

Beverage Journal

APRIL 2024



SUSTAINABILITY'S NEXT STEP

MAKING THE WINE INDUSTRY
SUSTAINABLE FOR WORKERS

ORGANIC WINES TO KNOW

 WHY CALVADOS
IS TRENDING



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**EYE ON THE MARYLAND
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Total Wine & More co-owner and U.S. Rep. David Trone is seeking to expand his business in Maryland, again. Maryland House Bill 1424 and Senate Bill 1171 would allow individuals to hold up to four retail alcohol licenses. Currently, Maryland law only allows for one license per individual. The bills are sponsored by Del. David Fraser-Hidalgo and Sen. Antonio Hayes.

David Trone and his brother Robert are owners of Total Wine & More, a chain of more than 260 stores across 28 states. Two of those stores are in Maryland — one in Laurel and the other in Towson. His ownership of Total Wine & More positions the company to benefit from the proposed bill, potentially allowing each Trone brother to own up to four licenses in Maryland.

According to the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA), the bill is a serious detriment to smaller stores. They would be put at a significant disadvantage by dramatically increased competition from Total Wine's enhanced buying power. Steve Wise, who represents the MSLBA in Annapolis, warns against granting Total Wine this buying advantage.

According to Wise, expanding from a single license per individual to four licenses is significant because it substantially changes the buying power of the person who would control those four licenses.

If HB 1424 passes, Total Wine would gain an impressive competitive edge, leveraging increased buying power and access to volume discounts at a much greater level than the vast majority of beverage alcohol retailers in Maryland.



The legislation marks the first attempt in seven years to expand liquor licenses in Maryland.

Have you contacted your General Assembly members about House Bill 1424 and Senate Bill 1171? Have you joined the MSLBA yet? It's probably time to do both; your livelihood may depend on it.

EFFECTIVE PROMOTIONS FOR APRIL

As April rolls in, here are some profitable promotion ideas for maximizing revenue this month.

Easter Weekend Deals: Capitalize on the Easter holiday by offering special promotions on popular spirits, wines, and craft beers. Consider organizing Easter-themed events such as egg hunts or brunch specials paired with discounted drinks to draw in customers celebrating the occasion.

Tax Day Relief: Help customers unwind after tax season by offering tax day relief promotions, such as discounted drinks or extended happy hours. Consider partnering with local tax preparation services to offer special deals for customers who show proof of filing their taxes.

National Beer Day Celebrations: April 7th marks National Beer Day, providing an excellent opportunity to showcase a variety of craft beers and host beer-tasting events.

Spring Cleaning Sales: Encourage customers to stock up on their favorite spirits and wines with spring cleaning sales. Offer discounts on seasonal products, clearance items, or bulk purchases to incentivize larger transactions. ■

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1. RHUM J.M

Rhum J.M.'s L'Atelier des Rhums range is an exploration of Martinique's terroir. Master blender Karine Lassalle evokes the island with a trio of expressions—Fumée Volcanique, Épices Créoles, and Jardin Fruité—that are aged between one and three years and emphasize smoke, spice, and fruit elements through different oak treatments and char levels.

\$ SRP: \$39.99 per 700-ml bottle
🌐 rhumjmus.com

4. GÉRARD BERTRAND

Languedoc-based Gérard Bertrand has revealed a new art edition of its popular Cote des Roses for the 2023 vintage. The art edition is a collaboration between Emma Bertrand, Gérard Bertrand's daughter and the brand's creative director, and Morgan Jamieson, one of Australia's leading artists. The bottle is adorned with Jamieson's signature floral motifs, while the wine inside, a blend of Grenache, Cinsault, Syrah, is made from certified-organic grapes.

\$ SRP: \$26.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 gerard-bertrand.com

2. THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY

Corrections, The Prisoner Wine Company's annual limited-edition series, sparks conversations about prison reform. Its second release, a 2021 reserve red blend from the Napa Valley, is wrapped in a label pulling from *Apokaluptein: 16389067*, a work by Jesse Krimes, who crafted the piece with 39 bed sheets, hair gel, and spoons while sentenced to 70 months in jail. Five percent of all Corrections sales will benefit The Center for Art & Advocacy, the organization Krimes started to help formerly incarcerated artists.

\$ SRP: \$150 per 1.5-liter bottle
🌐 theprisonerwinecompany.com

5. BRUGAL RUM

Maestro Rivera is Brugal's new luxury sipping rum, developed by maestra ronera Jassil Villanueva Quintana. It's made in the Dominican Republic with the distillery's proprietary Dark Aromatic Toasting technique, which includes emptying American sherry oak casks of freshly aged rum and then toasting the barrels to extract caramel pearls formed from the wood's sugars. The rum is then poured back into the casks to absorb the natural sweetness, resulting in notes of caramel and dried fruit.

\$ SRP: \$200 per 700-ml bottle
🌐 brugal-rum.com

3. DEWAR'S

Referencing both Scottish and Japanese distilling traditions, Dewar's Double Double 21-year-old Mizunara Oak Cask Finish is a spin on the brand's Double Double 21-year-old finished in oloroso sherry casks. Master Blender Stephanie Macleod employed her four-stage aging process to yield the new 92-proof iteration's sandalwood, coconut, and vanilla notes.

