


THE BEVERAGE JOURNAL

FEBRUARY 2017



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7 SPIRIT TRENDS TO WATCH

CHAMPAGNE 101: BUBBLY BASICS

WHEN BLENDS GO 'DARK'

MAKING THE LIST

HOW CREATIVE SHOULD RESTAURANTS BE WITH THEIR FORMATS?

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FEATURES

12 Local Chatter

A timely talk with Wine Director Elisa Wybraniec of the Coast Guard House Restaurant.

22 Retail Review

A serial entrepreneur finds happiness in liquor retail.

28 Lists on the Edge

Creativity doesn't end with wine selections. Restaurants are turning to unique list presentation, too.

34 Champagne 101

Back to basics with the world's most celebrated bubbly.

38 Spirit Watch

Seven trendy products and categories to stay on top of this year.



FEBRUARY 2017

46 Top Regions for Wine Values
Location can mean everything for wines that over-deliver.

50 Casamigos Shifts Gears
How the newly-created import company is driving its fast-growing tequila.

52 Management Focus
New Nielsen CGA research spotlights trends in both on- and off-premise channels.

56 Applying Order to Chaos
The wild Red Blend category is creating a juicy challenge for retailers.



DEPARTMENTS

5 Market Point	14 Around Town	24 The Find
6 News Front	20 Beer Column	25 Association News
10 On Premise Advice	23 New Products & Promotions	26 Serving Up

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LIQUOR BRAND INDEX
WINE BRAND INDEX

BEER BRAND INDEX
SHOPPING NETWORK

Page 1a
THE INDEX

The largest compilation of beverage alcohol price and brand information.

HOW BEER, WINE
AND SPIRITS
GET TO THE
MARKETPLACE



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MARKETPOINT

February is a great month to brew up sales. Romance is in the air and that means big business. We've showcased the latest trends, newest products and hottest brands.

- Creativity doesn't end with wine selections; **lists** are grabbing attention through creative and innovative presentations, too.
- **Champagne** gets the "Back to Basics" treatment with all the necessary educational ingredients to boost sales.
- Trend spotting for the year ahead continues with seven **spirits** to watch. Are you stocked and ready?



- Deliver more, while keeping margins in check, with **value** wine regions. Take a world tour.
- Big **data** offers big insight. Examine the 2016 interplay of on- and off-premise trends.
- So many **red blends**, so little space. A look at how retailers may need to start segmenting the category for the sake of sanity.
- "On-Premise Advice" also looks at the red blend **tasty** trend, too, with a Valentine's Day twist.
- Cultivators of **hops** offer beer brewers (and beer enthusiasts) variety and style. Dig a little deeper into this hot cash crop.
- Plus **local** news, local insight from the RI Hospitality Association and local event recaps.
- And always, the **largest** local product and price resources in print and online. Access it all; anywhere, anytime, any device.



ON THE COVER

Photograph by
Angelique Rademakers / Snapwire.

STONINGTON VINEYARDS FOUNDER LEAVES BEHIND LOCAL WINE LEGACY

Cornelius H. “Nick” Smith, Jr., co-founder of Stonington Vineyards, died after a long illness on November 2, 2016, at the age of 79. Along with his wife Happy, Smith purchased what



is now Stonington Vineyards in the mid-1980s. Together they transformed the property into a tourist destination, and produced many award-winning wines along the way. Smith was passionate about the vineyard and worked actively throughout the state of Connecticut to promote farm wineries, serving as a member of the Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association. He was “a devoted husband, father, brother and son, maintaining throughout his life strong connections to his extended family.” A service of remembrance will be held in Stonington on May 6, 2017 to commemorate what would have been his 80th birthday. A full profile of the vineyard was run shortly before his death in the November 2016 issue of *The Connecticut Beverage Journal* and can be found online.

BEAM SUNTORY SUPPORTS MILITARY FAMILIES VIA ANNUAL DONATION

Beam Suntory donated \$100,000 to Operation



Homefront, a national nonprofit that provides emergency financial and other assistance to military families and wounded military personnel. Beam Suntory’s donation specifically supported the program Holiday Meals for Military, through which the company provided 8,500 holiday meals to families on 28 U.S. military bases. In addition to their donation, employees volunteered to pack meals in Illinois and Tennessee for military families. Beam Suntory has donated more than \$2.5 million to Operation Homefront since 2006.

MONDAVI HONORED POSTHUMOUSLY BY AMERICAN WINE SOCIETY

Peter Mondavi, Sr., patriarch of Charles Krug Winery, posthumously earned an Award of Merit during the American Wine Society’s annual conference in December. The decision to recognize Mondavi was



made in late 2015, prior to his death in February 2016 at age 101. The American Wine Society bestows the Award of Merit to professionals in the wine industry to recognize a “substantial and meritorious contribution in viticulture, enology, education and journalism.” Peter Mondavi, Jr. accepted the award on his father’s behalf. “Dad would have been thrilled and humbled by the AWS’s recognition of his lifelong accomplishments through this Award of Merit,” said Mondavi.

U.S. BARS, NIGHTCLUBS CAN EXPECT STEADY EARNINGS AHEAD

The U.S. Bars and Nightclubs industry is expected to earn a revenue of \$25.4 billion in 2016, according to IBISWorld, an industry and market research firm. Industry revenue is expected



to increase 2.9 percent in 2016, as per capita alcohol consumption and disposable income increase, allowing people to spend more at bars and nightclubs. IBISWorld Industry Analyst Andrew Alvarez said, “Bar and nightclub operators have attempted to respond to volatile growth and increased competition by diversifying into a range of new concepts such as wine bars, cocktail lounges and brewpubs.” Over the next five years, the industry still faces competition from in-home alcohol consumption, however the financial performance is forecasted to remain steady.

KAH TEQUILA JOINS STOLI GROUP USA PORTFOLIO

Stoli Group USA will now hold the import, distribution, sales and marketing rights for KAH Tequila brand.



KAH, which translates to “life” in ancient Mayan, is produced by Fabrica de Tequilas Finos in Tequila, Jalisco, Mexico. The spirit was created to pay reverence to and honor Mexico and its people. The brand makes KAH Blanco, Reposado, Anejo and Extra Anejo. Stoli Groups’ acquisition of KAH Tequila comes at a time of growth. Tequila posted a 5.3-percent growth to surpass the 15m nine-liter case mark in 2015 and “shows no sign of slowing down,” according to IWSR’s “U.S. Beverage Alcohol Review 2016.”



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2-3-4 April 2017, dates that the world of wine professionals cannot avoid noting down: Grandi Langhe DOCG is back!!!! The biennial event organised by Consorzio di Tutela Barolo Barbaresco Alba Langhe e Dogliani open exclusively to national and international professionals. Three days of tasting taking place in the different municipalities of origin, to allow learning about the wines directly from the producers and make new business agreements. A real "journey" with itinerant tastings on the territory, in some of the most evocative castles and historic mansions to the discovery of the landscape of the Langhe, a unique territory where there has always been a visceral bond between man and grapevines.

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MICHAEL DAVID WINERY NAMES SCHMITZ NATIONAL SALES MANAGER

Tom Schmitz has been promoted to National Sales Manager at Michael David Winery. Schmitz has been with the winery for nearly 10 years and previously served as Midwest Divisional Manager. Schmitz has been in the wine and spirits industry for over 20 years and before joining Michael David Winery in 2008, he held sales positions at Peerless Importers in Brooklyn and Union Beverage Company in Chicago. Michael David Winery is owned by brothers Michael and David Phillips in Lodi, California.



NEW HOLLAND, PABST BREWING ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP

New Holland Brewing Company and Pabst Brewing Company announced a long-term partnership agreement, effective the first quarter of 2017. The craft beer partnership will focus on national distribution and sales of New Holland’s full portfolio of craft beer. “This partnership allows us to distribute our beer brands to more consumers throughout the country by leveraging PBC’s robust sales and distribution platform,” said Brett VanderKamp, Founder and President, New Holland Brewing Company. Pabst Brewing Company’s sales force will sell all of New Holland’s beers to wholesalers nationwide and they will become part of Pabst’s high-end portfolio.



HENNESSY COGNAC HONORS ACTOR AT ANNUAL AWARDS

Hennessy Cognac celebrated its annual V.S.O.P Privilege Awards where they honored Hill Harper, an award-winning actor, best-selling author and philanthropist, for his dedication to empowering the next generation of multicultural professionals. The Privilege Award is given to individuals who achieve



“unparalleled levels of accomplishment and use their success to give back to others in their community.” Harper has been recognized four times on the *New York Times* best-sellers’ list, has been awarded seven NAACP Image Awards and is the founder of Manifest Your Destiny Foundation, a non-profit organization that focuses on providing mentorship through job programs, conferences and community projects. He also has leading roles on “CSI: NY Covert Affairs” and Showtime’s “Homeland.”

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES ACQUIRES MASON CELLARS

Trinchero Family Estates acquired Mason Cellars, the owners of Pomelo and Three Pears wine brands. This acquisition will



allow Trinchero to grow their portfolio of super-premium and ultra-premium wines. Mason Cellars was founded in 1993 by Randy and Megan Mason. Pomelo offers a sauvignon blanc and a rosé, both of which have earned accolades on Top 100 Wines and Top 100 Values from *Wine Spectator*. Mason Cellars wines include sauvignon blanc and cabernet sauvignon sourced from Napa appellations.

LE CREMA PROMOTES MCALLISTER AS HEAD WINEMAKER

Le Crema promoted Craig McAllister to Head Winemaker, who most recently served as Associate Winemaker. He first joined La Crema as the harvest enologist in 2007 and has been a steward of La Crema’s Monterey program, helping elevate the winery’s Sonoma Coast portfolio. He also helped developed La Crema’s single vineyard collection of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines. In his new role, he oversees all winemaking operations and builds the company’s portfolio ranging from the coastal regions as far north as Willamette Valley and as south as Arroyo Seco, California. McAllister plans to “give more focus” on raising the winery’s Monterey series.



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The Month of *Love* and *Red Blends*

BY LEN PANAGGIO



As I have written about in past issues, February – and specifically Valentine’s Day – signals the end of winter and the beginning of summer to me! Now, I know full well that I’m skipping a season here, but I mean this in terms of sales.

Valentine’s Day is on a Tuesday this year and that will give a boost to restaurants, which will be able to capture both the weekend-before crowd, as well as the day-of celebrators. Hot on the holiday of love’s heels is President’s Day Weekend, usually followed by winter break, so there are lots of people out and about.

To me, it is a pivotal month; thoughts of gearing up for the upcoming busy season are real. Valentine’s Day offers a chance to evaluate your beverage program and perhaps introduce a beer, wine or mixed drink you never thought of having, but did think of trying. I will stick with wine as it is near and dear to my heart. To break away from thoughts of rosé, whether still or sparkling, and introduce some wines that would make for a special night is a great idea. After all, it is still winter and we tend to eat heavier foods. So, why not have a blended red wine that you can pair with your prix fixe menu or suggest on your menu page. A couple of things work well with these wines.

First, the wines I have in mind tend to cost a bit more, so enhancing the sale at the table is real. Our guests will often open up their wallets to make this night a memorable one, so focus on wines that are somewhat reasonable, but higher than your average bottle sale.

Now, when thinking of a blended or proprietary red, Opus One comes to mind immediately, but it is very expensive and allocated, making it difficult to get. There are many proprietary wines that

are far more affordable and available and can achieve the same results and, by the way, are quite good. And they pair well with beef or lamb – two seasonal and popular holiday dish items.

Two areas of the world where you should look for great red wine blends are Bordeaux and Napa Valley, although there are many other areas in the world where these wines are made well. Napa and Bordeaux, for the most part, offer the best.

I have found that the 2010 Bordeaux wines are excellent and many restaurants have them on their lists for under \$100, making for an enjoyable special-occasion evening. One thing about Bordeaux – there is not much brand recognition, so your guests will have to rely on you for having the right wines.

Napa has been on a roll this decade, producing great wines year in and year out. The large wineries in Napa make proprietary blends and some of the more recognizable ones are Beringer Quantum, BV Tapestry, Robert Mondavi Momentum and Flora Springs Trilogy. As compared to the boutique wineries, these labels are not over-the-top in price, but are very well made wines from great producers.

As the economy continues to improve, our guests are becoming more and more willing to try different products and now is a good time to upsell to this style of wines. It is important that you stay on top of beverage trends, red blends are a sought-after category, but these proprietary blends and Bordeaux wines are perfect for a special occasion, not everyday dining.

After all, our guests are looking to you to do the right thing by them. Show them that you are on top of the latest beverage trends! After all, spring is in the air!



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ABOUT LEN PANAGGIO

BEVERAGE CONSULTANT

Len Panaggio’s career in food and wine spans more than three decades as an owner and as a beverage director at some of the top restaurants in Rhode Island. Currently a hospitality consultant, Len is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island and has attended the Culinary Institute of America Master Sommelier program and the Sterling School of Service and Hospitality.



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A Mid-Career Switch Proves Fruitful for Coast Guard House Sommelier

BY LAUREN DALEY

In listening to her talk wine, it's hard to believe that just a few years ago, Court of Master Sommeliers Certified Sommelier Elisa Wybraniec was a mortgage account executive.

After Hurricane Sandy destroyed much of Narragansett's coastline, including landmark destination venue Coast Guard House, in 2012, Wybraniec left her 19-year career in banking to focus on rebuilding the business with her husband, Coast Guard House co-owner, Bob Leonard.

Now the Wine Director at the Coast Guard House Restaurant — and a *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence winner — Wybraniec's sophisticated palette is evidenced by the Coast Guard House's extensive and impeccably curated wine list of some 175 bottles — from a 2014 Txacoli white from Luzia de Ripa in Arabako Txakolina, Spain to a 2013 Pinotage red from Bosman Family Vineyards in Wellington, South Africa and a spectrum of terroirs and appellations in between.

The New Jersey native and 1990 University of Rhode Island alum is also now adjunct faculty at Johnson & Wales University.

THE BEVERAGE JOURNAL: *First off, why did you want to leave banking for wine?*

WYBRANIEC: I was in banking for 19 years, but I'd been interested in wine for a long time ... Then [Hurricane] Sandy gave me the opportunity. My bank said I could take three months off to



Wybraniec's carefully curated selections have earned a *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence.

[help rebuild the business] but ... I decided I wasn't going to go back. I called them and said, "Listen, I need to do something else for me, personally" ... and they were so great; they were terrific and understanding.

TBJ: *And what was your wine education like?*



Wine Director and Certified Sommelier Elisa Wybraniec behind the bar at the Coast Guard House in Narragansett.

WYBRANIEC: At Johnson & Wales, I obtained levels 1, 2 and 3 for WSET [Wine and Spirit Education Trust]. I also obtained Certified Specialist of Wine through the Society of Wine Educators at Johnson & Wales. For my WSET Level 4 Diploma, I did that in Boston with Adam Chase [director of] The Grape Experience. I was certified by the Court of Master Sommeliers in 2016. Overall, it's a 3- to 5-year commitment, depending on how frequently you want to take the exams...

