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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

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Watermelon
gaspacho with Extra
Spicy Bayou Boil BBQ
Seasoning is just one
of the unconventional
pairings conceived by
Gustus Vitae founder
Francis Scanlon
(pictured) and CEO
Elizabeth Kernan.

TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A Season

**GUSTUS VITAE'S SMALL-BATCH
SEASONINGS ARE BUILT FOR
CHEFS AND BARTENDERS**

Gustus Vitae started as a line of eight sea salts and has since expanded into a sizable collection of globally inspired seasonings and sugars made with sustainably sourced ingredients.



All chefs worth their salt are familiar with the drill: After the grill has reached 500 degrees Fahrenheit and the meat is warmed to room temperature, it's time to apply a rub. Enter Gustus Vitae (Latin for "taste of life"). The family-owned company offers over 250 gourmet salts, artisan cane sugars, and premium seasonings that, with just the shake of a wrist, can elevate and transform even the simplest of dishes. That includes the brand's Bougie BBQ collection, a line of rubs and seasonings with playful names like Chef's Kiss Spicy BBQ and Fancy AF BBQ.

Founder Francis Scanlon—the grandson of wealthy Chicago businessman Robert "Tubby" Bacon, renowned as a passionate gourmand and promoter of French food and wine—planted the seed for his future business when he began creating gourmet flavored sea salts for friends and family as Christmas presents. While living in Venice Beach, California, and working as an advertising executive, he experimented with selling a line of eight sea salts at the Venice Farmers Market in 2015; before long, he was discovered by Whole Foods' now-discontinued forager program, which scouted farmers markets for new products, and began selling his wares at the store's location in Venice Beach.

A year later, Scanlon found his future CEO (and wife) in Elizabeth

Kernan after the pair met at the Expo West trade show in California. Sensing that she could add tremendous value with her experience as head of wholesale for a cold-pressed juice company, he persuaded her to join Gustus Vitae, and with their combined creativity and energy, Scanlon and Kernan expanded beyond salts into sugars and blended seasonings.

"Easy, Healthy, and Approachable"

As Scanlon explains, the question at the heart of their business is always "How can we make it better?" Their answer, essentially, is to source as many ingredients as they can from California while omitting unnecessary additives, ensuring that Gustus Vitae's small-batch products contain no fillers, wheat, gluten, MSG, or artificial colors and flavors. For some items, they use an unprocessed fine-grain sea salt from the San Francisco Bay

Area, resulting in blends with a lower amount of sodium than traditional rubs and seasonings contain. In short, Scanlon says, "We put good things in so people get good things out."

Another emphasis is on accessibility. "[Cooks at all levels should] feel they can make something that's easy, healthy, and approachable with our products," he notes. "So, for example, if you're making a chicken dish every night, you can mix it up and have Jamaican chicken or Thai curry one night [and] a rustic Tuscan or a spicy

Moroccan meal another night, just using a natural spice blend."

A prime example is the Everything But The . . . collection of ten seasonings, including the popular Everything But The Avocado Toast. Scanlon, who describes it as "elevated [yet] easy to use," encourages experimentation with all of Gustus Vitae's products through the recipes and videos posted on its website (gustusvitae.com); take a simple watermelon gazpacho spiked with Extra Spicy Bayou Boil BBQ Seasoning for an unexpected kick.

Cooks with a sweet tooth, meanwhile, can look to the brand's extensive line of cane sugars; sustainably sourced from sugarcane grown in the United States, they're available individually or in gift packs like the Infused Cocktail and BBQ Cane Sugar set. Their applications range from classic to creative: The Spicy Raspberry Cane Sugar can rim the glass of a Margarita or make a flavorful simple syrup, the Pink Lemonade Cane Sugar can serve as a topping for frosted cupcakes, and the decadent Caramel Crème Brûlée Cane Sugar can, of course, caramelize the top of its namesake dessert with the help of a culinary butane torch or add new dimension to holiday drinks like eggnog, spiced rum, and Irish coffee.

Staying true to the brand's roots, Scanlon has also grown the gourmet sea salt line to 29 colorful and mouth-watering selections like Blue Spirulina Superfood Salt, Buffalo Wing Sea Salt, Lemon Rosemary Sea Salt, and Italian Black Winter Truffle Sea Salt. Like





the sugars, they also can be used behind the bar: Gustus Vitae's creations have appeared at establishments like neat LA. in Los Angeles, which features the brand's Red Cayenne Sea Salt in its Pretty Please Papi cocktail. And purists should look no further than the Must Have Kitchen Basics set of Garlic Pepper Rub, Crushed Red Pepper Flakes, and Granulated Garlic—representing, as stated on the Gustus Vitae website, the “culinary backbone” of any dish.



Scanlon prepares Crème Brûlée topped with Gustus Vitae's decadent Caramel Crème Brûlée Cane Sugar.

Sprinkling in Global Influences

Looking for a change of scenery, Scanlon and Kernan moved from Los Angeles to Scottsdale, Arizona, in February 2020 and prepared to work on their latest collection of products; the process was, unsurprisingly, complicated by the arrival of the pandemic, which necessitated that all research and development be conducted in their home. (Describing the chaos, Scanlon recalls seeing masks and baggies, which they use to hold their blends until they're packaged, “everywhere.”) But their productivity hardly suffered: In just three months, they created 40 new seasonings in addition to the aforementioned 20-piece line of gourmet rubs called Bougie BBQ. The flavor profiles of many of the seasonings—largely based on salt, onion, and pepper—reflect Kernan's preference for a big, bold, garlic-driven bite.

Many of the flavors the couple developed in their brainstorming sessions were influenced by their travels and their heritage; for example, Kernan says, “I knew there were a few ingredients that I wanted to use—like the Great Lakes Fish Fry and BBQ Rub had to have cherries in it, which, [in addition to being] different and delicious for a barbecue seasoning, was essential in representing the area of the Great Lakes, where my people are from.” Meanwhile, the New Zealand Lamb & Game BBQ Rub—made with ingredients found on and around the Scanlon family's cattle ranch on New Zealand's South Island—and Argentine Chimichurri & Steak Seasoning harken to the time Scanlon spent in both countries during his formative years.



Gustus Vitae's 4-ounce line of products features magnetic tins that stick to most metal surfaces, while a newly launched line of barbecue-focused rubs and seasonings comes in 8-ounce tins.

Explains Kernan, “We are inspired by the things we like to eat and make for ourselves and the places [we've visited]. We really find joy [in creating] something that is not made yet or things that already exist that are done poorly or have unnecessary additives, like artificial ingredients, fillers, and old spices.”

In addition to its website, Gustus Vitae is available on Amazon as well as in specialty grocers, co-ops, and select mom-and-pop shops across the country. The majority of its products come in 4-ounce magnetic tins that stick to most metal surfaces like fridges, grills, hoods, and ranges, while

its newly launched line of barbecue-focused rubs and seasonings comes in jumbo-sized 8-ounce tins. Scanlon and Kernan applied the same conscientious approach that they took with their sustainably sourced ingredients to their packaging: The tins, which are hand-packed in California, are made from recyclable material and the labels with recycled paper.

Explains Kernan, “We have something for everyone. That we are able to play a small part in the way that people cook and serve their friends, family, and loved ones is a huge privilege. It's something that we think about all day, every day.” **LE**



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Tasting Panel Contributing Editor Ian Buxton Pens Two New Books

Two new books from longtime spirits writer/commentator/consultant and *Tasting Panel* contributing editor Ian Buxton are set for release this fall: the second edition of *101 Craft and World Whiskies to Try Before You Die* (\$20), available November 9, and *Gin: The Ultimate Companion: The Essential Guide to Flavours, Brands, Cocktails, Tonics and More* (\$21.95), arriving December 14.

In the former, readers can explore the exciting and expanding world of craft distillers, from Austria and Argentina to Norway and New Zealand, who are reinventing the category as they challenge previous orthodoxies and tease drinkers with their exciting new styles and radical releases. Guaranteed to appeal equally to whisky aficionados and new enthusiasts in search of a well-informed guide, the updated handbook is written in Buxton's trademark irreverent and trenchant style.

The latter book, meanwhile, expands on the success of the bestselling *101 Gins to Try Before You Die*, of which 80,000 copies have sold in the U.K. The 21st century's gin craze has continued unabated since the book's publication, with exciting new expressions launched on a regular basis and a remarkable boom in tonics to suit every palate; hence the follow-up, which brings Buxton's customary wit, industry knowledge, and highly developed palate to this fast-evolving category once more. It includes background details on distilleries and craft artisans, tasting notes, cocktails, and tips on the latest brands as well as longstanding favorites.



V Is for Vino Returns for Season 3



V Is for Vino, the top-rated wine show on Amazon Prime, has released its much-anticipated third season, in which host/sommelier and new *SOMM Journal* columnist Vince Anter introduces viewers to the people, history, culture, food, and, of course, wine of Walla Walla, the epicenter of Washington winemaking, in episode one; Ensenada, located in Mexico's up-and-coming Valle de Guadalupe region, in episode two; and Finger Lakes, New York, which is known for its Riesling, in episode three.

The new season focuses on the spirit of community created in each destination by winemakers, locals, and tourists alike. "The difference between good and great wine regions are the people. In a year where everyone had to rely on their community more than ever, we wanted to explore the risk-takers, innovators, and collaborat[ors]" that define the wine industry, Anter says. Episodes are available on visforvino.com and can also be viewed on YouTube, Vimeo, Roku, Facebook Watch, and IGTV.

Trinchero Family Estates Hires Aimee Baker to Lead Its Luxury Wine Production

St. Helena-based Trinchero Family Estates

(TFE) has announced that former Opus One associate winemaker Aimee Baker will join the organization as director of luxury winemaking. Baker will work out of TFE's Winemakers' Studio, a state-of-the-art production facility built in 2017 for the company's luxury brands. She will work with winemakers across multiple labels, including Neyers Vineyards, Bravium, ZIATA, Trinchero Napa Valley, and Mason Cellars, as well as lead all luxury innovation projects.



"I'm incredibly excited to work across a range of brands and varieties alongside Trinchero Family Estates' team of talented winemakers," Baker says. "As a Napa Valley native, I've seen the growth of and investment in TFE's luxury portfolio, and I'm delighted to take part in building its next chapter."

Breakthru Beverage Group Appoints Tom Bené as President and CEO

Breakthru Beverage Group has appointed Tom Bené as its new president and CEO. Drawing on more than 30 years of leadership experience, Bené has a track record of driving growth and modernizing business



models throughout his career. Prior to joining Breakthru, he served as president and CEO of the National Restaurant Association and as chairman, president, and CEO of Sysco Corporation.

To ensure a smooth transition, former president and CEO Greg Baird will serve as an advisor to the company through the end of the year.

"Breakthru's strong positioning in the marketplace provides a springboard to accelerate growth," Bené says. "I look forward to working with the board of managers and the company's talented leadership team and associates to capture the many opportunities ahead and exceed expectations for our suppliers and customers."

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Wilson Daniels Appoints Scott Ehrlich as VP of Marketing



Wilson Daniels has announced the appointment of Scott Ehrlich as vice president of marketing. Ehrlich, who will report directly to Wilson Daniels president Rocco Lombardo, will lead the ten-person marketing team from the company's Napa headquarters.

Ehrlich was most recently the vice president of marketing at Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits, where he led strategy and brand marketing for 13 fine wine brands. Previously, he was the director of portfolio strategy and channel marketing for luxury wines at Constellation Brands as well as the director of

marketing for luxury imports at Ste. Michelle Wine Estates. "Scott's vast experience in the luxury and fine wine sector makes him deeply attuned to the workings of Wilson Daniels' 37 family-owned producers, who represent the quality pinnacle in their regions," says Lombardo. "On top of his fine wine experience, Scott also possesses a larger luxury-consumer-marketing background [that] will greatly benefit our partners in our overall route-to-market strategy."

Windsor Court Hotel Announces New Culinary and Beverage Team

New Orleans' Windsor Court Hotel has announced a new culinary and beverage team composed of industry leaders who will soon reveal a much-anticipated update to the iconic establishment as they launch new menus of modern American cuisine. Among them is John Mitchell, a 16-year veteran in wine and hospitality who has rejoined Windsor Court as the director of food and beverage operations. "I am happy to be home again," says Mitchell, who has a highly decorated resume based on a deep understanding of wine and a passion for exceeding guest expectations. "I love this city; this timeless hotel; and the team in place to elevate The Grill Room [and] Polo Club Lounge [while showing off] all the nuances we have in store."



689 Cellars Appoints Michael VonSalzen as VP of U.S. Sales



689 Cellars, the company behind the Killer Drop, Submission, and 689 Cellars brands, is entering the domestic market for the first time, having just grown its portfolio of California wines internationally to over 150,000 cases in just the past few years. Leading the expansion as VP of U.S. sales is Michael VonSalzen, who has a diverse background in the wine industry, having previously worked as a sales director with the Boisset Collection, a sommelier with the Ritz-Carlton, and a buyer for four of the biggest wine clubs in the U.S.

689 Cellars is operated out of San Rafael, California, and is owned by Curtis McBride and Ken Conner. Award-winning winemaker Kent Rasmussen makes the company's wines, ensuring consistent style and quality throughout the portfolio. For more information, visit 689cellars.com.

Delicato Family Wines Adds Prosecco to the RELAX Brand Portfolio

Delicato Family Wines, the fifth-largest wine supplier in the United States and exclusive importer for Mosel Valley-based RELAX Wines, recently announced the addition of a Prosecco DOC to the RELAX Wines portfolio, which



includes the top-selling imported Riesling in the U.S. as well as RELAX Rosé, Bubbles, and Rosé Bubbles. Now available nationwide at an SRP of \$15, RELAX Prosecco offers lively effervescence and a palate defined by refreshing white peach and light citrus flavors.

"Sales of Prosecco are up 21% over the last year and now account for 25% of all sparkling wine sales in the U.S., making it the fastest-growing [domestic] wine category," notes Mary Wachowicz, portfolio director for Delicato Family Wines. "RELAX has excellent consumer pull and loyalty among U.S. wine consumers, and we think the combination of a strong brand and a hot category is a winning one." 

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HEAVEN'S DOOR

The restless spirit of Bob Dylan

#1

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Around the World in D.C.

SPANISH COMFORT FOOD AND MODERN VIETNAMESE CUISINE WHISK DISTRICT DINERS ABROAD SANS PASSPORTS

What has José Andrés been up to lately—besides traveling the world to feed those in need as the founder of World Central Kitchen? Converting the Bethesda location of his longtime tapas hot spot, Jaleo, into a Spanish take on the all-day diner (called, appropriately enough, Spanish Diner). For his latest project, the renowned chef, author, humanitarian, and veritable national treasure (who lives nearby when he isn't globetrotting) was stirred by the simple, satisfying home cooking he grew up with.

My August visit coincided with La Tomatina, Andrés' homage to the yearly festival (and messy food fight) held in Valencia. Though it was canceled this year due to the pandemic, Andrés went ahead with an entire menu dedicated to the late-summer farmers market darling. I sipped a wildly addictive Tom Mare made with black pepper-infused Gin Mare, tomato water, rosemary syrup, and lemon while dining on a Catalan salad of salt cod, tomato, olive oil, and olives as well as a tomato and watermelon salad topped with pistachios, Caña de Cabra cheese, and a drizzle of PX Sherry reduction.

Like any diner worth its salt, this one serves up breakfast all day; here, it takes the form of eggs fried in olive oil and topped with crispy potatoes plus your choice of chistorra, morcilla, jamón, and/or smoked salmon. The section of the menu labeled "La Cocina de la Abuela," meanwhile, offers such hearty dishes as beef tripe stew with chickpeas and mac and cheese with Manchego and chorizo. No offense to Grandma, but those dishes seemed more fitting for the chilly weather ahead than the summer heat we were experiencing, so we opted instead for the chef's greatest hits: crispy patatas bravas, delicate slices of acorn-fed jamón ibérico, pan con tomate, and a G&T with custom-made tonic. For dessert? Tomatoes, of course, in the



form of a marmalade with olive-oil and brioche ice creams.

On the D.C. waterfront, another chef is paying tribute to his culinary heritage. After launching in October 2020 and then shuttering for a few months, Moon Rabbit, a modern Vietnamese restaurant named for the virtuous rabbit in the Buddhist Jataka tale, reopened last winter in the InterContinental Washington D.C. – The Wharf. Chef Kevin Tien playfully references his experiences as a first-generation Asian American through dishes like panko-fried turmeric catfish with smoked dill tartar, evoking a McDonald's Filet-O-Fish; shrimp grilled on sugarcane skewers; and charred cabbage with peanut romesco.

A close friend and I plotted our dining strategy over delicate White Negronis featuring Nolet's Silver Gin, grapefruit-infused Belvedere Vodka,

Dolin Vermouth, and grapefruit liqueur. It would have been all too easy to fill up on the shareable small plates, but our server thoughtfully reminded us to save room for the crispy fried chicken lacquered with chili-maple fish sauce and crawfish noodles with crab-fat butter. The true star of the night, however, was the tender pork blade, fragrant with lemongrass and served with scallion pancakes, lettuce leaves, and hoisin for a choose-your-own-adventure Asian taco even better than a fancy fast-food fish sandwich. [📖](#)

Crawfish noodles with crab-fat butter at Moon Rabbit.



Spanish Diner's Tom Mare cocktail with black pepper-infused Gin Mare, tomato water, rosemary syrup, and lemon.



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ROSA REGALE

Phoenix Rising

ROSS SIMON IS THE SCOT BEHIND SOME OF THE VALLEY'S HOTTEST SPOTS

Leave it to a talent like Scotsman Ross Simon to show Valley residents a thing or two about cocktail bars. After serving as a bartender at the London Academy of Bartenders (LAB), Simon moved to Phoenix, sensing the potential of this desert town. Now, he's catapulted it toward the top of the nation's cocktail scene—and garnered numerous awards in the process. "Phoenix had a good base to build something from," he says. "Why not create a cocktail culture where there wasn't really one in existence?"

Simon co-founded the US Bartenders' Guild chapter in Phoenix and the annual Arizona Cocktail Week before opening Bitter & Twisted Cocktail Parlour (B&T) in 2014. Showcasing over 100 craft cocktails using premium spirits, the spacious, 160-seat bar is located in the historic Luhrs Building in downtown Phoenix and also offers globally inspired bar snacks. "I really like the [menu's] street food aspect; I think it complements the drinks well," Simon says. Earlier this year, the London-based reviewers behind the World's 50 Best Bars ranking named B&T to their 50 Best Discovery list for notable lounges and bars in smaller markets, further



Garnished with a housemade praline, Little Rituals' Midnight Snack cocktail features shiitake-infused Rittenhouse Rye, Vicario Nocino, Cardamaro, carrot eau de vie, and fennel bitters.



Ross Simon is among the hospitality pros transforming Phoenix's cocktail scene.

cementing its stellar standing.

Another Simon project, Little Rituals, is similarly acclaimed: It immediately secured a nomination for Outstanding Bar Program from the James Beard Awards upon opening in 2019. Located on the fourth floor of the Residence Inn/Courtyard by Marriott Phoenix Downtown, the 75-person lounge may be a high-end cocktail destination, but its name suggests its knack for the personal touch, signifying not only the "little rituals" behind life's most special memories but also those that go into crafting specialty cocktails.

Partnering with renowned mixologist Aaron DeFeo, whom he lured away from Casino del Sol in Tucson and describes as "one of the most talented bartenders in the state," Simon set out

to create a hotel bar that was unlike anything this town of golf megaresorts has ever seen. The drinks deliver familiarity with an international flair; take, for instance, a Daiquiri spiced up with curry syrup and Sichuan pepper oil. Meanwhile, chef Jeremiah Wilhelms' menu highlights equally inventive comfort food such as a Vietnamese-inspired French dip with pho.

For his next act, Simon collaborated with Rise Uptown Hotel on two new concepts: pool bar Lylo Swim Club and rooftop bar Don Woods' Say When. "Lylo is not your standard pool bar but a little oasis with fun, tasty, balanced, fresh cocktails," he notes. They meet their vibrant match in the tropics-inspired food created in collaboration with the hotel's culinary team. Filtered misters keep guests cool in the 100-degree heat while creative touches keep the drinks chilled; the Bellini, for example, is served with seasonal sorbet.

Taking advantage of a roof deck with expansive views, Don Woods' Say When is an ideal spot to enjoy the sunset or to meet friends post-dinner. Simon explains, "We wanted refreshing, balanced drinks, with highballs and spritzes as the focus." The small menu, which he describes as being "more like hors d'oeuvres for a cocktail party," offers light but sophisticated snacks such as gin-soaked Castelvetrano olives and chips with dill crème fraîche.

In establishing a thriving cocktail scene, Simon has given Valley dwellers something we may not have realized was lacking. "What we have done [with our programs] is to basically turn people into cocktail drinkers, and that is kind of exciting," he says. **LT**

PHOTOS: GRACE STUFKOSKY



The bar program at Lylo Swim Club pairs cocktails like the Seasonal Sorbet Bellini and the Lazy Daze with tropical-inspired food such as fruit with spicy chile mix.

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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.

The Accidental Wine Tourist

After a year and a half of COVID, during which we sold our home in New York and hit the road for an extended sojourn around the country, my wife and I had plans to put down roots in New Orleans and were just about to sign a lease when Hurricane Ida hit. We were lucky enough to get out before the Category 4 storm ravaged the Gulf Coast and sent the Crescent City to its knees, evacuating to California's Central Coast, Chicago, and New York City.

While visiting wineries in Paso Robles during our Central Coast leg, I was particularly impressed by Ancient Peaks Winery. Its vineyards are planted in ancient fossilized oyster beds nestled in the middle of the historic Santa

some of the creative and well-made blends that this winery, founded in 2007, is building its reputation on; Mad Crush, made with Grenache, Tempranillo, and Mourvèdre, was a definite favorite.

Next, a few days in Chicago brought us to Travelle at The Langham Hotel for drinks, where we made a surprise discovery of goodwill toward my newly adopted city. Compelled to help those in New Orleans affected by the hurricane, beverage director Christine Boyd spearheaded the Drink for a Cause initiative, which ran from September 1 to October 31 and donated \$1 from every Old Fashioned sold to fund relief efforts by the Tales of the Cocktail Foundation.



Yannick Benjamin conceived Contento as New York City's first totally accessible dining establishment.

Margarita Ranch, and those soils lend a lovely minerality to the wines. Particular expressions of note included the Cabernet Franc, a rarity in Paso's hot climate, and Chardonnay. A stop at ONX Wines in the Tin City industrial park, meanwhile, brought insight into

Lastly, back in New York, we got to experience the much-hyped Contento. With a Peruvian-themed menu, the uber-inclusive restaurant is the realization of Advanced Sommelier and Wine on Wheels co-founder Yannick Benjamin's dream to open the first



The lineup of Ancient Peaks wines from Paso Robles.



A selection of ONX wines.

totally accessible dining establishment in the city. As such, the well-appointed restaurant includes almost every feature possible to facilitate the dining experience for people with disabilities; from the lowered bar for those in wheelchairs and the optional Braille menu to the staff trained in sign language, Contento delivers on all fronts. Benjamin even dedicates a section of the wine list to "wines of impact," with bottles from producers like Israel's Kishor Winery—which employs workers with special needs—and Kitá Wines, run by members of the Chumash tribe in the Santa Ynez Valley.

It was an eye-opening trip on so many levels. Reflecting back, it was good to see that even with all we've been through these past 18 months, the cogs of the wine and dining industries are still oiled and finding new inspiration with which to catch our attention. **TR**

PHOTOS: DAVID RANSOM

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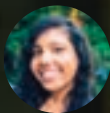
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BY PARIS VASSER

**Tiffanie Barriere is an
award-winning mixologist
and educator.**

History OUT LOUD

AWARD-WINNING MIXOLOGIST
TIFFANIE BARRIERE ON
THE IMPORTANCE OF
UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINS
OF COCKTAIL CULTURE

PHOTO: LYNSEY WEATHERSPON

When a bartender slides a drink across a bar to a guest, they briefly open up a gateway into history. This gesture represents much more than an act of service: It is, as award-winning mixologist, educator, and historian Tiffanie Barriere says, “an entire story” in a glass. Tea cocktails, for example, are the perfect vehicle for piquing patrons’ curiosity about different global cultures in which tea’s role ranges from the ceremonial to the medicinal. “I connect with people through it,” Barriere says, adding that whether hot or cold, sweet or unsweet, or green or black, “it’s a hit every time.”

Barriere’s impressive knowledge has won her both invitations to speak at such events as the Southern Foodways Symposium and accolades as the former beverage director of One Flew South in the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, which was named Best Airport Bar in the World by *Tales of the Cocktail* in 2014, during her seven-year tenure. For the past several years, under the name “The Drinking Coach,” she’s taught online cocktail classes focused on helping patrons connect with the art of mixology while improving not only their

technique but their understanding of the history behind it—especially the contributions of Black people, who are all too often overlooked or erased entirely.

“The reason I like to be a little loud with history is because our stories were never told,” she says. “Black inventors of this country created things that are so important to what we use today.” One example she provides is the ubiquitous lemon squeezer, which was perfected in the early 1800s by John Thomas White; he patented the tool and used it to make lemonade, a drink that had been largely reserved for those who could afford it—namely, white people.

Barriere’s passion for education is motivated by her desire to share the stories of these silenced pioneers and bartenders who were often looked at as “the help.” But the person behind the bar, she explains, “knows the world [contained] in a bottle” and its ability to unlock cocktail drinkers’ own curiosity. She spells that out for her guests—“I’m about to make you something. Here’s what’s going inside, here’s why I made it . . . it’s a full poem”—and then challenges them to bolster their own

knowledge by going beyond simple descriptors like “smooth” and delving deeper into why a spirit tastes the way it does, perhaps because of the water used in the country it came from, for example. “People call it ‘nerding out,’” she adds, but “[bartenders] don’t—we call it ‘knowing your product.’”

Barriere plans to continue connecting people to the beverage world in new ways. In addition to writing about the Black community’s influence on cocktail culture for a book with Toni Tipton-Martin, she’s also developing a tool kit for home bartending and plans to open her own bar in Atlanta in the coming months. Named *Et Tois*, meaning “And You” in French and “Hey, You” in Creole, she envisions it as a playful yet mysterious space where, most importantly, her guests can enjoy delicious drinks.

Driven by the fact that so few bar owners are Black women, Barriere sees *Et Tois* as a natural next step in her career, evolving from years of crafting cocktails and educating patrons around the world. She says, “I want to do something that is documented and recorded and [that will] be a victory on so many levels.” **LV**

J. LOHR SIGNATURE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

"My signature on the label indicates that this wine is a personal statement for me, looking to encompass thirty-five years of Paso Robles winegrowing experience and history in a single bottle."

J. Lohr

2017 VINTAGE

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POINTS

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The Roosevelt Room Rebounds

THE CRAFT COCKTAIL BAR PROVES IT STILL HAS ROOM TO GROW IN AUSTIN

A few months into the pandemic, I started paying an unprecedented level of attention to my sense of smell. I'd wake up and promptly take a big chemical whiff of Irish Spring soap to reassure myself that everything was still working properly before sniffing my way through the day. Whether I was taking in the earthy-sweet warmth of grated nutmeg in my French toast or the suggestion of honeysuckle and grapefruit in a glass of Albariño, I tried to notice how scents conjured memories and affected taste.

But my sample size was limited, so I really looked forward to returning to bars like The Roosevelt Room, which has been an innovator in Austin's craft-cocktail scene since opening in 2015. On a busy night, as its practically acrobatic bartenders prepare selections from the ambitious 82-drink menu with all manner of bitters, syrups, and garnishes—not to mention the occasional flaming flourish—a curious sniffer can have a heyday. It's good to be back.

Founders Justin Lavenue and Dennis Gobis met at a cocktail conference in New Orleans, where they discovered that their philosophies about hospitality and bartending meshed. A few years later, they wrangled a deal to rent two adjoining spaces in an Austin building built in 1929—and wound up running 7,000 square feet of bar space straight out of the gate. "Being young and naive worked to our advantage," says Lavenue, though he also had a business degree in his back pocket to help inform their approach.

The team—which eventually grew to include GM Matthew Ross and assistant GM Matthew Korzelius, now also a co-owner—spent 18 months developing The Roosevelt Room's current 53-drink "Classics" menu. Decorating a 15-foot chalkboard over the gleaming, 36-foot-long bar, it was inspired by not only history but the



Justin Lavenue, Matthew Korzelius, and Dennis Gobis of The Roosevelt Room in Austin, TX.

crafts of cooking, brewing, winemaking, and beyond. "All of us have been in the competition bartending circuit, which is based on creativity," says Gobis. "To do well, you need a good palate and a professional presentation. A lot of times, your judges are chefs with incredible palates, and you get a lot of valuable feedback."

Divided into seven "drinking eras" from pre-1800 to modern times, the menu progresses from concoctions like the Sherry Cobbler and Milk Punch to contemporary classics like the Oaxaca Old Fashioned. "But each drink has our unique spin, [creating] what we think is the perfect version of that drink," says Lavenue. "For our Aviation, for example, we add a little bit of pisco, which bridges the gap between the gin and the violette liqueur."

Korzelius, whose easy laugh and communication skills helped buoy flagging staff morale in the months the bar was closed, adds that "it's a hard bar to work in, mostly due to the complexity and breadth of the menu. Industry-wide labor shortages and supply-chain issues mean that *everything* is rockier

right now, but one of the most important things we can do . . . is exercise a little empathy for everyone's situation so we can work together and get through this."

With business ticking up as pandemic fears ease, the team is able to take advantage of improvements made during the shutdown. They removed a cinderblock wall to expand the seating area and improve lighting; added additional wells; and created "secret bookshelf" passageways between The Roosevelt Room and their event space, The Eleanor, which will allow for double-venue bookings for private parties. "But one of the most important things we did during the pandemic was to focus on many quality-of-life issues for our employees," says Gobis. "We improved our health insurance, shortened shifts, and streamlined training, which has allowed us to reopen as the strongest business and team we've ever been."

"Overall," adds Lavenue, "we feel like we can withstand anything now. Our entire team is excited for what the future holds." **LT**

PHOTO: LORI MOFFATT

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Cabernet drinkers actually tend to prefer Syrah. They just don't know it yet.

The Cabernet Comundrum: Is It Love or Force of Habit?

There are two marketing geniuses I want to meet. First, I need to know who turned kale from a disposable salad bar garnish into the first item to sell out in Whole Foods whenever a storm is imminent. Second, I'd love to have a chat with the person who managed to convince the majority of red wine drinkers in the U.S. that Cabernet Sauvignon is the be-all and end-all.

Don't get me wrong—I'm a big fan of Cabernet, which enjoys popularity across multiple generations, starting with the silent generation, who, along with the boomers, passed their dogmatic affinity down to Gen X and in turn the millennials. Basically, most living wine drinkers have been told by their parents that Cabernet Sauvignon is the "it" grape.

But there is a slight problem with their collective memory. While Cabernet can be excellent and is certainly responsible for some of the world's best wines, it can also be overcropped, overextracted, overoaked, overpriced, and underwhelming. In fact, because the cult of Cabernet

has so many devout members, wine-makers can get away with a lot more than they should.

Enter Syrah (or Shiraz, as the Aussies call it). What amazes me most about this grape is the value it offers at virtually every tier. The most expensive Syrahs in the world (Penfolds Grange, Henschke Hill of Grace, Guigal's famous "La La" wines, et cetera) all tend to be far less expensive than their Cabernet-based equivalents; in some instances, you could get a case of one of these wines for the same price as a single bottle of Napa Cab. But beyond bang for your buck, there's something far more important you should know: Cabernet drinkers actually tend to prefer Syrah. They just don't know it yet.

I spent most of my 20-odd years as a corporate-level wine director overseeing many upscale steakhouses. No matter the restaurant or circumstance, empirical experimentation proved time and time again that self-proclaimed Cabernet lovers largely prefer Syrah. Every time a guest told me they loved Cabernet or felt they should drink a

Cab because they were having red meat, I would ask them to describe what they loved about the grape. And wouldn't you know it—999 times out of 1,000, they wrote the perfect tasting note for Syrah of some type. Sometimes it was from Washington State, other times South Africa, France, or Australia. But the consistent theme was a textbook understanding of Syrah: smoky, earthy, savory, juicy, concentrated, dark, deep, spicy, oaky, and so on.

Every time that occurred, I'd tell a guest I had the perfect wine for them, serve it to them blind, and feel a tremendous sense of satisfaction when, after they exclaimed how perfect the wine was, I'd reveal it to be not Cabernet but Syrah! It's a wonderfully enjoyable game to play, not because I'm in the habit of tricking guests but rather because it leads them to a discovery they would have never made if left to their own devices. So the next time you are thinking about ordering a Cabernet, try Syrah instead. The life you change may well be your own. **LT**



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Mynars Bar:

A Return to the Beginning in West, Texas

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).

It was May 2019, before the whole damn world changed. Nine years had passed since we first pulled off I-35 toward the Texan hamlet of West, near Waco. Back then, weary from a day's work, we came across Mynars Bar, a faded brick building holding up the corner of East Oak and North Roberts streets. It was about 8 p.m. We were thirsty. We walked in.

At first glance, everything was lumbered with ancient-looking wood, including the floor—probably original but still shining respectfully—and a long, straight, powerful-looking bar. High overhead, the wooden ceiling, with a couple of spinning fans, helped complete the appearance of an Old West saloon—if not for the dozens of

dollar bills hanging from its boards like a colony of bats.

Some country tune was playing on the corner jukebox. A small woman, well kept, smiled at Kirk and me from behind the bar and asked in a voice sweet as peach pie, “Just passing through?”

“We should write a book.”


That's what I said. I meant to say it to Kirk, but I think that's how I answered the woman. After we ordered a couple beers, I said it again. “We *really* should write a book.”

First, though, we published an article about Mynars in the August 2010 issue of *The Tasting Panel*, thereby documenting the true and authentic origin story of *Texas Dives*.

