

# Beverage Journal

JULY 2025

## SOUTH OF THE HEMISPHERE

FROM ARGENTINA TO AUSTRALIA AND BEYOND, WHAT'S DRIVING WINEMAKING FORWARD IN SOME OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE'S TOP REGIONS?



RETHINKING THE AUSSIE  
SHIRAZ STEREOTYPE

TOP SOUTH AMERICAN WINES



## FEATURES

04

### **JAILBREAK**

Jailbreak Foodworks & Brewing Company:  
Free to Create and Innovate.

09

### **RETHINKING THE AUSTRALIAN SHIRAZ STEREOTYPE**

An exploration of the category reveals a broad spectrum of wine styles.

13

### **SOMM-FAVORITE SOUTH AMERICAN WINES**

Sommeliers recommend nine top wines from South America.

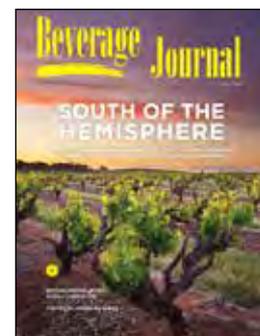


## DEPARTMENTS

02

### **PUB PAGE**

Best time to be heard,  
is when no one else is talking.



Cover Credit:

CO Jane Lopes/Legend Imports

**BEST TIME TO BE HEARD,  
IS WHEN NO ONE ELSE IS TALKING**

Every January, I use this space to sound the alarm: The Maryland General Assembly is convening, and your business may soon be in the legislative crosshairs.

From efforts to expand retail alcohol licensing to looming tax debates, the beverage alcohol industry never seems far from the spotlight. So I encourage you to get informed, get involved, and build relationships with your elected officials—before it's too late.

But here's the truth: By the time January arrives, it's already a scramble.

When legislators are in session, they're dealing with packed schedules, endless hearings, late-night votes, and hundreds of voices competing for their attention. If you're only reaching out during session, you're probably not getting through. That's why summer is your moment.

Right now, in the quiet months when legislators are back in their districts and the pace slows down, is the best time to get on their radar. You don't need a lobbyist or a PR campaign. You just need to show up, be authentic, and make a connection as a local business owner who cares about the community and understands the stakes.

**Here's how you can take advantage of this window of opportunity:**

**Stay Informed:** Follow the work of your county beverage association and the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association



tion (MSLBA.org). These organizations do the heavy lifting to track legislation that impacts your livelihood.

**Make Contact:** Use mdelect.net to find your Senator and Delegate(s). Reach out to introduce yourself—not with an ask, but

with a handshake. Invite them to your business, or offer to meet for coffee.

**Put a Face to the Numbers:** Want to make your impact hit home? American Beverage Licensees (ABL) members can log in to ablusa.org and download data showing the jobs, tax revenue, and community value your business brings to their district.

**Communicate with Purpose:** A short, personal note still goes a long way. Explain what

you do, who you employ, and how legislation in Annapolis affects your bottom line. Be real. Be concise. Be present.

Strong relationships with your representatives aren't built in the heat of session, they're built now, while the Capitol is quiet and real conversations can happen.

So don't wait for January. You've heard me say it before: **What if your livelihood depended on it?**

It still does. Maybe even more so this summer. ■

**STEPHEN PATTEN PUBLISHER**

*"Right now, in the quiet months when legislators are back in their districts and the pace slows down, is the best time to get on their radar."*

**Beverage Journal**

Published Monthly by  
**The Beverage Journal, Inc.**  
(USPS# PE 783300)

Over 80 Years of Continuous Publication

**BEVERAGE JOURNAL, INC.**

President / Publisher Stephen Patten  
steve@beveragejournalinc.com  
410.796.5455

Board of Directors Lee W. Murray  
Thomas W. Murray

Information Technology Director Peter Williams

**EDITORIAL**

Editor-in-Chief Kristen Bieler

Senior Editor Courtney Schiessl

Contributing Editors Alia Akkam, Arielle Albert,  
Keven Danow, Jim Clarke,  
Edward Durgin, Jeff Siegel

**ART & DESIGN**

Creative Director Larry Lee

Senior Designer Jeff Tsui

**TECHNOLOGY & WEB**

eCommerce Director Ian Griffith

Online Web Programming Vali Balescu

**PRINT & PRODUCTION**

Print Services Manager Lee Stringham

**ADVERTISING & MARKETING**

MD & DC Advertising Sales Stephen Patten

National Advertising Sales Jody Slone-Spitalnik

**POSTMASTER:**

Send address changes to  
**THE BEVERAGE JOURNAL, INC.**  
**PO Box 2062, Williamsport, PA 17703**

The Maryland Beverage Journal and the Washington, DC Beverage Journal are registered trademarks of Beverage Journal, Inc. All rights reserved.