\$ SRP: \$149.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 dewars.com

6. GIN & JUICE

Thirty years after their hit 1994 song Gin & Juice, Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg have reunited on a ready-to-drink beverage of the same name. The four gin-based canned cocktails (5.9% ABV), available in breezy apricot, citrus, melon, and passionfruit flavors, are the first creations from the powerhouse music duo's new premium spirits company.

\$ SRP: \$14.95 per four-pack of 12-oz. cans
🌐 bydreandsnoop.com

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7. THE BUSKER IRISH WHISKEY

The Busker's first small-batch, limited-edition offering is a 92.6-proof full-bodied single pot still whiskey. Double-aged in first-fill bourbon barrels and finished in oloroso sherry casks at the Royal Oak Distillery in County Carlow, Ireland, its palate is distinguished by jolts of leather, prune, and sandalwood.

\$ SRP: \$49.99 per 700-ml bottle

thebusker.com

8. CLIFF LEDE VINEYARDS

Dominated by grapes from its Stags Leap District and Calistoga estate vineyards and rounded out with fruit from Oakville, Rutherford, and Howell Mountain, the Cliff Lede Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2021 is a celebration of the region's diversity. It reveals soft flavors of dark fruit underpinned by jasmine and violet.

\$ SRP: \$82 per 750-ml bottle

cliffledevineyards.com

9. EL DORADO RUM

La Bonne Intention (LBI) / Diamond High Ester (DHE) is El Dorado Rum's new high-ester blend, the inaugural launch in a nine-product series responding to consumer demand for more eclectic varieties. Produced at Demerara Distillers Limited in Guyana, it combines La Bonne Intention and Diamond High Ester rums that were distilled in 2012 and aged in former bourbon barrels before blending. The cask-strength release is infused with cinnamon, clove, and vanilla.

\$ SRP: \$130 to \$140 per 750-ml bottle

theeldoradorums.com

10. TRAVELLER WHISKEY

Grammy Award-winning country singer, songwriter, and guitarist Chris Stapleton and Harlen Wheatley, the master distiller at Kentucky's Buffalo Trace Distillery, sampled more than 50 versions of Traveller Whiskey before settling on the 90-proof Blend No. 40. Tasting of spice, oak, and toasted nuts, it works equally well sipped neat and in cocktails.

\$ SRP: \$39.99 per 750-ml bottle

travellerwhiskey.com

11. HENDRICK'S GIN

For the purple-hued Grand Cabaret, the latest installment in the Hendrick's Gin Cabinet of Curiosities, master distiller Lesley Gracie looked to early 1900s Paris for inspiration, when celebrations revolved around eau de vie, peach schnapps, and cherry liqueurs. Amplifying stone fruit and herb flavors, the spirit pops in spritzes and gin and tonics.

\$ SRP: \$39.99 per 750-ml bottle

hendricksgin.com

12. MIJENTA TEQUILA

Sustainable tequila producer Mijenta has unveiled a limited-edition Cristalino that reflects maestra tequilera Ana María Romero Mena's penchant for experimentation. The complex, clear spirit, which exhibits layers of coconut, chocolate, and coffee, was matured for some eight months in American oak Symphony barrels that flaunt staves from forests in Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

\$ SRP: \$199.99 per 750-ml bottle

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QUEUE IRENE DONNELLY

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | IMAGES BY ASHLI MIX PHOTOGRAPHY

In this ongoing series of articles on Maryland and D.C. bars, restaurants, and taverns named after their owner (or a legacy family member), I typically talk to the actual namesake of the place. For Dylan's Oyster Cellar in Baltimore, owner Dylan Salmon was unavailable. In journalism, though, one must be flexible. And, in this case, that flexibility paid off in the form of an excellent interview with Dylan's wife, Irene Donnelly, the establishment's co-owner.

She has been with him from the start, and she remembers some early trepidation upon making their restaurant a self-named eating and drinking place. She recalled, "There was a brief time where he felt, 'I think I might have cursed myself because I put my name on the business.' There was definitely a whole set of expectations that went with that he felt, and still feels, that I don't necessarily feel. I watch him go around and talk to tables. And people are like, 'Who is this guy?' That's because Dylan is very casual. He wears T-shirts and you'll often see him in a beanie or a hat. He doesn't present like a manager or an owner. He's just a dude. But as soon as he says, 'I'm Dylan' then everybody lights up and gets really excited and they're like, 'Oh my God, you're Dylan!' It's a lot for him, but he likes it."

NEW

HENDRICK'S

GRAND CABARET



LIMITED RELEASE

Deliciously Fruity, Alluringly Hendrick's



IMAGE BY PAULA B PHOTO

Irene Donnelly
Co-Owner & Co-Operator
Dylan's Oyster Cellar

Dylan's Oyster Cellar is open evenings, Tuesday through Saturday, from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Located in the Hampden neighborhood of Charm City, Dylan's celebrated its seventh anniversary this past December. So, what has made the place stand out? Donnelly was quick to answer: "We have an open raw bar with master shuckers who are right in front of the guests, interacting with them and shucking. It's rare to sit right in front of the oyster bar and hang out with the experts. We usually have at least seven different varieties of oysters every night. I really don't think you can find that anywhere else, at least not in Baltimore."