So nine years after that, we open the screen door and walk into Mynars again. It's Friday afternoon. Same old gas pump by the front door, same old ice box at the end of the bar packed with bottles of Shiner, Bud, Corona. The dollar bills on the ceiling have multiplied.

Half the seats at the bar and the tables are taken. I hear a Mickey Gilley tune playing. Conversations are loud—bolstered by end-of-the-week enthusiasm and cold beer that's priced to respect a customer's intelligence. In the back, men play dominoes with knobby, calloused hands indicating that they work outside for a living. Others rotate in and out of the game, keeping the table active most of the evening. Such games have been going on for decades.

John and Rosie Mynar bought the place in 1923 and ran it as a grocery store during the dark days of Prohibition and the Depression. After John passed away, it was Rosie who turned the grocery into a beer joint. It's remained a Mynar family bar ever since.

If seeing it again after nearly a decade is any indication, time does not stand still inside a dive. But it definitely tends to move slower than it does outside the front door. 



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Stunning fruit aromas of ripe Meyer lemon, pear and stone fruit, with hints of freshly baked sourdough bread.

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TAKING INVENTORY YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR VOICES

How
have your
professional
duties
changed
over the
past 18
months?



Darlin Kulla

Beverage director, KNEAD Hospitality + Design, Washington, D.C.

So much has happened within these 18 months; there's been a lot of evolution. The "Takeout Period," as I like to call it, was a very dark time: We're all in this industry because we enjoy people, we like to serve them and be part of a community. [But here] I was working as a food runner, a packager, a batch-cocktail maker, either by myself or with one manager or chef. It was a lonely experience.

Once the restaurants started to reopen, I went back to my position as more of a beverage director, but even now at 100% [capacity], it's still different. The biggest challenges are not new to us as an industry; they're things people read about in the news all the time. But they really are striking, the major one being labor. I have worked service bar more times in the past few months than I had in a long time. It keeps me nimble, but it's not usual: We all have to do everything, whether it be running food or putting deliveries away. It's all hands on deck with everybody in the operation involved in every way, shape, and form. And since we have a lot of different restaurants and concepts, I used to be able to dedicate a full day or week to each one, but now it's an awful lot of filling in as needed.

[Then there's] the quality of staff—it's great because we have very young newcomers to the industry who are eager to learn, but that doesn't make up for the sheer amount of staff that we need. The biggest thing that happened for us as a company was that, yes, COVID created challenges but also opportunities. We seized them, and KNEAD opened five concepts this year; today was the orientation for the [fifth]. That's been an interesting part of how my job has evolved: doing so much training. Education's always been important to us, a big driver of who we are as a company, but it's even more so now.

And if I'm having labor issues, so [are] the distributor, the supplier, the producer, and the shipper, which brings me to the other challenge—the supply chain. These things were always part of my world, but they weren't as predominant. In many ways, it's a daily struggle to deal with out-of-stock products or missed deliveries. Everybody is doing the best they can; I hear stories of frustrations from everybody, and I've learned a lot about patience. Through the pandemic, there were also issues with the taxes on European products, so that made a difference for pricing. But all that has given opportunities to smaller producers. You're always used to getting, [say,] your Pinot Grigio from this big supplier, which delivered it to you in these big quantities; [with that advantage gone], it opens up the field in some ways.

NEW LOOK
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AWARD-WINNING
TEQUILA

THICK CUT
TEQUILA



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Patrick Sterling

Director of food and beverage, The Clift Royal Sonesta Hotel, San Francisco, CA



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CLIFT ROYAL SONESTA HOTEL

There's a little bit more to do, more filling of gaps; I'm a lot more hands-on. Generally, a director's role is setting other people up for success and giving them the tools to do their jobs and be the rock stars; but with so few [members] of the management team back, there are just a lot more things to cover. Which is exciting, it's interesting work, but we definitely want to bring

people back. And personally, I think they want to come back. Unfortunately, in the hotel industry in the city of San Francisco, it's hard to rehire when the occupancy is so slow to return at the moment. So I could be here at 5:30 a.m. to open our breakfast outlet, then get caught up in meetings the rest of the day, then work a banquet event until 8 p.m. On weekends I'll switch roles

and return to my safe zone and what started my management career and run the Redwood Room until closing. There are a lot of places to be, a lot of hours that need to be covered until business allows for us to bring back more people.

There's also something to be said for responsibilities beyond the day-to-day. It's more necessary to be innovative to try to drive the little business that's out there. Obviously for hotels, you normally have a capture rate from your occupancy, but it's tough to capture what you don't have, so you have to capture business from the local community. [For instance,] we were required to get a new place-of-entertainment license from the city to be allowed to host music and entertainment programming. Once we got that, then we had to find the DJs, bands, [and] artists that would draw guests. Then you have the tasks of marketing, creating a creative social media campaign[—never mind] having a creative cocktail list and fun wine program.

[So] it's not just about opening the doors anymore—everything goes into figuring out ways to get people to come out. This is not exclusive to the hotel industry either; everyone [in] every business is working really hard to get people in the doors and feeling safe. In the Redwood Room, we're lucky to have extremely high ceilings, a little more elbow room; it's even more challenging for places that used to pack them in, because people don't want to be that close to each other anymore. There are just so many things you have to think about—everybody's wearing many hats, juggling multiple roles or inventing new ones to take care of the business. **TL**

Taking Inventory is a survey of sommeliers, retailers, managers, and other on- and off-premise buyers from around the country, covering all aspects of the beverage business. If you would like to be featured in a future issue, reach out to managing editor Ruth Tobias at rtobias@tastingpanelmag.com.

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DEEPLY DISTINCTIVE

EXPLORING DOURO WINES FROM **QUINTA VALE D. MARIA**

Quinta Vale D. Maria is located alongside the Torto River among the hills of the Cima Corgo subregion in Portugal's Douro Valley. Dating back to 1868, this traditional *quinta* (estate) commands a privileged view of over 89 acres of vineyards, some of them home to vines more than 80 years old. Today it is part of Aveleda, established in 1870 by the Guedes family, who have expanded its production to the Douro Superior subregion.

Every wine created at Quinta Vale D. Maria tells a story, reflecting the singular nature of the individual plots from which they come. Respect for this unique terroir is critical to revealing both the diverse characters of indigenous grape varieties and the magic of field blends. Quinta Vale D. Maria preserves such local traditions as plowing vineyards by horse and treading handpicked grapes by foot in granite *lagares* in accordance with the rhythms of ancient times. Each detail is important to ensuring unmatched quality in the wines, widely recognized for their distinctiveness.

Quinta Vale D. Maria has captured the attention of wine lovers across the globe as it communicates the Douro region's identity and traditions. Visit quintavaledonamaria.com to follow its story—and please enjoy responsibly.



Quinta Vale Dona Maria

The truest expression of the Douro Valley, this wine is a field blend of 41 different grape varieties, all grown together in an old vineyard. Deep, complex notes of fresh violets elegantly merge with dark berries and ripe prunes. All the signature aromas of the Douro take tasters on a remarkable journey.

Quinta Vale Dona Maria Vinha da Francisca

A departure from Douro tradition, this vibrant and fresh wine illustrates the promising future of the region while reflecting the consistency of excellence that Quinta Vale D. Maria consumers have grown accustomed to, time and again corroborated by the trade and press.



Vale Dona Maria Vinhas do Sabor

Quinta Vale do Sabor is located in one of the least known yet most special valleys of the Douro Superior. This quinta is distinguished by the sinuous curves of the Sabor River, where grape varieties such as Touriga Franca, Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz, Alicante Bouschet, and Baga are all planted on vines between 10 and 35 years old. The terroir here is ideal for creating wines with a deeply fruity and mineral style. Vale D. Maria Vinhas do Sabor is a highly concentrated yet fresh and lively red. Striking on the nose thanks to the exuberance of its raspberry, blueberry, and blackberry aromas, it also boasts floral touches and a long, fresh finish.

WHEATED & WANTED™



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.



101 North NV Chardonnay, California (\$7) The 101 North collection, which also includes a Pinot Grigio in addition to the Cabernet Sauvignon and Moscato reviewed below, decidedly overdelivers on quality for the price point. The Chardonnay shows summer peach and a squeeze of lemon as well as clean notes of vanilla custard and tangerine on its crisp palate. 12.5% ABV. **89**



THE WINE GROUP



101 North NV Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$7) Fruit-forward, with notes of dark cherry and sweet plum. The lush body accents the finish of cocoa and oak. 12.5% ABV. **89**

THE WINE GROUP



101 North NV Moscato, California (\$7) With an ABV of 10.5%, this pure expression was built for Moscato lovers: It’s well balanced, with a juicy, sweet, and generous dollop of mandarin orange, peach nectar, and vanilla bean. **89**

THE WINE GROUP



Gnarly Head 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$12) Twisted, head-trained old vines are the inspiration for the Gnarly Head label. This dashing red certainly overdelivers, linking bold notes of blackberry and espresso with sturdy plum-skin tannins. Pencil shavings, dark chocolate, and a meaty core lend layers of depth. 13.5% ABV. **89**



DELICATO FAMILY WINES



Singerstone 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, South Pacific Coast, Central Valley, Chile (\$15)

Light and crisp, this delightful white shows its playful side with a zing of grapefruit on the nose and palate. Minerality cools the tongue, with honeyed pear and floral tones following. **90**

VIÑA SUR ANDINO



Simple Life 2020 Chardonnay, California (\$13)

Fermented in oak and stainless steel with no malolactic fermentation, the forward and ripe fruit shines through. Blended with small percentages of Viognier and Chenin Blanc, it evolves through a delicate floral pattern that alternates with a richer one of lemon chiffon, tangerine, banana, and vanilla. **89**



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94
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BARNACLES
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BARNACLES
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*"Absolutely exquisite, beautiful,
captivating, and rich with story"*

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Tattoo Girl 2018 Red Wine, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$15) This blend of 69% Merlot, 15% Malbec, and 16% Cabernet Sauvignon shows an array of flavors and aromas, including grainy notes of dark chocolate-covered cherry that introduce a wave of texture and taste. Spice and smoky oak combine with grip and grace. **91**

WILLIAM WEAVER WINES



Gancia NV Prosecco DOC Rosé, Veneto, Italy (\$13) We fell for this perky bubbly from its attractive bottle to its pastel onion-skin hue. Powdered vanilla and fresh strawberry are unleashed on entry, while white rice, sweet melon, and bright minerality impact the clean, crisp finish. **90**

ROUST



Map Maker 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$15) Herbal aromas of dill and tarragon match with lemon zest on the nose of this graceful, stainless steel-fermented wine. Lime ice is crisp and thrilling on the palate, which opens further with hints of guava and yellow-floral tones. The finish lingers. **92**

SARANTY IMPORTS



Roaming Dog 2020 Riesling, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$15) Named for the winery dog, Blue, this label has been making some great value wines from Washington. On the heels of scents of lemon ice and sweet summer pear, round and mouth-filling notes of honey, lemon drop, lychee, and jicama lead to a jasmine-inspired finish. A touch of salinity gilds the rose. **91**



Tribute 2019 Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$15) This alluring white from Chris Benziger offers a hint of buttered caramel and banana that's gentled by white flower petals and perked up by pink peppercorn. Lemon verbena highlights the wine's sassy side along with spiced apple, cashew, and bright acidity. **91**

THE WINE GROUP



Ryder Estate 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Central Coast, California (\$15)

Aged in a combination of French, Hungarian, and American oak as well as stainless steel, this wine shows bold, spiced flavors on a satin-like palate. Salted plum, lilac, and sweet tobacco set the tone before tart pomegranate enters midway, followed by white pepper and mocha on the finish. **90**

SCHEID FAMILY WINES



Old Soul 2020 Chardonnay, Lodi (\$15) Aromas of banana-nut bread, vanilla pudding, and lemon verbena flourish on the nose as mouth-filling notes of guava, lemon curd, and caramel converge within a medium-bodied yet round and sumptuous frame. A touch of wet stone lingers on the finish. Aged eight months sur lie in 70% French oak and 30% American oak. **89**

OAK RIDGE WINERY



Elicio 2020 Vermentino, IGP Méditerranée, France (\$15)

This 100% Vermentino hails from a region south of the Luberon, where it's hot, dry, and windy. Clay and limestone soils add character, while aging for seven months in stainless-steel tanks creates vibrancy. Rich notes of ripe pear, heather, and salted kiwi are bathed in what the producer identifies as the flavor of olive oil, and on the finish, a hint of hazelnut leaves you wanting more. **91**

JP BOURGEOIS





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Felix Solis is a family owned winery devoted to the production of quality wines. Together with the Pagos del Rey project, the company covers the most relevant appellations of Spain: Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Rueda, Toro, Valdepeñas y La Mancha. Felix Solis offers a wide portfolio of wines with a modern profile and unique identity.



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Louis Jadot 2020 Beaujolais-Villages AOC, France (\$15) This lively 100% Gamay shows stark acidity; a lean yet juicy frame; and an earthy core of spiced-cherry aspic and pomegranate-tinged tartness. **90**

KOBRAND



Muirwood 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$16) The label of this American oak-aged red represents the redwoods of Muir Woods National Monument. Plum brandy, black currant, and a wave of mocha sashay with sweet tobacco as big, juicy notes of toasted caramel converge with a spicy pinch of cardamom and round, supple tannins. **89**



Bonterra 2020 Young Red, California (\$16) Showing more depth, spice, and intensity than a rosé, this fresh-faced, lighthearted red contains a plethora of organically grown varieties: 30% Viognier, 23% Grenache, 22% Malbec, 5% Muscat, 4% Zinfandel, 3% Syrah, 3% Nebbiolo, 2% Petite Sirah, 2% Carignan, 2% Sangiovese, and still others encased in a lively spice box with fruit and floral tones. Part of the blend fermented in barrel and the rest in stainless steel before it aged in neutral French oak for five months. From sweet herbs, hibiscus, and red raspberry to sweet red fig and rose petal, a refreshing array of flavors gathers in a summer garden. **91**

FETZER VINEYARDS



Cannonball 2019 Merlot, California (\$16) This easy-drinker is a fine food-pairing wine thanks to its good acid structure, light body weight, ABV of 13.5%, and balanced fruit tones. Aromas of dark cherry and a hint of cocoa introduce a flavor profile marked by firm, dry tannins. Spiced plum and a thread of minerality keep the ball rolling. **89**

SHARE A SPLASH



Umani Ronchi 2020 Vel-lodoro Pecorino, Terre di Chieti IGT, Abruzzo, Italy (\$17) Creamy flavors of white tea flowers and lime chiffon congregate with marvelous minerality on a tart and well-balanced palate that pops with zingy energy. **91**

VINEYARD BRANDS



Nick Goldschmidt Boulder Bank 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Fitzroy Vineyard, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$18) Startling acidity, green herbs, and white grapefruit manifest in this shiny white. Notes of copper penny show off fine, salty minerality before lemon-lime surges on the juicy finish. **91**



Notorious Pink 2020 Rosé of Grenache, Vin de France (\$19) Minerality shows through beautifully in this wine from an estate in the south of France, revealing fresh mango, strawberry, and apricot. Tangerine blossom adds floral character as fine acidity brightens the palate with racy verve. **91**



Truth & Valor 2019 Zinfandel, Paso Robles (\$20) French and American oak are used to age this 100% Zin for 17 months, lending it a spicy, creamy mouthfeel. Floral tones arise in a peppered, cherry-toned frame. It's medium-bodied and not at all jammy, with seamless tannins, bright red fruit, and pleasurable notes of red-peppered oak on the finish. **89**



J. Lohr 2019 Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$17) The addition of Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, and Malbec along with dollops of Cab Franc and Syrah lend complexity to this easy drinker through vibrant aromatics and dense texture. Notes of ripe, juicy cherry as well as vanilla, cinnamon, and nutmeg intertwine with toasty sandalwood and tilled earth as roasted coffee infuses flavor into the supple tannins. Aged 12 months in 60-gallon American oak barrels. **90**



Pike Road Wines 2019 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$20) Aged in 100% French oak for ten months, this wine opens with generous scents of wild strawberry and sweet basil. The glossy palate shows caramel apple dotted with white pepper; and a spark of lively acidity plus a finish of sage and iron add complexity. **91**

THE TRUE SPIRIT — of — AMERICA



95

POINTS
THE
tastingpanel
MAGAZINE

Finished for
3 months in
used Pinot
barrels.



92

POINTS
THE
tastingpanel
MAGAZINE

Finished for
3 months in
used Cabernet
barrels.



Freakshow 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Lodi (\$20) Juicy and fragrant, with wild strawberry, dark plum, and baking spices uniting under a big top. The tannins are marked by a bold layer of fudge and espresso, and ripe red fruit on the mid-palate gives way to white pepper on the mouthwatering finish. 82% Cabernet Sauvignon and 14% Petite Sirah with some Merlot and Cab Franc. **89**

MICHAEL DAVID WINERY



Frey Vineyards 2018 Biodynamic Zinfandel, Mendocino (\$20) The shadowed fruit in this red would be considered jammy if the balance of acidity and fine structure weren't so elegant. Dark cherry and dusty tannins make it a rich, satisfying sipper and a great food-pairing wine. 15.5% ABV. **91**



Baron de Ley 2018 Tres Viñas Blanco Reserva, Rioja, Spain (\$20) The Viura, Malvasia, and Garnacha Blanca in this wine from the Najarilla Valley in Rioja Alta are vinified separately before the blend is aged in American oak for 12 months. It's creamy and aromatic, with notes of dried orange peel, candied pineapple, and raisin. Tapioca and cashew converge with unique minerality that plays hide and seek with honeyed stone fruit. **90**



St Hallett 2019 Faith Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia (\$22) Scents of ripe boysenberry, cranberry, and vanilla lead the nose to a palate of dark-blue fruit and more tart, high-toned cranberry. Dried flowers and chalky tannins impart a dry mouthfeel before flavors of roasted coffee and textured minerality appear on the finish. **90**



Dogwood & Thistle 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Mendocino (\$22) Bright, with grassy aromas punctuated by lime chiffon. A harmony of kiwi, pear, and melon merges with spice and zing on the palate alongside focused minerality. Ripe orange notes linger on the long finish. The label was designed by Cynthia Kirk and Robert Hunt, who created the DreamWorks Animation logo. **92**



Trujillo 2020 Madelyn Cuvée, California (\$24) This white blend of 47% Sauvignon Blanc, 41% Gewürztraminer, and 12% Viognier is sourced from Napa and Mendocino counties. It's distinctive, elegant, and enticing, with tropical flowers blooming alongside fresh lemon, linen, lychee, and vanilla bean. A stunning, stainless steel-fermented beauty. **93**



VIK 2021 La Piu Belle Rosé, Cachapoal Valley, Chile (\$25) Aromas of vanilla and blackberry are deep and inviting, and on the palate, dark-fruit notes offer unexpected beauty alongside brown-sugared strawberry and rose petal. Lively yet plush, with a balanced acid structure. **93**



GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS



Ravel & Stutch 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Central Coast (\$25) Rich and concentrated with ripe blackberry and clove-spiced cedar. Generous, approachable, and round tannins appear with espresso on the finish. **90**

WENTE FAMILY ESTATES



One Stone 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$20) Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, executive VP at Ancient Peaks Winery, is also president and founder of Dream Big Darling, a nonprofit that aims to mentor and inspire the next generation of women leaders in the wine and spirits industry; five dollars from every case sold of this blend of 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, and 4% Petit Verdot is donated to that organization. Aged 16 months in French and American oak, it's well crafted and generous, with broad strokes of blackberry preserves, dark chocolate, espresso, and cedar encased in a silky texture. **92**



GUINIGI

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91
POINTS
TASTING PANEL





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Penfolds 2018 Max's Cabernet Sauvignon, South Australia (\$25) Espresso, anise, and plum form a remarkable alliance on the nose and palate before opening up to reveal wildflowers planted among sage and mint. Dried fruits and Italian herbs underscored by cedar make for a structured red aged 12 months in French and American oak. The bottle displays the Penfolds "stamp" inspired by the winery's legendary former winemaker Max Schubert. **91**

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



Devil's Candy 2018 Red Wine, Napa Valley (\$30) The fruit in this blend of Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, and Charbono is super-ripe. On the heels of candied plum and blueberry, a well of dark chocolate leads to the long finish. Aged in French oak for 12 months; 15.5% ABV. **89**

689 CELLARS



King Palm 2019 Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$25) The addition of 3% Viognier brings a floral presence to this graceful white. Joining stunning notes of caramel, orange, vanilla wafer, and lemongrass, a burst of chamomile and honeysuckle lingers with a wave of wet stone. **92**

SUMMERLAND WINE BRANDS



Sculpterra 2018 Héroe Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$25) Old World acidity and ripe cherry brighten the glass as top notes of blueberry, cranberry, and Italian herbs grace the palate. **89**



Sean Minor 2019 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$25) Ten months of aging in French oak impart a character of sweet cream and buttered peach to this endearing white. White-floral notes and vanilla merge on the silky, shiny palate. **91**



Unshackled 2019 Rosé, California (\$27) From The Prisoner Wine Company, this blend of Pinot Noir (80%) with Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvèdre is sourced from vineyards that span from Monterey to Sonoma and further north to Mendocino County. Bright cranberry shows a dusting of minerality and bright acidity. Wild strawberry and sweet tangerine linger on the finish with candied apple. **91**

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



Rabbit Ranch 2019 Pinot Noir, Central Otago, New Zealand (\$28) Light and easy-drinking, this 100% estate-grown red shows earthy scents of red cherry and pomegranate. Bright acidity and red-berry character keep it cheery and fresh. **91**

SARANTY IMPORTS



Wente Vineyards 2020 Niki's Pinot Noir Rosé, Arroyo Seco, Monterey (\$35) This dry and delicate small-lot sipper has a nose of raspberry and rose petal that translates to the palate. The floral notes are light and floaty, and the gossamer texture brings out whispers of red fruit on the finish. **93**



Sculpterra 2019 Primitivo, Paso Robles (\$40) Tart cherry is striking on the nose, and the lean entry and fine acidity give this Italian variety that Old World feel. Dusted cocoa and wet earth work seamlessly into a spiced pomegranate middle and bright finish. **89**



Cherry Pie 2019 San Pablo Bay Block Pinot Noir, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$50) Robust in body and pleasurable to sip, this French oak-aged Pinot Noir is distinctive, with smoky cedar, sage, black cherry, and black pepper. Round and earthy, with unexpected muscle. **93** *W*



VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

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Always Ascending

WENTE FAMILY ESTATES ANNOUNCES THE WINNERS OF THE FIFTH ANNUAL RISE AWARDS

Since 2017, Wente Family Estates has presented its annual Wente RISE Awards exclusively to those Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits (SGWS) partners that reflect its core values: Respect, Integrity, Sustainability, and Excellence. Pre-pandemic, the brand invited winners to a ceremony at its estate in Livermore, California, but in 2020 and 2021, the awards were held remotely. "One could argue [such] values matter the most in challenging times—and across the network, Wente and Southern Glazer's teams worked together, demonstrating those [tenets] and making decisions with excellence and sustainability . . . in mind," says Wente chief sales officer David Enderle.

Winners were determined by how effectively they rose to the occasion even as they drove the growth of the Wente portfolio. SGWS of New Mexico and Indiana each won their first RISE Award, while the Delaware branch nabbed one for the second consecutive year. Their accomplishments were particularly impressive because, as Enderle remarks, "Not many brands are still experiencing growth going up against retail num-

bers from last year. That sustained growth is a testament to solid relationships [and] consistent focus . . . which is what RISE is all about."

So how did the winners manage to emerge victorious in the face of the pandemic? Vice president and general manager of SGWS of Delaware Jim Miller says that "overcoming the challenges that were set forth by COVID were at times a daunting task," especially for the distributor's on-premise consultants. "Grit and determination matched with a consistent world-class winery enabled our team to strive for excellence and continue to gain a share of the market in key accounts," he adds.

Mike Thompson, executive vice president and general manager of the Indiana branch, says that while

the pandemic obviously presented obstacles, it also spurred "new ways of thinking, marketing, and maneuvering, and SGWS Indiana and the Wente team worked hand in hand to ensure success across the market." Calling the branch's win a group effort, Thompson adds that "the on-premise team leveraged Wente brands to success during what can easily be described as the most difficult time in our careers. Meanwhile, the off-premise team drove double-digit growth."

Greg Templeton, executive vice president and general manager of SGWS New Mexico, remarks that after focusing on the retail market at the onset of the pandemic, he and his team "quickly recognized that consumers were gravitating toward higher quality and more reputable wineries." He adds, "While quality-to-cost ratio is of utmost importance to consumers, so is stewardship of the land and history"—and fourth- and fifth-generation-run Wente Family Estates checks all those boxes. "Our job as the distributor is to simply tell [Wente's] story and secure the sale." *LT*

Christine Wente, fifth-generation winegrower and president of the Wente Foundation for Arts Education; Niki Wente, fifth-generation winegrower and senior viticulture manager; Phil Wente, fourth-generation winegrower and member of the board of directors; Aly Wente, fifth-generation winegrower and vice president of marketing and customer experience; Karl Wente, fifth-generation winegrower, chief operating officer, and chief winemaker; Jordan Wente, fifth-generation winegrower and brand marketing manager; Carolyn Wente, fourth-generation winegrower and chairman of the board of directors; and Eric Wente, fourth-generation winegrower and member of the board of directors.



MAY YOUR SPIRITS BE BRIGHT



Wishing you peace, hope, health and happiness this holiday season and throughout the New Year.

Chopin
IMPORTS

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:

88-89: VERY GOOD

90-94: OUTSTANDING

95-100: CLASSIC

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

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

For additional Blue Reviews, go to bluelifestyle.com.

Prices are for 750-mL bottles unless otherwise noted.

DOMESTIC



92 **Dutcher Crossing 2019 Sauvignon Blanc, Sonoma County (\$33)** Spiced nose and a smooth texture. Floral, juicy, and bright; layered and dense. Balanced, long, and quite impressive.



92 **Etrusca 2019 Velia Red Blend, Russian River Valley (\$50)** A smooth, fresh, and lively blend from Gamba Vineyards and Winery, with spice and racy acidity.



94 **Dutcher Crossing 2015 Winemaker's Cellar Kupferschmid Red, Dry Creek Valley (\$40)** Spicy yet refined, with dense berry notes and powerful depth. Rich and round, with a lasting finish.



95 **Gamba Vineyards and Winery 2019 Zinfandel, Messana Vineyard, Fountain Grove District, Sonoma County (\$65)** Deep and intense, with notes of spice and ripe berries. Exceptional, layered, and long, this is how Zinfandel should taste.



91 **SIMI Winery 2019 Reserve Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45)** Aromas of fresh cherry persist on the smooth and crisp palate along with firm acidity. Juicy, nicely balanced, and long.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



94 **Oleandri 2018 Cabernet Franc, Stagecoach Vineyard, Napa Valley (\$110)** Luscious and round, velvety and complex, with rich plum and a long finish.



93 **SIMI Winery 2018 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Landslide Vineyard, Sonoma (\$50)** Smooth

and lush, with bright notes of plum and berry. Tangy, ripe, and tannic; balanced and complex, with a rich, persistent finish.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



90 **Unshackled 2019 Rosé, California (\$27)** A pale salmon-pink blend of Pinot Noir, Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvèdre from the Central Coast and North Coast. Dry and racy; fresh, crisp, and long.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

92^{PTS}
The Tasting Panel

92^{PTS}
The Tasting Panel

92^{PTS}
The Tasting Panel

91^{PTS}
The Tasting Panel



broaden your palate

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SCORE AWARDED TO VINTAGE 2019 CHARDONNAY, VINTAGE 2019 PINOT NOIR AND VINTAGE 2020 SAUVIGNON BLANC. (THE TASTING PANEL 2020) SCORE AWARDED TO VINTAGE 2019 CABERNET SAUVIGNON. TRY OUR LATEST RELEASE. ©2021 IMAGERY ESTATE WINERY, GLEN ELLEN, CA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

92 Unshackled 2019 Red Blend, California (\$30) Smooth, fresh, and rounded with spice, vanilla, and rich berry notes; intense and luscious yet balanced. A blend of Zinfandel, Malbec, Petite Sirah, Syrah, and Grenache from the Central Coast and North Coast.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

92 Cadre 2020 Sea Queen Albariño, Edna Valley (\$28) Aromatic and crisp, with soft minerals, spices, and lovely balance; layered, charming, and long.

PARAGON VINEYARD CO.

91 Cadre 2020 Band of Stones Grüner Veltliner, Edna Valley (\$28) Smooth, ripe, and lush; mellow and balanced, with bright citrus and nice depth.

PARAGON VINEYARD CO.

94 Testarossa 2019 Chardonnay, Sta. Rita Hills (\$44) Silky and juicy, with elegant flavors of pear, subtle toast, and good length.

94 Testarossa 2019 Pinot Noir, Fogstone Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$74) Rich depth of color and a spiced cherry nose that carries over to the juicy palate before the long, smooth finish.



92 Twin Suns 2019 Zinfandel, Santa Ynez (\$30) Spicy nose; smooth flavors of blackberry with sweet vanilla and oak; and a round, lasting finish.

92 Red Phoenix 2017 Rubeus, Napa Valley (\$60) Bright, fresh, and edgy, with linear, intense fruit; deep and angular, with long-lasting flavors.

93 Ironstone 2019 Reserve Cabernet Franc, Sierra Foothills (\$26) Lush and spicy, with deep color; ripe plum, fine structure, and a long and elegant finish.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

94 Beaulieu Vineyard 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford Reserve, Napa Valley (\$80) Smooth and rich with a bright acid structure, this classic and generous Napa Cabernet is enormously drinkable now but would benefit from some aging.

TREASURY WINE ESTATES

93 Tablas Creek Vineyard 2020 Côtes de Tablas Blanc, Paso Robles (\$30) Lovely, lush, and seamless in its presentation, with the floral aromatics of Viognier; the tangy brightness of Grenache Blanc, and the richness of Marsanne and Roussanne.

VINEYARD BRANDS



94 Tablas Creek Vineyard 2019 Esprit de Tablas, Paso Robles (\$60) A rich and spicy wine that combines the meatiness of Mourvèdre, the elegance of Syrah, and the fruitiness of Grenache; racy yet polished and lush, with good aging potential.

VINEYARD BRANDS

94 Ridge Vineyards 2019 Zinfandel, Guadagni Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley (\$36) A dazzling Zin from Dry Creek Valley that shows bright fruit, lively acidity, and marvelous depth.

94 Alma Rosa 2019 Pinot Noir, El Jabali Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills (\$68) Spiced nose and silky, spicy Burgundian fruit. Dense and racy, with good depth; rich, toasty, and long.

94 Alma Rosa 2019 Barrel Select Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$72) Rich and spicy, with smooth notes of black cherry; complex and deep, balanced and long.

92 Alma Rosa 2019 Chardonnay, Sta. Rita Hills (\$30) Silky and ripe, with fresh spice and lively acidity; elegant and floral, with a lasting finish.

IMPORTED

93 Château des Jacques 2019 Morgon Côte du Py, France (\$42) Lush and spicy, with deep berry notes; smooth and racy, stylish and long.

KOBRAND

92 Château des Jacques 2019 Moulin-à-Vent Clos de Roche-grès, France (\$28) Rich and long, with notes of earth and cherry and good aging potential.

KOBRAND

94 Quinta do Vallado 2018 Tinta Roriz, Douro, Portugal (\$80) Deep color; spicy nose, and a velvety texture, with notes of ripe berry, complexity, and depth culminating in a long, rich finish.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

92 Patient Cottat 2020 Anciennes Vignes Sancerre, France (\$35) Fresh, juicy, and mineral; smooth and bright, with crisp, citrusy acidity and good length. 100% Sauvignon Blanc.

VINEYARD BRANDS

VALUE

91 Les Jamelles 2019 Viognier, Pays d'Oc, France (\$15) Floral, smooth, and round, with clean yet dense and luscious style.

GRAPEJUICE GROUP

91 Les Jamelles 2019 Syrah, Pays d'Oc, France (\$15) Deeply colored, lush, and juicy, with balance and depth; rich and long.

GRAPEJUICE GROUP

91 Kim Crawford 2020 Rosé, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand (\$15) Light salmon pink with a bright berry nose; tangy and crisp, with notes of berry and stone fruit.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

93 Kim Crawford 2021 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$16) Bright peach appears on both the nose and the fresh and juicy palate alongside racy acidity. This famed wine doesn't disappoint.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

90 Robert Mondavi Private Selection 2020 Buttery Chardonnay, California (\$10) Smooth, fresh, and succulent, with lush, toasty vanilla. Rich and balanced, it's a good value—and shows more butterscotch than butter.

CONSTELLATION BRANDS

94 Ruffino 2017 Modus Toscana IGT, Italy (\$25) A silky, dense, and tangy blend of Sangiovese, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon, with notes of ripe berry and plum, chocolate, and spice. Complex and long.

RUFFINO IMPORT CO./CONSTELLATION BRANDS

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SCAN ME

92 **Ruffino 2017 Riserva Ducale Chianti Classico Riserva** **DOCG, Italy (\$24)** Smooth, bright, and racy, with crisp berry and floral notes; spicy, balanced, and classic. 80% Sangiovese and 20% Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon.

RUFFINO IMPORT CO./CONSTELLATION BRANDS

90 **The Dreaming Tree 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$15)** Deep garnet color; juicy, clean, and layered with ripe plum; stylish and long.



92 **Borgi Ad Est 2019 Pinot Grigio, Friuli, Italy (\$15)** Fragrant, smooth, and surprisingly elegant, with a mineral component and good balance; a great value.

VINEYARD BRANDS

91 **The Dreaming Tree 2019 Red Blend, California (\$14)** Velvety and

toasty, with lush blackberry and plum; stylish and a very good value.

91 **Quinta do Vallado 2020 Prima, Douro, Portugal (\$25)** Aromatic, fresh, and bright, with racy acidity and juicy style; balanced and long.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES



91 **Famille Perrin 2020 Réserve Côtes du Rhône Rosé, France (\$20)** Pale salmon pink; clean, lush, and crisp, with a smooth texture and lovely balance; juicy and elegant.

