, this new series will be co-hosted by some of the most high-profile names in the hospitality industry as it visits vineyards all over the globe. Each winery will have the opportunity to have a customized tour of their vineyard or winery created by **SommGeo**.

Each monthly session will conclude with an opportunity for participants to win a cash scholarship via an essay contest through SommFoundation. Scholarship awards will vary from \$400 to \$1,000.

**Somm  
Foundation**



**SommGeo** is a one-of-a-kind platform that showcases virtual tours of wineries, vineyards, terroir, and wine regions, allowing participants incomparable interaction and the next best thing to being there in person.

We create an immersive experience for each winery that adds textual information, photos, and links into an interactive map.

SommGeo's eye-catching tours leave a lasting impression in a sea of other virtual events while allowing you to fully explain what makes your region or winery unique.

**SommFoundation** and *The SOMM Journal* will post the recorded sessions on their websites and make them accessible for months after the event.

Wineries can get a sense of our virtual tours by visiting:  
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### NOVEMBER 9

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### DECEMBER 14

- **Iconic Grapes, Distinctive Regions**

### JANUARY 20, 2022

- **A Cross-Section of Western Europe**

### FEBRUARY 17, 2022

- **Rising Stars of the Wine World**

### MARCH 24, 2022

- **The Minerality Factor: How Does It Come Across in Your Wine?**

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---

*Austin Hope*

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# THE JOURNEY IS THE DESTINATION

MEET **CHEF ROSH**, EXECUTIVE CHEF FOR SABESWINGS' FIRST ANNUAL STRIKE OUT EVENT, SIPS • SONGS • SWINGS • SAVOR

**R**oshni Gurnani, also known as Chef Rosh, has worn many toques over her career. She's served as an executive chef and a private chef; she owns a catering and consulting company and writes cookbooks; oh, and she's a TV personality too. If you're a lover of cooking competition shows, you might recall seeing her on a 2009 episode of *Chopped*, from which she walked away victorious, or in 2012 on *Hell's Kitchen*, where she managed to wow host Gordon Ramsey, moving him to remark—contrary to his notoriety for disparaging verbal barrages—

that Roshni was a “passionate, well-rounded chef [who] blended flavors magically.” Or maybe you remember her 2017 appearance on *Cutthroat Kitchen* . . . or, in 2019, another on hit Food Network show *Beat Bobby Flay*. It's quite a list.

But that's not all, so let's keep going: She was twice—first in 2018 and again in 2019—invited to cook at the James Beard House in New York City. And *India Currents* magazine named her one of the top five Indian chefs in the United States in 2015.

What's next on her docket? Well, for one thing, she's heading to Paso Robles,

California, on September 19 and 20 for SabesWings' First Annual Strike Out Event, SIPS • SONGS • SWINGS • SAVOR, where she'll join other chefs, songwriters, and award-winning winemakers for the gala fundraiser to aid cancer patients suffering from medical financial toxicity. Also in the house will be SabesWings founders Bret Saberhagen—yes, the two-time Cy Young Award-winning former Major League Baseball pitcher—and his wife, Kandace, a cancer survivor herself.

Roshni and the Saberhagens have history: “Bret and Kandace are near and dear friends of mine,” she says. “I

PHOTOS: SHAWN CHIPPENDALE



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have known them for many years, and we do charity events together each year. When they asked me to be a part of this event, I of course was, and am, super-excited!”

True to form, Roshni will play multiple roles at the event, serving as both executive chef and board member. “As a board member, my main duty is to make sure everyone has an amazing time,” she says. “As a chef, my duty is to make sure everyone has amazing food.” To that end, she’ll be aiding sponsorship-level guests in making amazing food themselves by teaching private, hands-on cooking classes. She’ll work with other participating chefs in preparation for the cooking demonstrations they’ll be doing, using local produce to offer flavors from around the world.

And she will also work with local chefs and vendors in creating the gala dinner menu.

And after that? What show she will she appear on next, what famous kitchen will she cook in? Roshni’s trademark answer is a free-spirited one: “Food is a journey, not a destination.” If her bio is at all telling, there will be many more stops to come. And fortunate SIPS • SONGS • SWINGS • SAVOR attendees will have the opportunity to cross paths with her at the event, the next sojourn on her great food odyssey.