Ed Korry at Johnson & Wales is brilliant. To be able to have his knowledge and expertise available here in [the] state of Rhode Island is a luxury ... Adam in Boston was a fantastic educator ... Having great educators was part of what made me more and more intrigued by the subject. There's so much to know about wine, you'll never know it all. It's a continuing education as well as camaraderie, especially as I proceeded to the highest level, the diploma level, where nobody else knows how difficult and grueling it is, so you develop friendships with these people in your class...

TBJ: *What do you love most about wine?*

WYBRANIEC: It's something that embodies happy times with family and friends; it's a complement to your whole dining experience. In college, we did a lot of cooking at our house dorm in URI, and we'd cook and have friends over, and it was part of the social culture. I also love the whole process of cultivating a grape vine into a Pinot Noir.

TBJ: *What wines do you like right now?*

WYBRANIEC: It changes ... My big one is sparkling, and my biggest is Champagne, which I know is cliché, but so much goes



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NEWPORT VINEYARDS HOSTS COCKTAIL AND TRUFFLE MAKING CLASS

Newport Vineyards presented “Making Spirits Bright” on December 8, 2016. The seminar was headed by Willa Van Nostrand of Little Bitte Artisanal Cocktails and Newport Vineyards’ Executive Chef Andy Teixeira. The two led guests through a cocktail and truffle making workshop. Nostrand instructed guests on “The Olympia Spritz” cocktail, which featured Bully Boy Vodka, Jules Theuriet Crème de Cassis, Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao, lemon juice and Newport Vineyards Brut 2014. Executive Chef Teixeira taught guests how to make two kinds of truffles: a Smoky Bacon Truffle and a Chili Spiked Truffle.

1. Guests were welcomed into the event with a glass of Newport Vineyards Sparkling Brut.
2. The lineup of products to make “The Olympia Spritz.” The recipe from Nostrand is as follows: 1.5 oz. Bully Boy Vodka; .5 oz. Jules Theuriet Crème de Cassis; .5 oz. Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao; .25 oz. fresh pressed lemon juice; 2 oz. of Newport Vineyards Brut 2014. Shake vodka, cassis, dry curaçao and fresh lemon juice over ice; pour over fresh ice into a wine glass. Top with Brut. Garnish with fresh herbs or edible blossoms.
3. Willa Van Nostrand of Little Bitte Artisanal Cocktails teaching guests about cocktails.
4. “The Olympia Spritz” cocktail.
5. Newport Vineyards’ Executive Chef Andy Teixeira.
6. A sampling of truffles.



APÉRITIFS, DIGESTIFS AND BITTERS TO BE FEATURED AT NEW TWIN RIVER EVENT

Twin River Casino will host “A Bitter Affair: A Love Story from Beginning to End,” on February 6-7, featuring seminars, demonstrations and tastings of apéritif and digestif bitters. The event begins with an opening night dinner at Fred & Steve’s Steakhouse presented by Campari America’s Nick Korn, Italian Spirits Specialist, on February 6. The six-course meal will be paired with hand-crafted cocktails made from featured Italian spirits. For tickets, \$65 and up, call 401-475-8438 or contact dwing@twinriver.com. On February 7, guests will have the opportunity to learn about and experience apéritifs, digestifs and bitters, sourced both locally and from around the world, during the Grand Tasting event from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Tickets are \$25. Must be 21 years of age or over to attend the events. For more information, visit twinriver.com/entertainment.



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BEST BEVERAGE WELCOMES NEW PRODUCTS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Best Beverage of Pawtucket added Le Val wines from France's Vintage Epicure/Vinadeis to its portfolio. Best Beverage now carries five single-varietal wines from Le Val, including Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot Noir. Best Beverage also launched Chateau Martin 2012 and Prieure Des Couleys 2012 from Saint-Estephe, and Chateau Ballue Mondon 2014 and Roche Darjac 2012 from Bordeaux.

German craft beers were added to its portfolio offerings in December with the brews of Reinheits Boten, comprised of five independent German craft breweries, all of which adhere to Reinheitsgebot, known as the "German Beer Purity Laws of 1516," in the brewing processes. The launch kicked off with ZollerHof and Riedenburger brews with the remaining three to follow in the coming months. "We found that these beers are incredibly well made, have a great packaging and a really cool story behind them. Our team is very excited and we're so happy that the response has been so strong so quickly," said Sales Manager Bryan Hoffman.

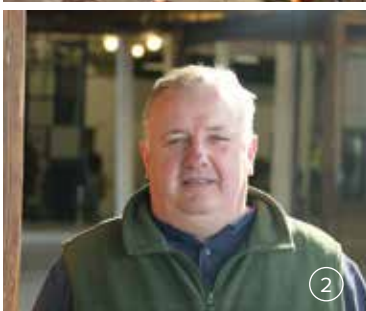
1. Le Val single varital wines include: Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Carbernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot Noir.
2. Saint-Estephe Chateau Martin 2012.
3. Saint-Estephe Prieure Des Couleys 2012.
4. Chateau Ballue Mondon 2014 from Bordeaux.
5. Roche Darjac 2012 from Bordeaux.
6. Riedenburger Pilsner, Riedenburger Emmer, ZollerHof Old Fred, ZollerHof Zoller and ZollerHof Doppelbock.
7. Riedenburger Organic Pilsner Unfiltered is a smooth-bitter and mild top Pilsner, brewed from fine aromatic noble hops. ABV 4.7%.
8. Riedenburger Organic Historic Emmer Beer Unfiltered is brewed out of historic ancient grain, 50% emmer malt, einkorn, spelt, barley and wheat malt. The beer is dark amber in color, ABV 5.5%.
9. From ZollerHof Brewery, a Heller (Pale) Doppelbock is matured over 50 weeks, featuring malty flavors with a multitude of hop bitterness created from cold hopping. ABV 8.5%.
10. ZollerHof Unfiltered Lager is brewed from local ingredients and has a long fermentation time. It has a moderately bitter flavor with a smooth malty sweetness and balance. ABV 5.5%.
11. Old Fred is in "loving memory of Mr. Frederick Miller," founder of Miller Brewing Company in Germany. The Old World style beer features "New World" flavor using American Cascade Hops. ABV 5.5%.



THE EDDY HOSTS CAMPARI ITALIAN SPIRITS SEMINAR

The Eddy and Campari America welcomed industry professionals to an Italian Spirits Seminar on December 11, 2016. United States Bartenders' Guild Rhode Island (USBG RI) chapter members and trade guests tasted through Aperol, Campari, Cynar, Cinzano 1757, Averna, Braulio, Cynar 70 and Frangelico, while discussing tasting notes, cocktail ideas and Italian culture surrounding the liqueurs. The Campari America portfolio is distributed in Rhode Island via Horizon Beverage Company.

1. The tasting mat greeting guests upon their arrival.
2. The portfolio lineup featuring Aperol, Campari, Cinzano 1757, Averna, Braulio, Cynar, Cynar 70 and Frangelico.
3. Guests during the Campari portfolio seminar.



ISLE BREWERS GUILD ANNOUNCES LEADERSHIP TEAM

Isle Brewers Guild, a craft beer cooperative in Pawtucket, hired Jack Streich, Jodi Andrews, Jael Cordero and Ken Hermann to lead operations at the company's 100-barrel brewery opening in early 2017. The team will work with Isle Brewers Guild's brewing partners to "collaborate on the development and delivery of their craft portfolio," according to its news release. Isle Brewers Guild includes Narragansett Brewing Company and Newburyport Brewing Company and expects to announce more partners in the coming months. Streich takes the role of Partner and Vice President of Brewing Operations. He has held various roles in the brewing industry for 16 years and will oversee all brewing and packaging operations. Andrews is named Cellar and Quality Control Supervisor. She has more than 20 years in brewing and will manage the cellar and aging operations, as well as lead quality control. Cordero, the Packaging Supervisor, joins the group from Stony Creek Brewery in Connecticut. Cordero will head the brewery's canning and keg lines. Hermann serves as Brewing Supervisor and previously served as senior brewer at Harpoon Brewery in Boston. He will be responsible for recipe formulation and collaboration with brewing partners. "Jack, Ken, Jodi and Jael each bring unique skill sets to our business, and their endless dedication to their craft will help us serve our brewing partners - and, in turn, beer lovers in Rhode Island and beyond - at the highest level," said Devin Kelly, Co-founder and Managing Partner, Isle Brewers Guild.

1. Isle Brewers Guild is located on 461 Main Street in Pawtucket and offers a 100-barrel brewhouse, tasting room, indoor and outdoor event spaces, along with classroom space and corporate offices. It's expected to open early 2017.
2. Jack Streich, Partner and Vice President of Brewing Operations.
3. Jodi Andrews, Cellar and Quality Control Supervisor.
4. Jael Cordero, Packaging Supervisor.
5. Ken Hermann, Brewing Supervisor.



J.C. IMPORTS HOSTS CALYPTRA WINES TASTING

J.C. Imports welcomed wine enthusiasts to its South Kingstown warehouse on December 21, 2016, where Calyptra Vineyards and Winery of Chile were showcased. The event was hosted for members of Knights of the Wine Table of Rhode Island, a private organization dedicated to learning about wine. It began with a casual tasting led by Milton Monzon, Commercial Director of J.C. Imports, consisting of Vivendo 2014 Reserve Sauvignon Blanc, 2014 Reserve Chardonnay, 2015 Reserve Rosé, 2010 Reserve Assemblage (88% Syrah and 12% Cabernet Sauvignon) and 2012 Reserve Pinot Noir.

After the introductory tasting, guests were guided upstairs to a more formal sitting area and presented with Calyptra's ultra-premium wine selections. Owner Carlos Figueroa of J.C. Imports led the tasting of Calyptra 2013 Gran Reserva Pinot Noir, 2011 Gran Reserva Assemblage, Calyptra 2009 Zahir Cabernet Sauvignon, Calyptra 2010 Limited Edition Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blend. The wine selections were paired with empanadas, cured meats and cheeses, and Latin American music from guest performers. During the wine tasting, a slideshow displayed photos from J.C. Imports team's trip to South American wineries in April 2016.

1. Milton Monzon, Commercial Director, J.C. Imports, holding Vivendo 2014 Reserve Sauvignon Blanc.
2. Carlos Figueroa, Owner of J.C. Imports, led members from the Knights of the Wine Table of Rhode Island through an educational wine tasting.
3. The Vivendo Calyptra lineup: 2014 Reserve Sauvignon Blanc, 2014 Reserve Chardonnay, 2015 Reserve Rosé, 2010 Reserve Assemblage (88% Syrah and 12% Cabernet Sauvignon) and 2012 Reserve Pinot Noir. The Vivendo wines greeted guests upon entrance.
4. The ultra-premium selections from Calyptra: Calyptra 2013 Gran Reserva Pinot Noir, 2011 Gran Reserva Assemblage, Calyptra Zahir Cabernet Sauvignon 2009, Calyptra 2010 Limited Edition Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blend.
5. Milton Monzon, Commercial Director of J.C. Imports, pouring wine for David Forte and Richard Lupino of Knights of the Wine Table of Rhode Island.
6. A pour of wine.

READ NEWS, BE NEWS

BEVcommunity is The Beverage Journal's online community for the local beverage industry. thebeveragejournal.com offers a connection to the local and national beverage industries (and the people who love you). BEVcommunity is where you are beverage industry news.





TWIN RIVER'S DECEMBER CHARITABLE EFFORTS HELP COMMUNITY

Twin River Casino, in partnership with the Northern RI Chamber of Commerce, donated \$6,000 to the Rhode Island Community Food Bank through the Chamber's Annual Holiday Open House and Table Top Expo on December 1, 2016, hosted at Twin River Casino. More than 350 people attended and a portion of the event's registration fees went to benefit the Community Food Bank. Twin River presented the RI Community Food Bank with a check for \$2,500 and the Chamber donated \$3,500, totaling \$6,000. "We want to thank our Board of Directors, Twin River Casino, and the many Chamber members who attended our signature event in order to make this donation possible," said John C. Gregory, President and CEO, Northern RI Chamber of Commerce.

On December 14, Twin River Casino held its fourth annual Holiday Charity Blackjack Tournament. Thirty-six players participated on behalf of their selected Rhode Island charities. The event donated \$60,000 to local charities and all represented charities received a minimum donation of \$1,000.

Twin River Casino also donated \$10,000 to the Lincoln Senior Center on December 21. "We are pleased to support one of the most instrumental facilities in the Blackstone Valley, which provides a wonderful experience for seniors in our community," said Kim Ward, Director of Public and Community Affairs, Twin River Casino. The donation will help fund the \$35,000 meal program. Over the past five years, Twin River has donated \$50,000 to the Lincoln Senior Center.

1. Andrew Schiff, CEO, RI Community Food Bank and John Gregory, President and CEO, Northern RI Chamber of Commerce.
2. John Taylor, Jr., Chairman, Twin River Worldwide Holdings, Inc.; Andrew Schiff, CEO, RI Community Food Bank; Craig Sculos, Vice President and General Manager, Twin River Casino.
3. The winners in the Holiday Charity Blackjack Tournament included Newport Mayor Harry Winthrop, who raised \$2,500 for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center; Paul DeRoche, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce and Twin River Advisory Committee, raised \$1,500 for Crossroads Rhode Island; John Gregory, President of Northern RI Chamber of Commerce and Twin River Advisory Committee, raised \$3,500 for Special Olympics of Rhode Island; House Representative Cale Keable raised \$10,000 for WellOne Primary Medical and Dental Care; John Taylor Jr., Chairman, Twin River Worldwide Holdings; Michaela Johnson, The Rhode Show Host/WPRI, raised \$7,500 for Potter League; and Brian Hunter, Hunter Insurance and Twin River Advisory Committee, raised \$5,000 for the Town of Lincoln Holiday Food Basket Program.
4. Kim Ward, Director of Public and Community Affairs, Twin River Casino; T. Joseph Almond, Lincoln Town Administrator; Lois Durkin, Director, Lincoln Senior Center.



SONS OF LIBERTY HOSTS WHISKEY WONDERLAND, CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS

Sons of Liberty Spirits Company of South Kingstown hosted its fourth Annual Whiskey Wonderland Holiday Bazaar on December 9, 2016. Guests enjoyed cocktails made with the company’s line of spirits and locally-produced beer in the Sons of Liberty tasting room, while shopping from local artisan vendors. Food was provided by Matunuck Oyster Bar and Open Season. At the end of the night, the Sons of Liberty team lit the distillery’s barrel Christmas tree to ring in the holiday season. The local jazz band Spumante provided musical entertainment for the evening.

Sons of Liberty Spirits Co. also celebrated five years in business on December 30, 2016. Since its inception, the distillery has received numerous awards from the American Craft Spirits Association, New York World Wine and Spirits Competition, World Whiskies Awards, the San Francisco World Spirits Competition, among others. Sons of Liberty Spirits produces a variety of American Single Malts, True Born Gin, and seasonal releases including Apple, Grapefruit Hop, Pumpkin Spice, Single Barrel Bourbon and Rye Whiskey available in the state via Rhode Island Distributing Company. The company is expanding into craft beer offerings in the year ahead.