VINEYARD BRANDS

92 **Caparzo 2019 Rosso di Montalcino, Italy (\$25)** Silky, fresh, and juicy, with raspberry and pomegranate; tangy and bright, racy and long. An all-purpose wine to go with pizza and pasta.

VINEYARD BRANDS

91 **The Seeker 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14)** Medium garnet color and a spicy nose; smooth, clean, and charming, with plum and raspberry. A remarkable value.

KOBRAND

91 **The Seeker 2020 Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina (\$14)** Refined, fresh, and balanced, with notes of juicy blackberry and black raspberry.

KOBRAND

92 **Photograph 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, North Coast (\$13)** Deep color and a plummy nose; lush and complex, with bright fruit and a long finish.

94 **Qupé 2019 Marsanne, Los Olivos District, Santa Ynez Valley (\$24)** Fresh and lively, this is a fine example of modern winemaking with a great Rhône variety. Smooth and rich, with racy acidity and a persistent finish.

92 **Ironstone 2019 Old Vine Reserve Zinfandel, Lodi (\$25)**

Deeply colored, silky, and luscious, with lovely spice and deep flavors that go long on the palate. A fine example of a premium Lodi Zinfandel.

QUINTESSENTIAL WINES

SPIRITS

93 **Five Brothers Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$60)** Sweet, toasted nose; rich and fleshy; smooth, spiced, and classic; mellow and long.

96 **Old Fitzgerald Bottled-in-Bond Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey Fall 2021 Edition, USA (\$110)** Medium amber color and an elegant floral nose. Pure and exemplary in its finesse and style; toasty, layered, and memorable.

93 **818 Tequila Blanco, Mexico (\$45)** Soft, refined agave nose; spicy, peppery, and smoky. Rich and intense, it's good in a Margarita but also on the rocks.

818 SPIRITS



91 **Duke & Dame Salted Caramel Flavored Whiskey, USA (\$25)** Caramel nose and flavors of smooth butterscotch; mellow, sweet, and toasty; creamy, balanced, and long.

94 **Maison Ferrand Mathilde Blackcurrant Cassis Liqueur, France (\$15)** Deep, thick, and jammy, with notes of sweet black currant and spice; juicy and rich.

DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS

93 **Maison Ferrand Mathilde Raspberry Liqueur, France (\$15)** Smooth and creamy, with a fresh nose of ripe raspberry that extends to the crisp and balanced palate.

DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS

93 **Maison Ferrand Mathilde Peach Liqueur, France (\$15)** Rich aromas of yellow peach; sweet and sugary; intense, authentic, and long.

DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS

96 **Jack Daniel's 10 Years Old Tennessee Whiskey, USA (\$70)**

Rich amber color and a lush, elegant, and spiced nose. Silky, juicy, and layered with sweet vanilla, chestnut, and toasty notes; stunning, with a lasting finish.



93 **O.H. Ingram River Aged Flagship Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$100)**

Velvety and rich, with flavors of toasted corn; floral, elegant, and mellowed by the motion of the Mississippi River in a floating rickhouse.

92 **Plantation Rum Australia 2007,**

Australia (\$80) Toasted, dry, and clean; pure, edgy, and long.

DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS

92 **Plantation Rum Peru 2006, Peru (\$80)** Toasty nose and a silky texture with a hint of burnt brown sugar; dry and long.

DEUTSCH FAMILY WINE & SPIRITS



92 **Slo de Vie Distillery Inc. Aguardiente Reserva, USA (\$49)** Rich and toasty nose, a creamy texture, and complex flavors of toasted caramel leading to a lasting finish.

REDWOOD ESTD. **EMPIRE** MMXV WHISKEY

Located in the heart of Sonoma County, Redwood Empire Whiskey sits in California's "fog belt" where ancient redwoods thrive. This temperate Northern California climate allows a slow, even flavor extraction which imbues the Redwood Empire Whiskey signature style.

PIPE DREAM BOURBON WHISKEY

94 POINTS, Wine Enthusiast, 2021
94 POINTS, The Tasting Panel, 2020
91 POINTS, Anthony Dias Blue Reviews, 2020
PLATINUM MEDAL, LA Spirits Awards, 2021
GOLD MEDAL, USA Spirits, 2021
GOLD MEDAL, TexSom Spirits, 2021

LOST MONARCH BLEND OF STRAIGHT WHISKEYS

95 POINTS, The Tasting Panel, 2020
92 POINTS, Anthony Dias Blue Reviews, 2020
90 POINTS, Whiskey Advocate, 2020
GOLD MEDAL, USA Spirits, 2021
GOLD MEDAL, LA Spirits Awards, 2021
SILVER MEDAL, NY World Spirits, 2021

EMERALD GIANT RYE WHISKEY

97 POINTS, The Tasting Panel, 2020
92 POINTS, Anthony Dias Blue Reviews, 2020
SILVER MEDAL, LA Spirits Awards, 2021
SILVER MEDAL, NY World Spirits, 2021
SILVER MEDAL, TexSom Spirits, 2021



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

Publisher's PICKS

PHOTO: JEREMY BALL



*Tasting Panel publisher/
editor-in-chief Meridith May.*

WINES



Gancia 2020 Pinot Grigio Delle Venezie DOC, Italy (\$10) Aromas of stone fruit and candied pineapple are bright and charming. The palate is clean and crisp, with fresh pear and a fine mineral component coursing through a bed of white flowers. **90**

ROUST



Tattoo Girl 2019 Chardonnay, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$13) Despite its value price, this modern, ultra-energetic white exceeds expectations; it has a brisk and bright tone, with tangerine and lime saturating the palate up front. Secondary flavors of oregano and pea tendrils, melded with subtle notes of oak and minerality, underline its crisp nature. **93**

WILLIAM WEAVER WINES



Simple Life 2020 Rosé, California (\$13) This not-so-simple blend of 47% Tempranillo, 29% Barbera, 13% Grenache, 8% Syrah, and 3% Zinfandel is a smashing success, encompassing watermelon, tangerine, jasmine, and red cherry within a juicy frame. **90**

DON SEBASTIANI & SONS



Tattoo Girl 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$15) With an ABV of 13.8%, this is a balanced, streamlined blend of 72% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 11% Malbec, and 2% Petit Verdot. Ripe cherry, cassis, and blackberry form a partnership on the round palate as high-toned acidity maintains

the wine's inherent elegance from start to finish. **91**

WILLIAM WEAVER WINES



OZV Red Blend 2020, Lodi (\$15) Building on a foundation of 60% Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah lend their flavors and textures to this sensational red. Cherry tart, red apple, caramel, and toasty cedar impart lushness, and the easygoing, jammy fruit is perfectly ripe and cocoa-kissed. Aged 11 months in 80% French and 20% American oak. **90**

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Publisher's PICKS



John Legend Signature Series by LVE 2020 Chardonnay, Sonoma County (\$15) Lithe and crisp, with a peach-blossom lilt. White pepper, honeyed pear, orange peel, and a piquant note excite the palate. **90**

BOISSET COLLECTION



Barón de Ley 2019 Varietales Tempranillo, Rioja, Spain (\$15) Illuminating scents of dark berry and vanilla lead to pleasing, dry tannins that wash the tongue with violets and plum. Mocha and graphite notes go long before superb acidity and a rustic, grainy texture add complexity to the finish. **91**



Cline Cellars 2019 Ancient Vines Zinfandel, Contra Costa County (\$15) The grapes for this juicy, fragrant red are from deep-rooted, dry-farmed, head-trained vines, some as old as 100 years. Ripe mulberry is accentuated by red tea, brush, and red beet. Elegance ensues, leaving a dash

of white pepper on the finish along with wild strawberry and red licorice. **91**



Nielson 2019 Chardonnay, Santa Barbara County (\$16) Fragrant and clean, this is a classic-style Chardonnay, with a white-floral tone and balanced notes of citrus, honeyed tropical fruit, and salty pine nut. Aged eight months in French oak, stainless steel, and concrete egg. **90**

JACKSON FAMILY WINES



Carmen 2020 Gran Reserva Pinot Noir, Leyda Valley, Chile (\$17) A charming single-vineyard Pinot Noir with sage, soil, and woody notes. A swath of cinnamon and white pepper graces rhubarb and black cherry as toasty oak and fine acidity keep things balanced. Aged eight months in used French oak. **91**

VIÑA SANTA RITA



Frey Vineyards 2020 Biodynamic Field Blend, Mendocino (\$17) The colorful, amusing label depicts astrological charts and *Farmers' Almanac*-type graphics—a nod to the Biodynamic roots of this blend of 45% Syrah, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 10% Carignane, and 5% Zinfandel. Heather and

mountain brush, along with savory notes of dried plum, peppercorn, clove, and mulberry, make for a rustic roundup of flavors and textures. **90**



District 7 2019 Chardonnay, Monterey (\$18) The Scheid family's commitment to a sustainable future, exemplified by their state-of-the-art winery, is palpable in this delicious, superbly crafted white. Aromas of candied pineapple and white cake are mesmerizing, and on the palate, white chocolate melts

into lemon chiffon and papaya. With good acid structure and plenty of layers of flavor, it finishes with crisp notes of wet stone and toasted coconut. Aged 14 months in stainless steel with 25% new French oak. **92**

SCHEID FAMILY WINES



Lost Eden 2018 Red Blend, Georgia (\$19) Georgian wine imports are on the rise, and this one should be at the top of everyone's lists. Coming from the documented birthplace of wine circa 5500 B.C., this wonder of a project was launched by a young Georgian named Tariel Chichua, an attendee of Cornell University who sought funding from Georgia's ministry of agriculture. Eleventh-generation Georgian winemaker Lado Uzunashvili, who trained in Austria and France, created the wine with fruit from the Kakhetian region, mostly the indigenous Saperavi. The result is concentrated and fragrant, offering a marvelous layer of velvet atop dark berries and melted chocolate—and while it comes across as dense and sweet, it's well balanced, with optimum acidity for its style at 13% ABV. Absolutely delicious. **93**

GLOBAL BRAND LLC



Michael David Winery 2020 Freakshow Chardonnay, Lodi (\$18) Partially barrel-fermented in French and American oak and partially stainless steel-fermented, this multifaceted white features luscious flavors of apricot and caramel apple that are wrangled by good acid structure and tightwire minerality. Floral aromatics linger on the nose and palate, with honeysuckle petals gracing the tongue. **91**

PEJU

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93

points

2020 Sauvignon Blanc
Legacy Collection, Napa Valley
The Tasting Panel, 9/21

95

points

2019 Cabernet Sauvignon
Legacy Collection, Napa Valley
The Tasting Panel, 9/21

Publisher's PICKS



Wente Vineyards 2020 Louis Mel Sauvignon Blanc, Livermore Valley (\$18) Aromas of golden apple and lemon blossom lead to a stony path along the palate, gently strewn with notes of white tea flowers. The crisp, vivacious, lime-kissed frame keeps things fresh and balanced. **92**



Mas des Étoiles 2016 Cahors Malbec, France (\$18) Aged 18 months on the lees in stainless-steel tanks, this 100% Malbec from 25-year-old vines treats the tongue to violets and espresso as well as toothsome notes of dark plum, cassis, and black-cherry bitters.

The flavors press juicy yet firm tannins on the palate with the fluidity and pace of a well-bred racehorse. **93**

JP BOURGEOIS



Ancient Peaks 2020 Chardonnay, Santa Margarita Ranch, Paso Robles (\$19) From Paso Robles' southernmost subregion, which is also one of its coolest, this unctuous Chardonnay offers up a dollop of lemon crème fraîche and buttered pecan. Well

textured and delicious, with bright notes of pineapple and lime chiffon set against distinctive seashell minerality. **92**



Scandalous One 2019 Cabernet Noir, Vin de France (\$19) With an impressively dark carmine hue, this juicy, fruit-dominant red offers up vanilla and boysenberry with an earthy undertone. It's rustic, yet its intense flavors show finesse rather than weight. **90**



Staete Landt 2019 Annabel Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$20) An elegant beauty from the Rapaura subregion of Marlborough, with notes of dried herbs and grapefruit pith. Flavors of tangerine, peach, and honeyed pear burst out in song, while the mouthfeel is slightly nervy, with racy acidity and a chalky mineral component. **94**

SARANTY IMPORTS



Baron de Ley 2017 Reserva, Rioja, Spain (\$20) Aged one year in American oak and another 24 months in bottle, this Tempranillo offers aromas of sweet tobacco, beetroot, plum, and violets. Toasty notes of cinnamon and cedar join red plum, boysenberry, and new leather in rounding out the palate. With a touch of dark chocolate and coconut, the finish is seamless. **92**

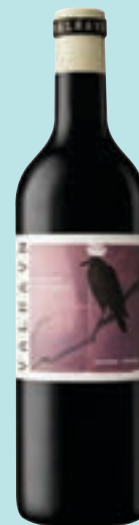


Sean Minor 2019 Nicole Marie, North Coast (\$22) This blend of 50% Merlot, 33% Zinfandel, and 17% Petite Sirah is a great value, with scents of ripe blackberry and toasty mocha. Black-cherry preserves garner attention on the first sip before mountain brush, dried violets, and a thread of cassis carry the palate to a finish of tilled soil. **90**



Muirwood 2019 Pinot Noir, Arroyo Seco, Monterey (\$22) Earthy, woody tones of tilled soil and tobacco leaf join espresso on the mid-palate, making for a savory, deep-rooted red. Rich, tarry notes envelop black plum, mulberry, baking spices, and finely tuned acidity. **91**

ASV WINES



Valrav 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County (\$24) This standout, standout blend of 92% Cab Sauvignon with Cab Franc, Malbec, and Petit Verdot tastes twice as expensive as it is. Plum-skin tannins and notes of espresso, anise, and earth are sumptuous on the palate. Juicy flavors of sweet tobacco and ripe blue fruit enter midway. **92**

VALKYRIE SELECTIONS



Böen 2019 Pinot Noir, Santa Barbara, Sonoma, and Monterey Counties (\$25) The nose of cocoa, cherry, and raisin is aromatic, deep, and sensual. Broad notes of black cherry and anise join a creamy lather of bittersweet chocolate on the robust, generous, and extroverted palate. **91**

COPPER CANE WINES & PROVISIONS



J. Lohr 2019 Arroyo Vista Chardonnay, Arroyo Seco, Monterey (\$25) Comprising the key Clone 76 from the famed Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru in Burgundy, this ripe and succulent white brings out notes of baked apple in butterscotch. Its leesy mouth-

feel is a textural dream spiced with ginger, cinnamon, cedar, and white pepper. Aged sur lie for 14 months. **91**



Penfolds 2018 Max's Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon, South Australia (\$25)

Violets and peppered, cured meats merge with rhubarb, red plum, and red tea in this iconic blend of Shiraz (64%) and Cab (36%) from an even more iconic winery; the name pays tribute to former chief winemaker Max Schubert. We love the wave of cocoa, sparked with black pepper and the ripest of red cherry, that brightens the wine all the way to the finish. **92**

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



Killer Drop 2019 Red Wine, California (\$25) This big-bodied blend of Grenache, Syrah, and Petite Sirah shows abundant personality, with notes of red plum and dried fruit amplified by good acidity. Broad flavors of chocolate and new leather give way to a satisfying finish seasoned with dried heather. **90**

689 CELLARS



Summerland 2020 Central Coast Collection Rosé, Central Coast, California (\$25) Light and refreshing, with mineral notes that keep it dry and crisp. Tangerine and guava align with rose-petal sweetness and a pinch of Italian herbs. **91**

SUMMERLAND WINE BRANDS



King Palm 2019 Pinot Noir, Monterey County (\$25) Fermented in stainless steel and aged 19 months in 40% French oak and 20% American oak, this wine sees the addition of a small percentage of Syrah that brings its bold personality to the forefront. Cinnamon-spiced

red cherry and a hint of cola leave a lasting impression, while an earthy tone brings in savory wild strawberry and salted plum, followed by a smooth finish of tobacco leaf. **91**

SUMMERLAND WINE BRANDS



Dogwood & Thistle 2019 Carignan, Mendocino (\$26) Located on Highway 101, the Testa Vineyard is home to the grapes for this poised red, elegantly appointed with notes of mulberry, elderberry, and wild strawberry. Nutmeg and red tea swarm the fruit as a dash of salinity and toastiness

revs up the palate. Aged ten months in 60% neutral French oak and 40% used French oak. **93**



Dutton Estate Winery 2020 Kylie's Cuvée Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$27) Aged four months in stainless steel (75%) as well as new and neutral French oak (25%), this wine is made with the Musqué clone from Mrs. George's Vineyard, one of Dutton Estate's 80-plus properties. Aromas and flavors of wildflowers and oregano are stunning openers to an alert, tropical paradise. Pineapple, gardenia, tangerine, and a hint of caramel merge on the crisp yet deluxe flavor profile. **92**



Gehricke 2018 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County (\$29) Aromas of a brambly strawberry patch lead to earthy roundness and a plush plum texture on the palate. Notes of wet leaves, oregano, and cinnamon converge on the mid-palate with sweet cherry and marzipan. **92**

3 BADGE ENOLOGY



Agricola Punica 2019 Montessu, Isola dei Nuraghi IGT, Sardinia, Italy (\$30) Grown in the clay and limestone soils of southwest Sardinia, this Carignano-based red sees the addition of some Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, and Cab Franc. It begins with tarry chocolate

notes and a layer of topsoil lined with blackberry and black pepper. Teeth-gripping notes of anise and dark plum form an intriguing, dense mouthfeel on the finish. Aged for 12 months in French oak. **93**

KOBRAND



Cedar + Salmon 2018 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$30) Aromas of chocolate-covered cherry in tilled soil give way to a plethora of savory and bold notes—cigar box, root beer, black plum—in this concentrated, muscular Pinot Noir. Its earthy nature is tempered by ripe black cherry and sandalwood, emphasizing the silky mouthfeel. **92**

3 BADGE ENOLOGY

Publisher's PICKS



Staete Landt 2020 Duchess Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$30) From the Brancott Valley sub-appellation in Marlborough, this single-vineyard white is fermented in six- to ten-year-old barriques, imparting a creamy ripeness to the wine. Jasmine and ginger lead the way with grapefruit perkiness, notes of basil leaf, and an underlying hint of bread dough. Ripe pear and melon come in on the sumptuous finish with lemon ice and guava. **95**

SARANTY IMPORTS



Staete Landt 2017 State of Grace Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$33) Small-production Pinot Noir aged 18 months in 25% new French oak creates a unique flavor profile rich with herbs, wildflowers, violets, sage, clove, and black cherry. Bracing acidity keeps it fresh and alive as minerality, forest floor, and graphite leave traces of salinity on the finish. **94**

USA WINE WEST



Trione Vineyards and Winery 2018 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$35) Following a sensational nosing of grilled pineapple and apple pie, this sumptuous Chardonnay offers rich notes of caramel, banana bread, and vanilla bean. The acidity is uplifting and

enlivening even as biscuit and pine nut relay a round texture; a wedge of lime cools the palate on the finish. **94**



Anthony & Dominic 2019 Reserve Pinot Noir, Carneros (\$35) Bright cola and cherry combine to show off this wine's fine acidity. A salted-plum middle and a savory finish of soy sauce impress as they reflect an "Old World meets New World" personality. **91**

SCOTTO CELLARS



Jordan 2019 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$35) The 40th anniversary vintage of this wine was sourced from 11 vineyard blocks from five growers; the liquid spent six weeks on the lees (in stainless steel and in barrel) and five and a half months in new

French oak. Lemon-lime edginess is juxtaposed with an inherent creaminess, while wet stone and green apple add verve and personality to the wine's already abundant appeal. Jazzy acidity and floral aromas and flavors lend a French accent to this modern California Chardonnay. **94**



Wente Vineyards 2020 Erik's Unoaked Chardonnay, Livermore Valley (\$35) An all-out stunner, with banana, tangerine, and honeysuckle forming an eye-opening introduction to a series of

fragrant, flavorful sensations, from the tropical aromas of kiwi and lemon blossom to the palate's succulence. Minerality feeds into vanilla-wafer sweetness on the finish. **93**



Château des Jacques 2019 Clos du Grand Carlequin, Moulin-à-Vent, Beaujolais, France (\$42) This enticing cuvée shows spiced rhubarb with a flash of garrigue. It's full-bodied, with a lovely mouthfeel and a line of minerality underscored by espresso and herbes de

Provence. **93**



KOBRAND



Screen Door Cellars 2020 Chardonnay, Asern Vineyard, Green Valley of the Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$35) This single-vineyard Chardonnay made with the Spring Mountain clone was matured in new oak (50%) and concrete egg (50%). The breathtaking aromatics of white peach and honeysuckle lure you in, and on the palate, notes of jasmine and key lime align with a lithe texture set atop a base of creamy vanilla. Candied ginger adds a snap of crispness on the finish. **93**

DAYLIGHT WINE CO.

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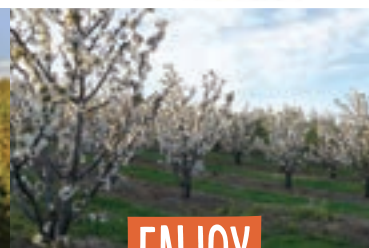
THE CHARMING TASTE OF EUROPE

There are places in Europe that have a timeless charm, where the highest quality products with distinct flavors are born. Products that evoke such charm and embody the culture, history, art, and heritage of their respective regions. The Charming Taste of Europe is a unique project that connects the flavors of wine from Italy and France, as well as fresh fruit from Greece, and introduces the United States and Canada to these exquisite items that evoke all of Europe's beauty and grace.

Italy is proud of the wines of Abruzzo, one of the oldest vine regions in the world, growing in a territory surrounded by the Apennine Mountains and the Adriatic Sea with an ideal microclimate. With three National Parks and more than ten national and regional reserves, Abruzzo territory, indeed, has a natural predisposition for winegrowing, with proof of a solid winemaking tradition dating back to ancient times. The fabulous properties of the wines from the inland Abruzzo were first mentioned by Pholybius, a Greek historian who lived between 205 and 123 B.C., and afterwards, in the texts of Roman authors Ovid and Pliny the Elder. Today, the production of wine has spread to the whole region and has evolved rapidly in quality over the last half century, becoming with no doubt the most significant segment of the region's agriculture with over 32,000 hectares of vineyards producing more than a million hectoliters of wines Doc each year, and almost 80% are made with Montepulciano grapes. Considered the king of Abruzzo wines, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo has become one of the Italy's most famous reds, thanks to its versatility, high quality, and typically affordable price point. Many historical documents show that Montepulciano has been present in the region since the mid-1700s, where it found the best conditions for growing. Montepulciano is a late-ripening grape characterized by a thick skin, which gives the wine its intense color, a nice medium structure and a good amount of tannins, usually mild. It can be produced in different ways, from young, easy-drinking wines to the more complex and ageable Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Riserva.

The campaign is co-funded by the European Union and aims to promote the merits of European agricultural products, such as quality, tradition, traceability, safety and high production standards. Quality is one of the greatest assets of the producers across the EU in their attempt to meet the consumer demand, to increase the competitiveness of the EU products on US and Canada markets.

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Publisher's PICKS



Silverado Vineyards 2018 Merlot, Mt George Vineyard, Coombsville, Napa Valley (\$45) Hailing from a cooler-climate area just east of downtown Napa, where it's grown on gravelly soils of volcanic rock, this red offers up ripe mulberry, coffee, and pencil shavings. A big, bold

character emerges with dusty tannins and a mineral core. Aged 16 months in French oak. **93**



Reptil 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$50) Ripe fruit sweetens notes of cocoa within a frame of graphite and clove. Floral notes persist on the nose and palate. Mulberry and red plum remain prominent as velvet tannins manage to grip with finesse. Aged in French and American oak for 18 months. **94**

VIÑA COBOS/PAUL HOBBS



Silverado Vineyards 2019 Chardonnay, Vineburg Vineyard, Carneros (\$40) This Chard shows body and style in droves. Its aromas of green apple are an intriguing nod to the orchard that once was located on this vineyard site; the grapes are sourced from vines planted in 2000

and situated on both sides of wetlands preserved by the winery. Loam soils and the breeze from the San Pablo Bay lend to its hallmark searing acidity. Layered flavors of caramel, orange, and chamomile balance atop a thread of minerality. **92**



Guarachi Family Wines 2019 Chardonnay, Sun Chase Vineyard, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma Coast (\$50) The windy hillsides of Sun Chase climb to 1,400 feet above sea level. Lemongrass and vanilla are the hallmark flavors of this white, aged 11 months in French oak. Great acidity appears alongside salty minerality on the mouth-filling and unctuous palate of creamy vanilla, toasty nougat, and almond. **95**



Perrin + Dobbs Vineyards 2018 Pitch Black Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$42) More like pitch perfect, this small-production Cab with 15% Syrah is truly a balanced beauty, releasing an elegant, steady stream of dark-chocolate mint, sweet earth, and a confection of wild straw-

berry and dark raisin. Bold and delicious. **93**

ATC WINES



Edict 2019 Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley (\$52) Super-aromatic, with a perfume of cherry, vanilla, cedar, and earth, this wine was grown on gravelly soils in Mendocino County north of Boonville and aged ten months in 41% new French oak. Notes of black cherry and earthy sandalwood

permeate with a pinch of salt and tobacco leaf throughout. Round and plump, the palate shows its savory side through flavors of black olive and anise. **95**

ATC WINES



Jordan 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County (\$58) Winemaker Maggie Kruse utilizes more than 60 estate blocks while

sourcing fruit from 14 family growers to create this masterpiece blend of 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 8% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec. Blackberry and dusted plum are beautifully captured in a wash of violets and chocolate mint. Silky and structured, the wine educates the palate through the elegant, reined-in power of its weight and texture. Aged 13 months in French oak. **95**



MacRostie 2018 Klopp Ranch Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$58) This Pommard-clone Pinot Noir grown on Goldridge sandy loam offers the prettiest perfume of a rose garden sprinkled with cinnamon. The ethereal rose-petal texture, wispy and bright,

barely touches the tongue. Raspberry is laced with sweet basil on a gossamer path before an earthy core merges with cinnamon and cocoa on the finish. **93**



Umani Ronchi 2016 Pelago, Conero, Marche, Italy (\$56) A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Montepulciano, this dark carmine-hued beauty lights up the palate with Luxardo cherry and boysenberry on a backdrop of wet stone. Brilliant notes of violets set the stage

for velvety tannins and a regal structure. Pairs beautifully with any protein. **94**

VINEYARD BRANDS



Öömrang 2019 Siegerrebe, Puget Sound, Washington (\$60) Indigenous to Germany, the white grape Siegerrebe is also grown in Canada's Okanagan Valley and in Washington State; pronounced zee-geh-RAY-buh, it's a cool-climate variety related to Gewürztraminer.

While it has a sweetness to it, it's quite dry, with über-aromatic scents of apricot nectar, chamomile, and pine nut giving way to unctuous, awe-inspiring notes of tangelo and crème fraîche-topped kiwi. Acidity and minerality lift the richness to a food-friendly peak. **95**



Elk Cove Vineyards 2019 Mount Richmond Pinot Noir, Yamhill-Carlton, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$60) Mount Richmond Vineyard was purchased in 1996 as a partnership between Elk Cove founders Pat and Joe Campbell and winemaker Adam Campbell and his wife, Carrie; it sits on Willakenzie soil at an elevation reaching 500 feet. The nose of this wine, which aged ten months in 34% new French oak, is bathed in exotic scents of wild strawberry, plumeria, and gardenia. On the palate, a generous stream of red and blue fruit melds with mocha, fig preserves, and nutmeg within an elegantly appointed mouthfeel. **94**



Silverado Vineyards 2018 Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$60)

With some Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Cabernet Franc blended in, this standup Cabernet Sauvignon aged 17 months in primarily French oak, seeing some Hungarian and American oak as well. Sourced from the winery's estate vineyards (Mt. George, Silverado, and Oakville Station), the fruit yielded tight-fisted tannins of coffee and plum skin that hold this superbly structured, concentrated, and elegant red together. Chewy, with earthy undertones and depth defined by dark chocolate and black olive. **94**



Bien Nacido Estate 2019 Syrah, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County (\$60)

This cool-climate Syrah hails from a vineyard 16 miles from the Pacific at an elevation of 700 feet; it aged 16 months in 600-liter French oak puncheons before it was bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Co-fermented with 1% Viognier, it offers magnificent scents of boysenberry preserves and lavender. The palate is meaty and plush, with more lavender weaving between chewy and mouth-filling notes of dark chocolate. White pepper, garrigue, and a taste of terroir serve as a nod to the Northern Rhône. **95**

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



Davies Vineyards 2019 Pinot Noir, Nobles Vineyard, Fort Ross-Seaview, Sonoma Coast (\$75) This remote vineyard sits at an elevation of 1,000 feet above the Pacific. Aged in French oak for 15 months, the wine speaks of rosebuds and sweet red cherry on both nose and palate. Within the down-pillow texture, notes of cinnamon-dusted mocha express themselves well, intermingling with tomato leaf, red tea, and blue fruit. Its lightness of being is remarkable. **95**

RED

The Color of the Season

92 POINTS

VIN. 2019

THE TASTING PANEL
Nov/Dec 2021



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Publisher's PICKS



Turnbull Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$85) Turnbull winemaker and 14th-generation grower Peter Heitz notes, "For me, a classic Oakville Cabernet captures the joyful spirit of being in the vineyard during the growing season; it's bright and fresh and full of

vibrant red fruit." The aromas of vanilla and plum within a garden of blue flowers extend to the palate alongside chewy, teeth-gripping tannins, which become sumptuous as the wine opens. Expressive notes of violets, black plum, and cocoa take hold, surging forth with weight and mouth-filling texture. **96**



Résonance 2018 Résonance Vineyard Pinot Noir, Yamhill-Carlton, Oregon (\$65) Organically dry-farmed fruit is planted on ungrafted 40-year-old rootstock to produce this wine, which spent 17 months in French oak (30% new) and has an exquisitely silky and juicy

entry of cocoa-tinged earthiness as a result. Red-plum tannins and a wave of sassafras linger for a lengthy span within a garden of heather. **94**

KOBRAND



Frisson 2018 Proprietary Red, Toucher Vineyards, Yountville, Napa Valley (\$65) From a valley-floor vineyard off the Silverado Trail, this blend of 78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, and 7% Petit Verdot had us mesmerized with its perfume of sage and sandalwood. A flash of

dark plum and fig brings in a plush mouthfeel, where black-peppered boysenberry leads the charge. It's energetic and well structured, with supple tannins, fruit-driven brightness, a depth of graphite and oak, and marvelous balance. **95**

ATC WINES



Trujillo 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$85) Fruit sourced from Rutherford, Howell Mountain, and St. Helena make up this outstanding blend of 82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, 6% Cab Franc, 3% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec with a remarkable and classic Napa

profile. Aromas of cherry build as cocoa powder chimes in on the nose as well as on the juicy palate, which shows grainy tannins and rich red and blue fruit. Tilled soil adds to its textural beauty as the crescendo of flavors includes caramel, sandalwood, anise, and sweet tobacco, culminating with roasted coffee on the finish. Aged 22 months in 88% new French oak. **95**



Goldschmidt Vineyards 2017 Game Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$90) This Cab is packed with power and extroverted character—much like Nick Goldschmidt himself. Spiced black fruit and dry tannins take hold and coat the teeth with dried violets and

tobacco. The tarry middle is surrounded by elegance, acidity, and structure that sing. **95**



Round Pond Estate 2018 Louis Bovet Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Home Ranch, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$120) Winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown has a deep understanding of the terroir in this part of the Round Pond estate, gravelly soils and all. High-toned raspberry and

dusty blue-floral notes are not only elegant on the nose and palate but remarkably upright and bright. Bay leaf, basil, and red pepper team up with more blue fruit on the mid-palate before anise and spiced sandalwood define the finish. **96**



Cult by Beau Vigne 2019, Napa Valley (\$125) Sumptuous, bold, and statuesque, this lushly textured red—94% Cab Sauvignon with some Petit Verdot and Malbec—aged 18 months in 80% new French oak. Its small production allows its name to ring true, as does its magnificent, lofty nature. Notes of blackberry preserves, roasted coffee, and sandalwood are impressive. The fruit flavors integrate well with the savory side of black olive and a field of violets. **97**

ATC WINES



Scattered Peaks 2018 Single Vineyard Selection Cabernet Sauvignon, Morisoli Vineyard, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$150) Tarry and chewy, this bold, adventurous red presents an iconic Rutherford mouthfeel, with the sensation of a dusty book cover and plum

skin. Firm tannins take hold, but the palate remains round, its seamless translating as pure pleasure. Aged 22 months in 70% new French oak; 14.8% ABV. **95**

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SPIRITS



Tequila Tromba Añejo, Mexico (\$53) Aged in white oak barrels for 20–24 months, this aged Highlands tequila is a standout that shows a perfume of vibrant peach, fresh agave, and sweet lime. The velvety, unctuous palate is one of the glossiest we've tasted, with well-defined flavors of peanut brittle and woody notes that fuse with a jasmine undertone. **95**



Uncle Val's Zested Gin, USA (\$39) White pepper, cumin, anise, and a whisper of blackstrap molasses attract the nose with a heady perfume. The palate shines with peppermint, dried heather, spiced plum, and sweet ginger before licorice and Earl Grey tea come in midway, calming the zestiness without totally relinquishing the bold flavor. 90 proof. **94**

3 BADGE MIXOLOGY



Benjamin Chapman 4-Year Corn Small-Batch Whiskey, USA (\$36) This satin-coated spirit features a mash bill of 80% corn, 11% rye, and 9% malt, resulting in aromas of peach tart, orange peel, and toasted marshmallow. Its nectar-like entry shows oatmeal, cashew, and English breakfast tea. A dash of black pepper and cinnamon edges out a blaze of spiced cedar as warming notes of baked apple keep the palate satisfied and ready for more. 90 proof. **94**

3 BADGE MIXOLOGY



Five Brothers Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$60) This small-batch spirit blends five aged bourbons as a nod to the five Shapira brothers who started the brand in 1935. Aromas of chocolate, cedar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and jasmine are lavish.

