

Beverage Journal

AUGUST 2025



2025 DRINKS INNOVATORS TO WATCH

THE CHANGEMAKERS CARVING
A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE
BEVERAGE INDUSTRY



Beverage Journal

Maryland • Washington, DC

AUGUST 2025

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Photography courtesy of:
Top Row: RVF One Block Challenge /
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French Bloom

Middle Row:
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Daddy Long Legs /
Tiffany Hernandez / French Bloom

Bottom Row: Samara Oster /
Rob Weir / Todd Wright





THE COMPANY WE KEEP

Every now and then, a piece of industry news crosses my desk that offers more than just an update—it offers a reflection. Not just on who's working with whom, but on why. Because often, the distributors and suppliers we choose to work with—and who choose to work with us—say something deeper about where our market is headed (and what is valued).

Such was the case this month when I learned that Prestige-Ledroit Distributing Co. has formed a new partnership with Kistler Vineyards, the Sonoma County producer known for its site-driven Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. Prestige will now represent Kistler in Maryland and Washington, D.C.

As the publisher of the Beverage Journal, I have the privilege of working with a wide range of distributors and suppliers, all of whom bring value to our readers and to the beverage alcohol community in this region. But developments like this are worth noting because they reflect something bigger: a maturing, increasingly sophisticated wine market here in the Mid-Atlantic.

For those unfamiliar, Kistler is not a newcomer. Founded in 1978, they've built a reputation for making elegant, terroir-focused wines that reward both patience and curiosity. Their decision to enter our market through Prestige-Ledroit—an established distributor with a focus on artisanal wines and craft producers—underscores

the rising expectations of both trade buyers and consumers in this area.

Tim O'Rourke of Prestige put it well when he described the fit as one rooted in shared values. And Leila Pearson of Kistler echoed that, emphasizing the importance of "sharing stories and building connections." It's a sentiment I hear more and more from suppliers looking to expand—not just into new territories, but into the right hands.

This isn't unique to one distributor, or one brand. Over the past few years, we've seen several strong portfolios deepen their selections and bring on more producers who value quality over quantity. We've also seen retailers and restaurant buyers grow more intentional with their lists, carving out space for independent, family-owned wineries—whether from California, Europe, or beyond.

That's a trend worth watching, and one I hope continues. It speaks to the strength of our marketplace and the relationships that keep it thriving. And while competition among suppliers and distributors will always be part of the game, collaborations like this show that there's still room for thoughtful growth.

So here's to smart partnerships, and to suppliers and distributors working together in ways that strengthen relationships, reflect shared values, and ultimately serve our market better. ■

STEPHEN PATTEN PUBLISHER

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1. LITTLE BOOK

During the advent of American whiskey-making, the budding spirit was distinguished by notes of vanilla, caramel, and oak, and the latest installment of Freddie Noe's Little Book series pays tribute to those roots. For the 121.8-proof Chapter 9, dubbed None for Granted, Noe, the eighth-generation master distiller at Fred B. Noe Distillery, blended seven- and eight-year-old Kentucky straight bourbon whiskeys with an eight-year-old Kentucky straight rye whiskey, resulting in layers of apple, butterscotch, and baking spice.

\$ SRP: \$159.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 littlebookwhiskey.com

4. CITADELLE

Swayed by memories of the preserves his grandmother prepared from scratch with orchard fruit, Maison Ferrand's Alexandre Gabriel was spurred to create the sweet and tart Citadelle Gin Rouge. The infusion of fresh red fruits—cranberry, raspberry, blueberry, blackcurrant, and rhubarb—buoy Citadelle's signature roster of 19 botanicals and work especially well in a refreshing Bramble.

\$ SRP: \$29.99 per 700-ml bottle
🌐 maisonferrand.com

2. SOULEIL

Just before fermentation, a gentle maceration lends the 2024 vintage of Souleil Vin de Bonté Le Rosé a distinctively summery pale pink sheen. Made with organically farmed Grenache, Syrah, and Cinsault from Southern France, its white cherry and citrus peel notes complement tapas and charcuterie plates.

\$ SRP: \$16.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 souleilwines.com

5. THE BITTER TRUTH

Germany's Bavaria region is the inspiration behind Hazy Hops, The Bitter Truth's latest innovation. Melding Caribbean rums and other spirits, as well as citrus peels, dried fruits, botanicals, and of course hops, the bitters are an ode to The Bitter Truth's production home, where hops have been cultivated for over 1,000 years. Grassy, smoky, and citrusy, they are ideal for elevating classics like the Negroni and Daiquiri.

\$ SRP: \$22.99 per 200-ml bottle
🌐 the-bitter-truth.com

3. ALOIS LAGEDER

In 2024, Alto Aldige winery Alois Lageder completed its conversion to organic and biodynamic certification, and Misto Mare reflects this poignant transition. Although it's a white wine, it flaunts a blend of 14 white and red grape varieties that put forth delicate flower and lemon zest flavors. The extremely lightweight bottle is adorned with a striking label by Finnish artist Klaus Haapaniemi.

\$ SRP: \$19.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 aloislageder.eu

6. DIPLOMÁTICO

Diplomático has launched the limited-edition Single Vintage 2013. For the first time, the Venezuelan rum brand has brought together all three of its distillates—pot still, column, and batch kettle. The novel blend, distilled back in 2013, was then matured for a decade in former whiskey casks, building up to a rich spirit that mingles notes of dark chocolate, cherry, and raisin.