1. Guests during the Annual Whiskey Wonderland Holiday Bazaar.
2. The Sons of Liberty barrel Christmas tree on display in its distillery for the holiday season.
3. Sons of Liberty Spirits Co. celebrated five years in business on December 30, 2016.



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HOPS GONE WILD

BY JACK KENNY

Hops are everyone's favorite part of craft beer today. Few say anything about the malty character of beer. The more piney, citrusy, floral and fruity a beer is, the more beer lovers crave it. A decade ago – heck, five years ago – this level and style of hop character was not present at retail, at least not in our neighborhood. It's all different now.

Hop growers and researchers have been busy breeding new cultivars (selected and cultivated by humans, as opposed to natural varieties), several of which have become wildly popular. Some brewers now include the hop in the name of the beer. People stand in line for hours at local breweries to buy a case of extra hoppy small-batch beer for \$75. They bother retailers incessantly about the availability of this brand or that. They want their hops, and they want them now.

The production of hops in the U.S. alone has skyrocketed in recent years, the bulk of it in Oregon, Washington and Idaho. In 2016, more than 87.1 million pounds of hops were harvested, an 8.3 million pound increase (9.5%) over last year. It was the fourth straight year that overall production went up, and the sixth consecutive year that hop acreage increased.

Experts know more about hops than ever before. And yet “we are still far from claiming to know everything about hops.” That's from the introduction to “The Role of Hops in Brewing,” a scholarly paper by Christina Schönberger and Tim Kostecky published in the *Journal of the Institute of Brewing* in 2012. (Unless you aced organic chemistry, pass this one by; far too dense.)

Scientists have been studying hop oil aroma compounds for more than 200 years. By 1966 a pair of researchers identified 100 of those components. In 2000, two others found 23 potent aroma compounds in just one hop variety. If that's not fascinating enough, consider that one hop type can have different aroma characteristics depending on the brewer and how he uses the plant to make beer.

For example, some beers that I enjoy are made using Citra and Columbus hops. Many more beers using the same two hops I find to possess unpleasant aromas. It's much more than just the amount or proportion of the hops used.

Hops fall into two basic categories in the brewhouse: bitterness and aroma. Bittering hops, which have been in use for centuries,

are introduced to the barley mash at the beginning of the boil. The estery notes and flavors disappear during a long cook, but the remaining bitterness pleasantly offsets the cloying sweetness of unhopped beer.

The second category is aromatic hops. These represent a fairly recent aspect of brewing, but now are almost required. Aromatics are added to the boil toward the end of the boil. The prized oils work their magic in the beer – again, with results varying according to time, volume, temperature and zodiac sign. This is called late hopping. (A few brewers, it turns out, are skipping the entire early bittering process, finding success using only the late hopping process.)

Another method of infusing the brew with hop aromas is called dry hopping. In this method, the aromatics are added to the nascent beer in the maturation tanks, after fermentation. Dry hopping is considered the gold standard among most craft brewers and consumers. In their paper, Schönberger and Kostecky wrote, “Dry hopping can be seen as a cold extraction of hop material into an alcoholic solution. Though only relatively little research has been carried out concerning dry hopping, some studies have shown that the dry-hop character is very sensitive in regard to changes,” which include growing location and variation in harvesting dates.

Yet another way is called wet hopping. This requires harvesting the hops and getting them to the brewhouse in a matter of a few hours, while the hop cones are still wet and sticky with their oils. Needless to say, this isn't possible for every brewer to undertake.

New hop cultivars continue to emerge. Dozens are tested each year for their brewing potential. Many fail. Those that survive the rigorous examinations, if they are hardy and present no great challenges, might give rise to the next generation of craft beers, as well as to a new bunch of beerophiles asking us more unanswerable questions.



ABOUT JACK KENNY

Jack Kenny has been writing the Beer Column for *The Beverage Journal* since 1995.



WRITE TO HIM: thebeercolumn@gmail.com



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**People's
Liquor Warehouse**

Market Beer Wine & Spirits

BY SAVANNAH MUL

Proprietor Norm Hale admits to an old tendency of buying and selling new businesses to “explore new industries.” His wife, Elizabeth, wanted him to settle into a business to stay in and, most importantly, be happy in. About six years ago, he found that happiness in liquor retail.

New to the industry, Hale enrolled in courses at Johnson & Wales University to attain his WSET certification and began to build on his own knowledge base, and on the new venture’s success. The store also completed a move from its original building in December 2015.

“We took almost a year looking for the right location,” he said. Hale went from about a 4,000 square foot store to now 6,000 square feet, which he said allows him to be more competitive with surrounding “big box stores.”

The new space presented the opportunity for Hale and his seven employees to design the store. Customers now shop from wide aisles accompanied by low




LOCATION
11 COMMERCE WAY
JOHNSTON, RI

FACTS
SQUARE FOOTAGE: 6,000
YEARS IN OPERATION: 5

shelving to allow for visibility to find products with ease. “I do try to give all my employees say in how the store is designed,” he said.

Customers are greeted with “kindness and enthusiasm,” Hale said. The store features what he calls “cozy areas” to attract customers to new or featured products. The multiple “cozy areas” showcase floor displays next to small

shelving units, creating a stand-alone area for those wines, spirits or beers. He said the areas “help the customer explore new products and try something new ... I like finding some small vineyard that may only make 300 cases of wine.”

In-store tastings hosted by staff and area sales

representatives also provide the opportunity for customers to explore those new tastes. He said the store’s sales are spilt pretty evenly across beer, wine and spirits, but lately he’s noticing an upsurge in hard liquors and wines.

“Everyone comes in the store for a reason,” he explained. “Whether they are going to a party, a friend’s house or to get wine for dinner, when they come into the store they should be excited about where they are and what they are going to do.”

Hale loves the industry. “I enjoy it,” he said. “I’m surprised at how many people you get to know and the relationships you build in the community.” Hale said Market Beer Wine & Spirits supports local charitable organizations and views the store as “an old-fashioned business to help people and to be part of the community.” ■



▲
Gina Gatta, Employee; Norm Hale, Owner; and April Barber, Employee.

FEATURE YOUR STORE



If you own a small, medium or megastore and would like to be featured, email: dana@thebeveragejournal.com

P

new
products

1



2



3



4



5



6

1. 'LOVE' BY ANNA DE CODORNÍU

Perfectly timed for Valentine's Day 2017, the limited edition bottle of Anna Blanc de Blancs Reserva is a celebration of love, romance and beauty. The rose petal-wrapped design invites consumers to personalize the bottle with a heartfelt message. Anna Blanc de Blancs Reserva is a blend of 70% Chardonnay, 15% Macabeo, 7.5% Xarel-lo, and 7.5% Parellada sourced from Codorníu's vineyards in D.O. Cava.

\$ SRP: \$15
aveniubrand.com

4. KERRYGOLD IRISH CREAM

Infinium Spirits has added 21 states for distribution of Kerrygold Irish Cream Liqueur. Produced by Kerrygold, which specializes in Irish dairy products (notably butter and cheese), the velvety liqueur is a premium blend of natural Irish cream, real chocolate and oak-aged Irish whiskey. Named World's Best Cream Liqueur at the 2016 World Drink Awards, it is now available in 36 states. 34 proof.

\$ SRP: \$24.99
kerrygoldirishcream.com

2. LA HECHICERA RUM

La Hechicera ultra-premium aged rum has joined the Phillips Distilling portfolio. Produced by Casa Santana, Colombia's only privately owned, family-run distillery, La Hechicera is a blend of rums aged 12-21 years. For three generations, the Riascos family has been creating rums using the solera method and aging the blend of mature rums in American white oak. The rum is bottled directly without any additives, allowing woody notes to shine through.

\$ SRP: \$44.99
phillipsdistilling.com

5. CHÂTEAU LIVERSAN HAUT-MÉDOC

This Bordeaux estate—the property of Marquis de Latresne in the 18th century—was acquired by the Lapalu family in 1995. The vines, next to Pauillac, face south for optimal exposure, and the gravel topsoils are excellent for vine roots. The deep ruby wine shows aromas of red fruits on a slightly spicy background; 50/50 Merlot and Cabernet; 12 months in French oak, (1/3 new). 90 points, Wine Enthusiast. Marketed by Bronco Wine Co.

\$ SRP: \$28.99
broncowine.com

3. CHICK TO CHIC ROSÉ OF SYRAH

This Rosé of Syrah has been produced in the South of France's Languedoc region, known for producing elegant dry and off-dry rosés with freshness, minerality and aromas of exotic. Traditional winemaking in stainless steel tank guarantees the fruitiness and freshness of aromas. It's a perfect match with sandwiches, salads, grilled fish or just an aperitif. The playful package adds extra appeal for active, outgoing, social-minded women. Marketed by Bronco Wine Co.

\$ SRP: \$15.99
broncowine.com

6. CAPTAIN MORGAN 'LOCONUT'

Captain Morgan is going "Loco" this spring, introducing a coconut spiced rum shot to the category-leading supplier's portfolio. Captain Morgan LocoNut is a brand new blend of real coconut liqueur, Captain Morgan Original Spiced Rum and Caribbean spices. Rolling out now, the new shot is aiming to be a hit on beaches and in bars. 40 proof.

\$ SRP: \$14.99
captainmorgan.com



HERRADURA GETS A MAKEOVER

Tequila Herradura has unveiled new luxury packaging, conceived to capture the “craft and charisma” of Casa Herradura, the last true tequila-producing hacienda on the planet. The updated labels feature bold colors and more recognizable expression names, reinforced via an embossed ribbon over the bottle cap for each entry in the line. herradura.com

MARYLAND RYE SPECIALIST CRAFTS ‘CASK STRENGTH’

Baltimore-based **Sagamore Spirit**, dedicated to putting Maryland back on the map as the premier distiller of rye whiskey, has released a Cask Strength Rye made with a unique process. Sagamore Spirit ages two different mash bills—a high rye and a low rye—then blends them. Each barrel ages to a slightly different proof (close to 111 or 112), and a ladle of Sagamore Farm spring water is added for smoothness. The Cask Strength Rye Whiskey, aged just under four years and sold for \$73.99, joins an 83 proof rye released previously. Limited markets. sagamorespirit.com



NEW 40-YEAR-OLD MACALLAN: RARE & PRECIOUS

The latest limited-release from The Macallan represents only the second non-vintage release of a 40-year-old expression to come from the Speyside distillery. In early 2006, as Master Whisky Maker Bob Dalgarno began crafting The Macallan 30 Years Old Sherry Oak, for which nine marrying casks were filled and bottled, Dalgarno’s intuition led to a tenth cask being filled and laid back down. Now it has been tapped to create 500 bottles at 90 proof, available at SRP \$8,000. themacallan.com



THIS CHOCOLATE LIKES TO HANG OUT

For those who believe that adding chocolate can make just about any situation—or drink—better, the “**Chocolate SideCar**” has arrived. Handmade from Belgian chocolate, the solid confection is designed to fit on the ridge of all glassware. Available in dark and milk versions, as well as a variety of flavors (orange, lemon, lime, strawberry and mint). Ideal for sweet, creamy cocktails, and chocolate-friendly wines like Brachetto d’Acqui and Port. Wholesale pricing available; 15-piece gift set (top photo) SRP is \$29.95. chocolatetext.com



FERDINAND’S GIN: RIESLING’S SECOND CALLING

Riesling from the steep shale slopes of Germany’s Saar makes Ferdinand Gin unique. The family of Master Distiller Andreas Vallendar has been distilling for generations. For the gin—named after Ferdinand Geltz, the historical figure who also co-founded the VDP Mosel-Saar-Ruwer winegrower’s group—30 finely balanced botanicals are taken from the estate plantings and nearby forests (quince, lavender, thyme, juniper, angelica root, rosehip and more).

The grain base is distilled several times, then steam-infused with freshly harvested herbs. Vallendar adds more botanicals for fresh floral notes then rounds the spirit out with a precise measure of late and selected harvest wines from the Saarburger Rausch vineyard. After resting for four weeks, Ferdinand’s is set to a drinking strength of 44% alcohol using demineralized water, then filled into nostalgic-looking wine bottles and enclosed with a natural cork sealed in beeswax. SRP \$59.

baronfrancois.com



THE RESTAURANT BUBBLE IS ABOUT TO BURST

BY DALE J. VENTURINI, PRESIDENT & CEO, RI HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION



I've written extensively about how proud I am of the hard-working restaurateurs and hoteliers in our industry. Folks who really understand the meaning of the word 'responsibility,' and take their role to provide good jobs, offerings and experiences seriously and responsibly.

It's been both an unfortunate and glorious time in our industry ... the glorious aspect is what our opponents focus on; the fact that restaurants and hotels have become leaders in the economy and bring relevance to the areas in which they are located. They have gentrified entire neighborhood blocks that were previously overlooked. They have given opportunity and meaning to many in search of a career or a part-time job to pay for school, family needs, etc. Most of all, restaurants have elevated the expectations of customers with farm-to-table, organic and seasonal dishes becoming standard operating procedure for many businesses. However, much like the housing bubble of the mid 2000s, restaurants are facing a similar bust.

This is the unfortunate part. Restaurateurs are facing an onslaught of issues that are forcing many to close their doors for good. Hardest hit are sit-down and fine dining concepts.

With attacks from organized labor movements who want to artificially inflate wages, landlords who exponentially increase rent as a restaurant gains success, tax laws and government mandates that create a seemingly inextricable maze of bureaucracy, paperwork and fines, there is

rapidly becoming little upside in owning a restaurant these days.

According to The NPD Group/ReCount® Spring 2016 Report, the number of independent, sit-down restaurants in the United States dropped 3% in 2016. The number of fast-casual eateries dropped 2% and the number of restaurants overall dropped 1%. NPD predicts that there will continue to be a lack of growth in the industry overall for 2017.

Yes, profit margins are slim ... it is a fact, not a rumor. Most operate on single-digits that are rapidly diminishing in the face of additional costs. The cold, hard facts are that while many restaurants are successful, they are not profitable. As margins continue to dwindle, operators continue to face labor increases.

Here in Rhode Island, we have undergone four wage increases in as many years. Business owners have had to keep adjusting to labor increases without the ability to recoup the cost. Where does the money come from? It comes from the business' bottom line.

In 2016, New York followed California and passed a \$15/hour minimum wage. The wage rises incrementally each year, between 50 cents and \$2.00 per hour, depending on the geographic location (county) of the business and the size of the company. In effect, for many businesses, this means facing a 500% or higher labor

increase, laying off employees, raising prices significantly or shutting the business down entirely.

I think we can all agree that people who are working in good jobs should not be living in poverty. However, a restaurant's business model will not support such a huge labor increase, coupled with rising rental costs and additional taxation. I cannot think of an industry that could support this 'perfect storm' of obstacles to running a successful business.

Hotels and restaurants have been heralded as pillars of the small business community. They provide meaningful jobs, offer flexible hours, and have been the reason that some regions receive so much wonderful media coverage.

The food economy has been a giant boon to local cities and towns and has made a huge difference in the local economy through increased tourism, sales tax and meals and beverage tax. But, as that bubble has risen, the winds of detrimental change have also impacted the bubble's ultimate course. As someone who has dedicated the better part of my life to representing the interests of the restaurant and hotel industries, I cannot think of a more dangerous or tumultuous time for our industry.