The creamy mouthfeel offers layers of milk chocolate, root beer, and dried apricot as oatmeal drenched in maple syrup lends an elegant presence. 90 proof. **94**

HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY



Ammunition Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$40) Finished in French oak barrels that previously held Pinot Noir, this blend of two-, three-, and four-year-old rye whiskeys from Sonoma wine country is a voluptuous beauty, with plump scents of butterscotch and nougat. Round and medium-bodied, it's chock-full of flavors such as peach, walnut, cocoa, and black cherry. The clean yet spiced cedar finish is striking and memorable, lingering and warming without a rush of alcohol. 90 proof. **95**

DAYLIGHT WINE AND SPIRITS



Remus Repeal Reserve Series V Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$90) The fifth-anniversary edition of Remus Repeal Reserve commemorates the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. Hailing from the brand's 174-year-old distillery in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, its blend of five bourbons ranges from 13 to 16 years

of age. A desirable nose of sandalwood, patchouli, and brown-sugared peach portends the oncoming taste profile, led by spiced caramel, lavender, and charred almond. Black cherry and mocha pave the way for a long finish that combines tobacco leaf and basil with just a hint of cayenne. It clocks in at 100 proof but doesn't come on too strong—this is a sumptuous sipper. **98**

LUXCO



Courage & Conviction Cuvée Cask American Single Malt Whisky, USA (\$85) The cask used for this spirit from Virginia is shaved, re-toasted, and re-charred, bringing out the natural sugars. Red fruit lends sweetness to the viscosity as dark chocolate and mountain brush

leave behind a textural, grainy quality. Saddle leather demands attention and smooths out the finish of peach nectar. 92 proof. **94**

VIRGINIA DISTILLERY CO.



Öömrang Blueberry Geist Brandy, USA (375-mL; \$50) Blueberries grown on an estate vineyard/orchard in Washington are infused for almost one month into this 80-proof spirit. Incredibly unique with its lithe bottle and glass cork, it delivers aromas of blueberry that engage with vanilla musk; on the palate, notes of root vegetables encompass subtle blue fruit, but the intensity of the liquid is its hallmark. **92**



Michter's 10-Year Single Barrel Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$170) The 10-Year is in high demand with limited stock, but this impressive whiskey has a bright future once the brand expands its Springfield Farm to produce more

estate-grown grain for distillation, according to Michter's president Joseph J. Magliocco. With a nose of saffras, ginger, and maple syrup-kissed apricot, the complex mouthfeel delivers sunflowers drenched in dripping honey and peach nectar. Resin resonates on the mid-palate as notes of sandalwood pave a path through melted saffron butter. 92.8 proof. **99** *LE*



Calirosa Tequila Rosa Blanco, Mexico (\$50) Aromas of white tea, raspberry, and vanilla give way to clean agave notes wrapped in rose petals. White raspberry and cherry envelop fine minerality, which maintains a fresh tone on the palate. 80 proof. **93**





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BY JANET FLETCHER



PHOTO: JANET FLETCHER/PLANET CHEESE

BARK

Meets

BITE

In times past, cheesemakers looked to nature for many of their cheesemaking tools. They wove draining baskets out of grasses or used strips of boiled bark to keep soft cheeses from slumping. Modern creameries order materials from a catalog now, but the bark band has persisted as a way to restrain runny cheeses, adding a woodsy aroma and a rustic look.

Late fall is prime time for these supple, spoonable cheeses. Cheesemakers say they turn out better when made with autumn milk, which tends to be higher in fat. And because of the labor required, bark-wrapped cheeses command a premium and sell more briskly when consumers are in the mood for holiday spending.

At peak ripeness, these cheeses are too runny to slice; besides, even a chef's knife has a hard time with that bark. The customary way to serve them is to cut the rind off the top, revealing the oozy paste inside. Provide a spoon for scooping or a butter knife for spreading on levain toast or crusty bread. Pair with a dry Alsatian Riesling,

a saison-style beer, or a Belgian strong golden ale.

Harbison from Jasper Hill Farm

(Vermont): This 10-ounce cow's milk disk gets wrapped on day one with a paper-thin strip of local white spruce. Over the course of four weeks at the creamery, white mold blooms on the outside, creating a powdery cloak. At about eight weeks, Harbison will be moist and supple inside—as spreadable as frosting—with aromas of piney woods, clotted cream, and mushroom.

Merry Goat Round Spruce Reserve from FireFly Farms (Maryland)


(Maryland): One of the few (maybe the only) bark-wrapped cheeses made with goat's milk, Merry Goat Round Spruce Reserve (pictured above) traces its roots to superstar chef José Andrés. A fan of the original brie-style Merry Goat Round, he suggested that the owners try making it extra-runny, like Spain's Torta del Casar. So they wrapped a batch with spruce bark and waited. At peak ripeness, after ten to 12 weeks, the wheels have a dimpled

surface and a soupy interior, with aromas of mushroom and mustard and a deeply savory flavor.

Rush Creek Reserve from Uplands Cheese (Wisconsin)

(Wisconsin): Made only in late summer, when the farm's cows produce exceptionally rich milk, this raw-milk beauty develops a woodsy, spicy fragrance from its bark wrap. The salmon-colored crust sports a dusting of white mold. Inside, expect huge fragrance and flavor, merging porcini and forest floor. Cheesemaker Andy Hatch suggests slicing off the top rind, spooning a couple tablespoons of white wine on the surface of the cheese, and warming it in a moderate oven for ten minutes.

Winnimere from Jasper Hill Farm

(Vermont): A raw-milk cheese similar to Harbison but with a brine-washed rind, Winnimere develops a profoundly woodsy aroma from its bark band. You may also find aromas of mustard, ham hock, cherry, garlic, and earth. What a ride! 

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Pouring GOOD

NOBLE VINES LIVES UP TO ITS NAME AS IT JOINS THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER AND FOOD WASTE

by Paris Vasser

The North Texas Food Bank is among the beneficiaries of Noble Vines' campaign to combat hunger and food waste.

A special bottle of wine can enliven any dinner party, turn every day into a celebration, and take you to faraway places in a sip—and now, thanks to Noble Vines, it can even provide nourishment for thousands of families in need around the U.S. The Delicato Family Wines brand has partnered with AmpleHarvest.org, a nonprofit that aims to reduce food waste and malnutrition, to empower consumers to donate a healthy meal simply by buying their favorite Cabernet Sauvignon.

Noble Vines is named for the superior vinestocks found on the estate properties from which it's sourced, namely the Indelicato family's vineyards in Lodi and the cool-climate San Bernabe Vineyard in Monterey. But it also aims to live up to its name through its focus on sustainability as a cornerstone of the brand. That means not only preserving the environment for generations to come but fostering those generations as well; as Noble Vines brand manager Ashley Larson puts it, "We look at sustainability holistically. It's not just about energy usage; it's also about people." In 2020, acting on a desire to make a positive impact on communities, she explains, Noble Vines began partnering with 26 food banks across 19 states on a rebate program designed to benefit them. In 2021, that number jumped to 38 food banks across 30 states.

Brand staples like the 337 Cabernet Sauvignon and 446 Chardonnay are set at an approachable price point, which makes it possible for a wide demographic of consumers to participate in its charitable efforts—or, as Larson puts it, to "pour good into the world and into [their] glass" of Noble Vines. But first they have to scan the QR code on the bottle, which will direct them to a microsite that offers them a \$3 rebate in participating states. If they choose to donate the money, Noble Vines will give it to a pantry in their region. But even in states where mail-in rebates aren't allowed, the code will lead charitable minds to the

website of AmpleHarvest.org, where they'll learn how and where to make their own donations.

Founded by CNN Hero and self-proclaimed "geek with a social responsibility" Gary Oppenheimer in 2009, the organization connects gardeners with harvest surpluses to local food banks that provide fresh produce for their communities. The



year prior, Oppenheimer had found himself with an overabundance of homegrown tomatoes and zucchini; following his instincts to share the bounty rather than see it wasted, he struggled to find an organization that would accept it before finally locating a women's shelter 7 miles away that was in desperate need of, and very grateful for, fresh food. Noticing the lack of available information about where and how to donate harvested produce, Oppenheimer, who also managed a community garden where complaints of food waste were common, resolved that "if we're going to have an ample

harvest, the least we could do is give it to people who really need it."

Leaning on his tech background, Oppenheimer found success seemingly overnight: Just 150 days after AmpleHarvest.org launched, 1,000 food pantries had already joined him in his efforts to solve what he calls "an information problem." The organization informs gardeners where and when to drop off their excess produce; the food is then immediately distributed, so it's "fresher than you can get in the market," says Oppenheimer. Though he's been rightly honored with Google grants, a 2011 invitation to the White House, and a nomination for the World Food Prize in 2015, he remains solely focused on "getting closer to the root of the problem"—namely that "we don't need more food; we need to use the food we already have."

Over the year to date, Noble Vines' promotion of AmpleHarvest.org and its additional charitable donation of \$25,000 have funded the delivery of more than 225,000 pounds of fresh produce to people in need and contributed to the rebuilding of the organization's website. No wonder Oppenheimer gives ample praise to Noble Vines as a strong force in spreading the word to everyday heroes that the key to eliminating hunger is right at their fingertips.

But because it's not enough to give a one-time donation for a single meal, Oppenheimer explains, it's the brand's long-term commitment to the cause that represents a truly "sustained solution." In fact, it's already planning to take its efforts to the next level, setting a goal to donate 2 million meals by the end of 2022 through additional partnerships related to hunger relief. After all, the more people are enlightened about the fact that they can directly donate food from their own backyards, the more their—and all of our—neighbors will be nourished. (That they'll be drinking Noble Vines wine along the way is just a bonus.) **LV**

Sparkling Up a Friendship

AN ABRIDGED INTERVIEW WITH **GIAN LUCA PASSI**, CO-FOUNDER OF FIOL PROSECCO

by **Jessie Birschbach**

Roughly a decade ago, Treviso native Gian Luca Passi got together with two of his childhood friends, brothers Giovanni and Pietro Ciani Bassetti, to develop their own Prosecco with help from veteran winemaker Marzio Pol. The result, FIOL Extra Dry Prosecco, was released in 2012; the brand's FIOL Rosé, meanwhile, launched after the Prosecco DOC approved the category in May 2020.

On an early fall afternoon, while sampling both freshly chilled expressions, I chatted with Passi on Instagram Live; though the internet connection in his New York apartment was a bit choppy, the passion he had for both his wines and the sense of companionship they've created remained steadfast. "Moving to NYC from my home in Italy and having FIOL here really connects me to my memories with friends in Treviso. It's wonderful," he told me. "And now I'm able to share it with my new friends here in the United States and create new memories every day." Read on for an abridged version of our interview.

Q In Italian, the singular form of *fiol* means "an admirable friend," and in plural form, it's "a close group of friends." Why was this concept your muse, and how did you translate it into your Prosecco?

I grew up in Treviso, the capital of Prosecco, and that's where we started our journey with FIOL ten years ago. The families of my two partners and mine knew each other before we were born, so we grew up together sharing the same values. Prosecco is in our veins, so we wanted to define what [it] meant for us, and we wanted to share it with the world. Growing up among the vineyards and having a passion for good wine, we didn't see anything out there representing what we stood for in the category. It was important for us to

partner with a small-batch distribution outlet so we could really be involved in the process day in and day out. We couldn't be more proud of FIOL's growth and the recent accolades we've received.

Q But going only through on-premise channels must have been tough during the pandemic.

It wasn't easy, because of our choice to distribute FIOL primarily in hotels, restaurants, [and] catering. As you can

FIOL on our website in 40 different states [as well as] in the U.K. through Amazon.

Q Why did you go with the sweeter Extra Dry category of Prosecco as opposed to the Brut?

For about a year we tried different samples with friends and experts around the world. We ended with the Extra Dry because . . . we noticed that, above all, it offers a softness on your palate [that the Brut doesn't have].



PHOTO COURTESY OF FIOL

imagine, last year was hard for us, [as] it was for many others. But this year started really well, and last year, the [Prosecco DOC] Consortium allowing a Prosecco rosé category was a great boost. We created our FIOL Rosé that is 85% Glera and 15% Pinot Noir; the Pinot Noir gives not only a nice berry character but a little more ageability. On top of that, we were able to really develop the e-commerce channel in the U.S. alongside more traditional distribution, so now you can order

It's much more sophisticated [yet more] approachable and drinkable. People might disagree! We might in the future also make FIOL Brut. But I would say [Prosecco in general] is the most versatile wine in the world. On the one hand, it pairs incredibly well with Asian food and, on the other, it's perfect . . . for mixology. There aren't many other wines, and this is especially true with FIOL, that you can put together with such a large variety of juices and spirits. **LT**

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Happiness Is a Filled Glass

PAQUÍ BUILDS A REPUTATION AS A TEQUILA BRAND DESIGNED FOR SIPPING

by Sarah Graybill

Aptly borrowing its name from a word meaning “to be happy” in the Aztec language of Nahuatl, PaQuí was born from founder John Chappell’s desire to create a blanco tequila that would satisfy the most discerning connoisseurs of sipping spirits. This desire drove him to Jalisco, Mexico, to collaborate with master distiller Gilberto Jasso on a product that would offer the purest aromas and flavors of blue agave.

Thanks to its proprietary distillation method, which separates the heart of the distillate to remove impurities, PaQuí offers up lush tropical and grassy herbal notes as well as agave-driven sweetness, making it a fast friend of both educated palates and those just getting acquainted with tequila. “I created PaQuí because I felt there had to be a better-tasting tequila—one that fully expresses the beautiful character of the blue agave fruit without the harsh bite that is so common in the category,” says Chappell.

The blue agave has more than 600 aroma and flavor compounds, and the PaQuí team aims to showcase the best of them in three expressions. Joining



PaQuí Silvera is unaged, while PaQuí Reposado and Añejo age for four and 14 months, respectively.

the unaged Silvera (\$50) are the Reposado (\$55), which ages for four months, and the Añejo (\$65), aged for 14 months.

PaQuí also credits its flavor profile and silky texture to the ripeness of its agave plants. Led by Jasso, the PaQuí team exclusively uses piñas that reach 25–26 Brix in ripeness, when the plants are seven to ten years old, and steams them in stainless-steel autoclaves. They’re then fermented for five days in stainless-steel vats instead of wood, which helps to preserve the sweetness and purity of the agave, using fresh wine yeast instead of airborne yeast

to ensure consistently high quality. PaQuí’s aforementioned distillation technique, meanwhile, aims to eliminate congeners and fusel oils that can create the harsh burn in many tequilas, serving to awaken its fruit aromas while allowing its minerality and soft texture to fully emerge. The resulting liquid is floral and complex yet also versatile, making for a beautiful sipping tequila and mixer that elevates cocktails like the Paloma and Margarita.

Launched in 2018, PaQuí Tequila is now distributed in 11 states and available nationally online as the first distilled spirit to be launched by Tequila Holdings, Inc., an independent New York–based spirits company founded by Chappell. The Silvera has already received a 96-point review from *The Tasting Panel*, outscoring top tequila brands such as Patrón, Don Julio, and Casamigos. According to Chappell, the brand “captures the emotion behind tequila, Mexican culture, and a sense of Old World craftsmanship and quality as well as enjoyment, sociability, and fun.” **LD**

PaQuí owes its flavor profile and silky texture to the ripeness of its seven- to ten-year-old agave plants, which are harvested when their piñas reach 25–26 Brix, and its proprietary distillation methods.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAQUITEQUILA





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CIGAR BOX WINES

IS POISED TO SHAKE UP THE POPULAR
PREMIUM CATEGORY

BY JONATHAN CRISTALDI

Cigar Box's Old Vine Pinot Noir comes from Chile's Leyda Valley.

With a half-empty bottle of Cigar Box 2019 Old Vine Hand Harvested Malbec from Luján de Cuyo in Argentina's Mendoza region sitting on my desk, I could think of only one person who could answer the question I was asking myself. On a whim, I texted Master Sommelier Ian Cauble: "Can I ask you about that 'cigar box' quality in wine?" "Yes, call me," he shot back.

Cauble is well known for his recurring role in the *SOMM* film series, where his encyclopedic knowledge—which rivals *The Oxford Companion to Wine*—is on display. So it was during our call. "It's all about the aroma of cedar," he explained. "A cigar box is made of cedar, so you have that wood accent and perhaps a derivative of the type of oak. . . . It reveals itself in a much gentler accent [in wine], but in many ways, it is the melding together of fruit and that cedar, along with aged cigar leaf and red-tobacco aromas. Think of the smell of a sauna." It's a quality we typically find in aged Bordeaux, Brunello, Rioja Gran Reserva, and Bordeaux-style reds from Napa.

Newly enlightened, I thanked him, picked up my glass of Cigar Box Old Vine Malbec, and sniffed deeply. Indeed, I detected delicate red-berry aromas and slate-like minerality married with a gentle yet unmistakable kiss of sweet tobacco, hinting at cedar. So the name fits, I thought. But there's much more to this brand's story than that.

Max Arriagada is USA national sales director for Cigar Box Wines.



BOLD AMBITION

Cigar Box Wines made its debut in the U.S. market about six years ago, when its Argentine Malbec and Chilean Pinot Noir were released in Massachusetts as a joint venture between Chile's Santa Rita Estates and a regional distributor. "It was a hand-sell for the first few years, [but] it did well in New England," explains USA national sales director Max Arriagada—so well, in fact, that the company outright acquired Cigar Box Wines in late 2016. Today, it's the brand's sole U.S. importer, and it has big ambitions for expanding distribution to Florida, Illinois, Colorado, and Texas, for starters.

"We're starting out with a big off-premise focus," said Arriagada when we spoke shortly after his return from the Aspen Food & Wine Festival, where he'd presented the Cigar Box 2020 Pinot Noir from Chile's Leyda Valley. "It showed really well," he told me, adding, "It was so nice to be in front of people again."

That said, "on-premise is [also] a key channel to build the image and recognition of the brand in the market," according to company CEO Andrés Lavados. "So we are looking to grow [in that channel] as well. Our wines are very gastronomical and have the perfect price point for by-the-glass pours."

PUTTING BOOTS ON THE GROUND

After studying business at the Universidad Católica in Santiago, Arriagada spent two years backpacking around the world and "trying to figure out what I wanted to do in life," he says. Something clicked when, on a jaunt through Asia, he met the Chilean ambassador to Japan in Tokyo and observed a series of meetings that got the wheels spinning: "He invited all these businessmen," Arriagada recalls, "and I was fascinated that all they wanted to talk about was wine! So I wondered what kind of job [in the wine industry] could give me the chance to use my business background while still traveling the world."

In 2018, Santa Rita Estates recruited him to oversee its portfolio, "and over the last couple of years, we realized the potential [Cigar Box] has in the U.S. and we wanted to give it more focus," Arriagada says. "Typically, we would entrust the brand to an importer in the U.S. and work with them on all logistics, but [in this case] we decided



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SANTA RITA ESTATES

Santa Rita Estates CEO Andrés Lavados.

to take a different approach."

Since relocating from Chile to Austin, Texas, to be the brand's boots on the ground, he is doing just that—taking a direct route to the on- and off-premise markets while targeting

Cigar Box's Old Vine Malbec is sourced from estate vineyards in Luján de Cuyo (pictured) and the Uco Valley in Argentina.



consumers in the 28–40 age range whom he calls “engaged explorers.” He admits that they had also envisioned a primarily male audience; however, early POS data has revealed the fact that over 50% of buyers are female. “It’s very exciting,” says Arriagada. “These are people who like to express themselves over what they do and drink. I think it also has to do with [our] style of [wine], which is more elegant and finessed.”

INSIDE THE PORTFOLIO

The Cigar Box portfolio currently includes three hand-harvested reds. The **Old Vine Malbec** is sourced from estate properties in Argentina, specifically the Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo subregions of Mendoza, while the **Old Vine Pinot Noir** comes from Chile’s Leyda Valley, a sub-appellation of the San Antonio Valley that’s deeply impacted by the Pacific Ocean’s frigid Humboldt Current. There’s also an **Old Vine Cabernet Sauvignon** from estate vineyards in Alto Maipo. Winemaker Belén Tudela is the woman behind it all, working on the ground in

Argentina while overseeing the Chilean production team.

The labels are priced in the \$11–\$15 range, which places them at the lower end of the premium category, though Arriagada is bullish about the quality: “I’m confident to say we can compete against the \$16–\$20 premium category of wines.” But competition aside, the ultimate goal is “to keep it fun and different and surprise people when they pop these bottles,” Arriagada says. “And hopefully, we inspire folks to drink more wines from Chile and Argentina!” Given that the U.S. market share for South American wines hovers around just 3%, there is certainly room for growth.

Lavados agrees. “Our competitors are [not] other Argentinian and Chilean wines,” he says. “We all need to work together to properly communicate our offerings and increase our share of [the] market, which I believe should be much bigger. What we offer . . . are estate-grown, -bottled, and -imported wines. This allows us to ensure the best quality and consistency on our wines at very competitive pricing.” *EW*



TASTING NOTES

Cigar Box 2020 Old Vine Hand Harvested Pinot Noir, Leyda Valley, Chile (\$13) Plush, ripe, and earthy. Dried violets and roses surge forward along with black cherry and cinnamon. Distinctly toasty mocha notes define the round, balanced texture. **93** —*Meridith May*

Cigar Box 2019 Old Vine Hand Harvested Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$13) Ripe and fresh, with structured yet supple tannins and meaty flavors of charcuterie, heather, and mulberry. Slate-like minerality underscores the wine’s generous earthiness. The mid-palate is laden with dark, lush fruit while mocha and sweet tobacco strengthen its core. A marvelous food companion. **93** —*M.M.*

Cigar Box 2020 Old Vine Hand Harvested Cabernet Sauvignon, Maipo Valley, Chile (\$13) Bright, youthful, and fresh. Tart cranberry leads a parade of tomato leaf, beet, mocha, and cherry. The toasty oak finish is lifted by the superb acid structure. **91** —*M.M.*

Estate vineyards in Alto Maipo are the source of Cigar Box Old Vine Cabernet Sauvignon.

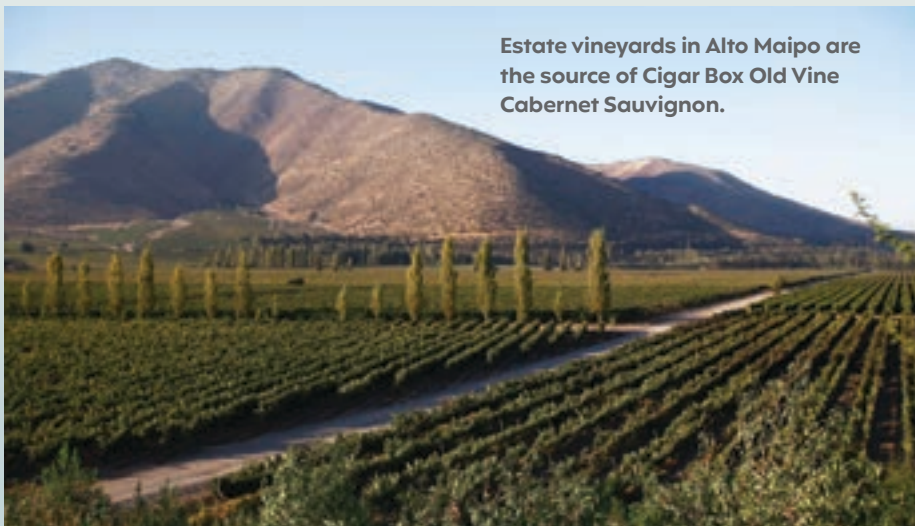


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The



story by Eric Marsh / photos by Jeremy Ball

ATC WINES LEVERAGES
ITS RELATIONSHIPS IN
NAPA VALLEY TO POSITION
ITS PORTFOLIO FOR THE
NATIONAL MARKET



**ATC chief marketing officer
David Zurowski.**


CONNECTION

In 2003,

after decades of commuting from Napa Valley to the Bay Area, Charles Bartlett quit his job in the printing industry. He wanted to spend more time in Napa, where he'd grown up, and he'd always had a hidden desire to work in the wine industry—just like some of his lifelong friends who were now running the family winery as their parents did before them. Soon after his return, Bartlett established himself as a print broker specializing in wine labels and, in so doing, began to learn more about the bulk wine market, occasionally purchasing a few barrels himself to resell in small amounts.

He learned that even small producers can end up with more wine than they're capable of selling as their own. This surplus can come about for a few reasons, a common one being that, in certain vintages, boutique winemakers who've planned for incremental growth are cursed with bumper crops that require them to increase inventory. If they attempt to sell it for a cheaper price, they might negatively affect both its perceived value and their reputation in the future. Another reason is that, well, consumers aren't always buying. Such was the case in the late aughts, at the height of the recession, when many producers were saddled with finished wine.

At that time, Bartlett had already been buying and reselling wine for years, and he saw an opportunity both for himself and for the local winemakers he'd formed relationships with. In addition to growing his knowledge of bulk wine, he'd developed a firm understanding of industry trends and how winemakers and winery owners operate. As



Old friends: ATC
founder and CEO
Charles Bartlett and
general manager
John Galvin.

he consistently and covertly bought wine over the years, Bartlett continued to earn trust from producers. So in 2008, when several of them had a surplus, Bartlett made his move, turning his small-scale operation into a full-scale enterprise: ATC (Appellation Trading Company).

MAKING A NAME

ATC is a relationship-driven business inside and out. For starters, Bartlett has known ATC general manager John Galvin since they were teens. They cut their teeth together in the printing industry; in fact, Galvin recommended Bartlett for a job at the company he worked for. That's where they learned, in Galvin's words, "to understand customer needs and to find solutions to meet those needs," providing service as much as executing sales. In 2013, Bartlett brought Galvin on board at ATC—and though their vocation has changed, their principle and approach are still the same; they remain, as Galvin puts it, "solution providers in the sales world."

Nearly 13 years since its inception, "ATC has earned a reputation in Napa

for purchasing quality wine at a fair price," Galvin asserts. And the brand is efficient at it. Whether it be a few barrels or half a fermenting tank, he adds, "We take all the wine; we move it when it's needed to be moved; we pay the bill . . . and we keep things confidential, which is key to the sale." In return, ATC receives exceptionally good wines that would otherwise never hit the market.

While the company got its start by buying and selling finished wine, it eventually began blending in house and, finally, procuring raw juice and grapes, contracting reputable Napa winemakers such as Kevin Morrissey, Chad Alexander, and Julien Fayard (who now serves as ATC's master blender) to make its own wines. Today, it bottles 200,000 cases a year in its 10,000-square-foot winery and has also acquired a handful of brands, including Edict Wines and the flagship Beau Vigne.

SCALING UP

It's the ATC team's wont to continuously raise the bar through growth. That means tirelessly conceptualizing

new sales strategies while forging relationships with distributors in addition to wineries. CMO David Zurowski says that he and his audacious team don't shy away from contacting national companies that are also expanding, sometimes unsolicited. They have, in fact, built partnerships after emailing distributors directly to say: "We have opportunities that might be of interest to your organization. We're both scalable organizations, and we'd love to see if there's some synergy." If it seems as though there might be, the ATC team will then identify exactly what they think their potential partner needs and put together a proposal.

Indeed, though ATC wines had been readily available only in Napa Valley up until this year, consumers in every state but Michigan can now purchase ATC labels such as Verdon Estate, Edict, and Beau Vigne at retail, thanks to the relationships it has formed with national distributors. And if the relationships the brand has cemented with boutique wineries is any indication, those it's building with distributors will also be lasting, forming the cornerstones of the superstructure that ATC is becoming. **LT**

TASTING NOTES



Beau Vigne 2018 Romeo Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford, Napa Valley (\$100)

Intense dark chocolate-covered cherry and roasted coffee glide in on a sleek mouthfeel with seductive notes of blackberry and licorice. In its youth, this

broad-shouldered yet already balanced red is cloaked in dark violets that bloom as it opens up. **97** —*Meridith May*



Beau Vigne 2018 Juliet Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, Napa Valley (\$100)

Spicier than her Romeo, Juliet is a savory beauty romanced by a sonnet of cigar leaf, black pepper, and sandalwood. Plummy flavors cling to dry, chalky tannins, delivering a

complex mouthfeel as notes of soy sauce and dark cherry paint the palate. **97** —*M.M.*



Verdon Estate 2018 Blueline Vineyards Proprietary Red, Napa Valley (\$58)

Aged ten months in second-use French oak, this superb blend of 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Malbec, and 20% Merlot announces itself through aromas of briar-laden

boysenberry, chocolate, and coffee bean. With notes of melting dark chocolate that lend graininess, the mouthfeel is sumptuous, meaty, and almost chewy before iron and white pepper awaken the back of the palate. A tremendous surge of blue fruit drenches the mouth on the finish. **94** —*M.M.*



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** —*M.M.*

Portonics work with a variety of garnishes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PORT AND DOURO WINE INSTITUTE



Diversifying Port Consumption

CANNED PORTONIC BRINGS A NEW TWIST TO RTD TIPPLES

Port, the famed fortified wine from Portugal's Douro region, is most commonly enjoyed as a dessert wine. But it's also great in cocktails—one of the most popular examples being the Portonic, or Port and Tonic. The classic version combines one part White Port, dry or sweet, with two parts tonic water, served over ice with a slice of lemon; Rosé, Ruby, or Tawny Port can also be used, however, to make a refreshing drink that's perfect for enjoying at the start of a meal.

And now the Portonic has joined the wide world of RTDs, whose popularity has never been more apparent. Since 2018, the mixed drinks category—including malt beverages and pre-mixed cocktails—has been the most buoyant on the U.S. alcohol market. According to a Mintel report from November 2019, while “one in five drinkers [was] reducing their alcohol consumption . . . RTDs were the only

alcohol segment to experience an increase in consumption over a 2018 measure.” And per an IWSR analysis, U.S. consumers were the biggest contributors to a 43% increase in the global volume consumption of RTDs in 2020.

In response to this trend, the Port and Douro Wine Institute (IVDP) recently registered the Portonic at Portugal's National Institute of Intellectual Property and at the European Union Intellectual Property Office. Its goal is to diversify the ways in which Port can be consumed; as IVDP president Gilberto Igrejas commented, “New forms of consumption . . . will make it possible to gain relevance among young people, through new experiences associated with conviviality and life's good moments.”

The IVDP is strictly regulating the production of Portonics, just as it does the production of Port. Ready-to-drink

Portonics can be produced only by registered Port producers. They're required to contain at least 25% Port for an ABV of 5–8% (adjuncts such as flavorings are permitted only in accordance with general regulations). They may be packaged in any format approved by the IVDP, including bottles and cans, but the process must occur within the demarcated Douro region, and all labeling on the package—including the symbol ® to indicate that the brand is registered—must also be sanctioned by the institute. And of course, before a single drop can be sold, it too must first be approved by the IVDP, which conducts a range of chemical and sensory analyses on each product.

Stringent as these standards are, several brands have already met them and reached the market, so there's no time like the present to introduce the Portonic as the next big thing in happy hours. [V](#)

on-premise

Steve Palumbo
is Patrimony
Estate's vice
president of
sales, Western
United States.

A Day in the **LIFE**

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH PATRIMONY'S
STEVE PALUMBO, VP OF SALES FOR THE
ESTEEMED PASO ROBLES BRAND

story by Eric Marsh / photos by Tameka Jacobs

It was in the vineyards of Bordeaux that Steve Palumbo got his start in wine. After graduating from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he majored in English literature, he went to Stratford-upon-Avon, England, to study Shakespeare for the summer. But after 14 straight weeks of reading and attending plays, the young graduate needed both a respite from academia and some cash in hand. Following leads on French growers who were hiring for harvest season, he found his way across the English Channel and was soon picking grapes in one of France's most famous regions.

He and other 20- and 30-somethings from every pocket of Europe "would wake up at the crack of dawn and work until noon, [then] have a three-hour lunch followed by a siesta. Then we'd work the vineyards again until the sun went down," he recalls. Beyond enlarging his worldview, it was an immersion into the world of wine—one that could have led to winemaking, but Palumbo took a different track. "I've been in sales since I was 12, selling candy on Sunset Boulevard," he says, only half-joking.

Upon returning to the States, Palumbo combined his proclivity for sales with his deep-rooted knowledge of wine. Through the 1990s, he climbed the ranks at Kobrand Corporation, eventually overseeing sales for Southern California, Oregon, and Washington. In 1999, he advanced his career with a move to Opus One, where for 21 years he played an integral role in the brand's enormous growth as its Western United States sales manager. And finally, in January, he took another major leap to become the vice president of sales, Western United States, at Patrimony Estate, which was founded by DAOU Vineyards' Daniel Daou and his brother Georges.

From Spain to Japan

Palumbo does in fact have the characteristics of a natural salesperson: He's charismatic, charming, and confident, with a welcoming smile—and though it was already over 90 degrees when I met him outside Tatel in Beverly Hills one September morning to tag along on his sales calls for this story, he still managed to look dapper in a modern-cut suit.



Palumbo at Nobu Los Angeles with general manager Daniel Garcia.



Tatel in Beverly Hills officially opened its doors to the public on September 21.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE TATEL GROUP

In the plush lounge at Baltaire Restaurant, Palumbo and wine director Matthew Arnall explore Patrimony in depth.



Tatel is a Spanish restaurant whose ambiance harkens back to 1940s-era Southern California: Wide doors open to a small bar with pastel-pink stools, which leads in turn to a cozy yet airy dining room adorned with pastel-green woodwork, Art Deco-style light fixtures, and tufted red-leather banquettes. Yet the restaurant is brand-new; in fact, that evening would mark its official grand opening, and aside from myself and our photographer, a TV news crew and other members of the press were there as well. Palumbo's window of time would be short, so he had to make his pitch pithy. Tactfully, he did just that as he sat down with Tatel general manager Morgan Dequillien at a corner table in the dining room to taste Patrimony Estate's two wines, the 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon and 2018 Caves des Lions.