\$ SRP: \$120 per 700-ml bottle
🌐 ron.diplomatico.com



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7. CHÂTEAU GASSIER

Summer's bounty of seafood dishes is even more inviting when accompanied by a light, fresh wine like Château Gassier's Côtes de Provence rosé 2024. A combination of lightly pressed, organic Grenache, Cinsault, Syrah, and Vermentino grapes, it opens with aromas of peach, nectarine, and Corsican clementine.

\$ SRP: \$24.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 gassier-provence.fr

8. GOOD DISTILLATIONS

Portland, Oregon-based Good Distillations kicks off its earth-friendly range of spirits with Weekender Wheat whisky. Made in small batches from soft red winter wheat and aged for a minimum of four years in toasted and charred American white oak barrels, the easy-to-drink, 84-proof spirit is ambitiously packaged in a 100 percent recycled paperboard bottle. Five times lighter than glass, it contains an interior liner to protect the liquid.

\$ SRP: \$59.95 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 gooddistillations.com

9. CURIOUS ELIXIRS

For a decade now, Curious Elixirs has been turning out alcohol-free beverages infused with adaptogens. Its newest addition is Curious Zero, a zero-proof craft lager centered on maca root to nurture vitality and lion's mane to boost cognitive function, but the beer is also enlivened with roasted barley, Yakima hops from the Pacific Northwest, American oak, clarified lime, sea salt, and golden apple.

\$ SRP: \$79 per 12-pack of 340-ml bottles

🌐 curiouselixirs.com

10. KŌLOA RUM

A rush of hot cinnamon underpinned by subtle spice floods the palate in Kōloa Cane Fire rum. Distilled from pure cane sugar in a vintage 1,210-gallon, steam-powered copper pot still, it incorporates filtered water from ancient Mount Wai'ale'ale and is slowly macerated with cinnamon grown at OK Farms in Hilo, on Hawaii's Big Island.

\$ SRP: \$32.99 to \$35.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 koloarum.com

11. GÉRARD BERTRAND

Gérard Bertrand's Trouble wines are organic, vegan, and unfiltered. Pairing Syrah and Grenache from the South of France, the unclarified rosé is decidedly rustic and cloudy. Evocative of the Mediterranean, it's a fruity, citrusy companion to the season's vegetable-topped pizzas and grilled chicken salads.

\$ SRP: \$24.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 gerard-bertrand.com

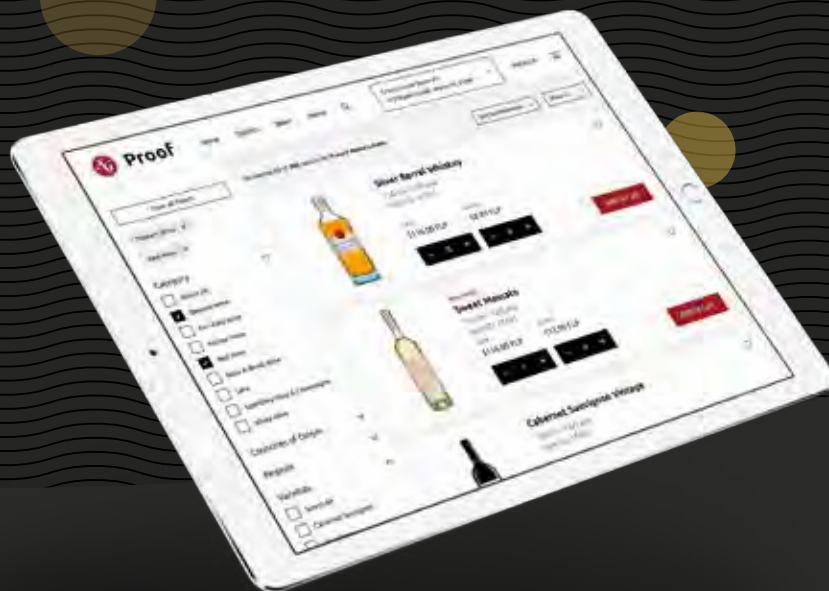
12. EAGLE RARE

Buffalo Trace Distillery's recently unveiled expansion project was pivotal in creating the 95-proof Eagle Rare 12 bourbon. Now a permanent addition to the lineup, which also includes Eagle Rare 10, Double Eagle Very Rare, Eagle Rare 25, and Eagle Rare 17, it showcases Buffalo Trace's classic low-rye Mash Bill #1, aged for a minimum of 12 years. The whiskey's almond aromas pave the way to vanilla and toasted oak on the palate, culminating in a toffee finish.

\$ SRP: \$49.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 buffalotrace-distillery.com

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A TEDDY TOP 10

FUNNY- OR QUIRKY-NAMED BARS AND RESTAURANTS FROM MOVIES AND TV

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

This month, we take a break from our current series of articles in which we have been spotlighting funny- and quirky-named bars, restaurants, and taverns in and around Maryland and Washington, D.C. So far, we have featured everything from One-Eyed Mike's in Baltimore to Easy Like Sunday in Roland Park to Jailbreak Brewery Co. in Laurel. All three are dream places to visit. All three also take their cues from funny- and quirky-named eating and drinking places that we here at the Beverage Journal would love to visit if we could!