LEARN MORE

For anyone interested in learning more, please visit www.restaurant.org



ABOUT DALE J. VENTURINI PRESIDENT & CEO, RI HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION

A veteran of more than 25 years in the hospitality industry, Venturini is considered by many to be the voice of the industry in the state of Rhode Island. She has been instrumental in improving the industry's educational and training programs in the state, as well as enhancing the bottom line of the business she represents. Venturini splits her time between the office and the State House, a constant presence for her membership.

THE MALTED BARLEY

42 HIGH STREET
WESTERLY, RI

A destination for craft beer enthusiasts, The Malted Barley features 40 draft lines and more than 100 bottled and canned offerings. A modern cocktail list, plus local and national wines, accompanies the gourmet stuffed pretzel menu, dipping sauces and sandwiches. The first franchise location recently opened in Providence at 334 Westminster Street.



Bartender
Dylan Sheak.

BARTENDER

Dylan Sheak

COCKTAIL

The Aphrodite

RECIPE

- » 2 oz. Hendrick's Gin
- » 1/2 oz. St. Germain elderflower liqueur
- » Splash of tonic water
- » A couple of fresh basil leaves
- » Handful of blackberries

Fill a coupe glass with ice. Muddle basil and blackberries in shaker, add Hendrick's Gin and St. Germain and shake. Remove ice from coupe glass, strain cocktail into glass. Add a generous splash of tonic water. Garnish with a basil leaf and a blackberry.

"It's delicious. The right ingredients just came together," said Sheak. "We named it after a yacht in Watch Hill, The Aphrodite. It's similar in color [and] it all came together in that fashion."

LOCAL CHATTER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

into that bottle. We went to Champagne recently ... The British are also making quality sparklings right now...

For Pinot Noir, I'd love to buy more Burgundy ... Italian wines are some of my favorites. I like the fact they don't use a lot of oak on their whites; I'm not huge on oaked whites. I'm not huge on California Chardonnays...

TBJ: *How would you characterize the Coast Guard House wine list?*

WYBRANIEC: I aim to keep to the familiar, so I'll try for popular wines, like Cabernets, but from a different area than people are used to. So for Chardonnay, I'll offer a Napa, but also offer one from Santa Barbara. I like cabs from Chiles Valley – all these little cabs that exist between Napa and Sonoma; you can taste the terroir...

We update the list semi-annually, which gives me time to play around. The word-of-the-day is white blends, so I ended up going with three white blends by the glass ... I'm also an advocate for lower alcohol wine ... For the winter, we brought on an intense Chilean Pinot Noir and another from Los Carneros, because I didn't have a Carneros appellation.

TBJ: *What's fun or different on your list now?*

WYBRANIEC: We have a wine called Txakoli from the coast of Spain; it's a very crisp, refreshing white, a super accompaniment to shellfish. For reds, we have Sagrantino di Montefalco, an Italian wine with a lot of guts to it ... For an oddball pick, a Chardonnay from Jura, France, which has nutty tones to it, which can make people think the bottle is flawed, but that's the way it's made.

TBJ: *What's popular with customers right now?*

WYBRANIEC: By the bottle, Pinot Noir, cab whites, Chardonnays. By the glass, its Pinot Grigio, hand over fist. For reds, I do see people more interested

in Merlots than when we first opened the restaurant.

TBJ: *What's a suggested pairing?*

WYBRANIEC: By the glass, we offer a rich-style Chardonnay, from Livermore Valley, not Napa, which is an appellation people don't think of – it's buttery, which goes with lobster pot pie and lobster ravioli just wonderfully.

TBJ: *With all your focus on education, do you feel it's important to teach your staff?*

WYBRANIEC: Oh, yes. We try and do field trips once a month to local vineyards and brewers and distillers ... because it's important for our staff to know how a beverage was made, and the people behind it.

I've also taught a "How to Analyze Wine" class, where they can taste and describe it ... We'll sit in tasting sessions, so for example, for a Chardonnay, I'll collect all the different flavors and aromas – caramel, toast, butterscotch, butter, green apples, chalk, rocks ... and I put 20 things out on a platter, and I'll say: "All these flavors can be in that glass. What do you taste?" Visual learning can be so effective.

TBJ: *That's fascinating. What wines do you drink at home to relax?*

WYBRANIEC: Depends on the time of year. This summer was definitely all about rosé. Right now, in the winter, more towards reds – there's a Pinot Noir I like now from Oregon, Big Table Farm. And La Voix, a California Pinot Noir, which is just pure, vivacious, complex.

TBJ: *Anything else you'd like to add?*

WYBRANIEC: One of the educators I had said, "Don't over stress about wine. It's just wine; it's supposed to be fun." And because banking was so serious, that made an impression on me. I get to freestyle it. I love it. ■

Interview has been condensed and edited.

“Excellent choice.”

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LISTS ON THE EDGE

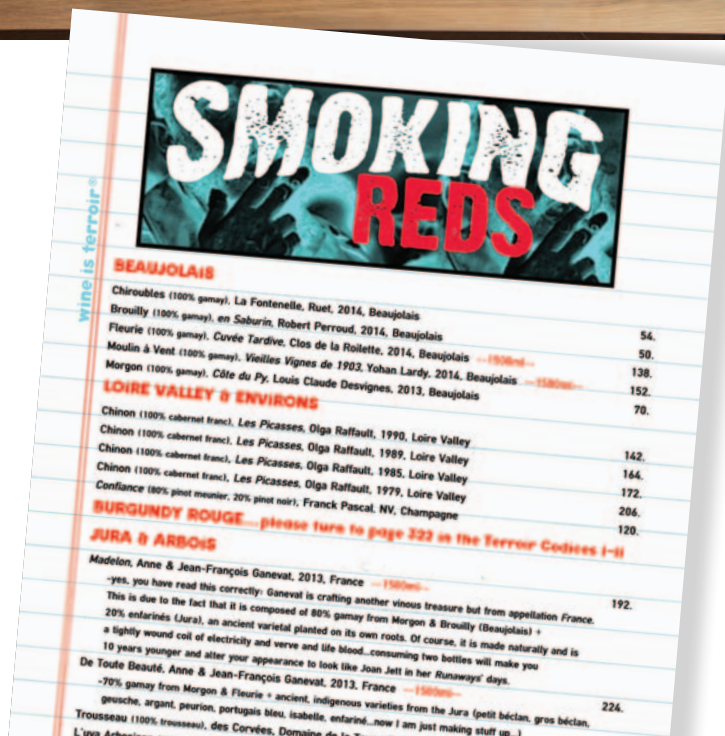
TO STAND OUT FROM THE PACK, RESTAURANTS
ARE SHAPING THEIR WINE LISTS
IN PROVOCATIVE WAYS

BY JIM CLARKE



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Interior of Husk, in Nashville, TN; Terroir Wine Bar, NYC; a page from Terroir's list; a lineup at Beaujolais-happy Freek's Mill.

HUSK NASHVILLE BY ANDREA BEHRENDIS



“Why does creativity end with choosing the wine itself? Other things in the wine world have changed, but presentation of the wine in the form of a list hasn’t changed at all,” asks Paul Grieco, proprietor of Terroir Wine Bar in Manhattan. Grieco’s list, which includes full-page paeans to producers like Chateau Musar; a birthday nod to Chianti, and passionate, sometimes off-color asides to wines he feels strongly about, takes a stand against the status quo.

Chef Chris Shepherd’s list at Underbelly in Houston is similarly irreverent, with cartoons and a shout-out from Beastie Boy Mike-D. In Scottsdale, Arizona, Cowboy Ciao’s list gets meta and a bit questionable, featuring “actual guest quotes.”

find some me time

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“OPACITY IS NO VIRTUE, AND A LIST DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BAROQUE OR LARGE TO HAVE AN ENGAGING PERSONALITY.”

Gimmicky? “A lot of people are interacting with the list when you present it,” says Grieco. “Why miss an opportunity to engage in a new and different way? Why not make a great first impression?” While Grieco concedes that some guests, typically older ones, have been taken aback, the usual reaction is positive. He draws the line at lists that aren't hospitable and fail to provide baseline details about the wines, citing the example of Hatchet Hall in Los Angeles. For a

time they organized their list according to the sales rep who supplied the wine; individual wines were listed with little or no information whatsoever, not even a producer or grape in many cases: “ham wine,” “oyster wine,” or “Vielles (sic) Vignes'13,” or “#kistler'15,” the last being not the Sonoma Chardonnay but a white wine in a glass that was first rinsed with Bourbon (the list is more conventionally organized these days).

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Opacity is no virtue, and a list doesn't have to be baroque or large to have an engaging personality. The wine list at Husk in Charleston and Nashville creates a conversation by matching the food with the restaurant's farm-to-table concept: wines are listed by the soil type they're grown in (limestone, alluvial, volcanic) followed by the place of origin, and only then backing into the more usual data: grape variety, vintage, and producer. “When you enter there's a huge board with all our purveyors and where the food came from,” says Nicolette Anclit, Sommelier at the Nashville location. “The list has the same idea.” Guests don't always clue in immediately, but Anclit and her staff know when to step in. “That's my job as sommelier on the floor. You're creating a story; that's why people come to the restaurant. I can talk about how the limestone wines have a lot of chalk and minerality and equate that with the oyster dish.”



Branch Line's Charlie Gaeta and a sample of their Mediterranean wine list



ROSÉ

- CORSICA-SCIACCARELLU BLEND DOMAINE MARCULLIANI 2015 45
- CORSICA-NIERRUCCIU BLEND LECICIA PATRIMONIO 2015 45
- BOURGUEIL-CABERNET FRANC BRETON LA RITOURNELLE 2015 55
- LANGUEDOC-CINSULT BLEND MAS CAL DEMOURA QUVES AGOU 2015 40
- BANDOL-MOURVEDRE TERREBRUNE 2014 80
- REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA-CHKVERI BERELI 2015 55
- REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA-ALDASTURI MAKARIZZE 2014 45
- ALICANTE-GRÉNACHE RAFA BERNABE YUSKANTO 2015 40

NEW YORK WINE

- FINGER LAKES-WHITE
- DRY RIESLING HERMANN J WEINER 2014 45
- DRY RIESLING BLOOMER CREEK MOREHOUSE ROAD 2013 50
- RIESLING HERMANN J WEINER MACDALENA VINEYARD 2014 85
- LONG ISLAND-WHITE
- CHARDONNAY SOUTHWOLD FARM & CELLAR, TILTING AT WINDMILLS 2014 80
- FINGER LAKES-RED
- PINOT NOIR BELLWETHER SAVINILL CREEK VINEYARD 2014 70
- CAB FRANC/MERLOT BLOOMER CREEK WHITE HORSE 2012 55
- LONG ISLAND-RED

ABOVE: Paul Grieco / Husk Charleston Exterior / Freek's Mill interior and wine list

It's not just layout, of course; the wines you choose can start the conversation, too, especially when a list takes a strong, unexpected stand on a region or grape. At Freek's Mill in Brooklyn, the relationship between the locally sourced menu and the wine list's emphases—Loire Valley Chenin and Beaujolais—isn't immediately clear, though Alex Alan, Beverage Director and Partner, says that they suit the cuisine well. He was personally attracted to Chenin's range of expression—“it does everything: sparkling, dry, sweet, semi-sweet”—and enjoys showing diners that Beaujolais doesn't just mean “a juicy red you drink in mid-November.”

“It's not a themed wine list, but it focuses on two places making great wine.” Alan's list does include other options. “I'm not a jerk. I understand that some people want their rich red Cabernet, I just didn't want that to be the default. I think any restaurant doing something special

AIMÉ ROQUESANTE

THE 2016 VINTAGE
HAS ARRIVED

A Provence Wine that is dry, authentic
and ideal for festive moments.





ABOVE: Freeks Mill in Brooklyn and Husk in Charleston. LEFT: Eric Hemer, head of wine education for Southern Glazer's, notes that requests for staff training are on the rise.

enough with its food should be doing something special with its wine list.”

GOING COASTAL

Opened last October in Watertown, MA, by Garrett Harker and Andrew Holden—owner and GM of Boston hotspot Eastern Standard, respectively—Branch Line is a neighborhood rotisserie with a very focused but flexible list. Holden wanted the list to be a cohesive collection of wines produced in coastal regions—particularly around the Mediterranean, which pair well with the restaurant’s fare. It’s one thing to have a thematic goal in mind; it’s another to translate the theme in a format that does not require heavy lifting (or reading, as it were). Tasked with this challenge, the team at Branch Line, which included GM Deena Marlette and Wine Director Charlie Gaeta, came up with a list comprising a number of low-visibility, high-quality wines from offbeat locales such as Corsica, Crete, Sardinia, Sicily and Tenerife—organized into succinct sections.

A 12-wine Corsica section starts the list off with an unexpected bang; other headers include “Rotisserie Whites & Reds,” “Portofino to Provence” and “Pres de la Mer,” among others. Within each section, typography is used to make both regions of origin and grapes clear.

The list was well-received from the start. “Early on I noticed that people who were flipping back and forth between pages out of curiosity, not confusion,” Gaeta says. “They recognize a real point of view on the list, and they know we are ready to offer more details on any of the wines.” Staff training touches on wine daily, he adds, and a full hour each week is devoted exclusively to wine. He



credits personalized ongoing training with Branch Line’s ability to move cases of wines like Caravaglio 2015 “Salina” Malvasia from Sicily.

MIDDLE TIER ROLE

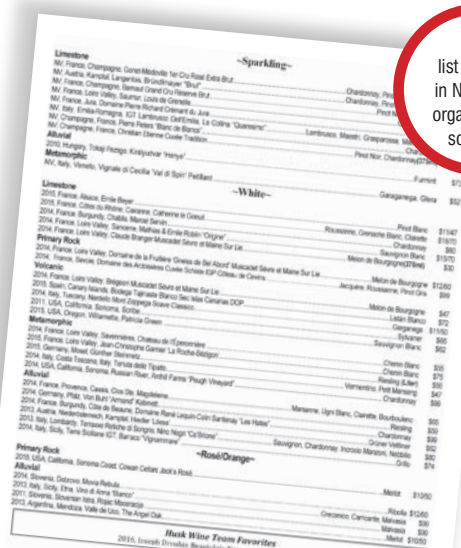
Not to be left out of the discussion are distributors, whose role in wine list creation is completely different than it was a few decades ago, notes Eric Hemer, who is a Master Sommelier and Master of Wine as well as SVP and Corporate Director of Wine Education for Southern Glazer’s. It was once common for a

salesperson to literally create a wine list—not only selecting the wines but also printing and maintaining the physical list.

“Only the very top restaurants had a knowledgeable person in charge of the wine program, so it was a relief for most restaurant managers to have this service provided for them,” Hemer recalls. “There was a lot of competition between distributors to be the one to provide this service as it allowed you to control the wine program.”