**Periodicals postage paid at Baltimore, MD** and additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: MD edition; 1 year \$49.00 plus tax, 2 years \$79.00 plus tax, 3 years \$109.00 plus tax, FedEx Ground delivery \$85.00 plus tax per year per edition, single copies \$10.00 plus tax. DC edition; 1 year \$36.00 plus tax, 2 years \$60.00 plus tax, 3 years \$83.00 plus tax, FedEx Ground delivery \$85.00 plus tax per year per edition, single copies \$5.00 plus tax.

The opinions expressed by guest columnists are their own and not necessarily those of Beverage Journal, Inc. Beverage Journal, Inc. is an equal opportunity corporation.

Copyright 2025 Beverage Journal, Inc. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. Not responsible for unsolicited material or advertising claims.

*Jamaica's*  
FINEST COCKTAILS & MIXES

**Yeah Mon!**

**Authentic Jamaican Rum Punch**

**Made with Natural Ingredients**



DISTRIBUTED BY EAST ROAD BEVERAGES  
(240)270-2411 [JamaicasFinestCocktails.com](http://JamaicasFinestCocktails.com)



# JAILBREAK BREWING

FREE TO CREATE AND INNOVATE

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

**J**ailbreak Foodworks & Brewing Company ... with a name like that, you would think this Laurel, MD, establishment would exist in a former jail or prison that has been renovated and retrofitted. But the name is more of a metaphorical one. After years working in the government contracting world, co-founders Justin Bonner and Kasey Turner decided they wanted to leave their desk jobs “breaking out” of the nine-to-five grind.

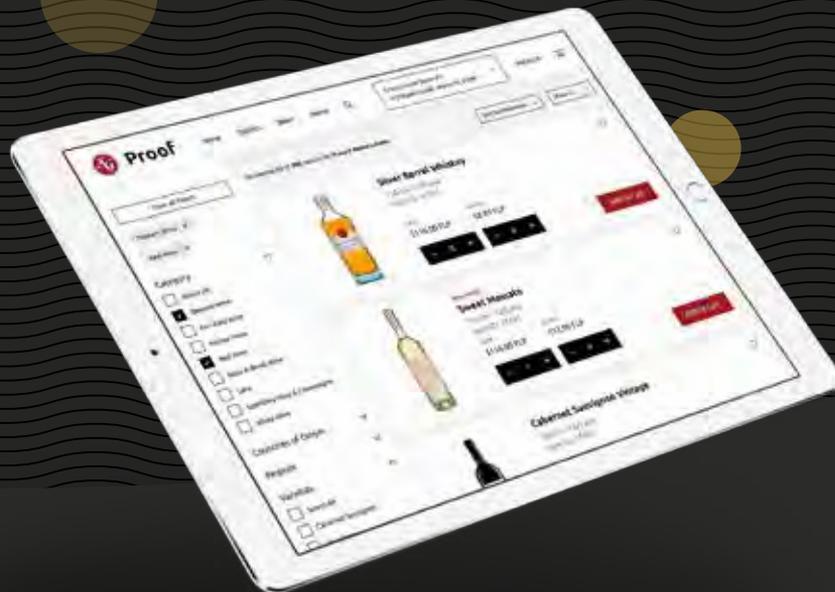
Bonner, in a phone interview with the Maryland Beverage Journal, recalled, “When you’re in the government space for years, you kind of feel trapped. The money is great. But it can be a thankless job. One day, we decided to just make an escape – make a jailbreak, if you will – and do something that wasn’t so cumbersome. So, we called it Jailbreak and started the beer brand first 11 years ago.”

He continued, “This was 2014, and we thought the beer market in Maryland at the time wasn’t being well served. There were a couple of big players like Heavy Seas and Flying Dog. But other than that, there were just a handful of smaller players.”

Jailbreak Brewing Company became Howard County’s first produc-

Turning inventory.  
And heads.

*That's Proof.*



**Proof**<sup>™</sup>  
BY SOUTHERN GLAZER'S

Visit [about.sgproof.com](http://about.sgproof.com) to find out more

**Justin Bonner  
co-founder**

**Jailbreak Foodworks & Brewing Company**

tion brewery. In 2018, the duo expanded the taproom with the addition of FoodWorks, which boasts additional seating and an open kitchen, Bonner and Turner's vision of the taproom continues to grow and offer customers an escape from the daily grind.

"It's interesting how we have evolved," Bonner said. "These days, it's as much about the food as it is the beer. By the way, a lot of our beer names are named after themes and moments from 'The Big Lebowski.' The official artist of our cans is a man named Bill Green out of Los Angeles, and he is the official artist of The Big Lebowski!"

And, of course, the beer still comes first. Jailbreak's brewing facility houses 11 conical fermenters, three brite tanks, and a canning line that creates product that's sent out to more than 400 retail accounts. In 2022, according to Jailbreak's website, the company brewed almost 50 different beers equating to over 4,000 barrels.