Here are our Top 10:

1. **The Club Obi Wan** – “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom.” Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) and damsel in distress Willie Scott (Kate Capshaw) have just escaped Chinese gangster Lao Che (Roy Chiao) in a Hong Kong nightclub by jumping out a top-floor window. Awnings break their fall as they plummet to street level, and the two end up clinging to the last awning before dropping into a getaway car driven by Indy's faithful sidekick, Short Round (Ke Huy Quan). As they dangle, the camera lingers on the dining club's exterior signage for a few seconds, long enough for fans of writer-producer George Lucas' other great movie franchise to laugh at the great in-joke he and director Steven Spielberg named the place . . . The Club Obi-Wan!
2. **The Regal Beagle** – “Three's Company.” In the late 1970s and early '80s, there was no better fictional neighborhood watering hole to



want to visit than the Regal Beagle on this zany ABC sitcom. There, you could go meet friends, have a drink, and decompress from a day's work. The Regal Beagle was the favorite watering hole of Jack Tripper (John Ritter) and Janet Wood (Joyce DeWitt) and their friends, roommates, and neighbors. Down at their rendezvous, they shared plenty of laughs and hijinks over beer, wine, and other spirits.

3. The Boar's Nest – "The Dukes of Hazzard." When I was a kid growing up in the late 1970s, The Boar's Nest was the first bar/restaurant I ever wished was real! I really, REALLY wanted to visit it and listen to the honky-tonk music of Johnny Paycheck, Donna Fargo, and Waylon Jennings and share a few "Yee-haws!" with Bo and Luke Duke (John Schneider and Tom Wopat); Cooter (Ben Jones); Boss Hogg (Sorrell Booke); and, of course, Daisy Duke (Catherine Bach).

4. The Ink and Paint Club – "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" This 1988 Robert Zemeckis-directed hit motion picture tells a 1940s detective story set in a world where animation and live action coexists. So, it stands to reason that characters like Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, and Mickey Mouse would have a place in this world to go to for a few drinks



after a hard day pounding the pavements of Toontown. The Ink and Paint Club provided just such a respite. Just imagine being able to share a brew with Daffy or Donald Duck, Mickey or Mighty Mouse, etc.

5. The Prancing Pony – "The Lord of the Rings." The Prancing Pony is a tavern and inn located in the town of Bree in



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J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth. It becomes a key location in "The Lord of the Rings" saga when Frodo (Elijah Wood) and his companions first meet Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen), who vows to help them destroy The Ring of Power before the dark lord Sauron can re-acquire it. The inn rather memorably features an exterior sign that depicts a fat pony rearing on its hind legs.

6. **The Drunken Clam** – "Family Guy." Let's face it. Moe's Tavern in "The Simpson's" isn't a quirky or funny enough name to warrant inclusion in this article. But the central meeting place of its long-time, Fox-TV animation rival certainly is. Rumor has it, the writers and producers wanted to name it The Bearded Clam early on, but network censors said, "No way!" Of course, that didn't stop Quagmire from saying, "Gig-gity!"

7. **Bada Bing!** – "The Sopranos." Oh, now. You just knew I had to include a movie or TV strip club on this list somewhere! In real life, numerous gentleman's clubs have been known to serve some of the best eats and drinks around. Or, uh, so I've heard. This is one of those fictional places that was made for people who like to yell "Fun fact!" For instance – fun fact! – the name Bada Bing! was chosen only after the proposed name, The Final Lap, was scrapped because a club in Minnesota shared that same name. Also – fun fact! – Bada Bing! represents a deviation from reality in that real-world New Jersey state law prohibits topless or nude dancing in establishments that sell alcohol. Again, or so I have heard! This has nothing to do with my last rather boring visit to my Aunt Carol in Trenton. That dear lady goes to sleep every night at 9 p.m., and well. . .



8. **The Alibi Room** – "Shameless." There has never been a better-named bar or tavern to escape to when you might have done something a little wrong, a little naughty, or you just need a place to say "Uh, yeah, I was there the whole time!" The Alibi Room was that kind of dive bar.

9. **Jack Rabbit Slim's** – "Pulp Fiction." There are many '50s-themed diners spread across the country, and several in and around Maryland. But this fictional one from writer-director Quentin Tarantino's 1994 masterpiece is still the one to beat. Jack Rabbit Slim's is designed with a strong 1950s aesthetic, with customers eating in booths shaped like vintage cars and being served by staff who are look-alikes of such famous '50s entertainers as Buddy Holly and Marilyn Monroe. Best of all,



there's a floor show – The Twist Contest – that you may find yourself under extreme pressure to win if you're there with your crime boss's coked-out wife.

10. **The Pit Stop**, "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby." The Pit Stop is the perfectly named place where race car drivers and race car driving fans gather for a drink and some bar food. It's also the place where racing legend Ricky Bobby (Will Ferrell) insists that no jazz music ever be played and where he has to represent America when a rival French driver (Sacha Baron Cohen) asks, "What have you given the world apart from George Bush, Cheerios, and The Thigh Master?!"

HONORABLE MENTION (in alphabetical order): The Bang Bang Bar, "Twin Peaks;" Bob's County Bunker, "The Blues Brothers;" The Double Deuce, "Road House;" The Feisty Goat Pub, "EuroTrip;" and The Slaughtered Lamb, "An American Werewolf in London."