Having just this year released its first commercial vintage, Patrimony is still in its nascency, featuring grapes from select blocks in the Daous' vineyard on DAOU Mountain in the Adelaida District of Paso Robles. The brothers purchased the land in 2007 after searching the world over for the most optimal area outside France to grow Bordeaux varietals, swayed by its 2,000-foot elevation, its clay and limestone soils, and the cool evening fog that rolls in from the Pacific 13 miles away. After establishing their namesake label, they set their sights on making ultra-premium reds comparable to first-growth Bordeaux from thick-skinned fruit that would yield wines high in phenolics. After much careful work, they achieved their goal for Patrimony.

Back at Tatel, Dequillien remarked

that the 2017 Cabernet "would pair well with our tomahawk, rib-eye, or tenderloin as well as our *pluma Ibérica*," one of the restaurant's specialties—a thin, lean cut from the end of the loin of Spain's highly prized, acorn-fed Black Iberian pig.

Our next stop was Nobu Los Angeles in West Hollywood. The Japanese-Peruvian concept from celebrity chef Nobuyuki "Nobu" Matsuhisa is best known for its sushi, but its menu also features dry-aged rib-eye, A5 wagyu, and other cuts of beef. To stand up to them, the "Rich & Full Bodied" section of the wine list includes more than a dozen labels, perhaps the most coveted (and definitely the most expensive) being the Patrimony 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon. Obviously, then, Palumbo had had success here before—but as Daniel Garcia had only recently come on board as general manager, Palumbo wanted to sit down with him for a tasting and tell the brand's story.

As they tasted through the wines, taking a seat at a round table illuminated by an intricate chandelier resembling a golden nest, Palumbo explained that the vines for Patrimony's wines are grown on steep slopes in high-density configurations; these conditions stress the plants and produce thick-skinned grapes that yield small amounts of rich juice, which in turn creates phenolic, tannic wines with a cashmere-like texture. He described the Cab as showing notes of black currant, plum, leather, and tobacco.

Palumbo then told the founders' story. "The Daous left Lebanon during the civil war there in the '70s and moved to France, which is where the seed for [their] interest in wine was planted," he explained. After high school, they moved to the States to attend UC San Diego and went on to run a technology company before launching DAOU Vineyards.

Garcia mentioned that he had read as much while researching Patrimony, and that was largely what interested him in the wine. He likened the brand to Nobu in that the owners of both were immigrants to the U.S. who strive for excellence in all they do: "Chef Nobu started out in Japan and then moved to South America before moving to Alaska and then L.A., opening Matsuhisa Beverly Hills [in 1987]." He now owns restaurants across the globe.

A Prime Pour for Prime Cuts

Our next stop, Baltaire Restaurant, was a few miles west in Brentwood; at lunchtime, the steakhouse's spacious atrium was bustling. Behind the linen-draped tables in the interior dining room, a glass wall offered a full view of the meticulously clean and orderly kitchen. We met Baltaire wine director Matthew Arnall at the host's stand and settled into a corner of the lounge area. With its camel-colored, mid-century modern leather sofas; wood-paneled walls; dimly lit lamps; and fireplace, the atmosphere might have you reaching for a cigar in the pocket of your sport coat (even if you don't smoke and aren't wearing a sport coat).

In this as in his other meetings, Palumbo went into detail about Patrimony's barrel program: After the hand-harvested and -sorted grapes have undergone a five-day cold soak and fermentation with proprietary yeast is complete, the aging regimen begins. The Cabernet Sauvignon rests in a variety of French oak vessels, he explained: "Through personal relationships the Daous have with top cooperages, they obtain Taransaud T5 barrels [made] from five-year-seasoned staves cut from centuries-old Tronçais forest trees; Tonnellerie Sylvain barrels made from a 39-meter-tall sessile oak that is approximately 350 years old; a proprietary DAOU barrel created from rare, super-fine-grain pink oak—or *bois rosé*—that's also seasoned in the elements for five years; Seguin Moreau's ICÔNE concept, whose technology allows even flavors throughout the barrels; and Berger barrels that [undergo a] customized toast for our fruit." To reach its first-growth-worthy potential, the Cabernet Sauvignon ages for a total of 30 months.

The Caves des Lions is likewise aged in a mix of proprietary barrels, Seguin Moreau's ICÔNE barrels, and Berger barrels as well as custom Jupille barrels made from trees from the forest of Bercé. According to Palumbo, "Collectively, these barrels provide for seamless oak integration and staggering complexity over a maturation period of 27 months, all without encroaching upon the pure qualities of our DAOU Mountain fruit"—in this case a blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon and 40% Cabernet Franc.

Arnall described the Caves des Lions as "heavy, bold, [and] extracted but

exceptionally well done, with a silky-soft, smooth texture." Though Baltaire offers just about as many seafood dishes as it does prime cuts, it's the latter that Arnall and his team suggest pairing Patrimony with; between their sales abilities and the deep pockets of many Brentwood residents, they have managed to pour three cases' worth of each Patrimony expression over the course of just a couple of months.

A Good Day's Work

After Baltaire, we circled back to Beverly Hills to visit Wally's Wine & Spirits wine director Phillip Dunn. The two old friends go back to the days when Palumbo was at Opus One and Dunn was the wine director at Spago.

Wally's could be called an epicurean

This day in the life of Steve Palumbo was a busy and fast-paced one, but there's no such thing as a typical day for him. While he lives in L.A., he travels a lot, mostly to Northern California, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, and Hawaii. In addition to making direct sales calls to accounts, he also interfaces with Patrimony's distributor partners, hosts dinners, and educates consumers on the portfolio.

With a case production of only 371 for the 2018 Caves des Lions and 650 for the 2017 Cabernet, Patrimony remains a small label. But "as our production increases incrementally, I'll start penetrating farther east," Palumbo told me. That'll likely happen sooner than later, considering that the Daous are building a winemaking facility exclusively for Patrimony on the



After comparing tasting notes on Patrimony, Palumbo and his old friend Phillip Dunn, director of wine at Wally's Wine & Spirits, clink glasses of Champagne.

epicenter, with its towering walls of wines from near and far, a spirits cove, a gourmet market, a kitchen, and a full restaurant and bar that boldly offers over 60 wines by the glass, including Patrimony Cabernet Sauvignon. Dunn noted that "Patrimony wines are plush, rich, and well crafted—crowd-pleasers for sure," adding that Wally's guests often remark on the Cab's refinement and "ease of drinking" even on its own, never mind as an accompaniment to, say, Wally's New York strip steak or truffle Bolognese.

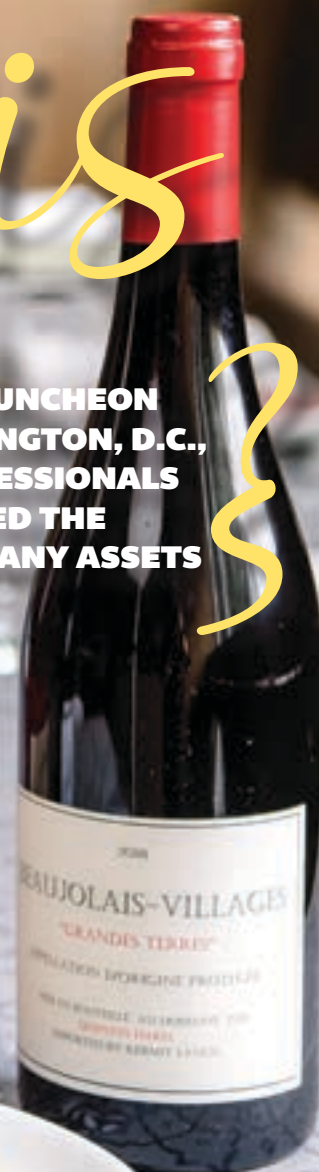
mountain next to the DAOU property. Palumbo divulged that Erik Johnson, former head sommelier at The French Laundry, will be the estate director of what he called the "Cheval Blanc-style, French-châteauxque winery complete with a . . . restaurant, cheese cave, cigar lounge, and eight suites." If all goes as planned, construction will be completed by late 2024. The excitement with which Palumbo talked about it suggested he's looking forward to a leisurely weekend or two there himself—and given his hectic schedule, he deserves one. *LT*

THE BUZZ BUILDS FOR

Beaujolais

A RECENT LUNCHEON
FOR WASHINGTON, D.C.,
WINE PROFESSIONALS
HIGHLIGHTED THE
REGION'S MANY ASSETS

Domaine Dupueble Père et Fils 2019 Beaujolais Blanc, Domaine Saint-Cyr 2020 La Galoche Beaujolais Rosé, and Quentin Harel 2018 Beaujolais Villages Les Grandes Terres accompanied the first course of leeks in vinaigrette with croutons, hard-boiled eggs, and capers during the Beaujolais Nouvelle Génération luncheon at Convivial in Washington, D.C.





STORY BY WANDA MANN / PHOTOS BY TASHA DOOLEY

Advanced Sommelier Erik Segelbaum served as presenter at the Beaujolais Nouvelle Génération luncheon, which was held for Washington, D.C., wine buyers at Shaw restaurant Convivial in August.

Beaujolais, not Beltway politics, was all the buzz in Washington, D.C., on a rainy day last August. The gray skies couldn't dampen the festive mood inside the aptly named Convivial restaurant in the Shaw neighborhood, where an enthusiastic group of wine professionals had gathered for the Beaujolais Nouvelle Génération luncheon.

Led by Advanced Sommelier Erik Segelbaum—the founder of hospitality agency SOMLYAY and a contributing editor at *The Tasting Panel*—the event emphasized the key attributes that have secured Beaujolais' status as a premier wine region. Running along the Saône River between Burgundy to the north and the Rhône to the south, it's best known among consumers for producing Beaujolais Nouveau, but Segelbaum reminded his audience that the hills and plains of its vineyards are capable of yielding the kind of elegance and quality that serves as a persuasive selling point. "Your job is to create a profitable wine program with a well-trained staff," he asserted. "If you're passionate about something, you can sell it."

Guest Megan Cruz, sommelier at upscale tavern St. Anselm, agreed that it plays a more lucrative role on a list than many buyers realize. "Beaujolais fits our restaurant style so perfectly in that it is unpretentious, approachable, and still pretty damn delicious," she said. "I love it because



Guests sniffed, swirled, and sipped their way through three courses.



Upon welcoming the audience, Segelbaum reminded them that Beaujolais' terroir is capable of yielding "hyper-complex and hyper-sophisticated" wines.

it's casual enough for a weeknight bottle [yet] elevated enough for the most experienced diners. . . . The artful and quality product, combined with its established approachability, secures Beaujolais a place on our list naturally."

Of course, the fact that it goes hand in hand with food is no small advantage: Because of the Gamay grape's brightness, low acidity, and supple tannins, Segelbaum noted, Beaujolais has achieved status as a food wine, becoming "the top-selling wine in the brasseries of Paris." Best served chilled, it's "great with spice-forward foods, barbecue, and South Asian cuisine"—but while it's delightfully easy-drinking, he added, it can also be "hyper-complex and hyper-sophisticated."

Lindsey Fern, director of wine at The Inn at Little Washington, which has been awarded three Michelin stars, also praised Beaujolais' versatility with food. "Cru Beaujolais can have many different expressions; for example, Fleurie will be more elegant and pretty, while Moulin-à-Vent can be somewhat tannic and dark-fruited,"



she said. "In 2017, I took a girls' trip to Burgundy with three other sommelier friends, and we drove from Beaujolais' southernmost cru to its northernmost. We looked at the various soils and elevations and tasted the wines. It was an incredible learning experience, and because I have this memory and

connection to the region, I love being able to offer it to our guests."

The kitchen at Convivial showcased Beaujolais' compatibility with a range of ingredients. During the lunch, guests were able to mix and match six wines with three courses: leeks in vinaigrette with croutons, hard-boiled eggs, and



For the main course, a duo of haricot vert—crusted salmon and diver scallop with crushed potatoes was accompanied by Domaine Michel Tête 2019 Juliéna Tradition, Château des Tours 2018 Brouilly, and Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes 2018 Côtes de Brouilly.



Guests enjoyed raspberry-rhubarb tart with mint, white chocolate, and mojito sorbet for dessert.

capers; a duo of salmon with a crust of haricots verts and diver scallop with crushed potatoes; and raspberry-rhubarb tart with mint, white chocolate, and mojito sorbet. The featured wines were Domaine Dupueble Père et Fils 2019 Beaujolais Blanc, Domaine Saint-Cyr 2020 La Galoche Beaujolais Rosé, and four reds—Quentin Harel 2018 Beaujolais Villages Les Grandes Terres; Domaine Michel Tête 2019 Juliéna Tradition; Château des Tours 2018 Brouilly; and Domaine de la Voûte des Crozes 2018 Côtes de Brouilly.

Although all the region's reds and rosés are produced from Gamay, whose full name is Gamay Noir à Jus Blanc, its 12 distinct appellations—Beaujolais; Beaujolais Villages; and the crus of Brouilly, Côte de Brouilly, Régnié, Morgon, Chiroubles, Fleurie, Moulin-à-Vent, Chénas, Juliéna, and Saint-Amour—offer a diverse range of styles. First planted here several centuries ago, Gamay accounts for 98% of production in Beaujolais. The red wines it yields show red fruits like strawberry, raspberry, and cherry; floral notes of violet, rose, and lily of the valley; and spices such as cinnamon, vanilla, and white pepper as well as flavors of minerals, leather, and eucalyptus. The fruit-forward style of Beaujolais rosé, meanwhile, has connected with consumers who are driving its growth. Chardonnay accounts for the remaining 2% of production, yielding white wines that are generally refreshing, round, and full of finesse.

How do Beaujolais grapes achieve

such an impressive range of flavors? The secret is in the soils. Although the growing area is relatively small, measuring 61 square miles and 14,500 hectares, over 300 soil variants have been identified within its boundaries. The region also benefits from France's three main climatic influences—continental currents, oceanic air movements, and Mediterranean winds—as well as the Haut-Beaujolais mountain range, which reaches 1,000 meters in altitude and serves to moderate the winds, including the *foehn* in the summertime. When this warm air from the west crosses the Beaujolais mountain ridges on its way down to the plain, it has a warming and drying effect that facilitates ripening. The Saône, meanwhile, helps to regulate temperature.

Given their respect for the terroir, it's not surprising that sustainability is a priority for winemakers in Beaujolais. In 1989, long before the concept began to trend, local producers joined together to study their vines and determine an effective strategy to protect them. They now work collectively to further the impact of agroecology, an agricultural practice whose tenets include maintaining and reintroducing biodiversity while preserving soil vitality and water quality.

Winemaking techniques in Beaujolais have also evolved. For example, the region traditionally embraced whole-bunch fermentation as a means of preserving the integrity of the berries. But alternative methods are on the rise as more producers

experiment with destemming, partially or completely, in order to craft new expressions of the region.

Vincent Moten, founder and CEO of event-planning company Elevate Your Tastes, said he was motivated by the Beaujolais Nouvelle Génération luncheon to include Beaujolais in future tastings. "There's enormous character and opportunity available in choosing wines from here," he explained. "Gamay is often in the shadow of Pinot Noir, so far fewer consumers are aware of [it], which is unfortunate because they're both delicious wines in their own respect!"

As Segelbaum pointed out, though, Beaujolais is more than just a wine region: "[It] equals connectivity and conviviality." He introduced attendees to the concept of *Beaujonomie*, which the Beaujolais Wine Council describes as "a philosophy, a mindset, that advocates the spirit of sharing, exchanging, discovering, and rediscovering the vineyard. . . . [These] values are universal and now especially resonate with contemporaries who are seeking real, concrete sociability beyond the virtual world."

The spirit of Beaujonomie was certainly alive and well in D.C., going to show that, for newly minted millennial enophiles and more seasoned sippers alike, Beaujolais' elegant, food-friendly, and intriguing wines bring people to the table. **U**

ALL EYES ON

PASO ROBLES

**HERE'S WHY
DISTRIBUTING
POWERHOUSE
RNDC IS BULLISH
ON CALIFORNIA'S
FASTEST-GROWING
WINE REGION**

BY SARAH GRAYBILL

Taylor Tierney, CSW and account executive of national accounts on-premise at RNDC, pours a glass of Austin Hope Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon for Justin Otsuka, CFO of Paul Martin's American Grill in Irvine, CA.

PHOTO: RAFAEL PETERSON



These are just some of the wines represented by the Paso Robles CAB Collective.

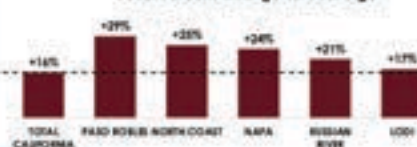
In the morning, before the sun has burned off the fog, Paso Robles' rolling hills of vines are hidden in mist. Dew—the closest thing to rain the vines in this semiarid region may see for a while—slips over the leaves and drips into the earth, beneath which thirsty roots wait patiently. Overhead, grapes swell with the secrets of the soil, the seasons, the sunlight, the struggle they've endured. These secrets will be revealed in the form of a story—one that's picked, bottled, sipped, and shared among wine drinkers who are coming to understand why Paso Robles is currently the fastest-growing AVA in California.

According to Nielsen data for the 52 weeks ending April 24, 2021, growth in wines from Paso Robles by dollar sales was up 51% from the year prior. That's almost double the change for all California table wine over \$20 as well as for the key regions of Napa (29%) and Sonoma (22%). Though this accomplishment may seem recent, it's been a long time coming: Paso Robles' history as a wine region is rooted in the 1800s, and it has been an AVA for more than 40 years. As Russell Motz, executive vice president of supplier business development for Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC), puts it, "Paso is by no means an overnight success. There has been much planning and a strong foundation laid over many decades that allowed for [its recognition] in the last ten years." He notes

PASO ROBLES WINE

Paso Robles Is The Fastest Growing Region In California

Dollar Percent Change vs. Year Ago



Top Paso Robles Varietals
(By Dollar Share)

Share %

% Change

CABERNET	78%	+23%
RED BLEND	10%	+30%
ZINFANDEL	3%	+15%
MERLOT	3%	+6%
SAUVIGNON BLANC	1%	+75%
CHARDONNAY	1%	+65%

Source: Nielsen IQ, 40 weeks ending April 24, 2021. Data for 2020 sales. *Paso Robles



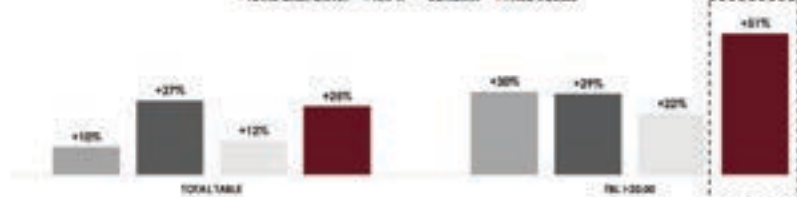
CALIFORNIA TABLE WINE PRICE

40% OF DOLLARS SOLD OF PASO ROBLES TABLE WINE AT RETAIL ARE PRICED \$20+ AND ABOVE

Paso Robles Is The Fastest Growing Region In California Table Wine \$20+

Dollar Percent Change vs. Year Ago

■ TOTAL CALIFORNIA ■ NAPA ■ SONOMA ■ PASO ROBLES



Source: Nielsen IQ, 40 weeks ending April 24, 2021. Data for 2020 sales. *Paso Robles



Paso Robles wines at Paul Martin's American Grill.



Karen Bell, business development manager of wine for San Antonio, TX-based grocery store chain H-E-B, with a selection of Paso Robles wines.



Terri Horan, VP of marketing for Paul Martin's American Grill, pores over the wine list with company CFO Justin Otsuka.



RNDC senior account executive, Texas, April Mery.

that the establishment of 11 distinct sub-AVAs in 2014 has demonstrated the commitment of producers here to continuing to improve the caliber of their wines, resulting in an uptick in not only quality but the kind of media buzz and tourism that is now motivating producers from other regions to establish a presence in Paso.

RED RENAISSANCE

Part of the region's appeal—perhaps no surprise given its size—is its diversity. Charlie Wright, senior vice president of supplier business development at RNDC, says that while it's known for

phenomenal Cabernet Sauvignon, which commands over 50% of its planted acres, Paso is home to many Bordeaux and Rhône varieties.

"There are superb examples of Syrah, Zinfandel, and Grenache coming out of Paso," he points out, "as the climate of the region is well suited to produce world-class quality for these varieties." He adds that the wines they yield showcase ripeness of fruit, high levels of phenolics, and bright acidity, resulting in uniquely complex yet balanced bottlings. In addition, Paso wines offer a high quality-to-cost ratio, especially when it comes to Cabernet Sauvignon, which

can rival those from the grape's key regions at a less expensive price point.

"Paso projects are striving to raise the bar to the highest level and compete with top wineries in Napa, France, and Italy," Motz says. "Many wine consumers are always looking for the 'next cool region.' Paso has caught the eye of the wine world, and now [it's] catching the eye of the wine consumer as a hip, innovative, and high-quality wine region." (Indeed, per the aforementioned data, Paso Cabernet Sauvignon was up 23% to dominate dollar share for the region at 78%, while red blends were up 30% at 10% dollar share.)

The viticulture of Paso Robles is saturated in history sown from ancient vines and the grit of those who have long labored over its vines and barrels. And for anyone with a trained eye for the masterful execution of winemaking as an art form, true appreciation for wines from this region develops organically.

Wright says that the growing market share of brands like those RNDK represents are putting the region on the radar of more and more consumers

ON- AND OFF-PREMISE POTENTIAL

Bell, for her part, predicts that while there hasn't yet been a huge call for Paso's Rhône varietals, it may be on the horizon. "There are some lovely

"[These wines have] the quality and the story that, when combined with rapidly rising retail sales data, allow for much more successful ad campaigns, couponing, and cross-merchandising programs," she says.

What's more, as wineries from other regions establish a presence here, bringing their followings and foot traffic with them, consumer confidence in Paso wines will only increase—as will the innovation and quality that results from competition. From lesser-known to most desired region, Paso Robles' journey is a success story that we can all truly savor. **LT**



Tiffany Tobey

SOMMELIER AND GENERAL MANAGER,
THIRTY EIGHT & VINE, FORT WORTH, TX



by Michelle M. Metter

PHOTO: LOGAN PERAZZO



A Certified Sommelier and Texas Tech University graduate student in viticulture, Tiffany Tobey is also the sommelier and GM at Fort Worth, Texas, wine bar Thirty Eight & Vine.

Q Tell us about your career path.

I started serving tables when I was 15, so hospitality was a natural path for me. I was a bartender through college and, being out in West Texas [wine country], I naturally started learning about wine. While getting bachelor's degrees in business hospitality and English from Texas Tech, I studied wine tourism abroad in Italy. It took maybe a week in Italy before I knew that I wanted wine in my life forever. I was mesmerized by the passion and history that spewed

out from the entire country and set my mind to becoming a sommelier as soon as I could. I achieved my goal and moved to the Dallas area after college to take over [as general manager] at the Delaney Vineyards tasting room in Grapevine. [From there] I went straight into corporate buying at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas. I have been running [Thirty Eight & Vine] since the world crumbled from the virus; I had to pivot my career out of fine dining because of restaurant closures.

Q What would you say is the focus for Thirty Eight & Vine?

The focus is on education for anyone who might like to learn and on tasty wine if they just want to sip. Being in fine dining for so long, I am used to telling someone why they should buy a bottle of amazing wine. . . . [Here,] we have 42 [self-serve] dispensers that allow me to create a constantly rotating selection that patrons can try by the ounce. I have the ability to explain to people why and how a wine is so amazing, where it is from, who made it—and then encourage them to try just [a taste] so it can come to life for them. That is something I didn't have the ability to do in a steakhouse. I am carrying wines that go for a couple bucks to a couple hundred for an ounce!

Q How does your wine club operate?

The wine club operates on a monthly basis and [features] all sommelier-selected wines. I change countries and taste profiles according to what I know my guest is into. It allows me to help explore specific tastes for wine club members, which allows me to learn more and teach more. A win-win situation!

Q How is the wine program integrated into your on-premise events?

I am constantly rotating our offerings in the dispensers [and in] bottles. . . . This allows us to have a wide range of on-premise events; in the past couple months we have gone from a gourmet five-course Israeli wine dinner to [a] doughnuts and bubbles [pairing] to a Texas wine and barbecue [night]. This setup and style allow me complete freedom to explore different regions and styles to introduce people to: Freedom is fabulous.

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

An older vintage Barolo and my mother. Two of my favorite things! 



The Tasting Panel and The SOMM Journal are proud supporters of SommCon's live and virtual education. Access to the recording of the 2021 SommCon Buyer's Forum is available at sommgo.com, and the virtual Spring Summit is available for viewing on demand at sommconusa.com.

DUKE SPIRITS



DUKE KENTUCKY
STRAIGHT BOURBON



DUKE GRAND CRU
RESERVE BOURBON



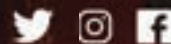
DUKE RESERVE
RYE WHISKEY

MADE FROM CHARACTER



*Grand Cru Reserve Bourbon awarded the Award of
Excellence at Somm Journal's Concours d'Spirits!*

KENTUCKY STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEY



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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.

Ole Smoky Salty Caramel Whiskey (\$20/750-mL and \$3/50-mL) Since its launch in 2010, Ole Smoky has become one of the fastest-growing spirits companies in the country—yet it still makes its many different expressions in small batches. In 2017, it added flavored whiskey to its compendium of classic and flavored moonshines, including this decadent Salty Caramel Whiskey, which has continued to be one of its top sellers. The sweet, savory, and slightly smoky liquid is available in 750-milliliter bottles as well as 50-milliliter bottles that make great stocking stuffers for that whiskey lover with a sweet tooth.




Glyph 85H Spirit Whiskey (\$25/750-mL) Produced by Endless West, Glyph 85H purports to be the first molecular whiskey: Its flavors are imparted not by barrel aging but by the infusion of natural extracts “molecule by molecule.” With oak at its fore, Glyph 85H also shows an array of notes such as vanilla bean, cedar smoke, and dried apricot along with an intense brightness. Since it can’t be denied that the use of barrels has environmental repercussions, could molecular spirits be an emerging segment of the market? Perhaps—after all, who would have predicted that the craft-cocktail revolution would beget an RTD craze?



A Good Drink: In Pursuit of Sustainable Spirits from Island Press (\$29) In *A Good Drink*, author Shanna Farrell seeks out the bellwethers of the sustainable spirits industry, including *mezcaleros* in Jalisco working to preserve traditional production methods that protect both their land and their culture; South Carolinian distillers who are reviving a nearly extinct variety of corn to make a coveted bourbon; and a London bar owner who has eliminated the use of bottles and ice. Through their (and other) stories, Farrell examines how the spirit industry harms the environment and how it could lessen the damage by following her subjects’ lead and encouraging the widespread adoption of their practices. This compelling, informative read will have you viewing spirits through the same eco-conscious lens you do food and wine.



Yebiga Bela Rakija (\$30/750-mL) *Rakija* (also spelled *rakia*) is Balkan brandy. It’s similar to American moonshine in that there isn’t a single agreed-upon recipe for it; rather, it’s distilled from anything fermentable, usually fruit. The Serbian brand Yebiga’s clear Bela expression—made with Čačanska Rodna and Čačanska Lepotica plums—has aromas of lavender and clove; a soft, lush mouthfeel; and stewed fruit and baking spice on the palate. While it might make an outstanding substitute

for the pisco in a Pisco Sour (especially garnished with cinnamon), *rakija* is traditionally consumed straight from a shot glass, as depicted in the endearing photo on the label. *Živeli!* 

MADE WITH ORGANIC GRAPES

SUSTAINABLY-FARMED

NO ADDED SUGAR

VEGAN

LOW CARB

LOW SULFITE

KETO-FRIENDLY

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For those of us who are trying to live healthier, but aren't about to give up that 5pm glass, Wonderful Wine takes the guesswork out of choosing a delicious, consciously-crafted wine that fits every lifestyle. Wonderful Wines are made with organic grapes, bottled without added sugars, vegan-friendly, low carb, and low sulfite—which is a long way of saying, basically as good for you as wine gets.

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VEGAN

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NO ADDED SUGAR



“Sips, Songs, Swings & Savor”

SABESWINGS HOSTS ITS FIRST ANNUAL FUNDRAISER TO STRIKE OUT MEDICAL FINANCIAL TOXICITY WHILE HONORING RNDC'S JAY JOHNSON

story by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

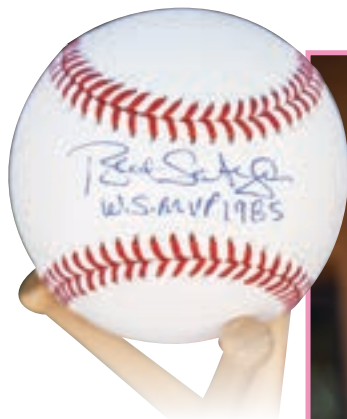


Tasting Panel and *SOMM Journal* publisher/editor-in-chief Meridith May with Jay Johnson, president of RNDC's West region, and his wife, Dewi. In 2008, Dewi fought a rare cancer called rhabdomyosarcoma, so the Johnsons understand firsthand the struggle of navigating insurance claims while battling illness.

SabesWings founders Bret and Kandace Saberhagen are presented with a check by *Tasting Panel* publisher Meridith May and VP/finance director Anna Russell. The magazine donated 50% of all proceeds from full-page ads in our September/October SabesWings insert to the organization. In fact, the ads sold out within two weeks as advertisers jumped in to lend their support to the tune of \$57,500.




Baseballs signed by Saberhagen—a former Kansas City Royals pitcher who was MVP of the 1985 World Series—adorned the tables at the live auction.



SabesWings, a charity dedicated to wiping out medical financial toxicity (MFT), was founded by former Major League Baseball pitcher Bret Saberhagen and his wife, Kandace, who hosted their first annual “Strike Out” fundraiser in Paso Robles wine country on September 19 and 20. *The Tasting Panel* and *The SOMM Journal* were honored to be media sponsors for the event, having raised \$57,500 for the cause through advertisements in an insert that appeared in the September/October issue of *The Tasting Panel*; in fact, publisher/ editor-in-chief Meridith May was on hand to present the check before Jay Johnson, president of RNDC’s West region, received the organization’s Lifetime Achievement Award. “If it wasn’t for [Johnson] and the wonderful suppliers who are distributed by RNDC, we wouldn’t have been able to raise the kind of funds that we did,” May told the attendees, many of them from the beverage and sports industries.

During his own acceptance speech, Johnson shared a personal story of his wife Dewi’s excruciating battle with a rare form of cancer, rhabdomyosarcoma. When facing one of their most challenging moments, they learned that their insurance company had denied one of their claims for a necessary and expensive treatment. “Luckily, I work for a great company, RNDC, that cared about their associates,” shared Johnson, adding that one of his colleagues quickly approached the insurance company on his behalf. “She dialed one number [and] spoke to one person who made one very important decision that helped change our lives. We were lucky,” he said, admitting that if he had not been fortunate enough to work for an outfit that advocated for its employees, they would be drowning in MFT.

SabesWings’ mission—to assist patients burdened by such debts to the point of having to choose between treatment and everyday expenses—may be a grave one, but its fundraiser was full of hope and the joy of doing good (while eating and drinking well). 



Former National Football League defensive lineman and television host Mike Golic was the emcee for the evening. “I look forward to talking to you about what it’s going to mean to help those who need to be helped and why you’re all here,” said Golic, who admitted that it was his first time visiting wine country.



Tim Moore, vice president of RNDC, attended to honor his colleague’s achievement.



Paso Robles’ Hope Family Wines was a key sponsor for the event.



The Tasting Panel and The SOMM Journal were pleased to be media sponsors for the inaugural event.



Well over a hundred people attended “Sips, Songs, Swings & Savor,” which included dinner and a live auction held on the stunning, sun-soaked backdrop of Paso Robles winery Guyomar.



CLASS *by the* GLASS

A RECENT SOMMCON BUYER'S
FORUM EVALUATED TOP PICKS
FOR YOUR BTG PROGRAM

by **Stefanie Schwalb**

Now that the industry is slowly starting to bounce back from the pandemic, restaurant and bar operators are rebuilding their by-the-glass programs, and the SommCon Buyer's Forum—sponsored by *The Tasting Panel* and sister publication *The SOMM Journal*—has become an important resource for their endeavor.

Advanced Sommelier Hai Tran moderated the latest edition of this webinar series, “Class by the Glass,” which featured a panel of winery representatives. As he welcomed the audience to the session, Tran acknowledged how important it is for buyers to understand and respect the nature of the beverage program they’re running. “A lot of times we’d like to put our own stamp on things, but ultimately, we also have to pay tribute and homage to the workplace,” he pointed out. He also stressed, among the many factors that impact buying decisions, the necessity of making solid connections with sales reps: “Coming out of the pandemic, relationships are one of the most important things you have to take advantage of—as well as nurture and build—because, if anything, this industry has become [even] more of a relationship-based business.”



PRESCRIPTION VINEYARDS

"Prescription Vineyards owner and winemaker Rob Lloyd has become a well-known Chardonnay guy over the course of his career," said the brand's director of sales, Greg Moore. "He was raised in a family where they like big, rich California Chardonnays, so we make big, rich Chardonnay at an affordable price—just the way Rob likes it." Describing it as a "Swiss Army knife" of a wine, Moore explained that Prescription Chardonnay could fill several niches on a wine list thanks to its multifaceted flavor profile, combining crisp, pronounced acidity with citrus notes and creaminess. In fact, he added, when he pours the wine for consumers, Moore calls it a "red-wine drinkers' white wine" because of its

weight and complexity.

To get a high-quality wine with a robust flavor profile that will fetch an average by-the-glass price of \$12–\$13, said Moore, "The first thing [Lloyd] does is get our [100% Chardonnay] fruit from a great friend and source who grows grapes in Clarksburg just east of the Sacramento Delta," namely James Reamer of Reamer Farms. As part of the production process, the wine is 100% stainless steel-fermented with oak treatment. "The nice thing about this wine is that it captures natural CO₂, so you probably taste a little bit of minerality," he added. "It holds up [so] well [that] when you try it the next day, it's still going to taste good."