Bonner stated, "Obviously, a lot of people know about our beer, and certainly many people know about our whiskey program. But what surprises people is we have 7,000 bottles of wine in our wine cellar! It's one of the deepest wine selections anywhere in Maryland or D.C., and it's kind of a hidden gem."

So, what kind of clientele does Jailbreak draw on a regular basis? Bonner once again was quick to point out that he and Turner come



from the world of the National Security Agency, which is located close by at Fort Meade. "It's why we located here," he said. "We wanted to be close to our tribe. During the week, they are a big part of our clientele. We really aren't located in or around any communities. Laurel is a big area, and it's a different demographic than you might think for high-end food and craft beer."

He continued, "That said, we always knew we had to become a destination location in order to survive. The consumer is less interested these days in going out and just hanging out in a brewery. People are looking for an experience. We recognized that we had to get out of the brewing business and into the experience business."

*(continued from page 8)*

## UPDATES = MORE SALES

Call today for your Assessment!



- ✓ New Doors
- ✓ New Lighting
- ✓ New Shelving = More Facings
- ✓ Serving the entire Mid-Atlantic region



Like us at  
[facebook.com/CAREYSALESANDSERVICES](https://www.facebook.com/CAREYSALESANDSERVICES)



**CAREY SALES & SERVICES**

Serving the Local Beverage Industry since 1933

3141 Frederick Ave., Baltimore, MD

410-945-7878 or 800-848-7748 • [careysales.com](https://www.careysales.com)



# NOW AVAILABLE

Republic National Distributing Company's  
**New Online Product Search And Ordering Experience**



**DISCOVER** NEW ITEMS

**DIVE** INTO BRANDS

**SAVE** YOUR FAVORITE PRODUCTS

**SEARCH & ORDER** WITH EASE

GET STARTED TODAY BY VISITING

**[www.eRNDC.com](http://www.eRNDC.com)**



Bonner said that when he and Turner opened their taproom, there were many skeptics. He said, “Quite frankly, other brewers laughed at us. ‘You guys have space for over 150 people! Who the Hell is going to be coming here?!’ And then we opened the restaurant and decided to serve high-end, dry-aged steaks and fish. And some people said, ‘Who’s going to eat this fancy at a brewery?!’ But it just continues to work.”

For Bonner, the favorite part of his job is having the freedom and ability to create and innovate: “Coming from the government world, there were a lot of restrictions. It was very hard to be creative. We’re a small company, and I love being nimble. I love waking up on a Monday morning and saying, ‘I dreamed of something last night.’ And later that morning, I’m in a meeting and saying, ‘Hey, guys. I have this idea. I think it will work. Let’s roll with it!’”

But the obstacles are many he acknowledged. “Out of COVID and over the last four or so years,” he lamented, “finding people has been a challenge. Our industry lost so many managers and experienced peo-

ple. We’re lucky in that we’ve had low turnover. But we had to rebuild much of our company [post-pandemic], and it’s just been really hard to get people back to work! And when they do come back to work, their benefits and financial expectations are completely different than they were just five years ago.”

Bonner recalled meeting with Maryland beverage biz legend Hugh Sisson, who opened the first ever brewpub in the state and eventually founded Clipper City Brewing Company in 1995 and would later rebrand as Heavy Seas Beer. “We sat down with Hugh very early on and asked him, ‘What’s the first piece of advice you can give us when opening a brewery?’ And he said, ‘My first piece of advice to you is . . . don’t open a brewery!’ [laughing] We came to learn that brewing is a low margin industry, and a few percentage points margin one way or another can make or break your company.”

Despite the hardships, Bonner still loves his job. He and Turner clearly have a level of commitment that has separated them from the competition and kept them in business for over a decade now.

Bonner concluded, “You can certainly set your own schedule. But what people don’t consider is, if you make your own schedule and you want your business to succeed, your schedule is going to be 24/7 attending to your business at least the first six or seven years. It’s great to make your own hours. But if every waking hour is dedicated to your business, you have to decide, ‘Is that really better than working for somebody else?’ Fortunately, my wife and I are both entrepreneurs. So, she knows it’s a lot of risk, a lot of stress, but we wouldn’t have it any other way!” ■



**SHOW MORE  
TO SELL MORE**

- ➔ Solid Shelves
- ➔ Maximum display  
Edgeless Doors
- ➔ Maximum efficiency

3141 Frederick Ave. Baltimore MD | 410-945-7878 or 800-848-7748 | [careysales.com](http://careysales.com)



# THE AUSTRALIAN SHIRAZ STEREOTYPE IS ALL WRONG

**MANY AMERICANS THINK THAT AUSTRALIAN SHIRAZ IS INHERENTLY JAMMY AND HIGH IN ALCOHOL. BUT AN EXPLORATION OF THE CATEGORY REVEALS A HIGHLY DIVERSE SPECTRUM OF WINES, WHICH IS SELDOM ACKNOWLEDGED STATESIDE**

BY CAITLIN A. MILLER

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MCHENRY HOHNEN

There are few grape varieties as closely linked to a specific style of wine as Shiraz. For many, the only thing that separates Shiraz, as it's dubbed in Australia, from Syrah, as it's known in France, the U.S., and beyond, is style. The archetype of Australian Shiraz is full-bodied with jammy fruit flavors and high alcohol, while Syrah—the same exact grape—evokes a sense of nuance, balance, and freshness.