HARRY POTTER: For a series of movies featuring a large cast of children wizards throughout, the "Harry Potter" films sure had their fair share of quirky-named eating and drinking places. Top ones include The Hanged Man, The Leaky Cauldron, and The Three Broomsticks.

BARS AND RESTAURANTS IN KIDS' SHOWS: Speaking of kids' entertainment, several animated programs and flicks over the years have featured funny and clever-named service establishments. They include The Krusty Krab and Salty Spitoon from "SpongeBob SquarePants;" The Poison Apple from "Shrek 2;" and, lastly, The Snuggly Duckling from "Tangled."

NAUGHTY NAMES: And, finally, there are those movies that are most definitely NOT kids' entertainment and dare to throw in a few naughty named bars, restaurants, and taverns. Personal favorites include The Dirty Sanchez in "DodgeBall: A True Underdog Story;" The Famous Cock in "The World's End;" Porky's from "Porky's;" and, my personal favorite, The Titty Twister in "From Dusk Till Dawn." ■

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WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Once again, **Castle & Key Distillery** and the Kentucky Black Bourbon Guild have teamed up for the latest release in The Untold Story of Kentucky Whiskey series, donating 100 percent of its profits to scholarship funds that support diversity initiatives in distilling. Aged for five years, the 104-proof Chapter 4 highlights Hickory King corn, an heirloom variety grown by Kentucky's Walnut Grove Farms. Rounded out with rye and malted barley, it honors Dallas Peters, a Black man who played a crucial behind-the-scenes role at Old Taylor Distillery, but was falsely accused of barrel theft in an era of rampant racism.

SRP: \$175 per 750-ml bottle



PUBLIC INTEREST

When launching **Good Trouble Bourbon**, Chicago entrepreneur and social impact advocate Dee M. Robinson hoped it would connect people, igniting powerful conversations that foster meaningful change along the way. Crafted by eighth-generation master distiller Jacob Call from a mash bill of 70 percent corn, 21 percent rye, and nine percent malted barley, the 92-proof

whiskey tastes of ginger and dried cherry. Fittingly, a portion of proceeds from Good Trouble sales are directed toward the Shine Your Light Foundation, a nonprofit that helps lift children out of poverty.

SRP: \$49.95 per 750-ml bottle



EXTRA TIME

Hawk's Rock Distillery, formerly Lough Gill Distillery, has introduced Garavogue 20-year-old single malt Irish whiskey. Brought to life by Helen Mulholland, the first female Irish whiskey master blender in history, the inaugural, limited-release expression is matured in former bourbon barrels for a minimum of 14 years. Then, the double-distilled liquid is moved to Muscat, Sauternes, Pedro Ximénez, and Barbadian rum casks for additional aging, garnering a 94-proof whiskey rife with notes of raisin and citrus.

SRP: \$199 per 700-ml bottle

A RARITY

Jacob's Pardon is kicking off its Cask Collective series with a 16-year-old oloroso sherry cask-finished whiskey. The 96.5-proof ultra-limited release—only 48 barrels were selected by master blender F. Paul Pacult—stars a mash bill of 99 percent corn and one percent malted barley. After a maturation period of 16 years, the liquid is finished in 50-year-old oloroso sherry casks from Bodegas Williams & Humbert, yielding orange zest and butterscotch on the palate.

SRP: \$124.99 per 750-ml bottle



NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

Corn, malted barley, rye, and red winter wheat, all grown in the Black Dirt region of New York's Warwick Valley, come together in **Great Jones Distilling Co.**'s 90-proof wheated straight bourbon. Made in small batches at the New York City-based distillery, the buttery, marzipan-tinged whiskey cut with Catskill Mountains water was aged for at least four years in new American oak barrels.

SRP: \$44.99 per 750-ml bottle





INTRODUCING OUR 2025 DRINKS INNOVATORS

**THIS YEAR'S EIGHT AWARD WINNERS ARE CARVING A BRIGHTER
FUTURE FOR THE BEVERAGE INDUSTRY THROUGH POSITIVE CHANGE**

Since we announced last year's award winners, it has been a challenging year for the drinks industry. Amidst a social shift away from alcohol, especially amongst younger consumers, tariffs and anti-alcohol messaging have contributed to economic headwinds. There is a lot to contend with—which is why it's more important than ever to acknowledge and celebrate the passionate individuals, organizations, and businesses dedicated to driving positive change and shaping a brighter future.

From over 100 nominations, we selected eight innovators representing every sector, including spirits, wine, and beer, and spanning fields from scientific research to distributor compliance, not to mention brewing and bar work. But each of these innovators have one thing in common: they're deserving of recognition. This year's winners are committed to making the drinks space more dynamic and diverse, and over-delivering not just for the bottom line, but for the community as a whole.

Join us in celebrating the 2025 class of Drinks Innovators!



SPEARHEADING THE ONE BLOCK CHALLENGE TO HELP MORE GRAPE GROWERS TRANSITION TO REGENERATIVE FARMING

STEPHEN CRONK AND CAINE THOMPSON

Cofounder and trustee, The Regenerative Viticulture Foundation

In February 2025, The Regenerative Viticulture Foundation (RVF) launched its One Block Challenge, an initiative created to help grape growers “test the waters” of regenerative agriculture. “This initiative is about meeting growers where they are, and encouraging the first step by minimizing risk,” says RVF trustee Caine Thompson.