Today is a whole new ballgame. Not only do more restaurants at all levels have someone in-house running the wine program, the lists are far more sophisticated and quickly modified in house via laser printer. “Today’s wine distributor personnel need to know so much more than their past counterparts,” notes Hemer. “Not all that long ago, few had even heard of wines such as Prosecco, Brunello di Montalcino, or Greco di Tufo. Now they are common. Not to mention the passion for off-the-beaten path regions and varieties that many new sommeliers seem to adore. The more obscure, the better.”

The latest trends are not a problem, however, he adds, as they can be capably tracked with timely training. “This is why wine education has become so important,” says Hemer, “not only for the distributor sales personnel but also in their ability to impart that knowledge to their customers. Requests for staff training are a far bigger part of the daily distributor routine today than in the past.” ■



The list at Husk in Nashville, organized by soil type



Gemma di Luna



ITALY'S NEW GEM

CHAMPAGNE

101

BACK TO
BASICS

BY MEGAN KRIGBAUM

Champagne is a portrait in irony. Inarguably an icon of luxury, the liquid itself is more like a silk purse made from a sow's ear; the now-famous method of nurturing a secondary fermentation in the bottle effectively compensates for the inability of grapes to ripen consistently in the (extremely) cool region.

And while the grapes are farmed by thousands of small growers, production remains dominated by a relatively small

number of Champagne houses. Champagne has not made headlines since the turn of the century, when fears of a Y2K shortage loomed (and proved unfounded).

The price tag led Champagne to lose market share as the Recession played out; but while it has slipped from its 11.4% share of the sparkling wine market in 2005, it has held steady at 8% since 2010, according to IWSR, and posted a 3.5% growth in sales from 2014 to 2015.

WHERE IS IT MADE?

France's Champagne (45 minutes on the train, due east from Paris) is one of the most northerly wine regions in the world, which means that it can be quite cold with unpredictable weather. This means that there can be a great deal of vintage variation in the wines, one of the reasons that many producers like to make non-vintage (also called multi-vintage), blending wines from more than one year.



THE GRAPES

Three grape varieties, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, make up the bulk of plantings in Champagne, planted nearly in thirds throughout the region. There are actually four others that are permitted, but seldom used: Fromenteau, Arbane, Pinot Blanc and Petit Meslier. Together, these make up less than 1% of plantings. **Most Champagnes are a blend of red and white grapes:**



Chardonnay
used for vibrance, floral and fresh fruit notes, like citrus and apple.



Pinot Noir
lends a good bit of structure and earthiness to the wines.



Pinot Meunier
contributes red fruit flavors, like strawberry and raspberry.

HOW CHAMPAGNE IS MADE

There are several ways of producing sparkling wine, but the *méthode champenoise*, or Champagne method, has been replicated for centuries in regions around the world because it makes for

complex and elegant wines, with finer mousse (bubbles), firmer acid, a toasty character, more intensity a longer finish which preps it for food.

1 HARVEST

Despite being a very cool region, Champagne's harvest is often earlier than many parts of Europe, with winemakers looking for vibrant acidity and lower alcohol in the base wines. The Comité Champagne determines the first permitted day of harvest every year; in 2016 it began on September 10th.



2 PRIMARY FERMENTATION

Champagne initially starts out just like any other wine, going through fermentation in tanks. Some producers will age this base wine in barrel for a bit before bottling, but most go straight to bottle.

3 BOTTLING

For non-vintage bottlings winemakers will blend wines from at least a couple vintages to get the desired base. At bottling, yeast and sugar are added to the wine. Bottles are closed with a soda crown cap, as opposed to cork, because they can better withstand intense pressure. Bottles are then laid down in a cool, dark, humid cellar.



4 SECONDARY FERMENTATION

Here come the bubbles. As the yeast consumes the sugar in the bottle, it produces CO₂, which gets trapped in the bottle, creating the elegant fizz Champagne is so known for.

5 AGING

At this point the Champagne will rest in the cellar for anywhere from 15 months or until the winemaker decides it's ready for

release. The lees (dead yeast cells) in the bottle contribute a nutty, toasty flavor and give texture to the wine, slowly with time.



6 RIDDLING

Before corking, the cellared, crown-capped bottles are "riddled"—either by hand or machine. This means that they're turned just a little bit, periodically to keep the lees from sticking to the side of the bottle.



7 DISGORGING

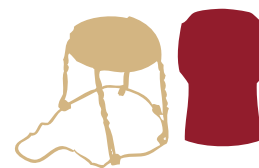
When it's time to cork, the bottles are turned upside down to get all of those lees to settle in to the neck of the bottle. Most Champagne houses freeze the neck of the bottle, turning the lees into a little puck. When the caps are removed, they lees shoot right out—a method called disgorgement—resulting in clear Champagne.

8 DOSAGE

Before corking, a little *dosage* of sugar mixed with still wine is added to top off the bottle and balance out the wine's acidity and texture. The amount of sugar in the dosage defines the style indicated on the label, for example, Brut.

9 CORKING

Then, using a powerful machine, the bottles are corked and the wire cages affixed.

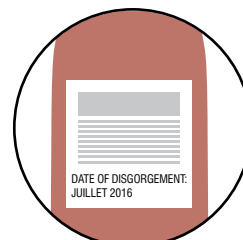


TO DOSAGE OR NOT TO DOSAGE

Over the past 10 years, Champagne has gotten drier and drier, with producers opting to add very little or no sugar to the *dosage*, making Extra Brut wines in a more focused style. This trend has been especially popular with smaller grower Champagne makers looking to give the wines the purest expression of their terroir. But larger Champagne houses are getting in the game, too, pointing to a shift in drinkers' palates, with many people preferring wines that are light and lifted.

DISGORGE DATING

Champagne ages more quickly when it's off the lees, which means that there can be a substantial difference between bottles depending on their disgorgement dates. With this in mind, many houses have begun printing the date directly on the bottle so that consumers know how fresh to expect their wines to be.

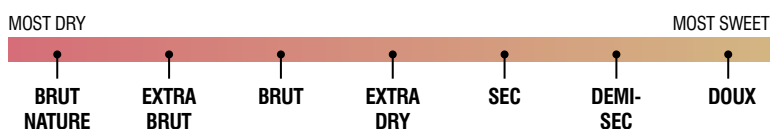


LABEL DESIGNATIONS

DRY VS. SWEET

The amount of sugar (measured in grams per liter, or g/L) in a Champagne's dosage defines its technical level of sweetness, which is indicated by a range of terms:

- ◆ **Brut Nature:** Also known as Pas Dosé or Dosage Zero contains no dosage and less than 3 g/L of residual sugar
- ◆ **Extra Brut:** Minimal dosage, leaving only up to 6 g/L
- ◆ **Brut:** Most Champagne falls in the Brut category, with 12 g/L or less residual sugar.
- ◆ **Extra Dry:** Counterintuitively, Extra Dry wines are actually sweeter than Bruts. These wines have between 12 and 17 g/L residual sugar.
- ◆ **Sec:** Getting sweeter, with 17-32g/L of residual sugar
- ◆ **Demi-Sec:** Demi-Sec Champagnes are perceptibly sweet and best served as dessert wines or, with 32-50 g/L sugar.
- ◆ **Doux:** The sweetest Champagne, registering 50+ g/L of residual sugar



STYLE

Most "standard" Champagnes are blends, both of vintages and grapes, but depending on varietal composition, a few other important stylistic designations may apply:

- ◆ **Blanc de Noirs:** These Champagnes are white, too, but they're made from black grapes, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, either blended or on their own.
- ◆ **Blanc de Blancs:** Whereas most Champagnes are made from a blend of red and white grapes, this style is made exclusively from Chardonnay. The name means white from white grapes.
- ◆ **Rosé:** Rosés are made one of two ways in Champagne: either from black (aka red) grapes left on their skins for a period to extract pink color; or from white Chardonnay, with some still red wine added in to give a rosy hue.

VINTAGE & PRESTIGE CUVÉES

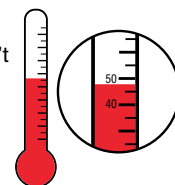
Non-vintage Champagne is vital not only to manage the variability of harvests, but also to maintain a "house style." However, in good quality years, which generally occur three or four times a decade, producers may bottle **wine made 100% from the harvest** and indicate that vintage on the label.

Rarer (only about 5% of overall production) and typically fuller (it has to rest three years before release, instead of 15 months), a producer's Vintage Champagne is always more expensive than the NV. In addition, houses separate their wines sourced from their very best vineyards in exceptional years to produce a prestige or **Tête-de-Cuvée Champagne**, representing their very best offering—often delivered in extra fancy packaging.

HOW TO SERVE CHAMPAGNE

TEMPERATURE

An ice-cold glass of Champagne can be incredibly refreshing, but it won't offer up much aromatically. **Look to serve most Champagne between 47 and 50°F**, which means pulled out of the fridge five or ten minutes before serving. With vintage Champagne, it's nice to serve these a little warmer, to really allow the aromas to show off.



GLASSWARE

- ◆ The shallow, broad **coupe glass**—recalling the Roaring Twenties/Gatsby era—has fallen from favor because its large surface area allows bubbly to lose its fizz too fast.
- ◆ More recently, the tall, narrow **flute** has become the stem of choice largely because it showcases the tiny stream of bubbles or *perlage* of the wine.
- ◆ These days, many sommeliers are opting for **white wine glasses**; while perhaps not as festive, the ample bowl is considered better at allowing the wine's aroma to be savored.



CHAMPAGNE QUOTES

“ Too much of anything is bad, but too much Champagne is just right. ”

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

“ There comes a time in every woman's life when the only thing that helps is a glass of Champagne. ”

—Bette Davis as Kit Marlowe in *Old Acquaintance* (1943)

“ Meeting Franklin Roosevelt was like opening your first bottle of Champagne; knowing him was like drinking it. ”

—Winston Churchill

“ ‘Champagne’ and ‘breathmint’ are the first two words all Oscar winners hear. ”

—Michael Moore

CHAMPAGNE BY THE NUMBERS

CHAMPAGNE REPRESENTS:

0.4% OF THE WORLD'S VINEYARD AREA

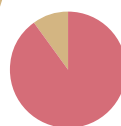
40% OF WORLD CONSUMPTION OF SPARKLING WINES BY VALUE.

CHAMPAGNE'S SHARE OF FRENCH SPARKLING WINE EXPORTS:

60% BY VOLUME



90% BY VALUE



IN FACT, CHAMPAGNE REPRESENTS OVER 1/3 THE EXPORT VALUE OF ALL FRENCH WINES.

TINY BUBBLES...

Scientist Bill Lembeck, also a wine expert, calculated that a 750ml bottle of Champagne contains

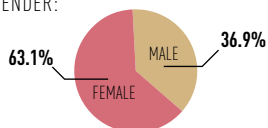
49 MILLION BUBBLES.

In a single bottle:

VOLUME OF GAS
5.5 X
VOLUME OF LIQUID

TOTAL CHAMPAGNE & SPARKLING WINE CONSUMPTION IN THE U.S.

GENDER:



AGE:

AMERICANS < 45 ACCOUNT FOR 58% OF THE TOTAL CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE CONSUMPTION.

MANY GROWERS, BIG HOUSES:

There are more than **15,000** growers in Champagne, who own roughly 90% of the vineyards, yet the Champagne Houses (more than **300** in all) account for more than **two-thirds** of all Champagne shipments and represent **90%** of the export market.

HOW TO OPEN CHAMPAGNE

1 Start by removing the foil wrapping (pull on the tab if there is one).

2 While holding the cork down firmly with one hand and tilting the bottle away from you (and others), untwist the wire loop at the base of the muzzle.

3 Still holding the cork firmly, gently rotate the bottle with your other hand so that the cork comes sliding (not popping) out.



SELLING CHAMPAGNE

As much as everyone in the wine industry would love Champagne to be consumed with equal gusto year-round, Americans have proven again and again that bubbly remains a **go-to for holidays and celebrations**. Why fight it? "Popping the cork" brings joy, and Champagne remains an emblem of quality, so for special occasions, Champagne is exactly what merchants can and should be promoting. In the same vein, **Champagne is a rock solid choice for gifting**, at any time of year. In short, with its reputation as the best of the bubbly genre, Champagne is a vital staple in any wine merchant's inventory or restaurant's list.



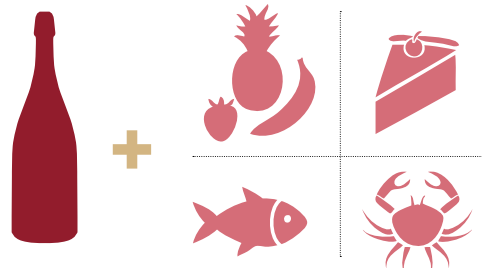
GROWER CHAMPAGNE

For a long time, Champagne was largely dominated by big houses (*grandes marques*) that bought grapes from farmers throughout the region. While this is still common practice for the more well known brands, **over the past 10 or 15 years, more and more wines from small family-owned wineries, that grow their own grapes, have become more popular on wine lists and in shops around the States**. While the *grandes marques* certainly still control the business, these little guys have proven to make impressive, unique wines.

FOOD PAIRING

Sparkling wine in general is food-friendly, the bubbles themselves earning credit for their palate-cleansing action. But Champagne, with its sharper acidity buoying a longer finish than other bubblys, is even more versatile at the table. Classic pairing partners include:

- ◆ Fried and/or salty foods
- ◆ Asian food
- ◆ Shellfish, fish, pork
- ◆ Hors d'oeuvres / finger food
- ◆ Fresh fruit or dessert (Demi-Sec)



“ The feeling of friendship is like that of being comfortably filled with roast beef; love, like being enlivened with Champagne. ”

—Samuel Johnson

“ I drink it when I'm happy and when I'm sad. Sometimes I drink it when I'm alone. When I have company I consider it obligatory. I trifle with it if I'm not hungry and drink it when I am. Otherwise, I never touch it—unless I'm thirsty. ”

— Lily Bollinger

BACK TO BASICS

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SPIRITWATCH 2017

SIX BOTTLES AND ONE BOX TO SELL TO STAY ON TREND IN MONTHS AHEAD

BY ROBERT HAYNES-PETERSON

Pearing into the months ahead, here are a few trends taking shape that retailers and mixologists ought to keep an eye on. Hot topics range from whole categories to new packaging to niche-y spinoffs to the “Craft” movement itself.

1. SIPPING CUBAN-STYLE

Rum drinkers (and cigar smokers) received a pleasant surprise last year when travel restrictions to Cuba were relaxed. Now drinkers and bartenders eagerly await the arrival on our shores of Cuban rum brands like Santiago, Union and especially Havana Club, a joint venture product between the Cuban government and Pernod Ricard.

But there is room for confusion: While Havana Club 7 is the coveted cane-spirit of the casual smuggler, there’s another Havana Club already on the U.S. market.

This label, by Bacardi, while produced in Puerto Rico, is far from a knock-off: it purports to contain the original pre-Castro Havana Club recipe. Following exile from Cuba in 1959, Bacardi set up shop in Puerto Rico (but clung defiantly to their Cuban heritage), and eventually purchased the Havana Club recipe that the also-exiled Arechabala family had held on to.