Yet Shiraz—or Syrah—grown in Australia is not inherently ripe, jammy, or high in alcohol. “Australia has been making diverse, interesting, balanced Shiraz and Syrah from across the country for decades,” says Jane Lopes, the cofounder of Legend Imports, which specializes in Australian wine.

Part of the disconnect may lie in the way the category is commonly presented in the U.S. “I don't like the term *Australian Shiraz* because we would never say, ‘what does French Syrah taste like?’ Or, ‘what does American Syrah taste like?’” says Aaron Meeker, the national sales manager for Vine Street Imports in New Jersey. “There needs to be more discussion about what do [wines from specific] states taste like, and what do regions taste like within those states?”

Indeed, there can be no single style of Australian Shiraz in a country with such a large and diverse winegrowing culture as Australia. “Australia has over 65 different growing regions and they all make Syrah/Shiraz,” confirms Lopes. “So, there is just a huge diversity on the market.”

But the dynamic nature of this category also makes it difficult to understand, especially for American consumers and trade professionals who often have little exposure to the diversity of styles available, and less familiarity with Australia's many wine regions. After a deep dive into the category, one thing is clear: The monolith of Aus-



australian Shiraz is a thing of the past—and the U.S. market has a lot of catching up to do to reflect that reality.

## BOOM AND BUST FOR SHIRAZ IN THE U.S.

While the category's nuances may be elusive, an image of Australian Shiraz is alive and well in the U.S. market, and it stems all the way back to the 1990s. "Australian Shiraz had its heyday in the U.S. in the late '90s and early 2000s, when Robert Parker scores were paramount and Yellow Tail came on the scene," says Lopes.

Australia had all the elements needed to produce the international style of red wine that was in demand at that time: warm, sunny wine regions that produced healthy, ripe grapes with ease; a well-established red variety (some plantings of Shiraz date back to the 1800s) with a penchant for fruity, full-bodied styles; and a fun, easy-to-understand marketing approach that featured cute Australian critters.

The wines were highly popular in the U.S., but by the mid-2000s, demand started to wane as Shiraz became overly big and alcoholic, chasing higher and higher scores. Then, global events caused U.S. imports of those wines to take a hit.

"If you look at the Australian-focused importers [that existed] prior to the recession in 2008, a lot of them went out of business or diversified away from Australia," says Meeker. Lopes echoes this sentiment. "Due to a number of factors—the global financial crisis being primary among them, and the resulting lack of availability of quality Australian wine in the U.S.—Australian wine fell out of favor in the U.S."

As a result, the story of Shiraz—and Australian wine more generally—was put on pause. "You had a pretty long period of time where there were no new ideas of



Australian wine coming into the U.S. market," says Meeker. "All this great Shiraz was being made in Australia and there were no storytellers [here]."

## FROM SHIRAZ TO SYRAH—AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

While the image of Shiraz was on pause in the U.S., its evolution was accelerating back in Australia. By the mid-2000s, the dominance of jammy, high-alcohol Shiraz began to slip. "It took a few maverick, punk rock winemakers to change things," says Meeker.

A good example of this shift is the late Taras Ochota, who started Ochota Barrels in 2008. "He worked for big wineries, like huge co-op farms," says Meeker. "He made those [big] styles of wines, but then he started his own brand with his wife—and it was the antithesis of all those wines." Fresh, adventurous, and energetic are all words that have been used to describe Ochota's wines—not descriptors typically used to describe Australian Shiraz in the U.S.

"There was a dominant style [of Shiraz] in the 1990s, or at least a more famous style, and that still exists," says David LeMire, MW, the head of sales and marketing and the joint CEO of Shaw + Smith in Adelaide Hills. That well-known style was "rich, ripe, and intense. Now, though, that is one of a number of different prominent styles, and in a lot of cases that is because producers are leaning into their regional characters and showcasing them."

One example comes from Australia's coolest region, Tasmania. "We first planted Syrah in 2000," says Matt Pooley,



ABOVE: Jane Lopes, the cofounder of Legend Imports, says U.S. perceptions of Australian wine changed with the recession.

a second-generation family member and the brand ambassador and export manager for Pooley Wines. While it took years of trial and error to learn how to best grow Shiraz in Tasmania's cool climate, Pooley was ultimately successful. "We just don't have those heat degree days that they're getting in South Australia, so Tasmanian Syrah tends to have more of the peppery, herbaceous sort of characters."