The program asks farmers to start small—farming one row, one block, one acre regeneratively—to help them learn

“IF REGENERATIVE VITICULTURE IS TO POSITIVELY IMPACT THE WORLD, IT MUST BE ABLE TO SCALE, WHICH MEANS IT NEEDS TO BE AN INCLUSIVE FORM OF FARMING.”

—Caine Thompson

how regenerative farming practically applies to their specific piece of land. “The process not only builds awareness of practices and benefits, but creates a low-risk way of discovery while transitioning,” adds RVF cofounder Stephen Cronk.

In Thompson's experience from transitioning properties owned by O'Neill to regenerative farming, the soil and vines



Caine Thompson (left) and Stephen Cronk

were rejuvenated by the introduction of practices like cover cropping, composting, and animal grazing, and the elimination of synthetic materials. By helping growers of all sizes experiment and see these kinds of positive results, Thompson and Cronk hope to get more growers working regeneratively. “We can't do this alone,” says Thompson. “Collectively, however, we can create a huge impact that the wine industry can lead for the wider agriculture sector.”

—STACY BRISCOE



BREWING THE FIRST GLUTEN-FREE BEER MADE WITH AN UNLIKELY—AND HIGHLY SUSTAINABLE—GRAIN

SAMARA OSTER

Founder, Meli

Making quinoa salad is a snap. Brewing beer with the nutritious, gluten-free, itchy-bitsy seed is trickier. Inspired by her functional health journey, Boston's Samara Oster and MIT food scientists spent three-plus years trialing North and South American quinoas. Protein, lipid, and carbohydrate levels proved variable, creating a challenge to determine what worked best for flavor and fermentation. “I didn't want anything to be unachievable on basic commercial brewing equipment,” says Oster, who opted for Bolivia's or-

“WE'RE OPENING THE BEER AISLE TO CONSUMERS THAT HAVE BEEN ALIENATED BY IT OR HAVEN'T DISCOVERED IT.”

ganic royal quinoa. It's the foundation for Meli, America's first beer solely fermented from quinoa.

The snappy low-alcohol beer naturally includes potassium, sodium, and protein, which are listed on the nutritional label—a rarity in beer. Transparency has helped Meli land placements at Trader Joe's, Whole Foods, and restaurants with robust gluten-free menus. Beer is often categorized by style, but styles can be “alienating,” says Oster, who doesn't categorize Meli. (It's a blonde ale, FYI.) The intent is to seed a new customer base. As Oster says, “We're opening the beer aisle to con-



sumers that have been alienated by it or haven't discovered it.”

—JOSHUA M. BERNSTEIN



MOBILIZING THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY WITH RESOURCES TO PROTECT WORKERS AND COMMUNITY UNDER THREAT FROM NEW FEDERAL IMMIGRATION POLICIES

TIFFANY HERNANDEZ

Founder, Escuela, and bartender

When Donald Trump was re-elected President, Tiffany Hernandez, then a bar manager and educational coordinator for a restaurant in Colorado, partnered with civil rights attorney Milo Schwab to host a know-your-rights workshop. Sixty bartenders and brand ambassadors turned up. Recognizing the demand for this resource, Hernandez founded Escuela and expanded nationally, with sponsorship from Mexi-

"I FELT THAT I NEEDED TO PREPARE THE HOSPITALITY COMMUNITY FOR THINGS THAT I KNEW COULD BE A VERY REAL DANGER."

can spirits brands like Mijenta. She had no background in advocacy, she says, "but there are so many things I've learned." The most important lesson she shares? "You don't have to be a citizen for the Bill of Rights to apply to you. That is universal for anyone on U.S. soil."

With seminars hosted in Denver, Boulder, Phoenix, and Chicago, and due to continue this summer, throughout California, in Nashville, at Tales of the Cocktail in New Orleans, and wherever the drinks community invites her, attendees of Escuela get fed lunch, schooled by Schwab or immigration lawyer Juliana Manzanarez on responding to



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement presence, and connected to a local organization for ongoing help. "Bars and restaurants are the heartbeat of communities, and this is a five-alarm fire," says Hernandez, who has launched a GoFundMe to support running Escuela full time. "It's extremely important to mobilize people on a grassroots level to stand up for each other."

—BETSY ANDREWS



DOCUMENTING, PRESERVING, AND REVIVING THE INDIGENOUS FERMENTATION TRADITIONS AND KNOWLEDGE OF MEXICO

CÉSAR IVÁN OJEDA LINARES

Postdoctoral researcher, University of Mexico

What happens during a fermentation? For a nuanced answer, turn to César Iván Ojeda Linares, a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Genomic Sciences at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) whose research in ethnomicrobiology (looking at the intersection between human culture and microorganisms) has been unlocking the invisible worlds inside traditional fermented beverages for nearly a decade. Born and raised in Mexico City's Xochimilco neighborhood, where

"WHAT ALL BREWERS SHOULD KNOW IS TO EMBRACE DIVERSITY. THERE'S A LOT OF YEAST, AND WE ARE PROBABLY JUST FOCUSING ON ALCOHOL PRODUCTION."

extant chinampas (floating farms) recall ancient foodways, Ojeda Linares uses scientific techniques like metagenomics and chromatography to document, explain, and preserve the disappearing indigenous fermentations of Mexico.