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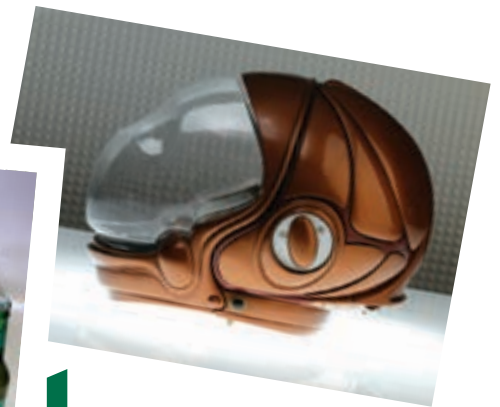




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# ABOUT CHEF BRIAN K. STEIN

OWNER OF STEIN'S BBQ & CATERING, PASO ROBLES, CALIFORNIA

"I WHOLEHEARTEDLY  
SUPPORT SABESWINGS  
IN HONOR OF MY FAMILY  
MEMBERS WHO HAVE  
HAD BREAST CANCER AND  
RECENTLY STRUGGLED TO  
SURVIVE BREAST CANCER."

*-Brian K. Stein*

Chef Brian Stein, 62, is a professionally trained chef and master baker as well as a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. Doing business on the Central Coast since 1981, he's owned multiple restaurants, including Circle B Bagelry, Big Apple Bagels, Stein's Bagels & Deli, and Stein's BBQ Co.; he eventually sold Big Apple Bagels to Otis Spunkmeyer, which took his recipe nationwide.

Brian has also created his own seasoning company, Pit Master's Choice Professional Seasoning, whose California Blend, Love Rub, and new Salt Free seasonings are available in supermarkets all over California. In addition to owning and operating a successful catering company in Paso Robles with his wife, Nancy, for over 25 years, Brian has participated in demonstration and exhibition barbecues like the Los Angeles BBQ Festival; considered a pitmaster, he teaches Santa Maria-style barbecue, which utilizes red oak.

Brain has been a featured chef on Fox 11 Los Angeles and Central Coast stations KSBY and KCOY. He's also appeared at numerous events and shows, including the 2019 Winemakers' Cookoff in Paso Robles, where Stein's Catering won the first-place Professional Chef award; Taste of Home; the California Mid-State Fair; and *Sunset's* Celebration Weekend.

Of his participation in SabesWings, Brian says, "I wholeheartedly support SabesWings in honor of my family members who have had breast cancer and recently struggled to survive breast cancer. I truly appreciate what Bret and Kandace Saberhagen are doing to help our local breast-cancer warriors."



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# ABOUT MARC SACHS

LIFETIME AWARD PRESENTER



Marc Sachs became a board member of the Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC) in 2021. During his 25-year career in sales and marketing, he has focused on brand building, marketing strategy, and commercial planning. He spent the first ten years of his career in advertising, producing national campaigns for some of the world's most iconic brands. In 2005, he joined the wine and spirits company formerly known as Block Distributing. Through its growth and transition from Republic Beverage to RNDC, he managed and led multiple sales, marketing, and organizational development strategic initiatives. Prior to joining the SabesWings board in 2021, Marc spent five years as vice president of supplier business development for RNDC. Along the way, he worked closely with Jay Johnson and is proud to call him a personal friend for more than 20 years.

Marc is familiar with the challenges faced by families dealing with costly long-term illnesses; his father has leukemia and is currently undergoing treatment. Passionately contributing his time and energy to supporting his own community and others, he has served on the board of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation – North Texas Chapter, among others, and has also been involved with the American Cancer Society. Marc resides in Dallas with his wife, Paige, and their three children.



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William Grant & Sons congratulates  
**Jay Johnson, Region President - RNDC WEST**  
on his Lifetime Achievement Award 2021



*William Grant & Sons*







# REVISITING RULES OF THUMB FOR RESTAURANT SERVICE

**I**n a previous column, I covered the six rules upon which I managed to build a successful 28-year career as an on-premise wine professional:

1. There is no point in price gouging.
2. Increased volume of sales never makes up for higher costs.
3. It is never good to “upsell” guests.
4. Don’t be a snob by forcing guests to like “somm wines.”
5. A great wine list does not make a restaurant great.
6. Wine is always a condiment, never the main ingredient.