The Bacardi-vs-Pernod dynamic had simmered within industry circles for months, then it hit prime time via the first *60 Minutes* broadcast of the year. For bars and stores in the U.S., this controversy

Craft distillers like Stranahan’s Colorado Whiskey, particularly those that have a strong local market, continue to thrive. Bacardi is counting on renewed interest in Cuba to cast a halo on Havana Club Rum.

isn’t necessarily a bad thing: American consumers have heard about, or tried, the Cuban label but can’t get it. A little education on the history of the two brands, and you’ve got a customer happily sipping aged rum that still sports authentic Cuban heritage.

2. FLAVORED GIN

Stay on the lookout for a whole new crop of gins with very non-traditional botanical mixes. “Flavored gins” is a bit of a misnomer, since all gins are



MY MY MY KEY LIME PIE

INTRODUCING KEY LIME RUM CREAM

mix up this beach-ready cocktail
KEY LIME COLADA

- 1 oz. Blue Chair Bay® Key Lime Rum Cream
- .5 oz. Blue Chair Bay® Coconut Rum
- 1 oz. pineapple juice
- 1 oz. orange juice
- 1 oz. cream of coconut
- 1 cup of ice

Blend all ingredients together.
Pour into a cup rimmed with coconut flakes.
Garnish with a lime wheel and a cherry.



flavored—generally with juniper, citrus peel, angelica root, cassia and the like. But now, thanks to the explosion of inventive “GinTonic” cocktails in Spain and the expansion of less juniper-forward New American Dry Gins over the past decade, we’re seeing even more experimentation in the botanical mix.

This has been going on in Spain for quite a while, with brands like Port of Dragons (extra floral), Cool (purple and fruity) and Blanc Ocean (sea beans!), among others. Now a number of inventive expressions are showing up on American shores. New York-based ESP (Empire Spirits Project) launched late last year with three expressions: NoHo (saffron, cardamom, orange), American Beauty (rose, ginger, cinnamon) and Smoked (applewood smoke, peppercorn, caraway), each ripe for creating unique Gin & Tonics.

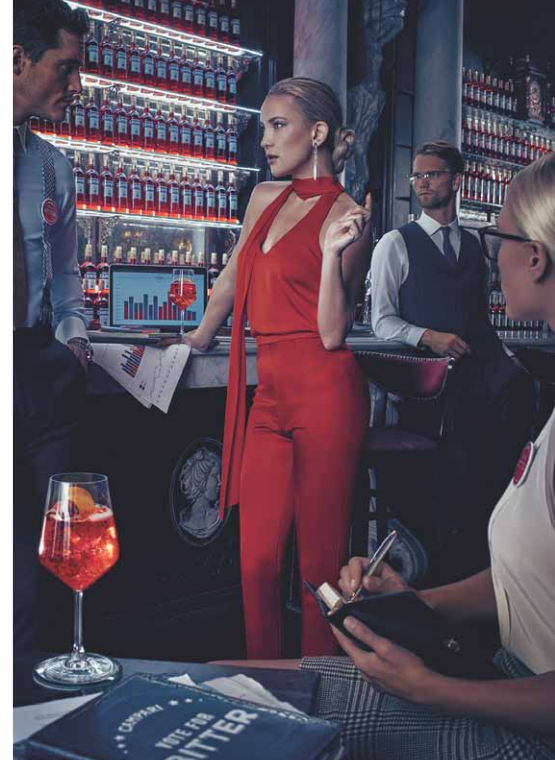


Others hail from distant lands: Italy’s lemon-powered Malfy, England’s Boodles Mulberry, and from Australia, Four Pillars, whose Rare Dry incorporates local Australian botanicals, while the Spiced Negroni Gin benefits from extra Tasmanian peppercorn, blood orange and ginger.

While these flavor expansions might seem adventurous, in the gin category they seem more logical than some of the outlandish vodka or whiskey flavors that have come down the pike.



Campari has traditionally created artsy calendars with an *au courant* star to promote the brand; 2016 was Kate Hudson’s year. But in 2017 the brand is going in a different direction, introducing *Campari Red Diaries*—housed on Campari’s YouTube channel—a series of short films that bring to life the powerful ethos that “every cocktail tells a story.” The lead story in the series, a mini film noir called *Killer in Red*, stars acclaimed actor Clive Owen.



World of Bittersweet, Herbal Liqueurs, with Cocktails, Recipes and Formulas by Brad Thomas Parsons.

3. AMARO ON THE RISE

Thanks to the huge popularity of classic craft cocktails in the past decade or so, Americans are increasingly comfortable with European bitters, digestifs and amaros. Campari, Averna, Fernet Branca and the like are all on the front bar, and sometimes consumed on their own. The surge in low-alcohol cocktail sections on bar menus is making these astringent options even tastier to bar goers seeking to get home safely or extend their night, and there’s even a colorful (and informative) new book called *Amaro: The Spirited*



Now traditional brands like Amaro Sfumato and Luxardo are expanding their portfolio in the U.S. (Luxardo recently released a clear bitters, perfect for the white Negronis showing up on some menus), and manufacturers in America and Canada are getting in on the game in a big way. Amaro Angeleno is an intriguing, terroir-inspired new option out of Southern California. The brainchild of LA-based photographer Stephen Sakulsky (who co-owns an Italian restaurant and Amaro bar called Osteria La Buca), the brand is promoted as “Uniquely Californian, Distinctly Italian.”

4. LIQUID INSTAGRAM

Perhaps no social media trend has more influenced dining and drinking in recent years than Instagram. Sandwiches are sliced in half; waiters are asked to pause while guests take pictures; cocktails glimmer before they are quaffed. Restaurants like Catit in Tel Aviv and 2nd City in NYC deliberately plate “Gram-Worthy” dishes as part of their marketing strategy. Now it seems liquor brands are clueing into this potential.

Magnum Cream, a cream liqueur out of Scotland, is bottled in a miniature steel milk can. Last fall they sent out mailers



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Source: 1. Nielsen Scan, FDCM+, L52 07-16-16 2. Nielsen, Spectra L52 Aug '16





to editors and influencers that included a mooring sound effect and the social media reverb was, if not deafening, at least filled with lots of cows. “The bottle stands out on shelves,” says the brand’s publicist. “Look at that cute thing!” (Just in time, too, as sales of cream liqueurs, led by iconic Baileys, are on the rise.)

It’s not the only brand to stray from traditional packaging. Highland Park single malt Scotch whisky aims to turn heads with their latest release, HP Fire. Following their successful high-end series dedicated to Norse gods, this latest elemental series includes (so far) Ice and Fire. The bottle arrives encased in wooden frame shaped somewhat like a mountain (or volcano). The visually arresting bottle generated better-than-average likes on social media, and is a bit reminiscent of the 1960s and ’70s when backbars were filled with bottles shaped like sea captains, mermaids and rifles.



5. GO FOR THE GREEN

With California legalizing recreational marijuana, the percentage of the nation living in pot-friendly states will jump significantly—and will ensure that legal weed stays in the public eye through 2017. This fact was demonstrated wittily on New Year’s Day when enthusiasts transformed the famous Hollywood sign to “Hollyweed.” Now the spirits industry has a product that could hitch a ride on pot’s newfound status.

Humboldt’s Finest is vodka infused with legally grown hemp seed, which is part of the cannabis family (*cannabis sativa*). It features a unique botanical character and an aroma reminiscent of fresh herb (and cannabis), leading into a smooth finish. The producer—Humboldt Distillery, based in Fortuna, CA—recommends it as a replacement for gin in cocktails. The combination of its mixability, weed-ish identity and distinctive flavor profile give Humboldt’s Finest (80 proof, SRP \$25) some compelling selling points.

6. CRAFT MOMENTUM

Craft distilleries are on the rise globally. In the U.S.—where every state now boasts a distillery—the Distilled Spirits Council reports the number of small distilleries has risen from 92 in 2010 to over 750 in 2015. We could see upwards of 1,000 in another couple of years. Amidst the ever-expanding roster of passionate mad scientists and booze-hungry investors, we’re seeing the beginnings of the acquisition phase: Constellation Brands recently bought High West (Utah); Rémy Cointreau has Westland (an American Single Malt in Washington); Beam Suntory snapped up London-based Sipsmith Gin.

So where do we stand? Will the bubble continue? What happens next?



Every year, Colorado’s Stranahan’s Whiskey special limited release—dubbed “Snowflake”—draws faithful fans to wait in the freezing cold, outside the distillery, starting the day before. It always sells out in an hour. This year’s Snowflake, “Crestone Peak,” blends in whiskey finished in barrels formerly storing Madeira, old-vine Zin, rum and Amador Syrah, among others.

In general, confidence seems high. No one projects an immediate abatement to the continuing expansion of craft distilleries, or craft offerings at stores and bars. But of course shelf space is limited and consumer interest is still relatively small in the big picture.

“There is going to be shakeout over time,” says Dennis Carr, President and CEO of Anchor Distilling Company, which produces Junipero Gin, Old Portrero Whiskey and Hophead Vodka (along with importing a slew of small brands), and celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. “Ultimately, what consumers are looking for is premium: they’re looking for the best quality product they can afford. So what it’s going to go from is this concept of ‘craft,’ which is what

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Black Button Distilling, in Rochester, NY, was founded by Jason Barrett when he was 24. The portfolio ranges from apple pie moonshine to flavoured gins, and bourbon to bourbon cream.

everyone is hot and heavy about right now, to ‘Why is that important? Does craft make it better?’”

Look for a few trends to appear, according to Carr and others:

- Introduction of new and different whiskey expressions, taking a cue from the craft beer world.
- A redefining of categories emphasizing regional production not unlike the traditional Scotch whisky regions.
- Local distilleries playing up their regional game rather than trying to take over the country.

“We are 100% local,” says Jason Barrett, founder and head distiller of Black Button Distilling in Rochester, NY. “We work with three farms to grow everything we use. We do just fine in Alabama and Georgia, but no one in Georgia cares that we had a bumper grain crop this year. There’s an allure, of course, to selling in many states, but in reality, what works in craft is making super products and making them unique.”

For Rob “Whiskey Rob” Dietrich, the head distiller at Colorado’s Stranahan’s Whiskey (founded by innovator Jess Graber), the opportunity to get adventurous is part and parcel of the future of craft distilling. Each year, the company releases a special limited expression—dubbed “Snowflake”—featuring unique combinations of barrel finishes.

And he sees no reason for craft distillers to ease up on the experimental throttle: “I think the move for different categories [Stranahan’s is an American Single Malt] is going to spearhead the opportunity to create more categories and open whiskey up to a lot of weird stuff. We’re going American-style. We’re going outlaw on this. That’s what we do as Americans: we break tradition to create tradition.” ■

7. GREAT BOX OF FIRE?

Well, **Fireball** needs no introduction, but its newest incarnation could mark a sea change in how shots are, well, shared. What sets this new expression apart is the package: while most wine bag-in-box packages are 3L, Fireball’s is 3.5L—with two spouts. On opposite sides of the box. The byproduct of this dual-spout design is brilliantly simple: it invites partiers to use both sides at once (social media posts can confirm). Bottom line: if a “Firebox” boosts the already potent brand, we could be seeing more “spirited” boxes.

3.5L Box has 2nd spout

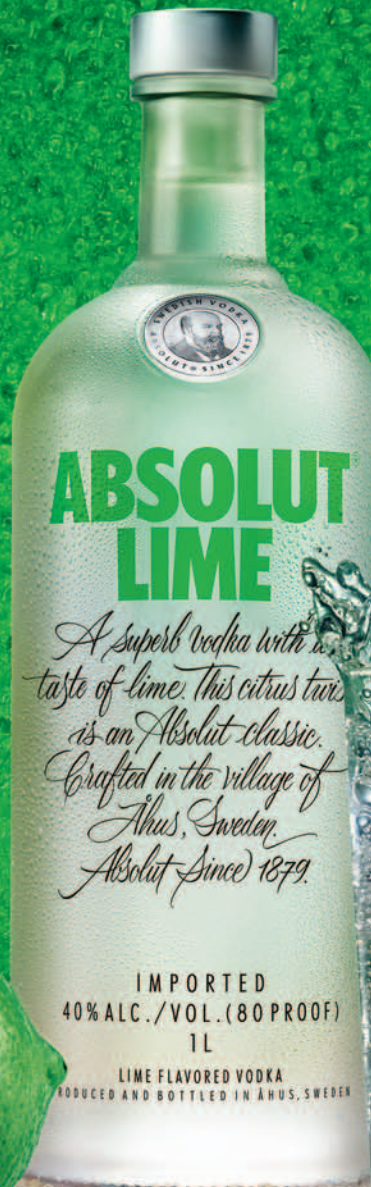


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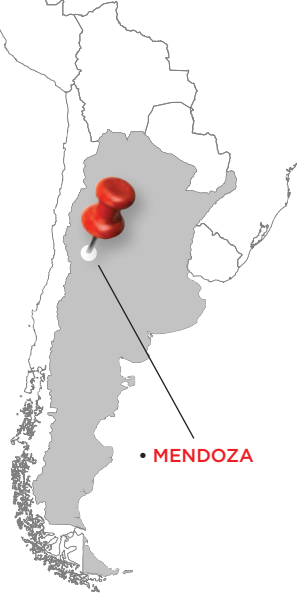
BY AMY ZAVATTO

You're not asking for much—merely to stock your pages or shelves with enjoyable juice that gives your consumers a lot of cork-popping bang for the buck (and, perhaps, incline them to buy more than one). But where to look? We asked a few pros where their peripatetic tastes travel for value.

1 GET MICRO IN MENDOZA

Dig deeper to find great Malbec in Mendoza—or, in some cases, climb higher where quality producers are finding nuance in high-altitude plantings, say Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jenssen, authors of *Wines of the Southern Hemisphere*. “Seek out Malbec from the subzones of Tupungato, Maipú, Godoy Cruz, and Luján de Cuyo—in the latter, get even geekier with the sub-subregions of Perdriel

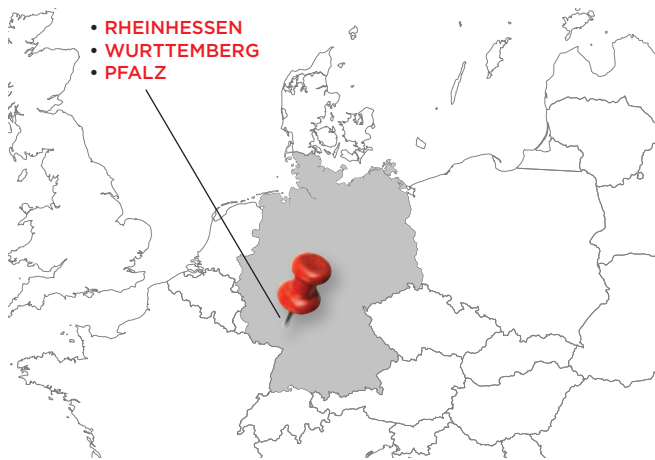
and Agrelo. It's a Who's Who of the top producers—look for bottles from Achaval-Ferrer, Alta Vista, Catena Zapata, Cheval des Andes, Luigi Bosca, Norton, Pulenta Estate, and Terrazas de los Andes.”