The recipient of the 2024 Howard Scott Gentry Award, which recognizes leaders in collaborative research on agave conservation and use, Ojeda Linares delves into how producers control fermentation, codify that information in culture, and use it for tasty and utilitarian ends. He has shared

his knowledge at industry events like the Agave Heritage Festival and Pueblos del Maíz, and his research has appeared in a variety of peer-reviewed journals. In his work, Ojeda Linares sees lessons for brewers, vintners, and distillers everywhere. "What all brewers should know is to embrace diversity," he says. "There's a lot of yeast, and we are probably just focusing on alcohol production, but the other yeasts are related to other metabolites such as aroma compounds, ester production, and other acid metabolism."

—N.C. STEVENS





UNCOVERING THE POTENTIAL OF VIRGINIA'S HERITAGE GRAINS FOR FUTURE DISTILLERS

SHELLEY SACKIER

Director of distillery education, Reservoir Distillery,
and founder, Virginia Heritage Grain Project

On any Virginia farm, Shelley Sackier never sees just a patch of dirt. She sees a natural canvas for the state's historical flavors that are waiting to be uncovered. To that end, she established the Virginia Heritage Grain Project to identify, plant, harvest, distill, and analyze historical grains and rediscover America's oldest spirit-worthy varieties. The first heritage varieties were planted in the fall of 2023, and this year they barreled the first single-grain spirits distilled at Reservoir using heritage corn, wheat, and rye.



Working with small-scale farmers and distillers, and tracking a matrix of variables, Sackier aims to identify the Platonic ideal of a heritage grain: high yields for farmers, and distinctive flavors for distillers. And all of her data is open source. "The project is about rediscovery, preservation, and an historical treasure hunt for flavor," she says.

By uncovering unique flavors, Sackier also hopes to give small distillers, who don't have economies of scale, a competitive edge. It's hard to compete, she says, if you don't make products that stand

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VIABLE INGREDIENTS FOR
MODERN DISTILLATION."**

out on the shelf. "I want to create a viable local alternative that prioritizes flavor and heritage and economic resilience—something uncopyable."

—LIZA WEISSTUCH

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF TODD WRIGHT / FRENCH BLOOM / INCLUDING OPENING PAGE



UNOPENING NON- ALCOHOLIC WINEMAKING AND PACKAGING TO FORGE A NEW PATH FOR THE CATEGORY

MAGGIE FREREJEAN- TAITTINGER, CONSTANCE JABLONSKI, AND RODOLPHE TAITTINGER

Founders and winemaker, French Bloom

When Maggie Frerejean-Taittinger and Constance Jablonski first imagined French Bloom, they were focused on solving a singular problem: a lack of high-quality, non-alcoholic wines. But in realizing that dream through the innovative winemaking of Rodolphe Taittinger, they put in motion something much larger: an entirely new vision for the non-alcoholic wine landscape.

By producing terroir-focused non-alcoholic wines in premium packaging,

**"OUR AMBITION IS TO
BE A TOP 10 SPARKLING
WINE BRAND, NOT JUST
IN THE 0.0% ABV SPACE,
BUT ACROSS THE ENTIRE
CATEGORY OF SPARKLING
WINES."**

—Maggie Frerejean-Taittinger

French Bloom is putting the category on par with any serious full-alcohol wine, which is a core part of their mission. "We are first making wine," says Rodolphe Taittinger. "The fact that it's alcohol free is secondary."

Like so many wine consumers around the world, the team at French Bloom loves wine—but doesn't want to drink alcohol all the time. In fact, Frerejean-Taittinger

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Rodolphe Taittinger,
Maggie Frerejean-Taittinger, and Constance Jablonski



shares that 93 percent of non-alcoholic wine buyers purchase alcoholic options as well. This is a product—and a new era of non-alcoholic wine—for them, offering a serious wine-drinking experience for the moments when alcohol is not needed.

—CAITLIN A. MILLER

★★★
AWARDED
FOR

CREATING A PLATFORM TO SHEPHERD ARTISANAL PRODUCERS THROUGH THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE U.S. BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SUPPLY CHAIN

ROB WEIR

Cofounder and CEO, Maguey Exchange

Rob Weir sits at the nexus of a fast-expanding network of artisanal wine and spirits producers and global buyers including importers, distributors, restaurants, and premium retailers. A West Point graduate, U.S. Army Airborne Ranger veteran, and former Kearney consultant, Weir is now the CEO of Maguey Exchange, a platform that connects artisanal producers to brands. His ambition? “We’re building a universal digital infrastructure for artisanal trade, start-

**“SOLVING THOSE
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OF TRADITION AND
TECHNOLOGY.”**

ing with the \$380 billion artisanal spirits and wine industry.”

Small and medium producers, whose expertise lies in craftsmanship, do not always have the resources to locate buyers or fulfill international orders. Estimating that producers lose between 15 and 25 percent of potential revenue to logistical challenges, Weir strives to empower the expanding network of so-far 750 verified producers (across all categories but mainly agave spirits) with easier market access, simplified supply chains, and the



increased employment opportunities of successful producing communities.

On the buyer side, Weir helps brands identify producers and verify authenticity, reducing sourcing time by an estimated 80 percent. His platform offers blockchain-backed tracing to prove provenance of spirits, an AI-powered tasting tool called SpiritsSense to match flavor profiles to producers, and compliance tools to get products to market.