Times are different now. Countless restaurants have shut down, many sommeliers are out of work, and to top it all off, one of our institutions—the Court of Master Sommeliers—is in complete shambles. Surely this won’t be forever. But if you’ve been laid off or are currently working for a fraction of what you should be earning, now is as good a time as any to think about how to improve your game once you’re back in it. So here are a few more tried-and-true guidelines:

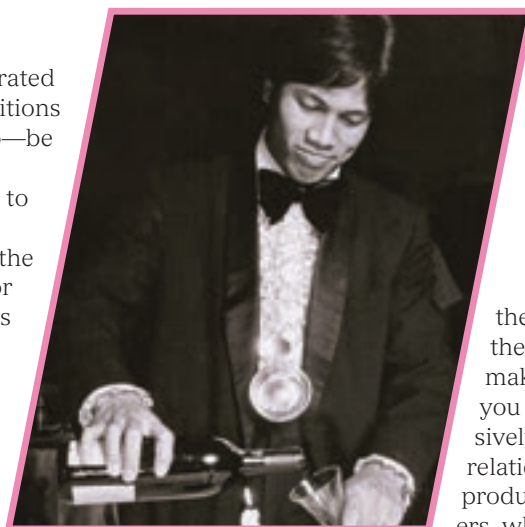
**1. SHOW UP—AND RESPECT YOUR COLLEAGUES.** It’s an industry joke that sommeliers are prima donnas. Half the time they don’t show up to trade events, even after they’ve sent an RSVP. Some, I’m ashamed to say, are well-known luses, takers, harassers, and/or abusers. You know who you are. If you can’t help yourself, I am sorry, but you need to get out of the business. To be respected, you need to be respectful.

**2. RESPECT YOUR PROFESSION.** Just because much of the on-premise

industry has operated on nasty old traditions like quid pro quo—be it relinquishing control of the list to distributors who agree to assume the cost of printing or carrying products in exchange for sports tickets—doesn’t mean it has ever been right. The only things that matter are the quality of the wines you serve, the guest experiences you provide, and your integrity as a wine professional. Period.

**3. TELL YOUR SUPPLIERS EXACTLY WHAT YOU NEED—IDEALLY BEFORE YOU MEET WITH THEM.** Encounters with your reps—especially suppliers who travel thousands of miles to make appointments—should never be guessing games. If you are devoting hours each week to tasting wines that you’d never buy because they’re wrong for your program, it’s a sign that you’ve failed to communicate. Stop wasting their time and your own by explaining your needs via email in the most specific terms possible.

**4. RELATEDLY, COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY WITH PRODUCERS AND IMPORTERS.** There has never been a rule that says you must work only with distributors. Wineries and importers always have far more to offer than what distributors choose to carry. At the same time, most distributors will bring on new wines when they see that



A portrait of the author as a young sommelier.

there is a buyer for them. If you want to make a difference, you must aggressively cultivate direct relationships with producers and importers, who by and large love to deal directly with

sommeliers, even in three-tier systems.

## **5. NEVER UNDERESTIMATE GUESTS.**

By now you should know that they’re not stupid; even if they don’t know the latest or coolest wines, they obviously have the capacity to appreciate them as easily as you ever have. So don’t insult them with a dumbed-down selection. Assume the best in them, give them lots of choices, and you’ll be rewarded by their appreciation of the work you’ve put into it.

## **6. BREAK OUT OF YOUR OWN LITTLE WORLD.**

The usual way to do this is still the best—by visiting wine regions and getting to know the people who grow and craft their wines so as to understand them from the ground up. Negotiate a set number of weeks per year with your employer to do exactly that, and never allow your itinerary to be handled by a distributor or anyone with ulterior motives. Go your own way, and it will show in the wine program you create to distinguish your restaurant.



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*Michael Mondavi*

Michael Mondavi, Founder and Coach







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