While Prescription's Chardonnay is known as the winery's signature offering, its Cabernet Sauvignon is relatively new. Hailing from an Alexander Valley vineyard in the Mayacamas Mountains, the grapes come from a private label Lloyd has been working with for years. "We had the opportunity to get some of this fruit back, so it's a lower production for us—about 500 cases in comparison to about 10,000 for the Chardonnay," explained Moore. "But it's a nice source. The vineyard is shaped almost like a bowl at 1,700 feet above the valley floor, so you're getting unique sun exposure and terroir." At a by-the-glass cost of \$18–\$20, he believes, an Alexander Valley designate is especially attractive to buyers.

BANFI

Founded in 1919 by Giovanni F. Mariani Sr., Banfi has been a family-owned wine company for more than 100 years. Today, the producer and importer is led by third-generation CEO Cristina Mariani-May, who is passionately committed to sustainability initiatives. The company's vast portfolio includes properties in Italy, Chile, Oregon, and Washington.

For the webinar, Banfi's trade development manager, Elizabeth Booth, provided insights on both the company and the 2016 Belnero Toscana it produced at Castello Banfi in Montalcino. Because the region was formed over several geological eras, she explained, it has some of the most complex soils in the world; more than 29

different soil types have been identified on the estate itself. Just one-third of its 7,000-plus acres is planted to vine, while the other two-thirds is dedicated to olive groves, plum trees, and woodland; even so, said Booth, "Due to the size of the property, we have numerous microclimates that allow us to grow other varieties in addition to Sangiovese. Our philosophy has always been about pioneering."

So "while Sangiovese is the heart of what we produce," Booth went on, "we also make a small [amount] of high-quality Super Tuscans—which brings us to Belnero," a blend of 90% Sangiovese with small amounts of Cabernet and Merlot grown on the estate's

calcareous clay soils. The 2016 vintage was warm, with significant diurnal shifts and sporadic rain happening all at the right time, she noted, so the grapes were able to ripen perfectly.

After a meticulous selection process, the harvested grapes ferment in hybrid stainless steel-and-oak barrels. The wine then spends 12 months in 350-liter French oak vessels. "This is a great luxury by-the-glass offering as the perfect pairing with so many different food options—including red meats, wild game, and aged cheeses," concluded Booth. "[At] the amazing cost of under \$20, it gives your guests the opportunity to try wine from Montalcino without having to pay Brunello prices."

PHOTO: I. FRANCHINI

Castello Banfi in Montalcino, Tuscany.



7 DEADLY WINES



Since its introduction to the market almost 20 years ago, 7 Deadly Wines has made a name for itself with its signature Lodi Zinfandel, 7 Deadly Zins. (The clever name alludes to the winemaker's Catholic school upbringing.) It followed up that strong introduction with a red blend, and this year it's bringing to the national market a Cabernet Sauvignon that was the focus of the webinar presentation led by senior brand manager Carolyn Lescher and head winemaker Scott Dahlstrom. "When we looked at the consumer who buys 7 Deadly, we found that they were buying almost as much Cabernet as Zinfandel, and [they] were buying a lot of Lodi [wine specifically]," said Lescher, "so it just made sense for us to look at a [Lodi] Cabernet for the brand. We also felt that it really supported our ethos, which is about a bold, robust wine style with a bold, robust attitude."

Going for about \$9–\$10 by the glass in restaurants and approximately \$14 by the bottle at retail, 7 Deadly Cabernet Sauvignon also contains 5% each Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, and Merlot. "I like to put those blenders in there because they add an extra something to the wine," explained Dahlstrom. "Zinfandel gives us that fruity character and some spice; Petite Sirah has color and tons of structure; and Merlot is similar to Cabernet but has a softer mouthfeel." Everything rests in French oak for approximately six months, he added, to enhance the fruit without overpowering anything.

Since all of the wines are certified sustainable by LODI RULES, the team must carefully monitor everything they do—from water and integrated pest management to air quality control, soil fertility, and preserving and protecting native plants and wildlife habitats. "At the end of the day," said Dahlstrom, "what we're looking at is being good stewards of the land and good neighbors."

CLINE FAMILY CELLARS

"We're launching a brand-new range of wines called Seven Ranchlands," Cline Family Cellars director of winemaking and viticulture Tom Gendall told the audience. "Its inspiration [comes] from the seven ranches we own throughout California and their fantastic climates." The lineup includes five expressions—Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot; while noting that they're all geared toward on-premise accounts, Gendall focused on the 2020 Sonoma County Chardonnay and 2019 Sonoma County Pinot Noir.

For the former, which also contains estate-grown fruit from the Petaluma Gap, "most of the grapes come from the J. Poppe Vineyard in Carneros, which has everything from Pinot Noir to Riesling to Gewürztraminer and all five Bordeaux varieties," explained Gendall. "It was planted in 1991, which was basically at the beginning of the

region's production history]." Seventy percent of the wine is fermented with cultured yeast in stainless steel, while the remainder is wild yeast-fermented in barrel. It's then aged ten months in new French oak "to give a creamy characteristic and fresh vanilla notes," he said.

The Pinot Noir comes from Cline's Catapult Ranch and Diamond Pile vineyards. Grapes are destemmed and directly pumped into stainless-steel tanks in which the wine is fermented with naturally occurring yeast. The caps are pumped over twice a day to extract color and flavor, then the wine is pressed shortly after dryness. After it undergoes 100% malolactic fermentation, it's aged for 15 months in (40% new) French oak as well as a touch of American and Hungarian, according to Gendall.

Because the fog that rolls in through the Petaluma Gap from the Pacific Ocean gets channeled into the vineyards, there's a lot of wind, he added: "We have an average of 10-mile-per-hour wind throughout the area, causing smaller berries, thicker skins, and more flavorful wines."

Certified sustainable by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance since 2017, Cline has positioned itself as a steward of the land. "We want to leave the places we farm better than what we started with," said Gendall. "We stopped using herbicides and pesticides and only use sulfur as a fungicide to keep our vineyards disease-free." The company also has a history of giving back to its community: Today, for instance, \$2 from every case of Seven Ranchlands wine sold is being donated to local restaurant relief programs.



Some of the fruit for Cline Family Cellars' new Seven Ranchlands Pinot Noir comes from the Catapult Ranch estate vineyard.

PHOTO: MEGAN CLINE



J. LOHR

For two generations, the Lohr family and their winemaking team have been leaders on California's Central Coast. "We've been around since 1974, and we're really based on [the] three main pillars of family, place, and craft," said director of national accounts on-premise and e-commerce Jennifer Clarke, CSW. "Founder Jerry Lohr believes that place is crucial to growing the correct varietal to produce exceptional wine."

The J. Lohr 2018 Hilltop Cabernet Sauvignon webinar participants tasted is part of the brand's Paso Robles-designated Vineyard Series. "That's where we make all of our red wines, with the exception of one Cabernet Sauvignon that's from Napa Valley," noted Clarke; known for its diurnal swings, Paso

"will get up to 100-plus degrees during the day, then drop to the 50s in the evening, so you get a long nice growing season. Jerry and his team found that it's the perfect environment to grow red varieties from Bordeaux and the Rhône."

The Hilltop is sourced primarily from the El Pomar District but also includes fruit from some other vineyards with unique flavor profiles. "Winemaker Brendan Wood makes a wonderful blend that's a true representation of the Paso Robles region," said Clarke. Made of 93% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Petit Verdot, and 2% Malbec, the wine is aged for 18 months in French oak, about 70% of it new barriques. The national average price by the glass is \$16, while the sug-

gested retail price by the bottle is \$35.

Clarke said that in addition to owning its own vineyards, J. Lohr's commitment to craft is reflected in its continuous investment in top-notch technology and equipment. As a 2020 honoree at the California Green Medal Sustainable Winegrowing Leadership Awards, J. Lohr has also become a standard-bearer in implementing the three E's of sustainability: environment, economics, and equity. "We really look at everything that we do as being sustainable," Clarke concluded, adding that protecting natural resources, ensuring the well-being of company employees, and leading the community through charitable efforts all play a role in J. Lohr's success. 

Chain Reactions

WHEN SUPPLIES RUN SHORT, THE PROS KEEP COOL

It's been over a year and a half since the pandemic upended our lives and our industry. One of the biggest challenges at the restaurant where I work has been sourcing: Products that would normally come within a few days or weeks are taking much, much longer, from the shades that were backordered for nearly four months to our investor's favorite bourbon, Whistle Pig 15 Year. At this point, we've seen it all—or more accurately, we've waited for it all.

And we're not the only ones. One of my favorite bartenders, Karla Hammer at The Maybourne Beverly Hills, has also been experiencing disruptions in spirit and wine shipments. "We find ourselves excited to create a cocktail only to find out the spirit we were looking forward to using is unavailable," she told me. "We are constantly rotating our wine list to accommodate what is available." But Hammer makes it work by experimenting with liquor types and brands she hadn't previously used—and her guests are enjoying the results. "After 25 years of bartending, not only has this been interesting but I truly believe it has made me appreciate my craft and fall in love with it all over again," she acknowledged.

The search for solutions extends, of course, to the beginning of the supply chain. PJ Dwyer, chief revenue officer and partner at Nosotros Life and Spirits, has run into several issues for tequila production. "We source all of



PJ Dwyer is chief revenue officer and partner at Nosotros Life and Spirits.

our raw materials in Mexico and have been experiencing serious shortages in glass supply," he told me. "Glass shortages can be attributed to labor shortages and distilleries competing for limited [resources]." When I asked how he overcame those challenges, he said Nosotros invested in growing the operational team to rethink their supply chain; one new hire had access to vendors the company wasn't aware of, including an artisanal supplier who uses 100% recycled glass—all the better for a company that, as Dwyer says, "firmly

Josh Goldman is the co-founder of Silvergrin Vodka.



believe[s] in sustainable practices throughout all aspects of our business."

As the co-founder of Silvergrin Vodka as well as a bartender and bar consultant, Josh Goldman has been dealing with everything from a shortage of qualified employees to unfilled orders from distributors that don't have enough delivery truck drivers to delays in imported products. To change the narrative, his philosophy is to go with the flow. "Running a bar is like riffing with jazz musicians," he observed.

"Things can change at any time, and you have to roll with the changes or your listeners will hear the disharmony."

And that's exactly where I find the beauty in the storm: watching our industry innovate and create solutions to every crisis we face. The rays of sunshine are coming through. *EW*

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.

A Success Story in Santenay

TASTING THROUGH THE WINES OF BURGUNDY'S
VINCENT GIRARDIN by Anthony Dias Blue

Vincent Girardin was raised in a family that had been growing vines in Santenay since the 17th century. Having inherited 5 acres of vineyard, he decided to leave the family business with the intention of making wine under his own name in 1980. He was only 19 years old, yet his elegant and precise wines, primarily from the Côte de Beaune, were an immediate commercial success. He increased production by buying grapes from well-situated producers that shared his philosophy of careful cultivation.

In 2012, after a brilliant career, Girardin retired, selling his winery and label to his longtime partner, Jean-Pierre Nié, who was determined to maintain the high standards that Girardin had established. The wines—more than 20 in all—are made by the well-respected Eric Germain, who has been at the helm for 20 years. Here are my thoughts on the current releases, all from the fine 2018 vintage:

Vincent Girardin 2018 Bourgogne Cuvée Saint-Vincent (\$26) Deep ruby color; fresh berry nose. Smooth and juicy with ripe raspberry and cherry—an excellent introduction to fine Burgundy. **91**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Auxey-Duresses Les Vieilles Vignes (\$36) Rich, earthy

cherry nose. Bright, tangy, and fresh, with ripe cherry flavors and crisp acidity, this one comes from an often-overlooked appellation. **92**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Santenay Premier Cru Le Beauregard (\$49) Deep, rich ruby color; complex fruit nose; and bright cherry and blueberry notes. Balanced and long. **93**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Chassagne-Montrachet Les Vieilles Vignes (\$51) Dense berry nose. Fresh, tangy, and crisp, this is a charming red from an appellation known for Chardonnay. **92**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Savigny-Les-Beaune Premier Cru Les Marconnets (\$53) Medium ruby color; aromas of cherry and earth. Tangy and rich with ripe cherry and spice; smooth and long. **93**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Beaune Premier Cru Les Aigrots (\$61) Nose of ripe cherry and pomegranate. Fresh and juicy yet silky-smooth, with lively cherry and raspberry notes and elegant structure. **94**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Pommard Les Vieilles Vignes (\$67) Rich ruby color. Smooth and balanced, with notes of dusty cherry; earthy yet elegant thanks to a fine acid structure. **93**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Volnay Premier Cru Les Santenots (\$72) Showing juicy



Vincent Girardin winemaker Eric Germain.

cherry with a slight hint of earth, this wine is silky, lush, and lovely. **94**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Morey-Saint-Denis Les Vieilles Vignes (\$73) With an earthy cherry nose, this ruby-colored wine is rich, spicy, and deep, showing old-vine complexity and firm acidity before a long finish. **93**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Volnay Premier Cru Les Pitures (\$75) Juicy and tangy, with notes of bright raspberry and cherry; silky and balanced, fresh and long. **95**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Chambolle-Musigny Les Vieilles Vignes (\$100) Deeply colored, with a complex nose, a lovely acid structure, and intense notes of cherry and boysenberry. Velvety, rich, and long. **96**

Vincent Girardin 2018 Corton Grand Cru Perrières (\$126) With deep color and a rich nose, this stunning and memorable wine is pure, elegant, and powerful yet refined, with ripe black cherry and blackberry, classic structure, and a long finish. **97**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINEYARD BRANDS

Vincent Girardin established his namesake label in 1980 after inheriting 5 planted acres in Santenay.

The Right Place at the Right Time

LIFE LESSONS AT DENVER'S LATEST GREATEST WINE SHOP

by Ruth Tobias

Though I'm slightly embarrassed to admit it, I think I can be forgiven for never having heard of top-notch retail shop Denver Wine Merchant (DWM) until I received an email from co-owner Sally Stewart inviting me to come check it out late last spring. After all, it had opened in August 2020, at the height of the pandemic, in a veritable commercial no man's land between Globeville and Sunnyside in the shadow of I-25—neither the time nor the place for foot traffic, in short.

A minute's worth of browsing on my first visit, however, was enough to confirm that DWM deserves all the buzz it's now beginning to get: fabulous grower Champagnes here, skin-contact Sylvaner from Alsace and clay-pot Aladasturi from Georgia there, local cult favorites like Ratio Beerworks' King of Carrot Flowers saison and Haykin Family Cider's Niedzwetzkyana Reserve over there—not to mention a cuddly cat named for one of Stewart and her partner Steven Washuta's favorite Barolo producers, Aldo Conterno, roaming around. (They carry its wines too, of course.)

And the shop's virtues aren't limited to inventory (vinous or feline). With a small bar in back for twice-weekly tastings of their favorite Austrian wines, say, or Muscadet and Grolleau, the couple puts a premium on ambiance and service; as Stewart explained, "Most [retailers] don't take the time to make the interior feel so cozy and welcoming. . . . We want the shop to feel like you're walking into our personal wine cellar [in] our home." Added Washuta, "Our major focus was to have a comforting atmosphere and to hire hospitality professionals. It's not often you can go to a retail store and talk to someone who could be or has been a somm at a restaurant."

To call that an understatement would itself be an understatement in their cases. Stewart holds an Advanced certification and Washuta is a Master



Denver Wine Merchant owners Sally Stewart and Steven Washuta recently started a wine club that "has become very popular," per Stewart.



Sommelier, and though they've worked in the industry everywhere from San Francisco to Casablanca, Chile, their time in New York City alone speaks volumes: Over the course of four years, Stewart was a sommelier at Babbo, Atera, and CUT by Wolfgang Puck, while Washuta served as wine director at Felidia and Portale. So why would they leave such prestigious posts to work retail in a town where, per Stewart, "let's just say there's a lot of room for growth" as far as fine-wine consumption goes?

Part of the answer to that question will be all too painfully familiar to their on-premise colleagues: They were getting burned out by the unrelenting pace and stress of the big-city dining scene even before Washuta was furloughed early on in the pandemic. But the other part is downright heartrending, as well as related to the reason Stewart reached out to me when she did, during ALS Awareness Month in May. To put it in her own words, "[In 2019,] I was diagnosed with the terminal nerve disease . . . [and] essentially given a death sentence at 31 years old, [told] that I had a maximum of a few years

left to live. Rather than rolling over and succumbing to depression that my time was up, I chose to push even harder toward achieving my dream of owning the best wine shop in the country."

It no doubt helps that her drive is matched by a naturally sunny, funny personality. "We're happy to be practicing our craft in a cool place with cool people—we actually love what we do again," she told me. After Washuta pointed proudly to the Sonos Five speakers he'd installed to further the good vibes in the space, she added, "We may have Grand Cru Burgundy on the shelf, but we also listen to gangster rap—we have the highbrow-lowbrow mentality, which I think keeps us leveled. I'm not from a well-to-do family, but today I drink amazing wine, and I want to help others get to that point." Profound challenges notwithstanding, it seems she's finally in exactly the right place at the right time to do just that. **T**



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Purveyors of Potential

IMPORTER/DISTRIBUTOR **MHW** CONTINUES TO HELP BRANDS PAVE A PATH TOWARD SUCCESS, NO MATTER THEIR SIZE OR SCOPE **by Allyson Reedy**

There are a lot of fancy ways to describe what Manhasset, New York-based importer, distributor, and service provider MHW does for the scores of brands they work with. (“Scores” is an understatement; to date, they’ve brought to market more than 100,000 spirits, wines, and malt beverages from more than 100 countries around the world.) Operations, logistics, compliance, sales distribution, accounting, laser-focused marketing—the list goes on long enough to make your head spin. To put it simply and most effectively, then, MHW has the backs of both aspiring and established alcohol brands.

They have the backs of the industry newcomers behind top-quality passion projects such as Raphael Yakoby, whose Hpnotiq liqueur was imported and distributed by MHW before he sold it for a rumored eight figures back in 2003. They have the backs of big brands looking to separate from their parent companies and strike out on their own, including Proximo Spirits’ 1800 Tequila, Edrington’s Macallan Scotch Whisky, and Agave Loco’s RumChata. And they have the backs of companies with celebrity stakeholders, including George Clooney’s Casamigos, Jay-Z’s Ace of Spades, and Kendall Jenner’s 818 Tequila. In short,

every beverage alcohol supplier they work with, large or small, benefits from the knowledge, experience, and drive MHW puts in service of helping them maximize their potential.

“We meet folks from all walks of life,” says MHW founder and longtime partner John Beaudette. “It’s pretty cool that, in a given week, we’re talking to [so many] industry players and people coming from the outside with dreams and visions. It’s rewarding because, at the end of the day, if they win, we win.”

Over his decades-long tenure, Beaudette has worked with a lot of winners, supporting them through MHW’s suite of back-office services



PHOTO COURTESY OF MHW

Meet the MHW executive team. Front row, left to right: Gabe Barkley, CEO, and John Beaudette, founder and partner. Back row: Chrissy Beaudette, director of client development; Rebecca Beaudette, director of human resources; John Wrenn, COO; Alexandra Morey, director of operations; Scott Saul, executive VP; Brigid McCabe, director of growth marketing; Jay Dave, VP of technology; Jeanette Jankiewicz, director of operations; and MaryAnn Pisani, chief revenue officer.

so that they can focus on the liquid; in 2017, meanwhile, CEO Gabe Barkley partnered with private equity firm NextGen Growth Partners to acquire MHW and lead its next phase of growth. “The passion people bring to this industry, and the passion they bring to the products that they launch, is really second to none,” says Barkley. “One of the most incredible things our team does for our clients is match that passion and find ways to help them execute on it to find success.”

Their experience is more sought after than ever: This year to date, MHW has increased its staff by 40% to meet the demand for its services, including helping brands to navigate the e-commerce and direct-to-consumer platforms whose growth was spurred early in the pandemic by stay-at-home orders. While many of MHW’s larger clients already had a well-established presence online, the smaller brands did not; to eliminate that disadvantage, the company worked closely in spring 2020 with platforms like Drizly, Thirstie,

ReserveBar, and Speakeasy to secure placement for labels such as Cotswolds Dry Gin, Cheurlin Champagne, and One With Life Organic Tequila.

“The rabbit’s out of the hat,” Barkley says. “It’s the start of a broader conversation that can yield more opportunities for beverage producers across all types. It’s a great new place for brands to be successful in the market. We’re excited about that, because in many ways, that dovetails with our primary focus, which is helping these brands find opportunities to succeed. For our part, it’s about putting them in a position to do that effectively. How can we take the burden of all the back-office services and partner with them so they can focus on making sure they have great liquid and are reaching the consumers they’re targeting effectively? If we can take care of that middle, we can allow them to find success. And if we can allow them to find success through all of those different avenues, we’re really excited about what that means for us, but we’re also

really excited about what that means for those brands.”

With more ways to get bottles and cans to consumers; explosive new categories on the market (hello, RTDs!); social media helping to push product out the door; and permits and approvals for new products being issued at a much quicker rate by the U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, the future of beverage alcohol is looking bright enough to, well, make your head spin again. “I think the next five to ten years are going to be the most dynamic this industry has ever seen,” Beaudette says. “There are lots of really neat things happening [all] at the same time”—not the least of which is MHW’s October acquisition of two major importers, distributors, and wholesalers, USA Wine Imports and USA Wine West, significantly growing its leadership in the global wine trade.

And for new brands in search of a prosperous route to market or existing ones hoping to expand their reach, MHW will have their backs. **LT**

brown spirits REPORT

brown ENERGY

FUELING UP ON WHISK(E)YS GALORE

The whisk(e)y category is in great shape right now, with established distillers and emerging craft brands alike offering unrivaled choice and variety—and the timing couldn't be better, as the coming cold weather calls for delicious drams and tasty tipples of everything from Australian single malt to California bourbon. In this category report, there's something for every bar and every buyer—so get ready to take the West Fork, explore the Redwood Empire, look Starward, and knock on Heaven's Door as you check out these fine products just in time for the holiday season. —*Ian Buxton*



homegrown: WEST FORK WHISKEY CO.

At their industrial-chic distillery in the Kennedy-King neighborhood of Indianapolis, Indiana, the folks at West Fork Whiskey Co. are “hell-bent on creating great whiskey,” according to co-founder Blake Jones. Using 100% state-grown grains and mineral-rich water, they craft a full line of bourbon, rye, and corn whiskeys, respecting a local distilling tradition that dates back to 1825.

The success they've found since launching in 2015 has created the opportunity for them to expand to a new, 35,000-square-foot facility in Westfield that will make West Fork one of the largest craft distilleries in the U.S. Work started on the site in July 2021; when complete, says Jones, the result will be a “tourism destination and community hub.” —*Ian Buxton*





wheated, wanted, and winning:

LARCENY BOURBON

“Wheated and Wanted”: So goes the tagline for storied Kentucky bourbon brand Larceny, which has made off with a fistful of awards from major competitive tastings in a manner befitting its name. It’s lauded by industry professionals for its smooth taste, and well-informed whiskey enthusiasts have joined the clamor, praising Larceny as a standout in terms of both taste and value.

The secret lies in the mash bill shared by the 92-proof Larceny Small Batch; Larceny Barrel Proof, which typically has a proof of 120 or higher; and the mainstay Old Fitzgerald—but it’s a secret they’re happy to share: Quite simply, it’s wheat, which beats out rye as Larceny’s secondary grain.

Of course, plenty of other producers use wheat in their mash bills, but there’s a much higher proportion of it here than in many labels, making for a softer, rounder sipping experience when enjoying neat or on the rocks.

That point is driven home by the stellar collection of accolades Larceny has received this year to date. The Small Batch expression collected a prestigious double gold medal at the SIP Awards, where it was also recognized with a Consumers’ Choice award, as well as gold medals from the San Francisco World Spirits Competition and the John Barleycorn Awards. Judges at the latter were even more taken with the Barrel Proof, naming it Best Bourbon and pinning a double gold medal on the style, which also collected a platinum medal at the ASCOT Awards and was picked as the 2020 Whisky of the Year by *Whisky Advocate’s* tasting panel. Old Fitzgerald, meanwhile, claimed a platinum medal and Best in Class accolade from the aforementioned SIP Awards, all but solidifying Larceny’s ranking among the country’s most sought-after and decorated whiskey brands.

The spirits are produced in down-



town Louisville at parent company Heaven Hill’s Bernheim Distillery; the world’s largest independent, family-owned bourbon distillery, it’s capable of producing 1,500 barrels a day as it aims to honor Old Fitzgerald namesake John E. Fitzgerald, whose job as a U.S. treasury agent gave him access to rickhouses and thus led to clandestine late-night raids on their best barrels—larceny by any standard. Today, all three Larceny expressions are drawn from a limited number of barrels selected from specific locations in the rickhouse to deliver a distinctive six-year-old taste profile that continues to attract a growing crowd of admirers. “Wheated and Wanted,” indeed. —*Ian Buxton*

THE *real* DEAL

HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY CONTINUES TO
SUPPORT ALS RESEARCH IN HONOR OF
THE LATE PARKER BEAM THROUGH THE
PARKER'S HERITAGE COLLECTION
BY IAN BUXTON

Parker Beam worked at
Heaven Hill Distillery for
nearly 60 years, becoming
master distiller in 1975.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEAVEN HILL BRANDS

The first 11 editions of the
Parker's Heritage Collection.



The 15th edition of the Parker's Heritage Collection was released in September.



There are legendary characters in whiskey the world over. The genuine articles have proved harder to identify, however, as some within the burgeoning craft-distilling community all too frequently anoint themselves as master distillers on the flimsiest of foundations, laid by the fickle forces of social media and other forms of self-promotion.

Comprising the frequently self-effacing former group are men and an increasing number of talented women who have covered the hard yards, worked through good times and bad, and, over many years, genuinely led and innovated within an industry that they love to serve. Within this storied assembly, a few names stand out, among them Parker Beam: He was, without a doubt, the real deal, and he remains respected wherever and whenever great whiskey is distilled, drunk, or discussed.

Prior to his death in 2017, Beam worked for 56 years at Heaven Hill Distillery in Kentucky, succeeding his father, Earl Beam, as master distiller in 1975. There, he was able to build on his father's techniques, developing and refining his work as his knowledge and curiosity grew. Though these were difficult years for bourbon as fashion dictated the dominance of white spirits, Beam's belief in great whiskey never wavered; he continued to experiment and lay down stocks, investing in a future with confidence that few shared at the time.

As the 21st century dawned, consumer appreciation and understanding of the category began to grow, and a new generation of enthusiasts embraced the heritage and provenance of brown spirits, keen to learn more and to meet the distillers who had faithfully tended

the flame during the lean years. Launched in 2007, the Parker's Heritage Collection aimed to quench their curiosity. Spanning multiple styles that reflected Beam's restless interest in whiskey's richness and diversity, the series is an exploration of everything from well-aged bourbon, rye, malt, and wheat whiskeys to single-cask releases, innovative finishes, and the flavor impact of heavily charred barrels. Naturally, it's now highly sought after by avid collectors, on-premise buyers, and connoisseurs eager to taste some of the most acclaimed releases of the past ten-plus years.

Since its inception, the Parker's Heritage Collection has garnered some of the industry's most prestigious awards, including *Whisky Magazine's* "World's Best North American Whiskey" in 2010 and five double gold medals at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition—one of which was earned just this year, when the 14th release was also declared 2021's "Best Small-Batch Bourbon." This September saw the national release of the 15th edition, an 11 Year Old Heavy Char Wheat Whiskey (61% ABV; \$140) that will doubtless collect further praise.

But more importantly, it will raise much-needed funds for an important cause. In 2010, Beam was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease, and since 2013, each bottle purchased of the Heritage Collection has helped Heaven Hill raise more than \$1 million toward ALS research and patient care. The company will



again contribute a portion of the proceeds from the Heavy Char Wheat Whiskey edition to the ALS Association.

Selected from the distillery's 1.9 million barrels of maturing whiskeys, "the Parker's Heritage Collection is a testament to the distilling legacy at Heaven Hill Distillery and the detailed attention each step of the process receives," says Susan Wahl, vice president, American whiskeys, at

Heaven Hill. "We are excited to release the third mash bill in this Heavy Char series, showcasing the consistency of quality throughout our innovation pipeline. It is in tribute to Parker and his legacy that we continue to support ALS research and patient care with this collection."

It's an impressive achievement and, alongside Beam's place in the Kentucky Bourbon Hall of Fame, a fitting homage to a great yet modest man. Heaven Hill's director of new product development, Chris Briney, remembers him thus: "Parker Beam's entire life was influenced by and dedicated to the making of good bourbon. He did not seek out celebrity status but was chased down by it. And he always remained humble. He was known for saying, 'I don't know about all those fancy taste descriptors . . . but I do know what I like. And that is good whiskey.'"

In a world of transient and capricious fame, could there be any finer tribute to a true whiskey legend than this groundbreaking collection of truly innovative spirits? That and, of course, a donation of \$1 million (and rising) to beat the disease that tragically ended his life.

FIGHTING *spirit*

WITH THE RELEASE OF JAMES OWNBY RESERVE
TENNESSEE STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEY,
OLE SMOKY REACHES A NEW PEAK

BY ERIC MARSH



Ole Smoky Distillery co-founder Joe Baker.



Joe Baker's family has been in the United States since the country was called the United Colonies. The Ole Smoky Distillery co-founder's great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, James Ownby, fought in the Revolutionary War as one of the Overmountain Men. These soldiers were named for the expanse just west of the Appalachian Mountains, which served as the dividing line between the 13 colonies and the western frontier; it included parts of North Carolina, Virginia, and what is now Tennessee. Most notable of the Overmountain Men's achievements was their victory over the Loyalists fighting for Great Britain at the Battle of Kings Mountain, considered a major turning point for the Patriots in the war.

Over the centuries, Baker and his family have continued to keep the memory of their ancestor alive. So when it came time for him to name his new premium whiskey brand, he knew just what it should be called. "James Ownby lived a life so epic we still tell his tale," Baker says. "He enlisted at 17 and served six tours of duty throughout his esteemed military career. [He] fearlessly fought for our young country's freedom, for his beliefs, and for a better way of life." Beyond that, he had a penchant for distilling, a pastime that has obviously been passed down through generations; years later, he settled in eastern Tennessee, a stone's throw from where The Holler, Ole Smoky's flagship distillery, now sits—and where his namesake whiskey is produced.

"James Ownby Reserve pays tribute to my family's heritage and legacy," remarks Baker, even as it "embodies [Ole Smoky Distillery's] creativity and commitment to creating small-batch whiskey."

Co-founding Ole Smoky Distillery in 2010, Baker became the first legal moonshiner in Tennessee. The company has since grown exponentially, opening a total of four distilleries across the state—including its most



Ole Smoky Distillery CEO Robert Hall.

recent in Nashville—to distribute its brand nationwide. Such growth kept him busy, but all the while he set aside time for developing the consummate bourbon. Over the years, he aged batches of the spirit in 10-gallon barrels and shared them with family, friends, and other whiskey aficionados before ultimately settling on a recipe for a premium, 94-proof Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey.

By definition, Tennessee whiskey must be derived from a mash bill of at least 51% corn; it must also be charcoal filtered before it's aged in new charred oak barrels. This method of filtration, called the Lincoln County Process, adsorbs impurities from the liquid—or "mountain mellows" it, in Ole Smoky Distillery CEO Robert Hall's words. According to Hall, the sugar maple charcoal used for the process "removes harsh flavorings, resulting in a smooth, delicate spirit."

Additionally, to meet the straight bourbon requirement, the liquid must rest in barrel for at least two years. James Ownby Reserve Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey exceeds that by three, aging for five years before bottling. No shortage of flavor is imparted by Ole Smoky's new American white-oak barrels; Hall describes the result as a "rich, warm, easy-sipping spirit with a distinctly Southern soul."

The new release joins the distillery's lineup of flavored whiskeys, of which there are more than 17 in all, including Peanut Butter Whiskey, Mango Habanero Whiskey, and its most popular expression, Salty Caramel Whiskey (see page 104). But the refined James Ownby Reserve brings the company to new heights. Hall says he's "been very pleased by the reaction from the many whiskey experts who have tasted it," and he hopes that "consumers enjoy the product as much as the experts and then try our other fine Ole Smoky products."

James Ownby Reserve Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey is now available in select markets across the U.S. as well as in two of Ole Smoky's distilleries—the Barrelhouse in Gatlinburg and 6th & Peabody in Nashville—and at jamesownbyreserve.com. Which is to say that its name-sake's legend is spreading to reaches far, far over the mountain.



James Ownby Reserve Tennessee Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA

(\$40–\$45) Charcoal filtered and aged in virgin American charred oak barrels, this whiskey offers heady and mesmerizing aromas of brown sugar, cedar, apricot, and pecan. Warming the palate with oatmeal, maple syrup, and a dash of black pepper, the liquid coats the tongue with a rich, creamy, nectar-like texture that bursts with orange peel and pekoe tea. **96**—*Meridith May*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OLE SMOKY

The Trilogy Collection is a gift pack featuring 200-milliliter bottles of Heaven's Door's three award-winning core expressions.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEAVEN'S DOOR



THE *three* KINGS

THE TRILOGY COLLECTION FROM HEAVEN'S
DOOR IS AN IRONCLAD CHOICE FOR
HOLIDAY GIFT-GIVING BY IAN BUXTON

“I see a strong parallel between all tiers of the industry [as they strive] to maximize holiday sales [in part by] leveraging the ongoing trend of premiumization in the industry,” says Wayne Hartunian, VP of brand strategy for Spirits Investment Partnership, co-founders with none other than Bob Dylan of whiskey brand Heaven’s Door. “And with whiskey being one of the main contributors [to that trend], one of the inherent and unique strengths of Heaven’s Door is that it performs exceptionally well . . . during the holiday period.”