—N.C. STEVENS

★★★
AWARDED
FOR

CHAMPIONING AUDACIOUS SELF- ACCEPTANCE AMONG QUEER AND BIPOC BARTENDERS

DADDY LONG LEGS

Freelance bartender and founder of DNA Haus

In the beverage industry, there are sizable gaps in representation for LGBTQIA2S+, BIPOC, and other intersectional hospitality workers. So, when Daddy Long Legs entered the spotlight—first as an acclaimed pastry chef, then behind the bar—they decided to be the representation that they needed to see in bartending.

Daddy Long Legs is a nationally recognized, Black, nonbinary bartender; a mentee in Uncle Nearest’s Raise the Bar mentorship program; and an advocate working to increase the visibility of marginalized bartenders. To do this, they created DNA Haus in early 2024, a creative space for

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events and programming that centers BIPOC and queer artists of multiple mediums and uses hospitality as a tool for community and creation. DNA (which stands for “Diversity and Authenticity”) Haus is their love letter to the hospitality industry, but Daddy Long Legs also works to spread their message through discussions and panels;

they are co-leading a panel called “Queer Bodies in Hospitality: Finding your Community” at Tales of the Cocktail 2025. In an industry that still struggles with representation, Daddy Long Legs is creating opportunities for marginalized bartenders to be audaciously self-accepting, thus becoming changemakers themselves.

—SHAYNA CONDE





INSIDE THE QUEST TO MAKE BETTER NON-ALCOHOLIC WINES

AS NON-ALCOHOLIC WINE RAPIDLY GAINS GROUND, PRODUCERS ARE WORKING TO FIGURE OUT HOW WINEMAKING CHANGES WHEN ALCOHOL IS TAKEN OUT OF THE EQUATION

BY CAITLIN A. MILLER

WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY COURTNEY SCHIESSL MAGRINI

While many sectors of the beverage alcohol industry are struggling with declining sales, the no- and low-alcohol category continues to grow. The IWSR predicts the category will see a compound annual growth rate of more than four percent between 2024 and 2028. And while non-alcoholic wine is experiencing growth, its sales are well below more established categories like non-alcoholic beer.

Some winemakers see this as a huge opportunity for the industry, but realizing a significant increase in sales will depend on increasing the quality of non-alcoholic wines. Data shows that most consumers who buy non-alcoholic wine also buy alcoholic wine, so they assume a certain level

of quality, but it can still be difficult to find non-alcoholic wines that meet those quality expectations.

Nevertheless, winemakers around the world are diligently working to meet those expectations and raise the quality and reputation of the category. Their approaches are wide ranging, and sometimes quite distinct, but each producer is making strides, and creating some of the best non-alcoholic wines yet. Here's how they're doing it.

TECHNOLOGY VERSUS TECHNIQUE

"To make a better quality non-alcoholic wine, there are three important pillars," says Irem Eren, the business development and sales director for BevZero. "The first

one is the incoming wine—the base wine. The second one is the dealcoholization process—the technology. And the third one is the reformulation or post-dealcoholization adjustments. If one of those three pillars is not good enough, then we will have difficulty."

For years, many non-alcoholic winemakers focused on the technology required to remove alcohol, and for good reason. When Rodolphe Taittinger, the winemaker for the alcohol-free sparkling wine company French Bloom, began dealcoholizing wine, "We used to lose about 90 percent of the aromas," he says. Now, using more advanced technology that can separate the alcohol at a lower temperature, they're only losing 60 percent of the

aromas. The ability to retain significantly more aromas was a huge boost to the quality of their product.

But Taittinger wasn't satisfied. "You're still losing 60 percent of the aroma, and you're also losing the backbone of the wine, you're losing the texture, you're losing a lot of things." So Taittinger turned his attention to the base wine, believing that the next phase of quality improvements would come from developing better non-alcoholic winemaking techniques.

In Germany, Christian Nett, the winemaker for Bergdolt Reif & Nett, has gone through a similar thought process. He started producing their non-alcoholic range after trialing the Solos Technology developed by Dr. Alexander Hässelbarth and Claudia Geyer. He was so impressed with the results that he's no longer worried about the technology side of non-alcoholic winemaking. Like Taittinger, he's now turned his attention to the techniques involved.

"The advancement of the technology is good," says Nett. "Now, we have to learn to use the technology to get more experience with it."

WHAT HAPPENS TO WINE WHEN ALCOHOL IS REMOVED?

"We can dealcoholize any wine," says Eren. "However, that doesn't mean that it's going to give a good result. So, the [base] wine needs to be clean without any faults

because if you have, let's say, volatile acidity, it's going to concentrate."

Alcohol is one of wine's key structural components, therefore, removing it throws off balance the wine's other structural elements—especially acidity. "Alcohol inherently has a perceived sweetness," says Duncan Shouler, the director of innovation for Giesen Wines, which first launched an alcohol-removed wine five years ago. "When you lose the sweetness of alcohol, the acidity therefore becomes more pronounced, so you've got to find ways to balance that as best you can."

An obvious solution is to add sugar or grape juice concentrate to replace the alcohol, which is why most non-alcoholic wines are off-dry or sweet. But if a winemaker hopes to make a non-alcoholic wine that better emulates its dry, alcoholic counterpart, there are other options to try, such as creating a base wine with less acidity.