While both big, warm-climate styles and leaner, cool-climate styles of Shiraz are well represented in Australia, some winemakers have found a middle ground. Meeker points to Mac Forbes in Yarra Valley, Victoria, as an example. "His [wines], in the mid-to-late 2000s, were sometimes

BELOW: Despite being more Syrah-like in style, Shaw + Smith uses the traditional Australian name, Shiraz.





ABOVE: Matt Pooley, a second-generation family member and the brand ambassador and export manager for Pooley Wines.

10 or 11% ABV,” says Meeker. “It was a response to how big some of those wines were in the mid-2000s. Now, the wines are between 12.3 and 13.5% alcohol. I think Shiraz has done the same thing. You had that rebellious nature of [asking] ‘What does Shiraz look like at 12% ABV?’”

Today, the stylistic variations of Shiraz are endless. “You’ll truly find every style of the grape being grown across the country,” says Lopes. “It’s pretty cool—how often do you find a country that plants a grape in all of its regions, where you can really map how climate and terroir impact it?”

### WHAT’S IN A NAME?

The variation in Shiraz is certainly cool, if a little hard to keep track of. To complicate things further, the name of the grape used—Shiraz versus Syrah—now varies widely across Australia, as does the reason for selecting one name over another.

A primary reason for choosing a specific name is perhaps the most obvious one—style. Many Australian producers making a Rhône-style wine use the French spelling to communicate what’s in the bottle to the end consumer. “It is now quite common to label a wine Syrah, especially for wines from cooler climates,” says LeMire.

In Tasmania, Syrah is commonly seen on labels, including on Pooley’s wines. “I feel it’s the way in which we can distinguish ourselves from mainland Shiraz,” says Pooley.

However, LeMire adds, “There is still some grey area, a bit like with [Pinot] Gris and Grigio—we know what the producer is indicating, but sometimes one producer’s Shiraz is another’s Syrah—so it can be confusing for consumers.”

Other times, the name on the label is not meant to suggest a particular style. For example, Shaw + Smith’s Shiraz, which LeMire describes as “perfumed, medium-bodied, with some savory spice and freshness that reflects our cool, elevated sites,” does not use the cool-climate-indicating Syrah.

“I completely understand why some people label their wines Syrah,” says LeMire. “However, Shiraz is such a uniquely Australian name, and I think it can be used for all sorts of different styles of the variety. So, we don’t need to cede the name to one style in particular.”

Still others use the two names as an indication of different quality levels. “[Syrah] has become quite common and



well understood at premium price points, but less common at cheaper price points for larger volume markets,” says LeMire.

This is the approach that winemaker Jacopo Dalli Cani takes at McHenry Hohnen in Margaret River. “We make both Syrah and Shiraz,” he says. “[The Syrah] is fermented with some whole clusters and a portion of Viognier to elevate the spice and floral characters of the wines. The Shiraz we produce is a bit more juicy, fruit-driven, and less savory.”

The choice on the label may also boil down to marketing and sales. In Australia, for example, Shiraz is the better-known name, and the far more popular choice. “[Producers] call it Shiraz because a lot more people know what it is,” says Pooley, speaking about the Australian market. In the U.S., however, “by using the term Syrah, you’re definitely going to get more people buying it,” says Amy Mundwiler, the national wine and beverage director for Maple Hospitality Group in Chicago, suggesting that the French version resonates more with U.S. consumers and trade professionals.

BELOW: McHenry Hohnen’s spicy and floral Syrah.



### MORE HURDLES FOR SHIRAZ IN THE U.S.

In 2018, a decade after the financial crisis, Gordon Little, the cofounder of Little Peacock Imports, which also specializes in Australian wine, made a case for selling quality Australian wine in the U.S. He articulated many of the reasons—from disinterest to pricing misconceptions—why Australian wines were struggling to sell in

the U.S. market. Unfortunately, it seems that limited progress has been made in the past seven years.

“If you go to your average U.S. restaurant, people don't even pour [Shiraz] anymore,” says Meeker. “So many wine lists are identical. If the industry would give Australian Shiraz a chance, you can find homes for those wines that will make the staff happy, the bottom line happy, and the consumer happy. It's not the wine's fault—it's the entire path along the way to the end consumer.”

Indeed, the image of Shiraz among U.S. trade professionals is still a major hurdle. “In the U.S., as a young sommelier, you have these ideas about Shiraz,” says Mundwiler. “You think of the days when it was everywhere, all the grocery stores, and they were all value-priced, big, jammy wines.”