Perhaps that’s no surprise. With celebrity-endorsed brands popping up these days in all spirits categories, the backing of a truly global superstar (not to mention Nobel Prize winner) like Dylan is a sure route to consumer engagement. Even the packaging reflects his involvement: The singer-songwriter, actor, poet, author, and painter has his own metalworking shop, Black Buffalo Ironworks, where he fashions striking sculptural iron gates from found objects collected in scrapyards across the U.S. These form the inspiration for Heaven’s Door’s artistic bottle design, ensuring high shelf visibility as well as a memorable gift for whiskey and Dylan fans alike.

The portfolio contains three award-winning core expressions: Straight Rye Whiskey, Straight Bourbon Whiskey, and Double Barrel Whiskey. At the 2018 San Francisco World Spirits Competition, the former two took gold; a year later, the latter received a double gold medal. Now, the Trilogy Collection offers consumers the chance to try all three styles in a 200-milliliter format. With each bottle depicting a different facet of Dylan’s ironwork, retailers will be alert to the promotional possibilities this presents in Q4. “While we are seeing robust momentum throughout the year, with volume growth up 69% for the 12 months ending May 2021,” Hartunian says, the clearest indicator of the brand’s success during the holidays was a 345% surge in e-commerce volume in December 2020 compared to the average volume of the other 11 months. With the release of the Trilogy gift pack,

Heaven’s Door (as well as off-premise sellers) should benefit strongly from in-store displays too.

In addition to the core lineup, Heaven’s Door produces limited releases such as the slyly named Bootleg Series and the Master Blenders’ Edition in collaboration with Ireland’s famed Redbreast distillery (see our September/October issue). These highly coveted marques sell out quickly for as much as \$500; expect similar projects in the future. Meanwhile, longer-term plans for the brand include the construction of a new distillery and arts center in Nashville, Tennessee’s SoBro district. The site for this multiuse venue—fittingly home to the 160-year-old, deconsecrated Elm Street Church—



PHOTO: AZURE WITALA

The artistic bottle designs, inspired by Bob Dylan’s ironwork, make Heaven’s Door a memorable gift for whiskey and Dylan fans alike.

has already been acquired; though the completion date has yet to be confirmed, the new facility is clearly a multimillion-dollar investment in what Hartunian promises will provide “many other experiential components on-site in addition to distilling to create a truly immersive Heaven’s Door brand experience.” These include a 360-seat concert venue, restaurant, whiskey library, and gallery of Dylan’s paintings and metal sculptures—the latter being the mark of a true partnership, befitting the fact that it’s the musician’s first and only alliance with a consumer brand in his 50 years as

a worldwide cultural icon. The times, they clearly are a-changin’.

Heaven’s Door Cask Strength Single Barrel Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$60) Aromas of apple pie, pekoe tea, and gingersnap reveal a sweetness and more grain than fruit. The heat is not overwhelming; instead, this handsome spirit offers a seductive entry of peanut brittle and grilled peach accompanied by a dose of mocha and oak. Notes of walnut are followed by the lavish experience of papaya. Taking a deep dive into black pepper and espresso, the finish is sultry and sublime. 114.8 proof. **95** —*M.M.*

Heaven’s Door Straight Rye Whiskey, USA (\$80) Finished in Vosges oak barrels, this 92-proof whiskey presents a nose of banana cream pie, lemon blossom, and black tea, followed by a wave of alcohol that quickly diminishes. It’s off to a spicy start, with prickly pepper splashing into a pool of peach and tangelo nectar. Vanilla and resin even out the plump, sweet fruit and bring in a slight astringency. There’s remarkable balance here: straightforward and clean. **96** —*M.M.*

Heaven’s Door Straight Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$50) This 92-proofer grabs the nose with a hefty, profound bouquet of walnut, bread pudding, cinnamon, and cedar. An extroverted personality emerges with a spark of black pepper and dollops of maple syrup and orange marmalade, all moving in harmony across the palate. The cherry-peach finish is flirtatious on the tongue. **95** —*M.M.*

Heaven’s Door Double Barrel Whiskey, USA (\$50) For this 100-proof expression, the brand takes its six-year-old whiskey and ages it further in “alligator-charred” American oak to deepen the color. Aromas of mocha, cedar, and peach pie beckon you to breathe them in. On the palate, the spirit’s potency is harnessed as satisfying notes of Brazil nut and tropical fruit contribute sultry character. Woodsy notes are prominent and tannins are present and accounted for, but the balance between richness and a whisper of jalapeño, Italian herbs, and stone fruit denotes a superlative spirit with a memorable finish. **95** —*M.M.*



straight shooter:

AMMUNITION WHISKEY

by Ian Buxton

Daylight Wine & Spirits of Sonoma, California, is taking a well-aimed shot at the whiskey category with its new Ammunition brand. Appealing to craft whiskey enthusiasts with a taste for easy drinkability, it also celebrates the pioneering spirit of the American frontiersman, epitomized by the dramatic illustration of an eagle that dominates its label, made of real cherrywood.

Andy Wahl, co-founder and presi-

dent of the fast-growing independent company, attributes Ammunition's early success to Daylight's growing reputation for wine in the on-premise market as well as to its considerable value: With an SRP of less than \$40, its whiskeys represent a sweet spot within the category, displaying the qualities of small-batch spirits without the super-premium pricing. Indeed, since their May 2021 launch, Ammunition's Straight Bourbon

and Straight Rye have received such positive trade and consumer response that the Daylight team anticipates national distribution by the end of the year. In such major markets as California, Florida, New York, and Texas, it reports, initial stockists are already tripling their repeat orders in response to a fast-growing rate of sale.

Particularly impressive is the fact that it has already secured placement

with such prestigious accounts as Total Wine & More and Ruth's Chris Steak House: Ammunition whiskeys feature on the cocktail menus of the latter's Florida locations, while more than 50 other branches stock them nationwide. "Our on-premise wine listings have really helped the whiskeys gain acceptance and take flight," says Wahl. "Sommeliers are frequently surprised by a winery with a linked whiskey collection—it's a real point of difference for the brand." No wonder Daylight is already laying plans for an export drive, and discussions have begun on possible international duty-free distribution, though according to Wahl "the home market will be our priority, with wider plans not featuring until later in 2022."

Describing Ammunition Straight Bourbon and Straight Rye as "a marriage of craft and science," Wahl explains that "the use of well-aged wine barrels [for finishing] offers a more rounded [character] that delivers distinctive notes of cherry and [other] red fruits with an elegant finish." Both expressions are blends of equal proportions of two-, three-, and four-year-old small-batch whiskeys; the Bourbon, which involves up to six different batches, is finished in Bordeaux barrels that previously held Ammunition Sonoma Cabernet Sauvignon, whereas the Rye comprises up to three base spirits finished in Burgundy barrels that contained Ammunition Russian River Valley Pinot Noir for two or even three harvests. The finishing process takes a minimum of three months to ensure greater integration, depth, and integrity of the wide-ranging flavors in the whiskeys, which are then bottled at 90 proof.

Looking at the products in further depth, well-informed whiskey purists will note their traditional mash bills: 95% rye and 5% malted barley for the Rye (see our review on page 70), and 60% corn, 25% wheat, 10% rye, and 5% malted barley for the



Bill Kerr and Andy Wahl are the co-founders of Daylight Wine & Spirits.

Bourbon. "Bourbon drinkers will love the multidimensional notes of sweet caramel and vanilla with subtle notes of cherries and bacon," says Wahl, adding that "the straight rye whiskey has hints of rich butterscotch, rye spice, and caramelized red berries."

Bringing a winemaker's perspective to whiskey is evidence, in Wahl's words, of the "unconventional and unexpected approach" Daylight extends from its core business to its spirits (after all, few distillers can

claim to source casks from their own winery). Meanwhile, the team keeps established category leaders very much in their sights, viewing Ammunition as their equals in quality at a better price point: "We see brands like Buffalo Trace and Jefferson as the competitive set and respect [them]," notes Wahl, who adds that they're passionate about production on their own terms—much like the rugged individualists they pay homage to via their branding. Now that's the American spirit.

good things take time:

REDWOOD EMPIRE'S ROCKET TOP STRAIGHT RYE AND GRIZZLY BEAST STRAIGHT BOURBON

Consider the mighty coastal redwood. A forest of these trees stretches from San Francisco to the Humboldt Bay and on to the Oregon border; some are more than 2,000 years old and stand taller than a Saturn V rocket. Their majesty has inspired Californians for centuries—including Purple Brands owner Derek Benham, who, more than a decade ago, quietly started a project at his distillery in Graton in western Sonoma County that would eventually become the Redwood Empire whiskey brand.

Its core lineup of three expressions has shown strong sales growth over the past two years. Named for a few of the forest's most famous trees, Pipe Dream bourbon, Emerald Giant rye, and bourbon-rye blend Lost Monarch stand out on the shelf with their distinctive, somewhat surreal labels and their attractive \$40 SRP. Originally, they were crafted from Benham's stockpile of barrels, built up over several years of astute buying. But now, with its new Bottled In Bond range, Redwood Empire is showcasing its own whiskey, drawn by master distiller Jeff Duckhorn from its custom-made still.

The term "bottled in bond" denotes whiskey bottled under the strict requirements of the 1897 Bottled-in-Bond Act: It must be made at a single distillery over the course of one distillation season (January–June or July–December); aged in a federally bonded warehouse under U.S. government supervision for at least four years; and bottled at 100 proof. It's a guarantee of

quality and a confident advertisement for the distiller's craft.

Yet Redwood Empire Bottled In Bond exceeds the government's mandates, being aged a minimum of five years in 53-gallon American white-oak barrels with a custom toast and Level 3-char treatment to extract tannins and sugar. To produce a pair of expressions worthy of this intensive aging regimen, Duckhorn and his team distilled various lots of whiskey with mash bills designed to deliver complexity and character; more than 100 barrels were considered for inclusion, with just 26 making the final cut for bottling in the new releases, namely Rocket Top Straight Rye and Grizzly Beast Straight Bourbon. "We are careful and patient with the way we make and age our whiskeys," says Benham. "The first release of our Redwood Empire Bonded Bourbon and Rye is ten years in the making, a testimony to the adage that many good things take time."

The new releases follow the same naming convention as their predecessors: Rocket Top pays homage to a tree in the Patriarch Forest that dwarfs the Statue of Liberty by some 60 feet, while Grizzly Beast's name is a portmanteau of the Grizzly Giant of Yosemite and the 375-foot Mattole Beast. Fittingly—as the distillery's surroundings are a constant reminder of what trees do for our planet—Redwood Empire has partnered with nonprofit organization Trees for the Future to plant a tree for every bottle sold. To date, nearly 350,000 have been planted. —Ian Buxton

Redwood Empire Grizzly Beast Straight California Bourbon Whiskey, USA (\$80) Mocha latte and baking spices on the nose lead to heady flavors of McIntosh apple, tree bark, and pecan. Fresh tobacco leaf and black pepper vie for space on the spiced middle. Determined and bold. 100 proof. **94**
—M.M.

Redwood Empire Rocket Top Straight California Rye Whiskey, USA (\$80) Following aromas of brown-sugared peach, baked apple, and a hint of pekoe tea, the liquid spreads a warm blanket of papaya, cashew, and peach cobbler on the tongue before a finish of vanilla bean and tobacco leaf. 100 proof. **95**
—M.M.



the spirit of speyside: BENROMACH

Benromach's Speyside distillery.



Benromach 10-Year-Old Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$60)

A luminous amber-bronze hue presages a multilayered yet approachable nose and palate. The underlying peatiness is more heather than smoke, while the olfactory notes are even more floral, enhanced by a hint of charcoal and a waft of toffee. With a satin-lined mouthfeel, the Scotch makes a sweet entrance before its dryness shows in notes of pekoe tea. Plum, root beer, and woodiness are prominent midway. Caramel and Sherry barrel stand out on the vivacious finish. **93** —*M.M.*

Benromach 21-Year-Old Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Scotland (\$200) Salted peanut, cinnamon, rolled oats, and peat-smoked peach are alluring scents in this sassy single malt. Buttery waves of stone fruit such as nectarine and the scintillating sleekness of tangelo are tempered by fresh tobacco. Spiced and Sherried red berries are swathed in a woodsy, nutty coat. **94** —*M.M.*

Benromach was founded in 1898, a boom time for Scotch whisky—one that unfortunately preceded an economic recession, leading to the distillery's prompt closure. This most traditional of Speyside producers then passed through a number of owners' hands until it was finally mothballed in 1983, presumably never to open again.

But nearly a century after its establishment, its fortunes took a turn for the better when it was acquired by the renowned family-owned firm Gordon & MacPhail in 1993—committed whisky bottlers and merchants with an eye toward the long-term plan of becoming distillers in their own right. Their painstaking restoration of the facility was completed in 1998; Charles, Prince of Wales, presided over the reopening ceremony that brought Benromach back to life.

And today, the brand is gaining the international recognition it deserves for making single malt the right way, with true character. The 2021 San Francisco World Spirits Competition gave prestigious double gold awards to its 10, 15, and 21 Year Old Single Malt whiskies, joining the gold awards collected by all three at this year's International Spirits Challenge. Priced at \$60, \$100, and \$200,

respectively, these expressions form Benromach's core range and, with the rollout of updated packaging across the U.S., represent the future for the distillery.

Long-serving distillery manager Keith Cruickshank—whose name features on the new labels—was proud to tell me, "This is whisky made without computers and with no automation; [it's] a true handcrafted spirit." None more so, perhaps, than the very exclusive Benromach 40 Year Old, just 96 bottles of which are being released stateside in November at an SRP of \$2,000; additional, albeit still limited, supplies of the spirit will arrive stateside in 2022. Head of sales Americas Richard Urquhart said he hopes and believes that it will be heartily "consumed and enjoyed," adding that a bottle of his family's special dram was opened to celebrate his own 40th birthday. Though it was distilled prior to Gordon & MacPhail's ownership, both he and Cruickshank stressed that they are "proud to have it stand alongside our own make and the core range."

Family-owned and traditionally made, Benromach may just represent the spirit of Speyside in a bottle. For purchasing and other information, visit benromach.com. —*Ian Buxton*

finding a new sweet spot: **STARWARD WHISKY**

Thanks to its broad spectrum of styles, it is perhaps whisk(e)y that occupies the most land-mass in the proverbial world of spirits. We often look to a particular expression's origins to hint at what we can generally expect in the glass, whether it's the sweet caramel notes often found in bourbon, the smokiness of single malt Scotch, or the floral character of Japanese whisky. Over the past decade or so, we've witnessed another country emerge to broaden the category's scope even further: Australia, home of Melbourne's Starward Whisky.

But unlike the aforementioned archetypes, Starward Whisky is designed to be enjoyed during dinner, not after. "The pinnacle for me is elevating the craft of cuisine," says Starward founder David Vitale. "I'm always thinking about the dinner table and how whisk(e)y can turn up in an accessible way—no tweed jackets, no pipes." The Melbourne native not only sources the raw ingredients for his brand locally but acquires oak barrels of various types from surrounding wine regions, often filling them immediately after

they've been emptied of jammy, fruit-forward Australian red wine. "We know wine is food-friendly, so obviously whisky aged in wine barrels is going to be food-friendly too," says Vitale. The distillery has even gone so far as to partner with the *Michelin Guide*, connecting with Michelin-starred chefs across the United States to create custom Starward-based cocktails built for the dinner table (see recipe below).

Starward's brighter, more modern character can be attributed in part to the brand's aging regimen, which reflects the weather in Australia. "We can have a 40- to 50-degree temperature difference in a single day," says Vitale, "so the three years of aging in Melbourne is very different than anywhere else." He and his team consider that period of time in barrel to be the sweet spot for all of Starward's whiskies—including its single malt, Nova, and its blended wheat whisky, Two Fold—as it results in "complexity without intensity . . . [and] lots of fruit character, but it's not going to poke you in the eyes like a big Aussie Shiraz," he adds.

—*Jessie Birschbach*



Starward Nova Single Malt Whisky, Australia (\$55) Matured in barrels that previously held Australian red wine, this 82-proof whisky shows aromas of cedar and red berries with peach accents. Flavors of spiced orange, caramel apple, mocha latte, and a touch of cedar closet unfold in sumptuous, dramatically warming fashion. The finish is bright and well mannered, with grilled pineapple riding in on a ray of sunshine. **94** —*M.M.*

Starward Two Fold Double Grain Whisky, Australia (\$35) Although this 80-proof expression aged only three years, there is definite good breeding here, displayed through stately scents of walnut, maple oatmeal, mocha, and oak as well as flavors of dark cherry and tree bark that are synchronized with black pepper and tobacco leaf. A swirl of burnt orange peel and bold-roast coffee reveals a shadowed yet approachable character—this is an impactful whisky with loads of personality. **95** —*M.M.*

New World Sour

- 2 parts Starward Two Fold Double Grain Whisky
 - 1 part fresh lemon juice
 - ¾ part simple syrup
 - 1 egg white (optional)
- Shake ingredients vigorously and pour into a rocks glass. To finish, add a float of Aussie Shiraz.





PHOTOS: CLICK THOMPSON

not its first rodeo: PENDLETON WHISKY

The Pendleton Round-Up is “the spirit, soul, and conscience of [our] community,” says fifth-generation rancher and farmer Randy Bracher, who’s also the proud president of the famous annual rodeo. Based in the small town in Umatilla County, Oregon, that it’s named for, the Round-Up claims to be one of the longest-standing traditions of the Old West, dating back to 1910. Launched as “a frontier exhibition of picturesque pastimes, Indian and military spectacles, cowboy racing, and bronco busting,” it has grown to be a weeklong Western celebration, involving every part of the Pendleton community and beyond: Pendleton’s population of 17,000 grows by a factor of four to five times as visitors flock to the town, delivering a welcome boost to local businesses and charities alike.

But due to economic decline in the 1980s, long-term sponsorship became essential to the survival and eventual regeneration of the Round-Up. Fortunately, the then-owners of Oregon’s Hood River Distillers stepped in as backers. In 2003, they launched

Pendleton Whisky as a symbol of the Round-Up, representing the authentic cowboy spirit and what they called “true Western tradition.” The intention was to sell it exclusively at the Round-Up, but the whisky’s popularity led to its eventual arrival on the market, and in 2018, it was acquired by Proximo Spirits, Inc. Since then, the brand’s base has expanded nationwide, and its relationship with the rodeo has only grown stronger. In fact, it has “morphed into a [true] partnership . . . based on friendship and a sense of mutual support,” says Bracher, adding that the Pendleton brand team “says what they mean and does what they say,” right down to featuring the Round-Up’s distinctive bucking bronco logo on all their packaging.

The base spirit for the flagship product, Pendleton Whisky, is sourced from Canada and then blended with glacier-fed spring water from Oregon’s highest peak, the lofty Mt. Hood. The premium Pendleton 1910, meanwhile, is a 100% rye whisky aged for a minimum of 12 years to offer round, rich notes of

tobacco, charred oak, and butterscotch as well as a spicy rye and pepper kick. It’s named for the year of the inaugural Pendleton Round-Up and, fittingly, is packaged in a 750-milliliter bottle with an intricately embossed pattern reminiscent of the tooling on a saddle. At 45% ABV, Pendleton Midnight delivers a complex yet fruit-forward flavor and an exceptionally smooth finish, thanks to the fact that a portion of the blend is aged for more than six years in American brandy barrels. Notes of leather and warm spices provide a full-bodied profile. And finally, Pendleton Directors’ Reserve is a 20-year-aged whisky showing orange, spices such as vanilla, and caramel, followed by a mellow finish. Continuing the rodeo theme, each bottle is wrapped in a leather sleeve crafted by third-generation Pendleton saddle maker Randy Severe.

At this year’s Round-Up in September, Pendleton Whisky introduced the Champions Edition bottle. Available only in Oregon, it’s dedicated to honoring the families, volunteers, and competitors who have been part of the event’s long-running success, helping to make it one of America’s most iconic cultural celebrations for over a century. Despite the pandemic, the 2021 Round-Up was even better attended than it was in 2019, so it looks set to champion the Western way of life for decades to come—alongside its worthy whisky sponsor. —*Ian Buxton*



TAKING CENTER STAGE

WE PUT THE SPOTLIGHT ON SOME
“**ROCK STARS OF RUM**” AT A RECENT
BACK TO {SPIRITS} SCHOOL WEBINAR

by **Stefanie Schwalb**



Delectable drinks can spread comfort and cheer as autumn gives way to the holiday season, but a recent installment of *The Tasting Panel's* educational webinar series Back to {Spirits} School focused on their ability to spread knowledge as well.

Held in partnership with the Florida International University Bacardi Center of Excellence and co-sponsored by Lyre's Non-Alcoholic Spirits Co., the virtual event put a spotlight on rum, gathering eight brand representatives with plenty of insights to share. Serving as moderators were *SOMM Journal* VP of education Lars Leicht, Bacardi Center director Brian Connors, and Bacardi Center assistant teaching professor Nathan Dodge, MBA.



LYRE'S

NON-ALCOHOLIC SPIRITS CO.



The Australian lyrebird is known as one of nature's best mimics, so it's only fitting that it lent its name to Lyre's, a producer of premium nonalcoholic spirits that deftly imitates "all of your favorites from behind the bar," said regional manager-USA Southeast Maria Denton, CWE, CSW, CSS. "I think it's really telling that while we only have one gin and one whisky so far—plus our American Malt—we have three different products that pay homage to rum."

Introduced during the webinar, the brand's Dark Cane Spirit, White Cane Spirit, and Spice Cane Spirit provide consumers with the ability to make classic drinks that, while lacking alcohol, are hardly deficient in flavor. "Rum has a rich history. My favorite part of that is how it evolved into these incredibly iconic but diverse cocktails," noted Kyle Billings, Lyre's mar-

keting director, North America. "That's what's fascinating for me and the Lyre's team. Whether it's a Hemingway, Cable Car, Painkiller, or Jungle Bird, you can create this incredibly rich depth of cocktails from rum and from the Lyre's range as well."

By way of demonstration, Denton mixed a Mojito, a Piña Colada, and a Rum Manhattan featuring the Lyre's version of red vermouth, Aperitif Rosso—all without ice. "When you make drinks with Lyre's, we don't want the dilution," she explained. "With alcohol you want to ease that burn a little bit, so you're mixing with ice [when you shake it] or you're chilling down [when you pour it over]. I'm starting with cold Lyre's—cold ingredients—and I'm just pouring them right into my glass. It looks like a cocktail, it tastes like a cocktail, and I even get a little placebo effect when I drink it."

The company has also recently

introduced a ready-to-drink rum cocktail called the Dark 'N Spicy, which blends the Spice Cane Spirit and the Dark Cane Spirit with ginger and lime zest. "Rum figures very heavily into what we do at Lyre's, and we're always working on new iterations, because it's one of those categories that's just so interesting," added Denton.

The bottom line? Lyre's is all about giving people the freedom to have their drink their way. "Whether you want to make it without alcohol or you want to make a low-alcohol version of your favorite drink by using half of Lyre's and half of your favorite rum, you can certainly do that," said Denton. "When you're thinking of putting together a really good bar program, you want to have choices on the menu—so [that], whatever someone's reasons for not drinking, they have a sophisticated cocktail option as well."



BACARDÍ RUM

Established in 1862 by Cuban couple Don Facundo Bacardí Massó and Doña Amalia, BACARDÍ is a family-owned company that produces its flagship rums in Puerto Rico. At the time of its founding, the two biggest markets for rum were Jamaica and Martinique, whose styles were more flavorful than those from other regions. But BACARDÍ set out to pioneer an entirely new style that would be lighter, drier, and easier to mix. “Don Facundo pioneered the category as it exists today: All the classic cocktails that we think of now were created [with] BACARDÍ. It’s not to say that this is the best rum [available today], but to me it’s the benchmark,” said national brand ambassador A-K Hada, “and when I think of BACARDÍ, it’s kind of like

The Godfather. Everybody knows of it, but how much do you remember it? You can create your own opinions, but I strongly encourage you to go back and try tasting BACARDÍ Superior on its own—because it will surprise you with its depth of flavor.”

That flavor largely derives from a proprietary strain of yeast, *Levadura Bacardí*, which has been used during the fermentation process since the brand’s inception. “This was huge technology for the 1860s. [Bacardí Massó] was one of the first spirits producers in the world to isolate a strain of yeast so that it could be used again and again to create a consistent flavor profile,” explained Hada. After fermentation, Bacardí Massó distilled two styles of rum: one light and subtle, the other heavy with more character. BACARDÍ

Superior’s blend of these light and heavy styles ages for at least one year in American white-oak barrels—as required by law for Puerto Rican rum—and is charcoal filtered to add refinement (and, in the case of BACARDÍ Superior, to remove the color imparted by aging).

“With the combination of techniques we use—that isolated yeast strain, two separate distillates, the way it’s blended, the way it’s aged, and the manner in which we charcoal filter it—you can see the variety you can achieve for one spirit brand, let alone one spirit category,” said Hada. Exemplified through a range of products that also includes BACARDÍ Gold, BACARDÍ Gran Reserva Ocha, and BACARDÍ Spiced rums (to name a few), that variety has helped ensure BACARDÍ’s longevity.



Diplomático



In order to understand more about the style of a rum, it's important to know where it's coming from and how it's produced," said José Luis Ballesteros, brand ambassador for Diplomático Rum. "Diplomático is a blended rum, and we are the only producer to have three different distillation systems under the same roof: a barbet column, a batch kettle, and a pot still." The latter, which Ballesteros called the heart of their distillation process, is more than 150 years old and was brought from Scotland to Venezuela when Diplomático was founded in 1959.

After fermentation, the rum is distilled through all three of these systems and aged separately. Once the master blender decides they're ready, they're combined in different portions to develop a portfolio that includes the Traditional Range (Mantuano, Reserva Exclusiva, and Planas); the Prestige Range (Ambassador and Single Vintage); and the Distillery Collection (N°1 Batch Kettle, N°2 Barbet Column, and N°3 Pot Still).

All, of course, meet the country's strict requirements for rum production. "We are one of the few countries to have a DOC, which mandates that all raw materials have to be 100% local, either sugarcane molasses or sugarcane honey," explained Ballesteros, "and the most important part of our DOC is the aging. Every rum that's labeled Venezuelan has to have certification that it's been aged at least two years in white oak, which could be either new or used." The proof of the finished product also has to be between 80 and 100.

As consumers in Europe and, more recently, the U.S. have begun to develop a greater appreciation of premium spirits designed for savoring straight, categories such as tequila, whiskey, and gin have experienced significant market growth—and now Ballesteros sees premium rum joining their ranks rather than remaining a well-kept secret. After all, he said, "The spirit of Diplomático is the expression of a sipping rum."

Diplomático Reserva Exclusiva Rum, Venezuela (\$40)

Following a fantastic bouquet of Luxardo cherry, plum pudding, baking spices, and brown sugar, this indulgent liquid delivers luxury and finesse through its broad, satin-lined mouthfeel, revealing flavors of blue fruit, cherry cola, jasmine, and roasted coffee. A pecan-pie finish seals the deal. 80 proof. **95** —*Meridith May*

E. & J. GALLO



Don Q



Taking the title of the seminar to heart, Serrallés USA VP of sales John Meisler pointed out that “this is truly a panel of rock stars, and by definition, rock stars appeal to a wide range of audiences [because] . . . they can stand the test of time,” he said. “The [brands] on this screen today will be still impactful 50 years from now.”

A lot longer than 50 years ago, however, the Serrallés family was—much like Don Quixote, their brand’s namesake—on a quest when they moved to Puerto Rico in the 1830s to start growing sugar. They established their distillery in 1865, and it’s now the oldest operating facility of its kind on the island, having perfected a Spanish Colonial style of rum that’s light yet complex. “It’s the original Puerto Rican rum,” said Meisler, “and we hang our hats on things like aging and blending. For us, our rock stars of rum are often the blenders . . . [who are] taking those heavy and light rums and creating that final product.”

For the distillation process, Don Q uses a single-column, copper-lined whiskey still that dates back to Prohibition. “The inefficiencies of that still are beautiful because it leaves the congeners and flavors, and we create our heavy rums with that,” explained Meisler. “Then we have a six-column continuous still where science takes over and we’re able to create a very neutral yet rummy product. It’s the balance . . . that makes the difference.”

Speaking briefly about the new Reserva 7 and Gran Reserva (formerly known as Gran Añejo), Meisler revealed that both products are aged in American oak barrels. The former is the first rum they’ve ever designated with a number, which refers to the age of the youngest drop of rum in the bottle. For the latter, they increase the aging to nine to 12 years and blend it with some solera-aged rums that are up to 50 years old. “No sugar is added to our rum, so we compete against a wide variety of fine aged spirits,” he added, “and like a true rock star, we appeal to [everyone]—whiskey, Scotch, [and] Cognac lovers and, of course, rum connoisseurs.”

Don Q Reserva 7 Rum, Puerto Rico (\$25) A perfume of rancio, sassafras, salted cashew, and grilled peach leads to a lovely entry magnified by a swath of jasmine and dried ginger. Heavenly notes of toffee and root beer ride an unctuous wave brightened by light tannins. Cherry and cinnamon weave through an array of woody tones on the finish. 80 proof. **93** —*M.M.*

Don Q Añejo XO Gran Reserva Rum, Puerto Rico (\$50) Aromas of apple and fresh tobacco leaf lead to an intensity of nougat-wrapped oak and peppered peach. Bold moves on the palate are expressed through a regal lineup of chamomile, mocha, guava, and taro root. 80 proof. **94** —*M.M.*

DESTILERÍA SERRALLÉS



The Real MCCOY



While producing a documentary about Prohibition-era rum runner Bill McCoy, Emmy Award-winning writer, producer, and director Bailey Pryor decided to make use of his research and Caribbean travels by developing his own brand. He apprenticed with fourth-generation master distiller Richard Seale at the Seale family distillery, Foursquare, and other producers in the region to hone his craft before launching The Real McCoy Rum.

Focusing on its 12-Year-Old Prohibition Tradition—made from molasses and pure Barbados spring water without additives such as chemical stabilizers, flavors, sweeteners, and perfumes—Pryor explained that all of The Real McCoy’s small-batch rums are distilled in a combination of copper pot and column stills before they’re aged in heavy-char American oak barrels for three, five, or 12 years.

“I’ve been learning for a long time, and now I’m bringing [those lessons] into practice,” said Pryor, who was presenting from his new test distillery in Connecticut called The Lab. Standing in front of a custom-made still from Scotland, Pryor discussed the importance of generating more respect for rum. “It’s funny: This mythology about there being ‘no rules in rum’ has been propagated for so long that everybody says it—but so far, everyone who’s talked about rum [today] has identified the rules in their [region],” he noted. “The reality is there are rules in every single rum-producing nation, just like there are rules in every whiskey-producing nation. There is not one overarching global rule for rum production.” He believes the answers to the spirit’s image problem lie in, one, getting the European Union and U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) to respect and enforce the laws of those rum-producing nations and, two, better promoting the fact that “rum is incredibly diverse. There are so many different countries making rum, and they’re doing it with individual techniques that should be respected.”

Pryor thinks the general classification of rum as light, dark, or amber is misleading and part of the reason the spirit doesn’t always get its due. “What we’re doing by calling rum light and dark is we’re avoiding the conversation about how it’s made rather than providing any real information about the history, progeny, techniques, traditions, and culture,” he explained. “There is a much easier and more meaningful way to describe rum in general: Call it unaged versus aged or modified versus unmodified—that tells you right there what it’s worth [and] how it’s made. [The former] should be inexpensive because it’s made quickly, while [the latter] should be expensive because it’s very time consuming and costly to produce.”

The Real McCoy Single Blended Rum Aged 5 Years, Barbados

(\$35) This charmer starts out delicate before taking a swan dive into spiced cedar. Following distinct aromas of peach nectar, vanilla, and maple cereal, milk chocolate winds through a sea of resin, walnut, brined cherry, and sweet tobacco on the palate. 80 proof. **93** —*M.M.*



Mezan

We're a brand [that] celebrates the diversity of Caribbean rum," said Mezan brand ambassador Grégoire Erchoff, adding that all of Mezan's rums are made with molasses and sourced from different countries in the region. "We don't touch the product we get from those distilleries, so we receive the exact expression of what they wanted to do." On the back of every label, he adds, consumers get all of the information about the distillery the product comes from, its country of origin, and whether it was made with a pot still or column still.

The Mezan portfolio features numerous expressions, though only a few are exported to the U.S.: Mezan Jamaica XO and Mezan Chiriqui from the Permanent collection and Panama 2006 and Guyana 2005 from the Vintages line. For the webinar, Erchoff focused on the latter, a single-cask rum from Guyana's Diamond Distillery. "It's unusual—we don't do much single-cask rum," he explained. "But after years and years, we decided to [bottle one], and it's totally beautiful." It features local demerara molasses along with a proprietary strain of yeast and is finished one year in Pedro Ximénez Sherry casks. Erchoff also presented the Mezan XO, which is a blend of four different Jamaican rums that clocks in at 80 proof. "There's no sugar, no coloring or flavoring agents, and no chill filtration," he added.

After Mezan ages its rums in the humidity of the tropics at each of its partner distilleries for a few years in old bourbon casks, it sends them to England, where they undergo another round of aging in that continental climate to reduce oxidation and limit the concentration of esters. "But [there's] a big debate" over the purported benefits of continental versus Caribbean aging, admitted Erchoff, and while it's something he travels all around the world to talk about, he believes it shouldn't have too much of an influence on consumer preference. "At the end of the day, drink the rum you like to drink—it doesn't matter what it is [if] that's your style," he said. "But we wanted to tell you that continental aging can be really interesting [in terms of] the openness of the flavors."