She added, "There is also the community aspect. We're a neighborhood bar, for sure. But we do get a lot of tourists. They like to come and have that sort of authentic, neighborhood feel."

It's the customers that both Donnelly and Salmon enjoy the most. "We especially love the community aspect of it, seeing regulars and making connections with people," she said. "We live in this neighborhood, so I feel like we're the people's pub. Restaurants and pubs are special places where people get together, and so many of us got hit pretty hard during the pandemic. But I really think we've come back well. I was in the dish pit the other day, scraping plates, and then doing my rounds around the restaurant. And I briefly stopped



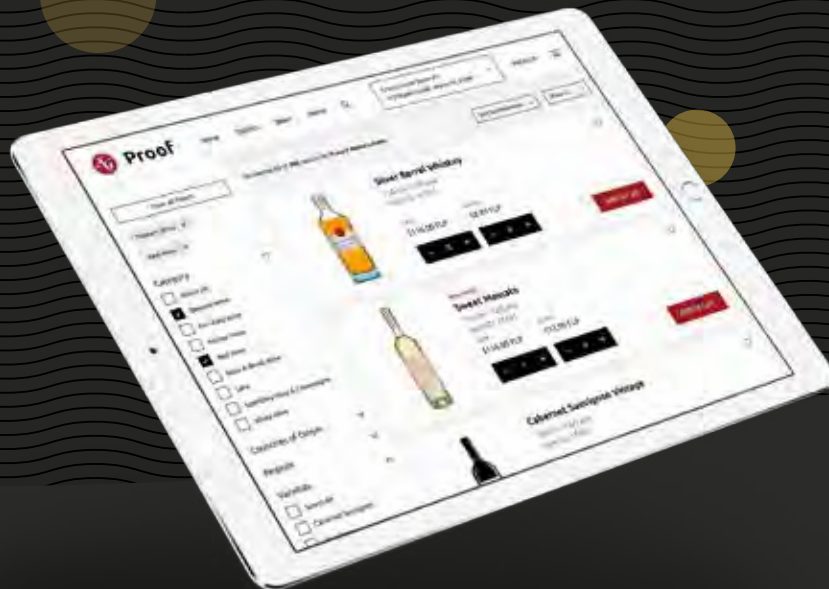
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Dylan Salmon
Co-Owner & Co-Operator
Dylan's Oyster Cellar

She is especially proud of the fact that some of Dylan's staffers over the years have gone on to become successful entrepreneurs in their own right. "Restaurants can feel like dead-end jobs for some people," she stated. "But they don't have to be. One of the things Dylan and I hold really high is the number of people we've encouraged and inspired to open their own places. We have had at least one bar manager, one chef, and an oyster shucker who have left Dylan's and started their own businesses. I know our current chef is in the works of opening his own place. If we can do it, they can do it. So, we encourage it. Our first chef, Karl, opened his own place with his wife and named it after the nickname her niece gave her. The business's name is Chachi's, but her name is Stephanie."

And her advice to them and others reading this who may want to open their own self-named bar or restaurant one day? "Work for a small business owner first! I worked for a lot of small businesses before opening our own. You learn a lot working with owners directly. Be sure to pick their brains and figure out what they're doing well and how they're doing it. I think it's harder to go from working for a big chain to owning your own place." ■

and said to myself, "This is just the best! I love this!"

One of the things their customers love the most is Dylan's full bar with its Happy Hour drink specials each weekday from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. They also like some of the legacy drinks that the couple has come up with.

"We have a drink that's been on our menu for years," she remarked. "It's called A Stern Fern. It's our version of a dirty martini. We're infusing gin and vodka in kelp and garnishing it with an olive. It's not everybody's cup of tea, but I think it's a cool drink. Dylan has made extensive moves on our non-alcohol offerings. He has made a specific drink called a Turmeric Tonic, and it's proved to be popular. I think he's hesitant to call it a 'mocktail.' He just calls it a 'good drink.'"

Of course, running a small business in this sector these days – all days – has its series of challenges. But just like in marriage, the husband-and-wife team endure together. "If anyone owns a home," Donnelly stated, "you know things break all the time or need tending to. In a restaurant, things are constantly breaking or needing to be updated. The constant attention of the actual space can sometimes be a lot! You can let some things go at home, but not at the business."



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WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW



EMPIRE STATE OF MIND

The worlds of Manhattan and The Hamptons come together in the 88-proof Great Jones x Wölffer Estate Cask Finished Bourbon, a true New York collaboration between **Great Jones Distilling Co.** head distiller Celina Perez and **Wölffer Estate Vineyard** winemaker Roman Roth. For this limited-edition liquid, new American oak casks holding four- to seven-year-old straight bourbons born from local grains were hand-selected at the NoHo distillery and then finished for over a year in Wölffer's Caya Cabernet Franc barrels, eliciting flavors of dark cherry and fig.

SRP: \$49.99 per 750-ml bottle



FROM THE HEARTLAND

To shine a spotlight on the Midwest's quality, yet often under-the-radar whiskeys, **Lost Lantern** is dedicating its spring collection to complex offerings from the region. The seven bottlings are from previous Lost Lantern partners Starlight Distillery in Indiana, Cedar Ridge Distillery in Iowa, and Tom's Foolery Distillery in Ohio as well as Wollersheim Winery and Distillery in Wisconsin, Few Spirits in Illinois, Middle West Spirits in Ohio, and a multi-distillery blend of Far-Flung Rye, all showcasing a rich agricultural heritage.