Isabel Kardon, a sommelier at The Modern in New York City, shares this sentiment. “I remember being taught that the entirety of Australia was a hot place and that all Shiraz was jammy,” she says. “In these entry-level [wine] courses, you need to simplify, but this oversimplification of Australia has done a disservice to the nuances of the country.”

“The problem is,” says Mundwiler, “I don't think the average consumer can get

BELOW: Isabel Kardon, a sommelier at The Modern, says her initial wine education oversimplified Shiraz.



away from the mindset of cheap, jammy Shiraz. So it's kind of a fight, or a passion project [when selling]—like ‘no, please, [Shiraz] is not the same, you're going to love it!’”

Off-premise sales can be just as difficult. “When you go to buy wine in an Australian section, there's no consistency to it across America,” says Little. “With most [stores], they're going for brand recognition and style, rather than trying to build depth.”

### A BRIGHT SPOT FOR CLASSIC AUSTRALIAN SHIRAZ

Nevertheless, Lopes still feels that Shiraz is a driver for Australian wine in the U.S. “It is at least a recognizable category of Australian wine,” says Lopes. “A retailer or restaurant might feel like they need to have an Aussie Shiraz in their program, in a way they wouldn't feel for, say, Australian Chardonnay or Cabernet.” But this also reinforces the singular image of Shiraz that stubbornly persists in the U.S., ultimately creating another problem.

For better or worse, the popularity and recognizability of those early wines helped cement Australian Shiraz as a singular brand—one that many U.S. consumers are still aware of, and still seek out.

“If you need to fill a spot in an Australian section, for the most part people are looking for a Shiraz that is more on the full-bodied side,” says Little. “They don't want a lean and mean one.”

While lighter, lower-alcohol wine styles seem to dominate the market today, big red wines, like classic Barossa Shiraz, haven't gone anywhere. In fact, these styles remain top sellers for many wine producers and distributors. At Vine Street Imports, for example, Dandelion Vineyards' fruity, 14.5% ABV Shiraz is their top-selling Australian wine. “If the wine's delicious, it's delicious,” says Meeker. “And Shiraz can be remarkable at 14.5 to 15% ABV.”

LeMire agrees. “The best of the rich, ripe, intense styles from the Barossa in



ABOVE: Amy Mundwiler, the beverage director for Maple Hospitality Group, believes the name Syrah will attract more consumers.

particular are still important and impressive,” he says. “There's evolution, but the great sites still come through. Producers like Henschke, Standish, Sami-Odi, and Hentley Farm are making Shiraz that can remind us of why Barossa Shiraz has timeless appeal.”

In the U.S., “People are definitely interested in drinking high tannin, high alcohol, rich, round, ripe styles of red wine,” says Kardon. “Napa Cabernets under \$200? We can't keep them stocked. Big reds never went out of style, so I think it is up to the retailer or the educator to convince people that Australian Shiraz is capable of high quality, even at lower price points.”

Stereotypical Australian Shiraz, with all its bold, jammy flavors, certainly has a place in the U.S. market, but it's far from the only style of Shiraz that should matter to U.S. consumers or wine professionals. The breadth of diversity makes the category incredibly exciting and full of discovery, which can make selling these wines all the more fun, even if it requires a bit more work to win over the end consumer.

“Changing perceptions among U.S. consumers is tough,” says Lopes. “It'll be a very long time before the various styles of Shiraz/Syrah enter the collective consciousness, but in the meantime, great wine professionals across the country will continue to pick up the wines that they love and introduce them to their clientele.” ■



In Chile, old-vine Carignan, small-lot Pinot Noir, and classic Bordeaux blends are gaining ground.

# EXPERT PICKS FROM SOUTH AMERICA

**FROM POWERFUL MALBECs TO  
LOW-INTERVENTION PINOT NOIRS, THESE  
ARE THE SOUTH AMERICAN WINES THAT  
SOMMELIERS AND RETAILERS ARE DIGGING**

BY KATHLEEN WILLCOX

**T**he world's appetite for alcohol has waned in recent years, with U.S. consumers leading the pivot away from fine wine. But there are a few categories of wine that seem to be more immune to the downward trend than others. Take South American wine.

South America is home to long coastlines and soaring mountains, arid deserts and sprawling tropics. This extraordinarily diverse continent offers a range of terroirs and climates that make it one of the most exciting sources for wine in the world. And while countries in South America have been producing wine since



ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Cheron Cowan, the beverage director at Craft; Winn Robertson, the head sommelier at Bourbon Steak D.C.

the 1500s, it wasn't until the 1990s that the top-producing countries began exporting wine to the U.S.

In recent years, U.S. consumers have scooped up South American wines with an eagerness that drastically outpaces their thirst for wine more broadly. In 2024, wine sales in the U.S. were down slightly more than seven percent in volume, according to SipSource data. But exports of wine from Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay to the U.S. increased by 13.7, 12.5, and 16 percent respectively.