• MENDOZA

2 RIGHTEOUS GERMAN REDS

“Germans are the third largest producer of Pinot Noir,” says Damon Goldstein of Truly Fine Wine, the San Diego-based importer, distributor and wine shop that specializes in Germany’s gorgeous juice. “There’s lots of Spatburgunder [the German word for Pinot], plus indigenous red grapes like Dornfelder. If looking for high quality to price, Pinot here is definitely worth looking at.” Goldstein, who grew up in the Rheingau, points to Rheinhessen, Wurttemberg and Pfalz from producers like Wasem and Gutzler.



• RHEINHESSEN
• WURTTENBERG
• PFALZ

3 FAWN OVER THE FINGER LAKES

“I think we’re getting to an era where the best Finger Lakes Rieslings truly do stand up to the best wines from anywhere else,” says Master Sommelier, restaurant owner and Finger Lakes native Christopher Bates. He’s a particular fan of the versions coming from Hermann J. Wiemer. “That is the icon for me,” says Bates. “Wiemer is pushing the envelope more than anyone else with their attention to detail.” Others to look for: Forge, Bellweather and Boundary Breaks. Barnes, who’s own Element wine label began focusing solely on cool-climate red varieties in 2014, also says astute enophiles should keep their

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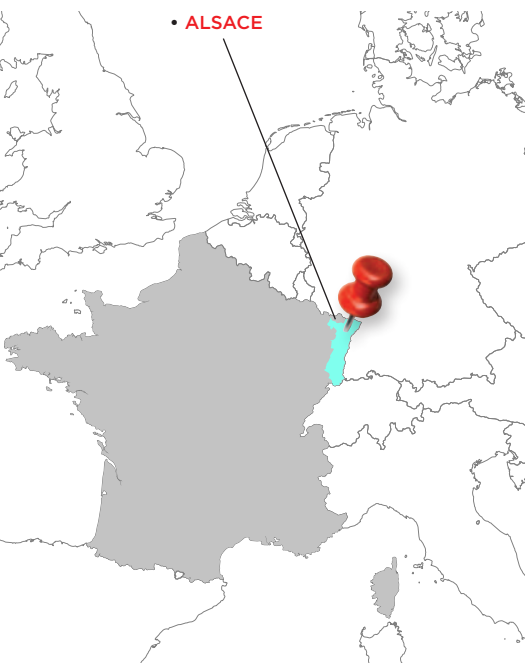
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palates poised for great Cab Franc and Pinot Noir from the FLX, too.

4 ALSATIAN NATION

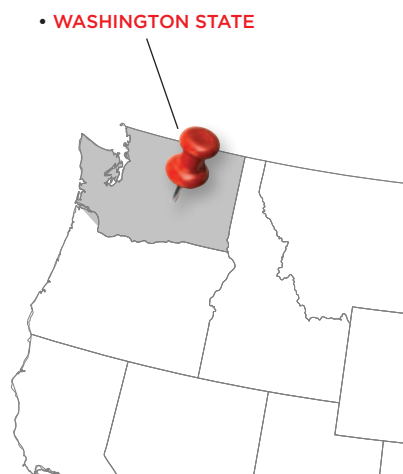
The beautiful patchwork-quilt topography here makes for a gulpable grab bag of terroir-driven deliciousness. “I strongly believe that the Lieu Dit and Grand Cru wines of Alsace are where the value shines brightest,” says Josh Nadel, NoHo Hospitality’s Beverage Director in NYC, as well as the founder of Gothic Wines and the current ambassador for Alsatian wine. “In these, we find artisanal, age-worthy, site specific wines made from noble varietals in small quantities. Apply those filters to other wine regions of the world and you are talking about wines which are at minimum twice if not three to four times the price.” For Nadel’s money, you can’t go wrong with Pinot Gris from producers like Paul Blank and Albert Boxler (the Grand Cru Som-



merberg in particular) and gewürztraminer like Bott Geyl’s Grand Cru Sonnenglanz or Trimbach’s Cuvée des Seigneurs.

5 WASHINGTON STATE OF MIND

If it’s Syrah you seek, turn your attention to the great state of Washington. “It strikes the balance between fresh, New World style and a little earthiness and acidity from the Old World,” says Scott Harper, the corporate wine and beverage director for Louisville, Kentucky’s Bristol Bar & Grille. And as a somm who’s a stickler for keeping high-quality bottles at \$50 and under aplenty on his lists, Harper knows value. “I’m a big fan of Gramercy Cellars by Master Somm Greg Harrington. The wines are not inexpensive, but they are a super great value.”



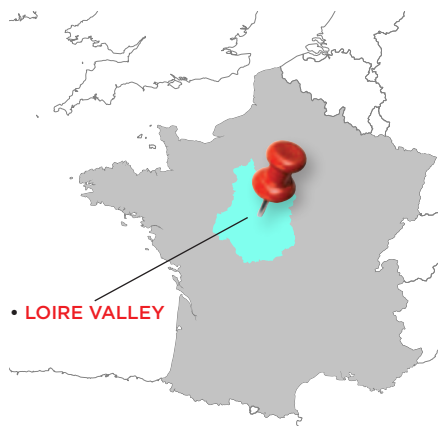
6 THE POWER OF PUGLIA

At Uva Wine Shoppe and tasting bar in Key West, FL, owner Mark Gambuzza is committed to biodynamically produced wines at prices that won’t freak out his flip-flop clad clientele, and Puglia hits that sweet spot for him. “The king for me is Antonio Lamona of La Quercia. He’s a rock star winemaker. You get a big mouthful of big, pronounced dark fruit, but they’re not sweet. And the finish is soft.” Gambuzza is a big fan of Aglianico from here. “For the average Joe who thinks they love Pinot but might not be into the big, biting tannins of a Cab, this is a good expression.”



7 LOVE FOR THE CENTRAL LOIRE

France’s long and lovely Loire Valley has a mind-boggling bevy of grapes and wines to fall in love with. But for Patrick Watson, sommelier and owner of Back Label Wine’s in New York’s Chelsea neighborhood, horning in on the middle gets you the most bang for your buck. “In the 20 to 30 range, there are just unbelievably solid wines, from white to red. “There are so many cool, unique, individual wines; none taste the same.” In particular, Watson is a fan of “overtly aromatic Cab Franc from producers like Domaine de l’Oubilee in Borgueil and Beatrice and Pascal Lambert in Chinon.”



8 SICILY’S SIREN SONG

“Fort quality, small producers with wines that sell under 20 bucks, Sicily is amazing,” says Gambuzza. “The wines go with pasta, meats, cheeses—they hold up with everything. Right now, the classic bright, blueberry notes of Nero d’Avola are doing very well in his

Uva Wine Shoppe. “I love Verso Rosso from Alessandro Botter—it’s right around 20 bucks. He’s making some killer Nero d’Avola. They feel a little like an Amarone-style wine. He sun dries the grapes—he likes to play with the wines in that style.”



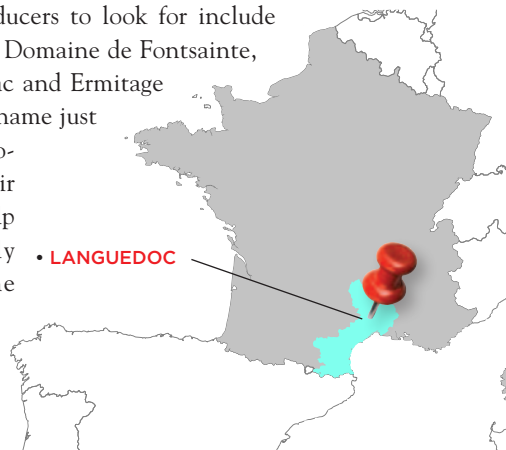
9 DIALING IT BACK FOR SAUV BLANC

New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is on the cusp of household-name status in some wine-centric homes, but bargains from NZ are few. Moreover, there are plenty of other regions doing great things with the grape. Dan Spadola, Chilean buyer at Suburban Wines & Spirits in Yorktown Heights, NY, has had great success steering customers to Chile. He doesn’t delve into the country’s SB-friendly terroir and climatic conditions; rather, he promotes its stylistic appeal, which he considers an advantage over New Zealand. “Chilean Sauvignon is generally less aggressive,” notes Spadola. “More like a level 7 compared to New Zealand’s 10. But it hits all the right flavor notes for Sauvignon Blanc lovers.” His shortlist of brands that overdeliver for the price are Santa Rita, Junta and Tres Palacios, all of which he offers for \$10.99 or less.



10 SOUTHERN FRENCH COMFORT

When considering regions of great value and quality in southern France, it’s natural to think immediately of the Languedoc. For decades, the wines of the Languedoc have been undervalued and this continues to be true. Many of the wines coming from Corbières, Pic Saint Loup, Terrasse du Larzac and Montpeyroux stand up in quality, character and ageability to their Rhône cousins in Lirac, Vacqueyras and Gigondas, but most often for a fraction of the price. According to Clark Z. Terry of importer Kermit Lynch, producers to look for include Château La Roque, Domaine de Fontsaïnte, Domaine d’Aupilhac and Ermitage Pic Saint Loup (to name just a few). These domains’ vines, terroir and knowhow help them consistently produce great wine for the money. ■



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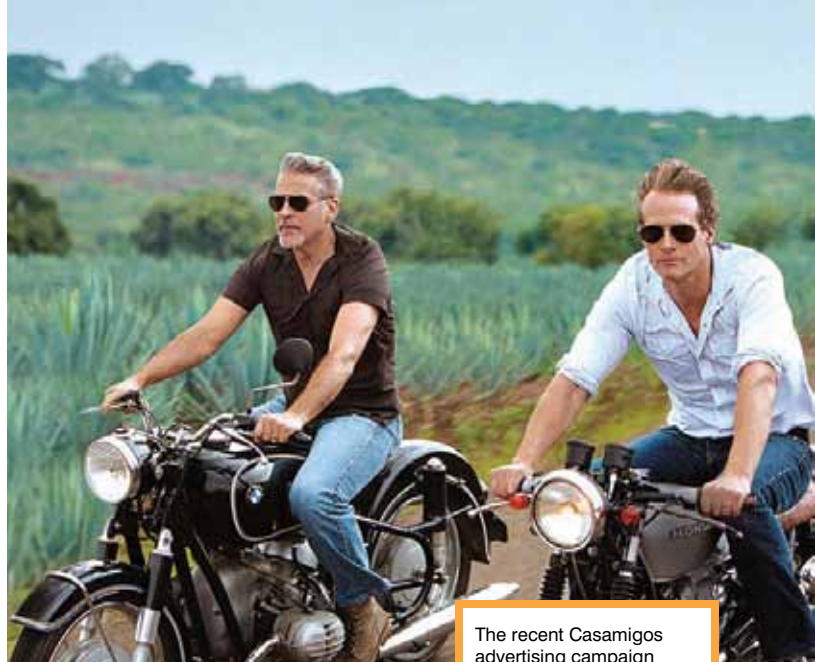
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The recent Casamigos advertising campaign features Rande Gerber and George Clooney on a motorcycle trip through Jalisco, Mexico: “We take a motorcycle trip every year and we thought riding through our agave fields would be perfect,” says Gerber. “We love spending time at our distillery with our team.”

CASAMIGOS SHIFTS GEARS

HOW THE NEWLY-CREATED IMPORT COMPANY IS DRIVING ITS FAST-GROWING TEQUILA

BY KRISTEN BIELER

Rare is the brand that transcends its own category. The whiskey that recruits non-whiskey drinkers, or the tequila that steals share from top vodka brands—they are unusual phenomena indeed, and the spirits industry has seen only a handful (Patrón, Grey Goose, Jameson).

Lee Einsidler believes Casamigos is on track to become a transcendent brand. As the CEO of Casamigos Spirits Company, he may be a bit biased, but when it comes to legendary brands, he is an expert. “Casamigos reminds me so much of Grey Goose early in its life cycle,” shares Einsidler, who launched and built the famed vodka at a previous company until its sale to Bacardi for \$2 billion seven years later. “Casamigos has all the ingredients for the same type of success,” he observes. “In our industry, people are very focused on categories, but not me; I talk to so many people who tell me they normally don’t drink tequila, but they love Casamigos.”

The Backstory

Casamigos was never intended for the limelight. Which is ironic, considering the celebrity of its creators. Best friends George Clooney and Rande Gerber were building adjacent homes at real estate developer Mike Meldman’s resort in Los Cabos a few years back, and felt frustrated by the quality of much of the tequila they were drinking. “We tried countless tequilas,” recalls Gerber. “They all had one thing in common—they burned going down. George suggested we make our own just for us to drink and share with our friends and family at our homes—literally our house tequila.”

Two years and 700-plus samples later, Casamigos, which loosely translates to House of Friends, was born. “We created it to drink with our friends,” explains Gerber. “It wasn’t intended for the public, but once word got out, we couldn’t resist sharing it with everyone.”

Make no mistake, Casamigos is not to be confused with the myriad of celebrity-endorsed brands on the market, adds Einsidler: “I think consumers are turned off by most celebrity brands; they see them as inauthentic. Casamigos was created by the people who drink it, and that resonates.”

Mike Meldman,
Rande Gerber,
George Clooney
and Lee Einsidler



Resonate it has: Earning a steady stream of top accolades and critical acclaim since its 2013 launch, Casamigos is currently the fastest-growing premium tequila in the U.S. The smoothness and mixability of Casamigos Blanco is pulling people from the vodka world, while the Reposado and Añejo are winning over bourbon and single malt drinkers.

Interestingly, while for most tequila brands the blanco overwhelmingly dominates sales, Casamigos' aged expressions represent half of the brand's business. "It's been fabulous to see big volume with our Reposado and Añejo; they present great alternatives to other categories and we're attracting so many whiskey drinkers."

The Move for Autonomy

Creating an independent company entirely focused on importing, marketing and selling Casamigos had been a goal of the founders since the beginning, and in 2016 they took the leap. Einsidler—who worked for Casamigos' previous importer and has worked in the spirits industry his entire life (his grandfather opened the first liquor store in Queens after Prohibition)—was tapped to lead their new importing company.

Casamigos Spirits Company was up and running immediately with "an excellent nucleus and strong sales force," Einsidler explains. Working out of the company's New York office, Einsidler has been steadily building his team—up to 25 sales people and growing, with Adam Rosen as EVP and Olivier Bugat as VP.

One year in, and the company is doing "magnificently well," Einsidler reports. Combining the tremendous focus that comes with being a single-brand company and the newly consolidated national distribution network has resulted in impressive momentum for the tequila. "Most ultra-premium brands are built on-premise, and that has always



"I think consumers are turned off by most celebrity brands; they see them as inauthentic. Casamigos was created by the people who drink it, and that resonates."

- Lee Einsidler

been our focus," says Einsidler. "But our retail business is exploding as people try Casamigos at a bar or restaurant and want to drink it at home. Today our sales are roughly 50/50 on- and off-premise which is the exact footprint you want for a brand on track to doing big volume."

The brand is doing well outside of traditional tequila markets too. "We're seeing success in tequila markets like California, Florida, New York and Texas, but also in less likely places. I've always believed a great restaurant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is just as important as a great restaurant in Chicago, New York or Atlanta."