SRP: \$90 to \$120 per 750-ml bottle

ON THE BORDER

Thunder Bay, Ontario, on Lake Superior was an epicenter for booze smuggling into the U.S. during Prohibition. It often went undetected by dogs when it was concealed in stacks of spices. As an homage to that historical nugget, **Zamora Company** has rolled out 60-proof Thunder Bitch, a liqueur ideal for shots that straddles sweet and fiery with its fusion of Canadian whisky, cinnamon, and chili.

SRP: \$17.99 per 750-ml bottle



EXPERIMENTAL MODE

Heaven's Door has launched The Exploration Series, featuring innovative, limited-edition releases that nod to cofounder Bob Dylan's expansive imagination. First up: a 108-proof Tennessee straight bourbon whiskey aged for at least five years and finished in just-used Calvados casks buoyed by medium-to-heavy toasted French oak staves, imparting notes of caramel and brown sugar.

SRP: \$79.99 per 750-ml bottle



SMOKE STUDY

Like the inaugural 2023 edition, **Westland Distillery's** second run of Solum American Single Malt Whiskey highlights a distinct Pacific Northwest terroir but was matured a year longer than its predecessor. The 100-proof spirit, embracing peat harvested from a bog some two hours south of Seattle, is aged in a combination of new and used oak casks that yields herbaceous fresh dill and green tea flavors.

SRP: \$149.99 per 700-ml bottle





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THE WINE INDUSTRY'S HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGE

IT'S TIME TO SCRUTINIZE THE SIGNIFICANT HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES FACING THE WINE SECTOR—AND EXPLORE THE PRELIMINARY STEPS BEING TAKEN TO MITIGATE THEM

BY JACOPO MAZZEO

"M

Modern developments within the wine sector have introduced a range of human rights challenges," argues Tom Owtram, the cofounder and general manager of the Sustainable Wine Roundtable (SWR), a global platform for collaboration to advance sustainability across the wine sector. "The industry has been slow to address them proactively, largely because it has not faced the same level of scrutiny from campaigners, activists, and journalists as other sectors have."

A common thread among these challenges is their disproportionate impact on the lower tiers of the supply chain. The tragic deaths of four pickers in Champagne during the last harvest, for instance, exposed how soaring temperatures, exacerbated by climate change, can pose severe health risks to workers.

"What happened in Champagne is so egregious because the top Champagne brands are all owned by huge companies," says Jason Glaser, the CEO of La Isla Network, an organization focused on occupational health research and consultancy for

workers in warm climates. "They [should] get their act together to make sure workers are protected."

According to Charles Goemaere, the director of the Comité Champagne, the region has tasked a select group of professionals with implementing new measures aimed at ensuring the safety of grape-pickers in the face of the changing climate, as well as addressing broader concerns

Workers at a Reyneke Wines vineyard in South Africa.



Grape pickers in Champagne

regarding accommodation, recruitment practices, and working conditions.

Indeed, human rights concerns within the global wine sector, not just Champagne or France, now extend beyond the risks of harvesting grapes in extreme heat, particularly as the industry becomes increasingly reliant on migrant labor to address a shortage of local workers.

A FRAGILE WORKFORCE

The Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) reports that there are nearly 170 million migrant workers worldwide, with a significant presence in the agricultural industry. Neill Wilkins, the head of the migrant workers program at IHRB, asserts that currently, one in every 20 workers is a migrant.

A recent investigation by German broadcaster DW shed light on how some grape pickers in Champagne may endure minimal rest between picking sessions or live in deplorable conditions, a scenario that's not isolated to a single region or country. Italian association No Cap, which combats human rights abuses in agriculture, claims that the exploitation of migrant laborers is systematically practiced in vineyards across Italy, including in Chianti, the Asti province, and Puglia. There have also been reports

of abuses in South Africa and Brazil, among others.

The growing reliance on service providers, who supply wineries and brands with temporary workers on demand, has compounded the challenges faced by the industry. Migrants are often required to pay substantial fees to secure employment abroad, taking out loans to cover these costs. "Payments are taken by various intermediaries for a variety of things," explains Wilkins, "and bear little relationship to the genuine cost of delivering those services."

Additionally, migrants frequently encounter working and housing conditions, as well as payment arrangements, that are markedly different from what they were promised or initially agreed upon. "They might be working the first year of any contract just to pay off the cost of their recruitment," Wilkins continues. "And they can't leave those inhumane conditions. These are all indicators of forced labor ... On top of that, they also face discrimination from the local population."

Wineries like Tablas Creek in Paso Robles and Domaine Bousquet in Mendoza have managed to dodge the risks associated with service providers by investing in full-time employees. This approach



"It's nonsense [to] treat the land and animals in a very respectful way, but then [not] offer safe and decent conditions for the workers."

-Sebastián Tramon,
Emiliana Organic Vineyards

not only helps ensure a fair treatment for vineyard workers, but also provides the wineries with a more dependable and skilled workforce.