BELOW: Nate Siegel, the owner of Cheeky's Fish & Raw Bar.



Amid widespread palate fatigue, wines from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, and Brazil—although they may be associated with one style or grape, as with Argentina's powerhouse Malbec—offer so much more to buyers today, thanks to daring and progressive vintners who are embracing the full potential these diverse terroirs offer. From powerful Malbecs to light and bright Criollas, these are the South American wines that are intriguing wine professionals and resonating with their guests. (All wines are listed with suggested retail price per bottle.)

**Villalobos 'Litrona' Carignan 2021, Colchagua Valley, Chile; \$24 per one-liter bottle**

*Selected by Nate Siegel, owner, Cheeky's Fish & Raw Bar, St. Petersburg, Florida*

Most Carignan grows in southern France, where it serves as a blending grape. But old-vine expressions from Chile offer fruity food-friendliness that ticks all of the boxes at Cheeky's Fish & Raw Bar.

"We love pouring this 100 percent Carignan by the glass," says Nate Siegel, the restaurant's owner. "The hand-harvested grapes, spontaneous fermentation with native yeast, the 80-year-old wild vines of Carignan on clay and quartz soils—it all adds up to a chillable, light, and bright red that is fresh and super joyful to drink." It pairs with everything, he adds. "Don't think, just drink!"



**Miguel Torres Cordillera de los Andes 'Vigno' Carignan 2018, Maule Valley, Chile; \$21**

*Selected by Cheron Cowan, beverage director, Craft, New York City*

Cheron Cowan has spent the last 20 years not just curating award-winning wine lists at restaurants like Craft, but also in connecting diners to new wines that will engage their senses, pair well with food, and excite their curiosity.



"This wine does that," Cowan says. "It has big fruit and floral notes, with herbal components, and the French oak is so well integrated, it's lush and amenable to a variety of palates. I love pairing it with duck breast or other rich meat dishes. And the price is so reasonable."

Plus, it's part of Miguel Torres' broad push to revive Carignan by producing terroir-driven wines made from old-vine, dry-farmed grapes under the Vigno label—a fact that makes it an ideal vehicle for conversation with curious diners.

**Corazón del Sol 'Los Chacayes' Malbec 2020, Uco Valley, Argentina; \$28**

*Selected by Winn Robertson, head sommelier, Bourbon Steak D.C., Washington, D.C.*

At steakhouses, Cabernet Sauvignon is often a go-to, but head sommelier Winn

Robertson finds that diners at Bourbon Steak D.C. are embracing this Mendoza Malbec from Corazón del Sol.



“It can appeal for many reasons,” Robertson says. “On the palate, the wine showcases a ripe, luxurious fruit profile lifted with bright acidity and graceful tannins provided by the high-elevation vineyards of the Uco Valley. But what really stands out is the beautiful floral aromas.”

It’s a particularly good choice for tables that might be offering an array of dishes; Robertson calls it a “Goldilocks wine,” noting that it pairs just as well with steak as it does with tuna au poivre. “When a guest is looking for a great bottle under \$100 on the wine list, this will certainly please the crowd,” he adds.

**Clos des Fous  
‘Pour Ma Gueule’  
Pinot Noir 2023,  
Chile; \$16**



*Selected by  
Kat Thomas,  
lead sommelier,  
Ada’s Wine Bar, Las Vegas*

Kat Thomas, the lead sommelier at Ada’s Wine Bar in Las Vegas, appreciates the vision behind Chilean winery Clos des Fous (which translates to “madhouse”) as much as she loves the flavors and aromas in the glass.

“It’s a collaboration of geeked-out wine-makers hunting extreme terroirs,” Thomas says. “They source from dry-farmed vineyards, use wild yeast, and their ‘why not’ attitude drives their small-lot wines.”

This cuvée blends a small portion of Cinsault with Pinot Noir, all vinified in concrete. “You find electric verve and juicy chaos in perfect balance,” says Thomas. “I love this one with pork belly and late night playlists.”

**ZUCCARDI ‘POLÍGONOS SAN PABLO’  
MALBEC 2021**

**“The wine is so elegant it threw me for a loop ... I would have never thought it was a Malbec.”**

– William Mellon, manna

**Proyecto Nakkal  
‘Nakcool’ Vino  
Tinto 2024;  
Canelones,  
Uruguay; \$15**



*Selected by  
Jill Weber, founder  
and owner, Jet Wine Bar, Philadelphia*

Proyecto Nakkal, which started in 2020, makes this red wine in the Canelones region of Uruguay, about an hour north of the nation’s capital, Montevideo. Jill Weber, a professional archaeologist and restaurateur who owns and operates four restaurants, including Jet Wine Bar, says the unusual method in which it’s made sets the wine apart from its South American cohorts.