Mezan Chiriqui Rum, Panama (\$25)

Heady aromas of guava and sun-drenched sugarcane lead to honeysuckle and passion fruit on the palate, where the tropical notes are enveloped by sandalwood and salted pine nut. Aged in Moscatel casks, this spirit possesses warmth, with hints of yellow pepper and sweet potato, that's opulent and generous to the finish. **93** —*M.M.*

Mezan XO Rum, Jamaica (\$35)

This unique and linear molasses-based rum is aged in ex-bourbon casks. Its aromas of porcini mushroom, orange peel, and grilled pineapple are heady and earthy. The free-form palate defines lightness: Pineapple and pine nut are juxtaposed with white-peppered snap pea, lemon custard, and oatmeal. 80 proof. **93** —*M.M.*

MARUSSIA BEVERAGES USA



Santa Teresa

1796



Established in 1796, Santa Teresa celebrated its 225th birthday on October 16, which brand ambassador Alex Noriega justifiably pointed out is a really big deal. “Santa Teresa is the oldest rum distillery in Venezuela and the third-oldest rum distillery in the world,” he noted. “We’re happy to say that we’ve been in these lands for more than 200 years. The brand has walked through a delicate type of political and economic upheaval . . . [and] it’s always looking for different ways to refine rum as generations pass and for the community to relate to each other during hardships.”

Santa Teresa—which recently entered into a sales distribution partnership with Bacardi—produces, ages, and bottles its rum on its estate in the Aragua Valley, a temperate region surrounded by peaks and valleys. “Everything is made on-site to ensure that the quality of the product is up to

par with two centuries of tradition,” said Noriega. The sugarcane and water come from the hacienda and neighboring farms, and the production process itself is guided by stringent Venezuelan DOC rules.

Santa Teresa, unsurprisingly, is deeply rooted in tradition and was one of the earliest registered trademarks in Venezuela as well as one of the first rum producers to pioneer the solera system. “We’re a Spanish-style rum, so we [use] 100% grade-A black molasses and a blend of three styles of rums aged between four and 35 years,” noted Noriega. “We harvest our sugarcane between the months of May and November and use both

a column still and a pot still for distillation.”

Another important focus of the brand, said Noriega, is how it can serve its community—so much so that when a group of men broke into the hacienda in 2013, CEO Alberto Vollmer gave them an ultimatum: Work with us for three months and we’ll consider your debt paid. “Naturally, these gentlemen chose life versus life incarceration, and the initiative transformed into a rehabilitation program,” added Noriega, noting that the brand gave the men “a second chance at life” while remaining focused on its mission of making “a delicious, great rum” built for the ages. [V](#)





Shelf LIFE

A QUARTET OF RETAIL
FINDS TO CARRY YOU
MERRILY THROUGH THE
SEASON

An Italian gin in packaging so cool you won't need gift wrap. A racy white and a rich red to cover the holiday feast from hors d'oeuvres onward. And a full line of wines—including a bubbly—from a company that's all about family (not to mention kosher products, for those celebrating Hannukah). Here are four brands that solve every headache your average last-minute shopper has, making their lives—and therefore your own—that much easier.



A NEW BRAND OF GARAGISTE:

Paolo Dalla Mora and EnGINE

Like many revolutionary ideas, EnGINE started in a garage. That's where Paolo Dalla Mora was working on his bike in Barbaresco, Italy—a town far more famous for wine than gin—while sipping an oh-so-Italian digestivo of hot water, lemon peel, and sage leaves. Formerly the global communication director for Disaronno, the industry vet had long wanted to create his own beverage, and it hit him that its identity should be tied to that gritty, grease-covered moment: a lemon- and sage-forward gin that would celebrate the motor world and the retro glamour it represents.

Because this wasn't, of course, just any old idea but a game-changing one, Dalla Mora took it one step further. He wanted his auto-inspired EnGINE to challenge the pristine, crystal-clear bottles we've come to expect from spirits brands, instead injecting grittiness into the packaging itself by making the bold choice to house his gin in a tin container—the half-liter, screw-capped kind that motor oil is often sold in. And to really drive home the theme, he chose to decorate that can with simple graphics reminiscent of old racing logos. The resulting “bottle” is sure to inspire obsessions among fashionistas, car enthusiasts, and spirits aficionados alike.

“I started imagining what the aesthetics of the project could be, and, considering that it all took shape in my garage, I thought it would be suitable for EnGINE to have an identity that went in another direction with respect to the transparency that spirits [brands] look for today,” Dalla Mora says. “Something



dirtier, unexpected, capable of completely distorting the concept of a bottle”—not to mention of its contents. Just like its tin container, EnGINE makes a statement while paying tribute to the Italian tradition of sweet liqueurs and cordials: Strong and distinctive juniper and balsamic flavors are balanced by the intense aroma of sage, the freshness of lemon peel sourced from Italy's famed Amalfi Coast, and the sweetness of Damask rose and Calabrian licorice root. According to Dalla Mora, it “radically contrasts with a gin aesthetic, which is becoming increasingly limpid, pure, and clean.”

The all-organic ingredients are blended with Alpine spring water and bottled in Alta Langa, making for a quintessentially Italian sip that just so happens to be poured out of a fuel can. And it all happens 14 miles—or as they'd measure it there, 23 kilometers—south of Dalla Mora's garage, where he originally conceived of the gin now revving up the spirits scene. —Allyson Reedy

EnGINE Organic Gin, Italy (\$30) From the Langhe in Piedmont—the land of Barolo and Barbaresco—comes a find beyond the vineyards. The pleasant nose of soft, rich pine needles also carries a perfume of jasmine and peach blossom. The palate is sensational: A sweet biscuity note, marzipan, candied ginger, and a touch of orris root keep it in high gear, while tangerine and meringue add drive to this well-oiled 84-proof spirit. **96**
—Meridith May



EnGINE
founder
Paolo Dalla
Mora.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ENGINE

Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and other dark and tannic grapes thrive in Scheid Family Wines' Harnes Valley Vineyard, located within the southern reaches of Monterey County.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SCHEID FAMILY WINES



A NONTRADITIONAL HOLIDAY TRADITION: **VDR Proprietary Red Blend**

Last year, at the height of the pandemic, Scheid Family Wines released the 2018 vintage of its VDR “Very Dark Red” proprietary blend in a striking new package. The updated front label, featuring bold initials stamped onto a dark-burgundy background, reflects the wine’s adventurous, uncommon blend of equally bold varieties, including Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The back label, meanwhile, uses a prominently displayed logo for the California Certified Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance to call attention to the company’s unwavering commitment to sustainability in both its vineyard and winery; the “100% Powered by Wind” stamp denotes that the latter is fully powered by a towering wind turbine that can be seen from a great distance as one approaches the Scheid family’s Monterey County estate in Greenfield.

Roughly a decade ago, VP of wine-making Dave Nagengast was inspired to shun traditional blending practices in order to fully realize the potential of the red varieties grown in the estate’s warm vineyards in the southernmost reaches of Monterey County. The veteran winemaker was particularly excited by

the Petite Sirah and Petit Verdot grown in this area—so much so that rather than use these varieties as smaller components in a blend, he celebrated their larger-than-life profiles by placing them front and center, along with a healthy dollop of Cabernet Sauvignon and a few other red grapes that aren’t typically blended together.

Perhaps it’s because we’re aspiring toward a cheerier holiday season this year, but the recently released 2019 vintage of VDR appears all the more spirited to us, featuring as it does not only the new label but a higher

portion of Cabernet Sauvignon (28%), with 24% Petite Sirah, 18% Syrah, 17% Petit Verdot, and 13% other red varieties. Monterey County received an extraordinary 20 inches of rainfall during the 2019 growing season, some of it during bud break and bloom time; yields were impacted as a result. But despite the smaller portion of Petite Sirah compared to 2018 (83%), the soul of VDR remains as it highlights the best of the big red varieties grown on the estate. The winemaking team’s keen and confident approach to blending is a testament to the brand’s enterprise.



VDR “Very Dark Red” 2019 Proprietary Red Blend, Monterey County (\$25) The opaque red-black hue of this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Syrah, Petit Verdot, and other reds—produced with 100% renewable wind energy and aged in French and Hungarian oak for 14 months—denotes a concentration that aptly matches its moniker. A nose of blackberry preserves and dark chocolate also shows depths of soil. Tongue-drying roasted-coffee tannins are a driving force, taking the palate to a higher level: tarry, chewy, bold, and passionate. Within a balanced structure, VDR possesses power and energy that truly deliver. **92** —*M.M.*

GOING THE GOLDEN MILE: **Stoneleigh**

If drinking a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc in the year it was made isn't on your wine bucket list, it should be. In 2021, harsh spring frosts significantly reduced yields in Marlborough—one of the world's top regions for the varietal—but, as it so often does, quality trumped quantity, so it's a banger vintage for Sauvignon Blanc producers like Stoneleigh. Stoneleigh winemaker Jamie Marfell calls it "fantastic," in fact, adding that "lighter crops and some great ripening weather leading up to harvest made for absolutely stunning fruit and resulted in gorgeous wine. It's the kind of vintage winemakers dream about."

Marfell's philosophy is simple: He takes a hands-off approach to allow the grapes and the characteristics of their vibrant terroir to speak for themselves. Working with sustainably sourced grapes from the prized Rapaura subzone of the Wairau Valley, he says, "We don't do much to [them] after we pick them other than crush them, ferment them, and filter the wine before

bottling, so the fruit has to be perfect." In other words, "I'm not trying to make a wine that reflects my hand as a winemaker—I'm after making a wine that reflects Rapaura, which is a really special place in the world to make Sauvignon Blanc."

That, he explains, is because of its distinctive stone-studded soil. Those stones capture heat during the day and slowly release it upward to the vines at night, steadily ripening the grapes while protecting the vines from frost. They also lower the soil's acidity levels, which makes for smaller vines with more concentrated fruit flavors, like the passion fruit and grapefruit that come through in Stoneleigh's Sauvignon Blanc.

Further solidifying Rapaura's ace reputation for viticulture is its location on the northern side of the Wairau, where slightly warmer temperatures make a big difference to producers in such a marginal climate. No wonder Marfell and his team consider taking care of the land a priority: Nature is



a compelling yet exacting partner in their winemaking program. That nature-nurture partnership especially shines through in Stoneleigh's impressive 2021 Sauvignon Blanc. As the year comes to a close, we can't think of a better way to send it off than by indulging in some of the best its vintage had to offer. —Allyson Reedy

Stoneleigh winemaker Jamie Marfell.



from the
holidays
to the
NEW YEAR

Honoring the **FAMILY NAME**

**HOW LINEAGE
DISTILLS HERZOG
WINE CELLARS'
HISTORY AND
PHILOSOPHY DOWN
TO ITS ESSENCE**

by Amanda M. Faison



PHOTO: DOUG YOUNG



Joseph Herzog is an eighth-generation viticulturalist and general manager of Herzog Wine Cellars.

Does serendipity happen in threes? Joseph Herzog, eighth-generation viticulturalist and general manager of Herzog Wine Cellars, might say it does. In 2018, the California-based winery bought a vineyard from which it had long been sourcing grapes on Herzog Road in the Clarksburg AVA. The name was a coincidence: The family who sold it was not related to the Herzogs, having long ago immigrated from Germany to farm the land since the mid-1800s. “We closed on the property in the middle of August,” Joseph says. “There were grapes to sell, but the harvest was hectic” due to the planting of 13 different varieties on one parcel. “We couldn’t bring in each [one] individually, [so] we decided we’ll bring it in as a field blend instead.”

This act of get-‘er-done ingenuity led to the second auspicious moment. As Joseph recalls, “We brought it into the winery, we were tasting the wine, and I had a moment that took me back. It





Herzog Lineage Pinot Noir is a top seller at Reserve Cut in New York, NY.

PHOTO: DOUG YOUNG

was a taste memory [of] the Royal Wine Company”—more on that in a moment—and the Porto Cordovero. It’s a dry, big, dark red wine; the spice and aroma [of our field blend] just took me back to that bottle. I was so excited.” And thus the Camouflage red blend was born, its release coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Herzog Wine Cellars’ establishment in California.

A legal battle quickly ensued over the name, and the winery was forced to cease using it in favor of a different name, Choreograph. That trademarking hiccup proved a third twist of fate, however, leading the family to launch a new brand of which the red blend would become a part; called Lineage, it would be a nod to their longevity in the wine industry.

Those roots indeed run deep: In the early 1800s, Rabbi Menachem Herzog built a distillery, winery, and brewery in the town of Vrbové in the Trnava region of Slovakia. Over time, the facility began to produce wines for the emperor’s court under the leadership of Phillip Herzog, who was named a baron by the Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Josef. In 1948, however, facing postwar upheaval, Phillip’s grandson Eugene was forced to flee Europe for New York City. He began making wine and driving delivery trucks at Royal Wine Company; within ten years, he purchased the company.

Eugene also founded Kedem Winery (the name means “ancient” in Hebrew) to produce bottlings from New York’s native Concord grapes. The pioneering move established both the kosher wine and kosher grape juice categories in the U.S. By the mid-1980s, the Herzog family was making premium, “delicious wines that just happen[ed] to be kosher,” to use their slogan, from California grapes.

And so, when a customer picks up some Lineage—which includes a Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Rosé, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, and Malbec as well as Choreograph and a newly released sparkler called Momentus—they are getting value in a bottle that resonates with the concept of heritage. The label’s background



spells out the names of the nine generations of Herzogs, along with their birth and (where applicable) death dates. “Lineage has really taken shape [along the lines of] history, pride, and family,” Joseph says. “It starts in the hands and names of our forebearers . . . in 1776, with almost 280 years of winemaking history generation to generation [since]. There aren’t many families that can say that.” With that legacy comes great responsibility, he adds: “We have to put [the wine] through that reality check—your name is on the bottle.”

Meanwhile, the purchase of the

Herzog Road vineyard in 2018 led Joseph to a newfound love of Malbec. “[One] of those 13 different varietals that were planted [there] were 400 vines of Malbec,” he says. “I started loving Argentinean-style Malbec, and I asked to bring in more and we planted it adjacent to [the original vines].” This organic experimentation underscores the Herzogs’ viticultural philosophy. Whereas many other wineries will use open acreage to plant whatever grape is in high demand, “we do the opposite,” he explains. “We wanted to own that property because of what was there. We only plant and produce wine

that the dirt has shown to do well. If the fruit does well, we'll buy the land and plant further."

The Malbec, as it turns out, features heavily on the Herzogs' holiday table. "I'm very proud of it," Joseph says, noting that the fruit characteristics and the spice notes pair well with celebratory dishes. He also recommends—for Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and every other occasion—starting a special meal with Momentus. "There's

nothing like bubbles to open the appetite and change the mood," he points out. "[A glass] really changes the moment from rushing and getting ready to relaxing into tranquil[ity]."

Moments are what the Herzog family hopes to create, capture, and highlight (as suggested by the very name of the bubbly). That doctrine was underscored by the pandemic, when we couldn't gather freely for daily or special occasions: Now, the company

stresses, is the time to reclaim what was lost. "Each one of those moments [is a] milestone . . . that makes up your own history," Joseph says. "If you're going out or having a favorite meal or eating at a favorite restaurant, these are the special moments that you celebrate." And really, there's no better brand to celebrate *with*, rooted as Lineage is in those moments, in family history, and in their combined ability to shape you. **W**

On-Premise Pros Dish on Lineage

PHOTO: DOUG YOUNG



Alessandro Giardiello is director of operations at Reserve Cut in New York, NY.

Alessandro Giardiello

Director of operations, Reserve Cut, New York, NY

"Herzog is a big line in kosher wine; it's very big in the Jewish community," Giardiello says. "[And] it's the best as far as the mevushal process," or flash-pasteurization, required to meet kosher standards.

Bestselling varietal: Pinot Noir

Sells: By the glass and the bottle

Drink it with: Appetizers, including beet salad

PHOTO: PATI BARRETO



Koen Kersemans is wine director of Casa D'Angelo Ristorante, which has locations in Florida and Colorado.

Koen Kersemans

Wine director, Casa D'Angelo Ristorante, Fort Lauderdale, Boca Raton, and Aventura, FL, and Aspen, CO

"The [Lineage] Chardonnay and Cab do very well for us," Kersemans says. "Believe it or not, in Florida most people drink red wine. [The Cab] is elegant and soft, and it goes very well with our menu."

Bestselling varietal: Cabernet Sauvignon

Sells: By the glass and the bottle

Drink it with: "For the holidays we're doing some white-truffle specials. The Cab will pair nicely."



Atlantic salmon with butternut squash and kombu is a signature dish at Vestry in New York, NY.



Salmon Meets Its Match From Coast to Coast

WE CHALLENGE THREE SOMMS TO CHOOSE WINES FOR VESTRY'S SIGNATURE FISH DISH

by Michelle M. Metter

It's fitting that Michelin-starred New York City restaurant Vestry is neighbor to some of SoHo's top art studios, given the painterly presentations for which Shaun Hergatt is known. The classically trained chef/owner derives equal inspiration from his roots in Queensland, Australia, and the daily bustle of Manhattan, but it's his signature dish of Atlantic salmon with butternut squash and kombu that steals the show.

Pronounced *KOM-boo*, the latter is an edible sea vegetable commonly used in the Japanese stock known as dashi. Hergatt makes kombu oil and combines it with koji sauce to harmonize with the umami richness of the



Vestry chef/owner Shaun Hergatt.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VESTRY

salmon. To prepare the fish, Hergatt explains, “We simply season [it], cook it over the [binchotan] charcoal grill, and then [finish] it for around eight minutes at around 200 degrees. We serve it with wakame seaweed dressed in a rice wine vinaigrette and the koji sauce with kombu oil. Cooking the salmon on the grill gives a wonderful, light smokiness to the fish and results in an exceptional crispy texture on the skin. What’s so beautiful about this dish is it’s about really taking the fish and its environment and serving them together—we’re truly recreating the idea of the animal swimming in the water.”

Beverage director Irene Miller is no stranger to well-crafted, story-driven pairings, having worked at such famed establishments as Le Bernardin, Blue Hill, and Del Posto. At Vestry, she approaches her wine choice as artfully as Hergatt does the dish, in this case recommending two options: “I think the Franz Hirtzberger 2018 Rotes Tor Grüner Veltliner [from] Smaragd [in] Wachau, Austria, is a good pairing for the salmon. The [fish] has a rich, oily texture, and these wines have a



Vestry beverage director Irene Miller.

richness that can stand up to [it] . . . while the acidity level is high enough that it will cut the oiliness. There is also typically a spicy quality [to the wine] that [further] contrasts the fish’s richness and an herbaceous quality that complements the dish. This wine is quite lush, with notes of white pepper, dill, lemon curd, and ripe pear. The fruit notes complement the flavor of the salmon; the texture of the wine matches [its] weight . . . making the transition on the palate seamless; and the dill note is a natural pairing with salmon and the wakame.

Another possible pairing is a white Burgundy. I’m thinking specifically of Meursault, which has a [similarly appropriate] richness and body . . . and a silky finish. Typical notes of salted butter, hazelnut skin, orchard fruit, and honey would complement the flavor of the [dish]. Acidity levels are quite robust, which cleanses the palate . . . and there is often a flinty quality that [adds] a layer of flavor. Jobard-Morey 2018 Meursault Premier Cru Les Perrières is an excellent pairing.”

Read on for more suggestions from two sommeliers on the opposite coast.



Lisa Redwine

Wine director, Addison, Del Mar, CA

The umami notes of the kombu oil, koji sauce, and wakame draw me toward the mushroom and umami notes that Oregon Pinot Noirs offer. The bright acidity of the Gran Moraine 2018 Pinot Noir [from] Yamhill Carlton [in the] Willamette Valley is the perfect foil for the richness of the salmon, and its soft fruit notes of pomegranate and red cherry enhance the subtle

smokiness from the bintochan grill. On the palate, the shiitake mushroom note elevates the rich, savory quality [of the dish] and let the briny quality of the wakame shine. [Both the] acidity and the lighter tannins complement the crispy texture [of the fish skin], and the structure [further] enhances the richness.

[Next,] the spectacular Alheit 2015 Radio Lazarus Chenin Blanc [from] Walker Bay [in] South Africa provides a different dimension to the salmon preparation. Coming from old bush vines at a higher elevation, the structure of this wine intertwines racy acidity with pronounced minerality and a . . . subtle salinity that accentuates the umami flavors of the wakame seaweed and kombu and enlivens the citrus notes of the koji sauce. . . . Its stone-fruit and orange-zest aromas and flavors bring out the sweet, earthy tones of the butternut squash and provide a contrast to the saline and earthy notes of the dish.



Molly Brooks

Wine buyer and director of events, Meritage Wine Market & Tasting, Encinitas, CA

I’m going to be a bit literal and pair with Jean Vesselle’s salmon-hued Oeil de Perdrix Champagne Rosé. This rare but traditional style of pink bubbles is named after the “eye-of-the-partridge” color imbued through less than a day’s skin contact with 100% Pinot Noir grapes, rather than being “dyed” by the addition of still Pinot, as is often the case in Champagne. The process

adds a touch of rustic grip, and ripe fruit from the village of Bouzy adds weight to the ephemeral Champagne method. Rather than being fruity, this rosé is full of bold Pinot earthiness and rosy floral character. Aromas of mesquite smoke and flavors of morel mushroom and dashi mingle with the charred, salty, and sweet salmon. But what really drives this pairing home is the whisper of tannic texture, finely integrated bubbles, and bright mineral acidity that cuts into the salmon fat, lifts the oily koji/kombu combination off the palate, and resonates with the rich umami notes in the dish. If Chef’s goal is to give the impression of this salmon in its natural habitat, then Vesselle’s Oeil de Perdrix is the foam on the waves in the ocean breeze. **LT**

GLOBEtrotter

THESE MAGNIFICENT WINES BELONG TO THE PORTFOLIO OF SUPER-IMPORTER **KYSELA PÈRE ET FILS**

It's not often that we taste through a selection of wines we aren't already familiar with—especially when the importer has been in the game since the 1990s. But have we got a stellar portfolio to share.

Kysela Père et Fils, Ltd. (KPF)—a Winchester, Virginia-based importer/distributor with a national reach—is run by Fran Kysela, MS, and his son Joe. Originally focused on the classic regions of France, the family company has grown over the years to have a global outlook, but Fran, who got his start working for Kermit Lynch, continues to bring a Master Sommelier's perspective and sense of precision to the portfolio-building process, having gained that distinction in 1989. KPF is the number-one U.S. importer of AOC Picpoul de Pinet wines and also has its own, on-premise-centered label, Rubus.

Here are *The Tasting Panel's* reviews for just some of the wines that, in our mind, set KPF apart. —David Ransom

**Les Costieres de Pomerol 2020
Picpoul de Pinet H.B., Languedoc-
Roussillon, France (\$15)**

From 15- to 20-year-old vines grown on clay and limestone amid the garrigue of the Mediterranean coast, this stunning wine shows its varietal's best traits. Aromas of lime and pistachio mix with notes of rosemary and other indigenous herbs. A fine coconut creaminess sits astride nervy acidity while chamomile is lifted by a salty stream of pineapple and white grapefruit, zest and all. Edgy, exciting, and ultimately quite food-friendly. **93**



**OTU 2021 Sauvignon
Blanc, Marlborough,
New Zealand (\$19)**

The grapes for this thrilling white are grown at the edge of the Pacific Ocean, where the Otuwhero River runs through the lower valleys of Marlborough. Vibrant and clean, it begins with zingy aromas of rosemary, tarra-gon, and white grapefruit peel. Star fruit sings on the palate alongside searing acidity and a stony mouthfeel. Green apple and lime ice mingle on the salty finish. **92**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KYSELA PÈRE ET FILS

**Picpoul grows
on the vines in
Languedoc-Roussillon.**

Maïpe 2019 Reserve Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina (\$21) From its deep, tarry, mineral-driven nose to its drying plum-skin tannins, this red, aged 12 months in French oak, offers structure and texture. Wet stone appears on the palate alongside intense notes of grilled steak. Blackberry has a softening effect, followed by a savory finish of anise and soy sauce. **92**



Château de Ségriès 2019 Côtes du Rhône AOC, France (\$22) Grown on 30-year-old vines, this blend of 50% Grenache, 30% Syrah, 10% Cinsault, and 10% Carignan aged mainly in concrete tanks (90%) as well as oak barrels (10%). Scented with bright raspberry, the palate shows spiced and savory notes, leading with rhubarb and white pepper. Powdered rose-petal tannins are firm before a beefier middle. This wine is delightful, juicy, and bright. **91**



Alain Jaume Domaine Grand Veneur 2018 Les Champavins, Côtes du Rhône, France (\$25) From lauded terroir on the northern border of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, this blend of 70% Grenache, 20% Syrah, and 10% Mourvèdre is grown on red clay soil covered with galets. Notes of bittersweet chocolate, candied yam, garrigue, and white-peppered cherry denote a layered, ultra-confident red. Mineral depth and bright acidity accent sassafras and salted charcuterie. Well developed and thrilling. **93**



Rubus 2019 Old Vine Zinfandel Reserve, Lodi (\$24) This head-trained Zin proffers ripe, red fruit; toasty oak; and a plush texture. Juicy, elegant, and spicy. **91**



An old-vine source for Rubus Zinfandel in Lodi, CA.

Rebula NV Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Superiore D.O.C.G., Veneto, Italy (\$25) Made with 100% Glera, this extra-dry Prosecco opens up with lemon curd, saffron, and crème fraîche. Following mouth-filling notes of juicy peach, lime ice, and fig, a hint of white flowers is painted with a wisp of caramel. Clean, fresh, and vibrant. **91**



Thorn-Clarke winemaker Peter Kelly.



Thorn-Clarke 2019 Shotfire Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia (\$26) "Shotfire" refers to a pioneering ancestor of the producer's family who worked the Barossa goldfields in the late 1800s; he had the hazardous job of handling the explosives used to find those rich veins of gold. Sourced from two Barossa Valley vineyards, this wine aged for 14 months in American oak. Aromas of mulberry along with cured meats promise intrigue on first sip. White pepper, dried lavender, and Italian herbs season rich, ripe plum. Juicy and fragrant all the way, the palate offers dark chocolate mint, roses, and a deep dive into a graphite core. The finish of cinnamon, cocoa, and cedar is mesmerizing. **94**

Les Demoiselles 2020 Sancerre Blanc, Loire Valley, France (\$30) Cranes that take a biannual flight over the Loire Valley are referred to as *les demoiselles*, or beautiful ladies. As graceful as those birds, this 100% Sauvignon Blanc shows verve and fine movement, texture, and pulchritude. Stony on the nose and palate, with a whisper of pineapple behind a curtain of white tea flowers. Unique notes of capers underline distinct earthiness. **94**

Keermont 2018 Terrasse White Blend, Stellenbosch, South Africa (\$34) From terraced vineyards in coastal Stellenbosch on the Western Cape of South Africa, this blend of Chenin Blanc (61%), Chardonnay (23%), Sauvignon Blanc (13%), and Viognier (3%) boasts a generous entry of peach nectar, honeyed tangerine, ginger root, and white flowers. Sumptuous notes of butterscotch are reined in by fine acidity. **93**

Keermont 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Stellenbosch, South Africa (\$58) Grown in the Cottage Lane Vineyard on the crest of a ridge over 1,000 feet above sea level, where small vines produce low yields, this is the best Cabernet Sauvignon we have tasted from South Africa (blended with 7% Malbec and 6% Cab Franc). Concentrated, with tight-fisted tannins, the palate artfully expresses flavors of espresso, dried violets, and blackberry; it's meaty, with a lush middle and end. **95**



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Over the Moon

LA LUNA MEZCAL WON US OVER AT FIRST SIP

story by Meridith May / photos by Tameka Jacobs



Salvador Chavez is the founder of La Luna Mezcal.

One of the winningest mezcals at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition this year, where it received five double gold medals, La Luna Mezcal is a craft brand with a whopping 17 expressions and counting. Too many? Not according to founder Salvador Chavez: “This is the way we can introduce the diverse nature of these many agaves from our home state of Michoacán. We harvest from several regions, finding vast personality differences [between] the piñas in select terroirs” that are then roasted underground and distilled in wood stills.

I recently met up with Chavez at Porta Via restaurant in Calabasas, California, where he flew in for the day to taste me on his award-winning portfolio. While Oaxaca is considered the hub of mezcal production (and Michoacán is better known as the

avocado capital of the world), I found La Luna to be an outstanding product. Here are some of my notes.

La Luna Ensemble Cupreata + Tequilana + Manso (Sahuayo) Mezcal, Michoacán, Mexico (\$40) Made from a species of high-elevation agave that possesses long, wide leaves, this entry-level expression is bright and citrus-forward. Notes of pineapple and lime sing along with a choir of floral tones; subtle smoke chimes in with a hint of maple and a hint of leather. 92.24 proof. **93**

La Luna Tequilana Mezcal, Michoacán, Mexico (\$80) The use of Blue Weber agave is traditional for tequila, not mezcal, production. So it serves as a great bridge for tequila lovers who want to take steps toward other agave expressions, like this 97.02-proof spirit. Aromas of sandalwood and red cherry lead to a darker flavor of Luxardo cherry that is

enveloped by sweet earthiness. Clean, with cocoa and toasted marshmallow replacing the usual smokiness. **96**

La Luna Manso Sahuayo Mezcal, Michoacán, Mexico (\$100) Manso agave is cultivated in the Michoacán area of Sahuayo, where it's known as Chato. The nose speaks of earth and clay along with woody agave and vanilla-tinged sweetness. Flavors of white-peppered chocolate are graceful on the 97.02-proof spirit's satin entry. Cigar leaf and forest floor replace the heavy smoke notes of most mezcals. Tangerine on the finish is distinctive and lovely. **95**

La Luna Bruto Mezcal, Michoacán, Mexico (\$140) The wild Bruto magueys are well named, weighing an average of 1,000 pounds and reaching heights of up to 14 feet. According to Chavez, the low-yielding species has the least amount of sugar in its piñas. This 97.02-proof mezcal's herbaceous character shows in aromas of oregano and anise, capturing a more masculine side of the spirit than do the dramatically refined personas of most of La Luna's other expressions. Intense notes of tropical sugarcane on a hot day meet smoke tamed by maple-and-vanilla musk. Flavors of Red Delicious apple are a nice surprise, joined by the earthy tones of root vegetables. **95**

La Luna Chino Mezcal, Michoacán, Mexico (\$100) Mature Cupreata agave is not easy to find in the wild, Chavez explains; the plants are "literally hunted in uncultivated land among trees, shrubs, and flowers." Passion fruit and pineapple surface among notes of cigar leaf and resin, enhanced by vivid minerality. 97.06 proof. **94**




Palatable Performances

NAMED FOR STREET ARTISTS WHO SHARE THEIR TALENT WITH SONG OR DANCE, **THE BUSKER** ENTERTAINED OUR PALATES WITH ITS TRIO OF IRISH WHISKEYS

From Royal Oak Distillery—a 42-acre 18th-century estate south of Dublin—The Busker is made from locally grown barley. Its Single Collection offers an undoubtedly modern take on the classic Irish styles of single grain, single malt, and single pot still whiskey.

The Busker Single Grain Irish Whiskey, Ireland Matured and finished in bourbon and Marsala casks, this 88.6-proof expression is perfumed with subtle aromas of vanilla musk and pecan. The palate is a satin-laced garment of burnt orange peel, caramel, and Brazil nut; in the creamy yet refined mouthfeel, minerality meets tangerine, oregano, cumin, and black olive. **94**

The Busker Single Malt Irish Whiskey, Ireland Distilled in large copper stills, then matured in bourbon and Sherry casks, this 88.6-proof single malt offers scents of marzipan, cocoa, tangerine, and cedar. Intense white pepper maintains an edge at the start while priming the palate for a smoother ride. Golden apple, yellow raisin, cocoa powder, and pine are textural and flavorful, carrying this punch of a whiskey to an energetic citrus zing on the finish. **94**

The Busker Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey, Ireland Ex-bourbon and -Sherry casks mature and finish this rich and expressive 88.6-proof spirit. A wedge of lime melds with caramel fudge on the nose. Mocha and cappuccino notes emerge out front on the palate, accompanied by apricot, jasmine, and gardenia. Spiced almond butter, clove, and bright salinity anchor it all on the superb finish. **95** 

DISARONNO INTERNATIONAL



Ryan Hill, partner and regional general manager of Porta Via in Calabasas, CA, talks mezcal with Salvador Chavez.

Sipping in a Virtual World

Those of us who thrive on the camaraderie of in-person events continue the drawn-out wait for safe gatherings. Just as we approached a return to normal, a new surge of cases pulled us back into the virtual world. Online platforms remain the go-to for connecting and sharing ideas about the brands we serve.

When your core job responsibilities center on engaging consumers face-to-face and generating excitement about brands through tastings, it's no wonder that uncertainty and fear are frequent feelings in the midst of a pandemic. (Let's be realistic: It's hard to compete against free samples.) But since virtual events are what we've got, let's make them effective.

Convincing an audience to join you online is nowhere near as easy as we wish it to be. How many people truly want to sit in front of a computer without samples of everything they're learning about? The secret is two-fold: One, tell a compelling story, and two, make recordings that can live online long after your event is over.

As Florida's oldest and largest family-owned alcohol retailer, ABC Fine Wine & Spirits has maintained an innovative spirit, which is why we quickly joined this trend. At first, our events were well attended, but after several weeks, they got a little stale. That was when we changed our outlook. Virtual events should be crafted to provide content you could not otherwise showcase and post. We've learned that while we cannot hand viewers a drink, we can provide valuable content in the form of Wine 101 classes and how-to segments on, for example, pairing wine with Christmas dinner or mixing bar-worthy cocktails at home. Have a great view in your vineyard, distillery, or tasting room? Make it a tour. Although not everyone will watch such programming live, we've noticed the view count rising in the days and weeks that follow an event.



Indira Vogel is the brand strategist for ABC Fine Wine & Spirits.

The more we test out thematic virtual events, the more our viewership grows. I have personally sat through more than 150 virtual tastings, some as a guest and some as a moderator. I have noticed that the more we focus on a theme or share stories about the people behind the brand, the more engaged the audience becomes.

If there's one thing I've learned from all this, it's that virtual events

are not merely substitutes for their real-life counterparts. Rather, they offer a new channel of communication to benefit from in the long run. Make them the focus of your brand's media strategy by providing a platform for your amazing storytellers to shine in videos that will stay online for as long as you want. It takes patience, but thanks to them, your audience will grow. **LV**



The Man Behind the Brand



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