However, the widespread adoption of this strategy encounters significant challenges that are closely tied to vineyards' operational structure. Conventionally operated wineries tend to rely on temporary workforce as harvest seasons demand a large number of pickers within a concentrated timeframe. A reduced workforce suffices for the rest of the year, when vineyard tasks such as pruning are generally less time-sensitive. Ensuring the financial feasibility of employing pickers on a full-time basis requires a winery to undertake a thorough restructuring of its



“Aligning with these certifications provides assurance that the right strides are being made in the pursuit of corporate social responsibility improvements.”

-Anne Bousquet, Domaine Bousquet

operations aimed at optimizing its workforce’s skills throughout the year.

TAKING ACTION THROUGH CERTIFICATION

To evaluate individual initiatives, enact performance benchmarks, and enhance their practices, some wineries are turning to certifications that adopt a comprehensive approach to social and environmental sustainability. B Corp is increasingly sought after by wine brands, while Italy’s Equalitas standard (which, unlike B Corp, is aimed specifically at the wine industry) was launched in 2015 and gained significant traction in recent years.

Environmental certifications are also gradually evolving to embrace a broader

view of sustainability issues. The California-based Regenerative Organic Alliance, founded in 2017, includes social responsibility criteria, while the Biodynamic Federation Demeter International—historically focused solely on biodynamic agriculture—introduced a social responsibility standard in October 2022. Initially voluntary, it became mandatory for all certifiers to implement at the beginning of this year.

“For us, this is good news,” says Sebastián Tramon, the head of sustainability at Chile’s Emiliana Organic Vineyards, a global pioneer of sustainable viticulture. “If you address sustainability ... you cannot only focus on one element of it. It’s nonsense that you treat the land and animals in a very respectful way, but then you don’t offer safe and decent conditions for the workers.”

Some wineries firmly believe that certifications are an essential and adequate tool for fostering a more socially ethical industry. “We strongly believe in certifications,” argues Anne Bousquet, whose Domaine Bousquet boasts a number of sustainability badges including B Corp and Regenerative Organic. “Mere compliance with the law may fall short, [but] aligning with these certifications provides assurance that the right strides are being made in the pursuit of corporate social responsibility improvements.”

Other producers, while generally supportive of certifying bodies, emphasize that many fail to effectively address social responsibility threats. “Not all certifications have the same level of rigorousness and scope,” says Francesc Cartanyà, the chief people officer at Familia Torres. “We must ensure they dive deep enough and set a minimum level of ambition that is high enough to tackle the main issues we are facing today.”

THE ROAD TO MEANINGFUL CHANGE

The voluntary nature of certifications implies that achieving meaningful change

across the entire industry requires broader efforts at a systemic level by trade organizations, retailers, and local and regional governments. In this regard, the actions of alcohol monopolies and global retailers can serve as pivotal mechanisms to effectively tackle human rights issues across the sector in the years ahead.

Owtram expects social responsibility credentials to soon become a market-access prerequisite for wineries, thereby encouraging more producers and brands to take proactive steps. “Retailers are going to make human rights a key issue and they will want to see a minimum level of performance in this area of sustainability,” he argues.

To contribute to this objective, the SWR is actively engaged in developing collaborative actions and tools for labor standards, with the specific aim to offer practical guidance to the broader global wine industry on addressing labor-related challenges. “The next steps entail a benchmarking process to assess the current state of social responsibility norms globally,” says Owtram. “This involves identifying regional variations and disparities, determining desired objectives, prioritizing areas for improvement, and establishing acceptable levels of labor and human rights requirements.”

Given the broad geographical scope and the multitude of stakeholders involved, it is expected that the project will encounter substantial obstacles in building consensus. Nevertheless, collaborative strategies such as this one are likely to represent the most effective tools for the industry in tackling labor issues on a global scale, both efficiently and comprehensively.

“We know there are challenges across the world, and the more we look, the more we may find,” says Owtram. “But this is exactly why the industry must come together to find a way forward—solutions can only be found with a collective approach.” ■



CALVADOS IS TRENDING—HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE EUROPEAN SPIRIT

OLD WORLD PRODUCERS ARE HONORING TIME-TESTED, NATURAL PRODUCTION METHODS, YET AREN'T AFRAID TO EMBRACE INNOVATION, ADDING UP TO AN INCREASINGLY DYNAMIC CATEGORY

Calvados has been the pride of Normandy for centuries. While many of its distilleries have rich, generations-long legacies, and boast unparalleled craftsmanship, the French brandy has seen a surge of renewed appreciation amongst U.S. consumers and beverage professionals.

While global sales increased by 4.7 percent in 2022, in the U.S., sales jumped 70 percent, making it the second-largest export market after Germany. The Calvados industry has led initiatives to highlight its merits—focusing on the dynamism of the category, the spirit's inherent sustainability, and small scale production methods—but the driving force behind the trend has come from innovation on the part of both producers and bartenders.

"As more and more bartenders use Calvados in their cocktails, [its] image renews," says Guillaume Drouin, the third-generation owner of Calvados Christian Drouin. "We have conducted a lot of work with bartenders, writing books with them, organizing cocktail competitions, hosting

them at the distillery to spread our passion and knowledge. Calvados is a great historic spirit with a long tradition. This is something we are very proud of."