“The wine is a separate fermentation of Merlot and Muscat Ottonel, both of which are hand-harvested from organic, sustainably grown grapes,” Weber says. “The result is a lovely, well-balanced wine with bright berry and ripe plum notes, plus Muscat’s floral blossoms.”

Part of the Nat’Cool movement, which started in Portugal and aims to connect low-intervention producers around the world, the Nakcool sees no fining, filtration, or added sulfur dioxide. “I love the red and white grapes together,” says Weber. “The body is light, the flavors are juicy, and the feel is fresh.”

**Santiago Queirolo  
‘Intipalka’  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2023, Ica Valley,  
Peru; \$16**



*Selected by Joel  
Arias, head sommelier  
and front of house manager,  
La Mar Cocina Peruana, San Francisco*

“We have several outstanding wines from South America on our extensive wine list at La Mar Cocina Peruana,” says Joel Arias, the restaurant’s head sommelier. “However, I especially enjoy introducing our guests to a standout Peruvian wine to pair with our cuisine: this Intipalka by the Queirolo family.”

The Queirolo family has been established in the Ica Valley, south of Lima, since the 1800s, and has pioneered both winemaking and Pisco production in the region.

“In Peru, we tend to drink wines with a touch of sweetness made from the Criolla grape,” Arias explains. “The family started planting Bordeaux grape varieties, and the Sauvignon Blanc is thriving. This one is tropical with aromas of passionfruit, kiwi, and hints of bell peppers. The mouthfeel has a great freshness and all these aromatics come back to the palate as well but add a kiss of salinity with high acid in the end.”

**Vik ‘La Piu Belle’ Red Blend 2021,  
Cachapoal Valley, Chile; \$100**

*Selected by Gracie Barwick,  
wine director and lead sommelier,  
Lazy Betty, Atlanta*

Gracie Barwick, the wine director and lead sommelier at the Michelin-starred Lazy Betty, says this blend of Carménère, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc embodies the restaurant’s approach to modern, intentional food and drink pairings.



ABOVE: Gracie Barwick, the wine director and lead sommelier at Lazy Betty.

“We feature Vik for our beef pairing on the chef’s menu’s final savory course,” Barwick says, nodding to the Stone Axe Wagyu beef with porcini dish. “I love that they use clay from their vineyard and make them into clay pots, which they use to age the wine. Plus, they grow organically and biodynamically, and both the food and the wine are the best of the best in this course.”



**Cara Sur Criolla Chica 2022; Valle de Calingasta, Argentina, \$28**

*Selected by Oscar Garcia Moncada, wine and spirits buyer, 67 Wine and Spirits, New York City*



Criolla is not a single grape variety; it’s a handful of both red and white Vitis vinifera first brought to South America by the Spanish in the 1500s. One of those Criolla grapes—known under the names Listán Prieto, País, Mission, and Criolla Chica—is garnering new attention thanks to its light and bright attributes.

The Cara Sur Criolla Chica comes from the Valle de Calingasta in San Juan, where high elevation creates an extreme

**CLOS DES FOUS ‘POUR MA GUEULE’ PINOT NOIR 2023**

**“You find electric verve and juicy chaos in perfect balance.”**

– Kat Thomas, Ada’s Wine Bar

diurnal temperature, imbuing the wines with unusual freshness and brightness, says Oscar Garcia Moncada, the wine and spirits buyer at 67 Wine and Spirits in New York City.

“The Cara Sur Criolla has been a total hit with our customers looking for a lighter, fresher, and more ethereal option from Argentina,” he explains. “It has an almost weightless texture, and that, with the fruit purity and acidity, combines to give the wine drinker a celestial experience.” The wine is made from 80-year-old Criolla Chica vines, which adds extra dimension and complexity.

**Zuccardi ‘Polígonos San Pablo’ Malbec 2021; Uco Valley, Argentina; \$27**

*Selected by William Mellon, general manager and proprietor, manna, Wilmington, North Carolina*



“I always blind-taste wines when I’m tasting with my vendors,” says William Mellon, the general manager and proprietor of manna in downtown Wilmington, North Carolina. “This was the first wine from Zuccardi that sort of stopped me in my tracks. The wine is so elegant it threw me for a loop. I thought, ‘this is quality Burgundy.’ I



would have never thought it was a Malbec, because it was integrated, balanced, and the tannins were very sexy and refined.”

Zuccardi’s ‘Polígonos San Pablo’ Malbec, which aims to spotlight the terroir of the Uco Valley’s San Pablo subregion, reset Mellon’s perspective on the potential of Argentinian wine, he notes.

“It was the total package, and when I finally visited, I understood how they did it,” Mellon says. “The proximity to the mountains, the altitude, the beautiful diversity of soils, and the harsh desert climate. The wine is an amazing value and sophisticated enough to highlight any meal.” ■

BELOW: Argentina is known for Malbec, but there’s even more to explore.