While star power never hurts, Einsidler believes that is the least of Casami-

The brand's minimalist package is based on the laboratory bottles they received while developing the product. "Why put a lot of money into a bottle when what counts is what's inside?" says Gerber.

gos' magic: "People might try it because they heard it's George Clooney's tequila, but it's got to deliver. If it was simply a matter of famous people making stuff it wouldn't work." While the three Casamigos expressions are far from inexpensive—priced at \$40, \$45 and \$50—Einsidler frequently hears from people that "they love Casamigos more than tequilas that cost three times as much. George and Rande decided to focus on the tequila itself rather than the bottle."

The founders are exploring some variants and additional expressions, but aren't ready to share details ("It's safe to say whatever you see from us will continue to be ultra-premium," Einsidler mentions). For now the focus remains on building Casamigos' base range and spreading the word. "I'm not every day focused on selling a certain amount of Casamigos," Einsidler explains. "I don't think that's how you build a brand—pumping volume then discounting to make numbers at the end of year. If you do the right things, the sales will take care of themselves." Being a private company allows for the authenticity of the brand to continue. "We have the freedom to make quick decisions and stay true to our core values and what's important to us," he adds.

In December, the Casamigos Spirits Company headed to Los Cabos for a company retreat. "We are a very entrepreneurial company with a smart, talented, dedicated team with lots of energy. It was important for us to connect everyone to the place where Casamigos was born—made by a couple of friends who know what they like, created the best tequila, for themselves to drink and share with friends," Einsidler says. ■



ON/OFF-PREMISE: A CLOSER LOOK

New Nielsen CGA research spotlights trends in both channels

BY W. R. TISH

Long a trusted resource of trend-tuned data in retail channels, Nielsen in 2016 began directing more attention to restaurants. In May, Nielsen CGA—a joint venture between Nielsen and CGA Strategy—released insights from their first On-Premise Consumer Survey for the U.S., based on a survey of 15,000 on-premise consumers, all of legal drinking age. Their year-end review, released in late December, focuses on the interplay between on- and off- premise performance, and in turn category and brand dynamics.

Restaurants and retailers, of course, operate in different environments, with different factors impacting their success and growth. This report highlights the commonalities and differences between both channels during 2016.

Generally speaking, off-premise growth outpaced that of bars and restaurants; and within the growth patterns some interesting data on product categories also emerged. Among the conclusions:

- Both on- and off-premise, spirits are performing the best, followed by wine, with beer trailing.

- Premiumization (value trend > volume trend) was a growth factor in both channels as well, although the trend was less pronounced on-premise where beverages are obviously higher-priced to start with.

Analyzing the current tilt of the on/off-premise dynamic, Danny Brager, SVP of Nielsen's Beverage Alcohol practice explains: "Drinking at home' growth is outpacing 'drinking out of home.' While both channels are critical, the off-premise continues to be not only significantly larger volumetrically than on-premise,

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but also the environment currently offering the larger growth opportunities.”

Brager also notes that in today’s competitive market, “a number of retailers continue to lean even more so into efforts to lure shoppers into their stores.” The Nielsen CGA report predicts that smaller independent retailers will continue to battle large retail entities who continue to expand their footprint. “While this allows suppliers and distributors efficiencies in terms of more concentrated points of distribution,” notes Brager, “it also raises concurrent risk challenges associated with more business in fewer hands.”

CATEGORY INSIGHTS

The Nielsen CGA report also yielded interesting data regarding category performance in both the on- and off-premise channels. In general, the on/off-premise remains a potent breeding ground for adoption, as brands continue to vie for on-premise trial that leads to off-premise follow-through purchases.

BEER

- Craft and domestic premium beer segments are now almost equal in dollar contribution to on-premise.
- Imports share overall is larger on-premise vs. off-, but Mexican imports are less developed, suggesting an area of opportunity since the Mexican beer segment is the growth leader in both channels.
- Domestic premium beers have suffered significant losses on-premise, much more so than off-premise.
- Ciders are growing on-premise; not so off-premise.



WINE



- While overall wine category trends are weaker on-premise compared to off-, sparkling wine is growing well in both channels.
- Varieties that are better developed on-premise compared to off- include: Pinot Noir, Malbec, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling.
- Imports overall are better developed in on-premise, led by Italy, Argentina and France.
- NZ remains the import growth leader in both channels.
- While off-premise growth rates are not too much different in the latest quarter compared to the full year, in restaurants, wine trends—led by reds—have improved generally.

SPIRITS



- Unlike beer and wine, spirits are growing in both channels.
- While spirits growth rates in the off-premise have eased just a bit in the latest quarter compared to the full year, in the on-premise, category growth rates have strengthened in the last quarter.
- Flavored vodka and whiskey are growing faster on-premise than off-.

- Cognac growth is enviable in both channels (but even more superlative in on-premise).
- Tequila is a growth leader in both channels.

LOOKING AHEAD

Not surprisingly, the road ahead is expected to be paved with competition in both channels. Scott Elliott, SVP, Nielsen CGA, spotlights “a population of ever-more discerning consumers with an expanding drinks repertoire and an increasing expectation that on-premise operators must deliver experiences that are truly worth leaving the house for.”



Within the off-premise marketplace in 2017, Nielsen CGA expects competition for the consumer dollar will be even more intense, with each adult beverage category seeking to be the drink of choice on each drinking occasion—whether those end up as in home or out of home occasions. E-commerce, while still relatively small in comparison to many other categories, will continue to expand; retail merchants will increasingly encounter consumers who want to buy but who may not see the need to visit the store to do so.

Perhaps most importantly, all three tiers—suppliers, distributors, and retailers—will continue to be challenged by the relentlessly growing range of beers, wines and spirits. The report concludes: “Those who are recognizing the importance of getting the ‘right’ products in the ‘right’ stores to meet the needs of shoppers in that store, will be the winners.” Sounds like pretty timeless advice. ■

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The newest blend from Trinchero Family Estates is Hopes End, combining Shiraz, Grenache and Malbec. The packaging calls the wine a Red Blend, but the verbiage plays in the trendy “Dark” territory.

APPLYING ORDER TO CHAOS

THE WILDLY EXPANDING ‘RED BLEND’ CATEGORY IS CREATING A JUICY CHALLENGE FOR RETAILERS

BY W. R. TISH

Blended wines are as old as the vine-covered hills. Bordeaux, Rioja, Chianti, Côtes-du-Rhône... all classic European blends. And they’re red. But they don’t call themselves “Red Blends.” Ditto Meritage wines, made under the umbrella of the 20th-century-born association codifying the Bordeaux-style blends of the world.

But here in America, those Old World classics and Meritage alike are being forced to make room on shelves and in conversation for wines that trumpet their blended identity while delivering flavor profiles that can be all

over the map (and have little connection to actual maps). These blends are about style more than about place or grapes, and increasingly that style is smooth and jammy—threatening to turn the general drinking public’s notion of blended wine on its head.

NEW—AND GROWING

It’s been building for few years now, and accelerating. If considered a varietal wine, Red Blends would be the third largest entry in terms of revenue tracked by Nielsen; and blends are dominating the introduction of new products—one out of every four in one study—bringing a fresh

mini-flood to the proverbial wine lake.

On the cautionary side, while the category is barely old enough to track statistically, it is morphing like a Hydra—a multi-headed beast—as words like “silk” and “dark” join “Blend” on the label. Retailers, being at the frontline, are tasked with making sense of the Blend trend, both in terms of organization on shelves and interaction with consumers.



DFV’s four Gnarly Head bottlings are positioned in marketing materials as presenting a stylistic spectrum from “Soft, Juicy” to “Intense, Huge.”



Apothic has demonstrated that line extensions are energizing rather than cannibalizing sales of other blends.

With that context in mind, let's set aside for the moment the fact that the sweetish new blends are an abomination in the view of wine purists. A more useful approach now is to take stock of how some of the bigger brands are positioning and growing their multi-varietal blends.

Make no doubt that the proliferation of Red Blends is a calculated response to market success. "In the past ten years, consumers started demanding more than just the sweet red blends, so suppliers began responding with dark red blends, and then soft red blends," explains Chris Indelicato, CEO of Delicato Family Vineyards. "In particular, the richer, lusher wines with concentrated, darker fruit profiles have really taken off." DFV saw enough market potential to launch a dark 3L box: Nighthawk. And for the four distinct blends under the Gnarly Head label, the key to the sales and marketing strategy is positioning the wines on a style spectrum, from "Soft, Juicy" to "Intense, Huge."

ADDITION BY MULTIPLICATION

E. & J. Gallo has been a pioneer in budget-minded, kitchen-sink blending since deep into last century, with Hearty Bur-

Producers are keenly aware of the need to differentiate their higher-priced wines, both inside the bottle and out.

gundy. Today, Gallo's Apothic has become the pioneer in the Red Blend sub-categories, via Apothic Crush and Apothic Dark. Both started seasonally and grew organically—the limited releases sold out like hotcakes. Ditto Inferno, the whiskey-barreled version.

A happy byproduct of the seasonal-first approach has been a thirsty fan base. Christine Jagher, Director of Marketing, Premium, notes, "Our fans have come to expect something new and different from us. They are willing to try something new while also relying on their old favorites. We've even heard from retailers and distributors that sometimes people are asking for the new Apothic wines before they've even been released." So if anyone was worried about cannibalization of other red blends, fear not: Apothic proved just the opposite.

Like Apothic, Ménage à Trois has had success multiplying; they now have Silk and Midnight, and even a white spinoff with Gold, a plush Chard-Viognier. But Ménage's parent company, Trinchero Family Estates, is hardly done. The newest from TFE is Hopes End, a blend of Shiraz, Grenache and Malbec. The wine labels itself a Red Blend, but the front of the bottle exhorts browsers to "run away to the DARK SIDE, to a place called Port Misery, South Australia."



SELLING TIPS

- **Grapes matter less than style** at the juicy end of the spectrum. Using words that clarify a wine's character—like jammy for flavor, smooth for texture, "more intense" for "dark"—can only help shoppers find the wine they will like.
- **Know what you sell.** This holds for all wines, but even more with blends—not only to be able to describe the ones labeled as blends, but also to remind people that there are plenty of classic blends, too.
- **Encourage experimentation.** These are FUN wines, and the lesson taught by the big brands' line extensions is that blend lovers are adventurous.

So that's another big brand owner not afraid to pile on with another blend. And in turn, the wave of Dark blends is spreading. Treasury Wine Estates is rolling out a Dark Red expression of 19 Crimes. "What brand is better to have a 'Dark' than 19 Crimes?" asks Samantha Collins, Director of Imports—after all, the brand's backstory is referencing the 19 acts that earned criminals a one-way trip to Australia. A distinguishing factor in 19 Crimes "The Banished" is Petite Sirah, which Collins says adds more color, more black fruit and a bit of tannin. Collins says the market introduction has been smooth: "The rise of the 'Dark' blends has been meteoric, and we have not really had to explain it to distributors or retailers, since they are already seeing consumers pick up both wines."

LET'S GET SERIOUS?

Interestingly, Treasury is rolling out another blend right now, but the contrast in positioning is enlightening with respect to the fast-evolving Blend(s) category. Max's—a tribute to Penfolds' first Chief

T**trend spotting**

Winemaker, Max Schubert, and overseen directly by current Grange-maker Peter Gagos—is not labeled a blend at all. The grapes—Shiraz and Cabernet—are there instead, though they are initially hidden behind a bright red full-bottle wrap that unzips. Emma Brown, Senior Brand Manager—Penfolds, shares that the intention with the package was to create something attention grab while maintaining the producer’s traditional labeling.

The point here is that \$24.99 Max’s, while a deliberate entry into the Blend arena, is being presented quite differently from the under-\$12 wines. As it should. Producers are keenly aware of the need to separate their higher-priced wines, both inside the bottle and out. The wine itself is flat-out delicious and, well, “serious,” showing ripe New World berried fruit and inviting spice, framed by what the winery tasting notes call “focused tannins and sensitive oak [12 months in barrel, 10% new French oak] affording a firm grip on the finish.”

Given suppliers’ ramped-up attention to Red Blends at the juicy, jammy end of the style spectrum, it makes perfect sense that similar effort is going to go into their higher-end blends. Consider the brand new William Hill 2014 “Bench Blend.” The final blend of 33% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Petite Sirah, 24% Merlot, 18% Petit Verdot and 1% Malbec is ripe and ready to enjoy, but with more depth, complexity and structure to satisfy New World red lovers. Just as important, the proprietary name here is instructive: 74% of the fruit was sourced from estate vineyards on the Silverado Bench, and the rest from other parts of Napa Valley, providing a tangible selling point for the \$40 SRP.

The idea of “Red Blends” coming to represent a higher-priced, more “serious” tier is certainly logical. In the process, however, sellers and buyers of these wines can and should expect clear differentiation—particularly over \$20 SRP.



That differentiation will often be visible on the packaging; upscale graphic elements, grape composition and proprietary names will be more common. And ideally the wine has a clear compositional identity and/or backstory that can help justify the higher price, whether it’s \$15, \$25 or more. As long as the price-tier distinction is merited by wine distinction, the category as whole can only benefit. And if the wine has a relevant backstory, even better. In the case

of Josh Cellars “Legacy,” Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits CMO Renato Reyes explains, “We positioned it as: hot brand meets a hot category. Consumers, especially millennials love to discover new wines and they love brands that stand for something. We offer both with Josh Cellars Legacy: a unique blend, in that signature Josh style that consumers love; and a sincere tribute to what Josh the man passed on to founder Joseph Carr.” Priced at \$16, the 2014 Legacy is only the second vintage of the blend.

**WHAT TO EXPECT**

- More Red Blends from all-sizes of producers, as well as from outside the U.S.
- More alternative packaging
- More blends labeled “Sweet”
- More competitive pricing around \$9.99
- More descriptive words and proprietary names on front labels at the lower end of the price range
- Grapes used on front labels to indicate a “serious” blend
- Petite Sirah as a wild card, both for “Dark” blends and more structured ones

STILL SHIFTING

All things considered, the trend of Red Blends is really just getting started. As suppliers devote more vicultural and marketing resources to these bright, fruit-driven wines, the wine-drinking public is responding positively. Continued success will depend in part on the distinctions among the types of blends.

As much as producers aim to make those distinctions via naming and labeling and packaging, it will still be vital for retailers stocking and promoting these wines to make sure to offer clarity and guidance in the process of giving people what they want. The better defined the blends are, the easier it will be for them to continue growing. ■



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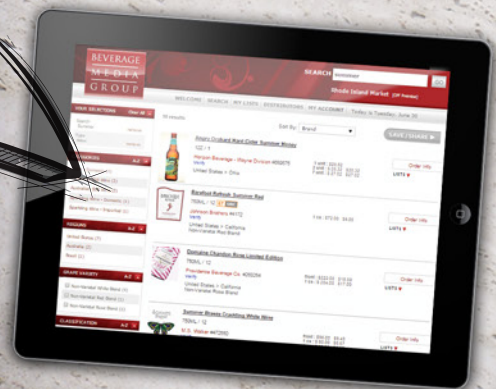
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