The Calvados Spirits Council (IDAC) has created "Introducing Calvados: Authentic Spirits from Europe," a new initiative funded in part by the European Union to raise awareness of European GI spirits. The program encompasses dinners, masterclasses, trade shows—it will appear at Bar Convent Brooklyn in June—in-store promotions, and other events, to help Calvados-curious buyers learn more about the spirit and cement its place behind the bar.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH FRENCH TRADITION

Spirits are deeply rooted in European culture and tradition, and are produced across all EU countries. The U.S. remains the top export market for European GI spirits as more American consumers seek expertise, authenticity, and know-how. Despite the vast potential of all 250 geographical indications, exports to the

ABOVE: Calvados is gaining momentum in the U.S.

U.S. are primarily centered on a few, like Cognac. However, other EU spirits are well positioned to align with current American consumption trends, such as Calvados, which is why it's the flagship spirit of this EU campaign, aiming to create positive awareness and recognition of European GI spirits as authentic and sustainable products. The campaign also works to enhance knowledge about the high-quality standards of European protected designations of origin in the U.S.

Calvados is essentially distilled cider, or *eau de vie de cidre*, made with apples or pears grown throughout 20,000 designated acres of France's Normandy region. It's protected by three different AOCs: Calvados AOC, which accounts for 70 percent of production; Calvados Pays d'Auge, which specifies a product that's double-distilled in a copper pot still (as opposed to a column still); and Calvados Domfrontais, which is distilled from a majority of pears.

Calvados was born from cider makers in Normandy distilling cider in the name of preservation, a practice that dates to 1553 in the region. As they worked, empty rum casks from the French Caribbean piled up in the Le Havre port and served as containers for the distilled cider. Much like the story of Cognac's evolution, storing cider distillate in barrels had auspicious consequences.

The name came about after the Calvados *département*, or parish, was established in the region in 1789. But Calvados didn't gain prominence until the latter half of the 19th century when phylloxera devastated the vineyards of France and the first industrial Calvados distillery opened.

Today, strict regulations govern Calvados' production. In accordance with its AOCs, Calvados must be produced in Normandy with fruits grown in the region. There are about 230 different legally recognized varieties of apples, divided into four classifications: sharps, sweets, bittersharps, and bittersweets, and about 139 varieties of pears.

AGE-OLD PRODUCTION MEETS MODERN INGENUITY

Once the apples are harvested, cleaned, and pressed to extract the juice, or must, this is fermented for at least 21 days before being distilled. (The minimum fermentation for Calvados Domfrontais is 30 days.) After distillation, the spirit must age for at least two years in French oak barrels, though many producers age it much longer. It's bottled at a minimum of 80 proof.

Each bottle is essentially a blend of various cider eaux-de-vie. Some producers also release vintages from individual years. Calvados is classified by age. Fine or VS Calvados is aged at least two years; VSOP bottlings spend at least four years in oak; Calvados aged more than six years is XO. Younger expressions are defined by fresh apple flavor profiles, while older Calvados offers more baked apple notes.

Production, of course, is seasonal. Ciders produced in the autumn are kept in cider vats and tuns for several months, then



their age is reflected in the brandy. "Distillation of the youngest ciders gives simple, fruity spirits that are well suited to sale as very young Calvados," says Drouin. "Distillation continues until June and sometimes even into the autumn to produce Calvados of more robust structure, with more clearly marked acidity. Calvados made in this way has greater potential for aging and makes it possible to create the more mature vintages, our firm's specialty."

But aging is only one way to influence flavor. Even with strict regulations, there's room for experimentation. Stéphanie Jordan, the cofounder of Avallen Spirits, points to how Calvados makers, long bound to tradition, are taking pages from other categories known for innovation.

"This shake-up began some five-plus years ago with the emergence of new, younger, fresher style brandies tailored to resonate with the preferences and aesthetics of the 21st-century drinkers," says Jordan. "Some were launched by established heritage family producers as the latest generation came to the helm, others by industry innovators finding their way into Normandy, sensing the category was ripe for new propositions. New cask finishes started to make their way out of the cellars—some so good they stand shoulder to shoulder with some of the finest Scotches."

Cask-finishing is largely driving innovation. Boulard, for one, offers its VSOP with a rye-whiskey cask finish, a wheated-whiskey cask finish, and a virgin Mizunara cask finish. The Expérimental de Christian Drouin series features collaborations with Hine Cognac, Springbank Whisky, and

rum producer Foursquare. Pierre Martin Neuhaus, the owner of Domaine du Coquerel, which his grandfather acquired in 1971, gives their 2015 Cask Finish Collection credit for attracting new customers, especially thanks to its new modern packaging.

AN INHERENTLY SUSTAINABLE SPIRIT

Sustainability isn't a strategy for Calvados producers; it's modus operandi. "The Calvados industry's carbon footprint is absolutely positive—unique for any spirit in the world—due to the large plantations of apple tree orchards that capture huge quantities of CO2 in the atmosphere," says Serge Der Sahaguian, the CEO and director general of Spirit France Diffusion.

Donatien Ferrari, the communications manager for La Martiniquaise Bardinet, the family company that produces and sells Busnel Calvados Pays d'Auge, estimates a hectare of apple trees captures between 35 and 50 tons of carbon over 25 years. Furthermore, orchards prevent soil erosion and contribute to biodiversity, particularly of bees and other pollinators. Careful measures are taken to protect the fruit. AOC regulations prohibit irrigation or pesticides, ensuring the apples are brimming with beneficial microbes.

"This innate microbial richness on the apple skins obviates the need for additional yeast during cider fermentation, relying instead on the indigenous yeast already present—a testament to the orchards' natural ecosystem," says Jordan.

Centuries ago, before there was legislation protecting standards, Calvados was a rough-edged spirit, commonly drunk as Café Calva—a shot of Calvados in coffee. But today Calvados is taking its place behind the bar and in craft cocktails across the U.S. One of Neuhaus' favorites is an Espresso Martini using VSOP—an elegant call back to those Café Calvas of old. *For more information, go to www.drinkcalvados.us* ■

This content was produced in collaboration with our partner, Calvados.



8 ORGANIC WINES TO KNOW, ACCORDING TO BUYERS

SOMMELIERS, RETAIL BUYERS, AND WINE DIRECTORS SHARE THEIR FAVORITE ORGANIC WINES OF THE MOMENT

BY SHANA CLARKE

T

he shelves of local retailers are evidence enough that consumers in the U.S. are increasingly interested in organic, biodynamic, and other sustainable wines. But the data backs it up, too: The number of drinkers who said they would pay more for a sustainable wine rose from 21 percent in 2021 to 30 percent in 2022, according to IWSR Drinks Market Analysis. On top of that, 46 percent of drinkers said they would always choose a sustainable wine if given the choice.

For many wine professionals this is welcome news, especially for the sommeliers and retailers who champion organic producers—or those practicing organic—on their lists and shelves already. It offers a greater opportunity to introduce their clientele to the increasing number of mindfully farmed wines that don't just taste good but work towards bettering the environment.

Beverage Media spoke with buyers around the country about the organic wines they are excited to talk about right now. (All wines are listed with price per bottle at the noted establishment.)

■ **NIBIRU 'TRADITION' NV, KAMPTAL, AUSTRIA; \$59**

Selected by Kellie Holmes, wine and events director, Herd Provisions, Charleston, South Carolina



Humane-raised beef from Herd Provisions' own farm is the centerpiece at this restaurant, butcher shop, and grocery store, and Kellie Holmes' wine list falls in line with the sustainably sourced ethos of the menu. She focuses on small-production winemakers who practice low-intervention winemaking. Off the floor, Holmes also champions the work of mindful producers in her role as co-chair of the Slow Food Charleston chapter.



Kellie Holmes

Currently, she's excited about this red cuvée from Demeter-certified Nibiru in Kamptal, Austria. This "easy red wine is crunchy and fresh," she says with "lots of dark berry fruit, and an undercurrent of potting soil," and it's best served chilled. The fruit—a blend of Merlot and Zweigelt—is sourced from organic and biodynamic vineyards surrounded by forests in

the northernmost part of the region. “The combination of loess [silt, sand, and clay] topsoil over hard rock, and the northernmost exposure inform this wine’s fresh and mineral-driven core,” she says.

■ **ROGUE VINE 'GRAND ITATA' TINTO 2021, ITATA VALLEY, CHILE; \$19**

Selected by Nathan Gordon, buyer and general manager, The Vineyard Wine Shop, Denver



In business since 1971, The Vineyard Wine Shop has focused on fine wine since its inception. But buyer and general manager Nathan Gordon is adamant that fine wine can be found at any price point. One such example is this Cinsault-dominant blend from Rogue Vine, which Gordon describes as “disarmingly delicious, juicy, and fresh with vibrant fruit and just the right rasp of País tannin to keep things solid and structured.” He adds, “It’s a great-value chillable red that’s versatile at the table and also delicious as an aperitif.”

The fruit comes from an organically farmed, single vineyard planted in 1960. Winemakers Leonardo Erazo and Justin Decker practice low-intervention winemaking using minimal water. They were severely hit by Chile’s wildfires in February 2023, losing nearly 90 percent of their vines. “Viticultural treasures like this are increasingly endangered in Chile due to climate change and questionable forestry management, historically speaking, on the part of the state,” says Gordon.

■ **LADY OF THE SUNSHINE 'CHENE VINEYARD' PINOT NOIR 2022, EDNA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA; \$46**

Selected by Ashley Hausman, MW, owner, So What Wine, Stillwater, Minnesota



At So What Wine, owner Ashley Hausman, MW, aims to “shed light in my community on the many special bottles and people that have shaped my relationship with wine,” she says. One of those is winemaker Gina Giuni and her Lady of the Sunshine wines. “[She] rep-



Ashley Hausman

resents just about everything I can ever hope to offer my customers,” says Hausman. “Humility, hard work, and a commitment to the land epitomize this grape grower-winemaker—a true vigneron.”

A second-generation grower, Giuni focuses on biodynamic and regenerative farming methods and practices a natural, minimalist style in the cellar. “[Giuni] goes further with lightweight glass, omits capsules, and natural cork,” says Hausman. “Her heart is in the details with family artwork on corks and labels of her own design. Everything about her wines feels crafted, intentional, and thoughtful.”

■ **LA GARAGISTA 'IN A DARK COUNTRY SKY' 2022, VERMONT; \$40**

Selected by Michelle DeWyngaert, general manager, The Town Cellar, Darien, Connecticut



Michelle DeWyngaert felt destined to go into wine—their last name translates to “of the vineyard.” At The Town Cellar, DeWyngaert focuses on smaller, family-owned produc-



Michelle DeWyngaert

ers, the majority of which follow organic or biodynamic practices. They believe wine “can generate thoughtful and meaningful conversations” about a wide variety of topics and they encourage this discourse through interactive experiences, such as weekly Friday tastings or monthly wine classes.

DeWyngaert says this La Garagista wine encompasses everything they want to champion at the shop. “Winemaker Deirdre Heekin is doing the most ecological farming possible, which includes using North-East climate-hardy hybrids, with an incredible team—mostly women—that she treats fairly and with respect,” they say.

In a Dark Country Sky is 100 percent Marquette, and DeWyngaert describes it as a “bright, purple-fruited, lighter red similar to a Gamay, with just a tiny bit of a spritz, that once decanted, blossoms and has this wonderful umami quality.”

■ **LUNARIA 'CIVITAS' PECORINO 2022, TERRE DI CHIETI, ABRUZZO, ITALY; \$48**

Selected by Alisha Blackwell-Calvert, beverage director, Madrina, Webster Groves, Missouri



Alisha Blackwell-Calvert’s career in wine has garnered her numerous accolades, most recently as a 2023 Iconoclast Wine Honoree at the James Beard House. In her role at Italian-American restaurant Madrina, she strives to showcase the wealth of indigenous white Italian varieties. This Lunaria Pecorino, offered both by the glass and bottle, “delivers satisfaction on all accounts, with fresh citrus pith, savory lemon verbena, green almond, and ripened white peach,” she says. “The zesty acidity makes it a reliable accompaniment to all of the seafood offerings on the menu, too.”

Beyond its versatility, Blackwell-Calvert is a fan of the estate’s commitment to sustainability. Lunaria is produced by Cantina Orsogna, a progressive cooperative of growers in Abruzzo, and the label, like others under the company umbrella,



Alisha Blackwell-Calvert

focuses on organic and biodynamic farming practices. “Orsogna emphasizes utilizing growers that commit to respecting nature and giving back to the community,” she says. “The Pecorino grapes for the Civitas bottling are Demeter certified and handled with minimal intervention.”

■ **DOMINIQUE CORNIN POUILLY-FUISSÉ ‘LES CHEVRIÈRES’ 2020, POUILLY-FUISSÉ, FRANCE; \$100**

Selected by Christina Stanley, wine director, The Slanted Door, Napa, California

Napa native and advanced sommelier Christina Stanley may have intimate knowledge of her



Christina Stanley



hometown’s wine scene, but in building the wine list for The Slanted Door’s new Napa location, she leaned into her interest in “uncharted” terroir from around the world.

“In 2020, 22 premier cru vineyards of Pouilly-Fuissé were approved, including Les Chevrères,” she says. She loves highlighting this part of history by offering a premier cru vineyard “before it was labeled as such.”

This wine, which Stanley describes as “bright and aromatic, with notes of dried chamomile and jasmine, and expressing its limestone-drenched terroir,” also highlights Stanley’s passion for winemakers who farm mindfully. The estate, certified organic since 2003 and practicing biodynamic, is now under the direction of Romain Cornin, who took over from his father, Dominique. Spontaneous fermentation and no fining or filtering are all hallmark practices in the cellar.

■ **LES VIGNES DE PARADIS ‘UN P’TIT COIN DE PARADIS’ 2020, SAVOIE, FRANCE; \$115**

Selected by Tira Johnson, wine director, Ilis, Brooklyn, New York

Ilis from Noma cofounder Mads Refslund, opened to much excitement in the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn at the end of last year. Seasonality dictates the ingredients, and with such a diverse menu, Tira Johnson is always looking for new wines with which to surprise customers that also can adapt to the ever-changing menu. One selection offered by the glass since day one is this Chasselas from Les Vignes de Paradis in Savoie, France.

The winemaker Dominique Lucas comes from a négociant family in Burgundy but found himself in Savoie when he was ready to branch out on his own. His 18.5-acre estate is certified organic and farmed biodynamically. “It drinks like fresh mountain air,” Johnson says. “It’s very light, fresh, and displays some floral undertones.”



Tira Johnson

■ **CHÂTEAU DE CAMPUGET ‘1753’ VIOGNIER 2021, COSTIÈRES DE NÎMES, RHÔNE VALLEY, FRANCE; \$23.99**

Selected by Nancy Sabatini, wine director, Mainstreet Wines and Spirits, Countryside, Illinois

As the wine director for Mainstreet Wine and Spirits, an almost four-decade-old independent wine shop outside of Chicago, Nancy Sabatini is always on the hunt for affordable organic wines to introduce to her clientele. She travels extensively to further her wine knowledge while also uncovering interesting wines that will grab customers’ attention. For this Viognier, her quest took her to the Rhône Valley. Established in 1942 in a château built in 1753 near Nîmes, Château de Campuget is now run by Franck-Lin Dalle, the estate’s third-generation vigneron. In 2019, the winery was certified Haute Valeur Environnementale.

“I love this aromatic Viognier, with its classical notes of honeysuckle, ginger, and nectarine,” says Sabatini. “It has a balanced mouthfeel, and is bursting with a crisp, long, elegant finish that keeps you coming back for more.” ■