"If you choose vineyards that [create grapes that] naturally have slightly lower acidity, then you've got a lower acidity base wine—and therefore, a lower-acidity final wine," says Shouler. It's also possible to de-acidify base wine in the cellar using potassium bicarbonate or sodium bicarbonate (baking soda), which reacts with tartaric acidity and causes it to fall out in the form of tartrates.

As it is in standard winemaking, malolactic fermentation is also an option to soften acidity, but employing it only makes sense for white grapes that work well with malo—Chardonnay, for example. "For some wines, it does help a lot, but for others, you try to avoid it," says Shouler.

There's also the body and textural element of the wine; alcohol is responsible for much of the richness and weight of a wine, so without it, non-alcoholic wines could seem thin and unbalanced. Sparkling wines have the benefit of texture



ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: French Bloom winemaker Rodolphe Taittinger with cofounders Maggie Frerejean-Taittinger and Constance Jablonski.

from bubbles, as evidenced in some of the successful non-alcoholic sparkling wines on the market today. But for still wines, Shouler might use lees stirring or the addition of mannoproteins or specific inactivated yeast products.

It's important, Shouler feels, not to take this manipulation too far. "Sometimes there's a temptation to try and create a zero-alcohol wine that has the same amount of body as a full-alcohol wine," he says. "Often that's a mistake because without alcohol, it can never be quite the same."

SO, WHAT MAKES A GOOD BASE WINE?

The quality of a non-alcoholic wine will depend on the quality of the base wine. But what exactly is the optimal type of base wine to produce the best possible dealcoholized wine?

Some producers view the situation simply—use the best-quality wine to create the best possible dealcoholized wine. "The process in the winery for making dealcoholized [white] wines is as simple as it could be," says Nett. "If it will be a good wine with alcohol, it will be a good wine without alcohol."

Others, however, have come to a different conclusion. "We realized that you can take the best wine in the world, and if you dealcoholize it, you're not going to make good alcohol-free wine," says Taittinger. "That's really the biggest thesis that we put in place after four years of R&D—you really have to completely rethink the way you make the base wine."



LEFT: Christian Nett, the winemaker for Bergdolt Reif & Nett.

Instead, Taittinger takes inspiration from Champagne. For example, the vinclairs for Champagne are often low in alcohol, highly acidic, and harsh tasting, but a winemaker knows this base is required to balance the wine after the second fermentation in the bottle. Similarly for a dealcoholized wine, Taittinger knows that he will lose aromas, texture, and structure during the dealcoholization process, so he creates a base wine with exaggerated characteristics.

"We create an almost undrinkable base wine," says Taittinger. "We age [the base wine] in [new] barrels, but we age without sulfites, so the wine becomes super oxidative." The goal is to create a base wine that is overly oxidative and oaky so that when 60 percent of the aromas are gone, you're left with a flavorful, well-balanced non-alcoholic wine that retains the toasty, nutty aromas that are associated with traditional-method sparkling wine.

THE CHALLENGE OF DEALCOHOLIZING RED WINE

The tannins in red wines, however, create a unique challenge, according to Nett. "When you take away the alcohol from the red wines, the tannins—even if they are pretty smooth in a wine with alcohol—are coming out really green, sometimes really

harsh, and it's not a good feeling because the silkiness and the alcohol-based substance is missing," he says.

Unlike whites, you cannot treat dealcoholize red wines the same as their alcoholic counterparts. Longer macerations or time in barrels, which can increase tannin levels, doesn't help the quality or texture of the final product as it might for an alcoholic red wine. "If we have 15 percent yield loss ... the tannins will also concentrate by 15 percent," says Eren. "If you have 30 percent yield loss, everything will concentrate by 30 percent."

Nett has also found that grape variety plays a big role here. His less tannic, dealcoholized Pinot Noir worked well after some trial and error, but his dealcoholized Cabernet Sauvignon, which develops less ripe tannins in Germany's cooler climate, never reached the quality level he was looking for.

At Zeronimo, a non-alcoholic wine brand produced by Katja and Patrick Bernegger of Heribert Bayer in Austria, the process for their flagship non-alcoholic red wine starts with their highest-quality wine. "We took our best wine and dealcoholized it," says Katja Bernegger. "It has two years in new oak. It comes from 70-year-old vineyards, so you have a lot of complexity in the grapes. There are no compromises in the vinification of the wine."

However, because the balance of the wine changes with dealcoholization, the Berneggers had to adjust their strategy to reach the desired quality level. They decided to further investigate exactly how their base wine was impacted by dealcoholization.

"We detected that the primary fruit is the component that is the most changed when you dealcoholize [a red wine]," says Katja Bernegger. "We also saw that secondary and tertiary aromas are nearly the same. We thought, 'how cool would it be if we could transform those aging flavors into non-alcoholic wine?' We did a



ABOVE: Duncan Shouler, the director of innovation for Giesen Wines.

test dealcoholization [of 20-year-old red wine] and saw that it was so close to the real thing."

But, Patrick Bernegger notes, "It was two years in the barrel, and another 18 years in the bottle," so the tannins had plenty of time to mellow. And thanks to the concentration of acidity, Patrick Bernegger says the dealcoholized aged wine tastes fresher than the full-strength version.

THE FUTURE OF NON-ALCOHOLIC WINE RESEARCH

While non-alcoholic winemaking stretches back more than 100 years, it's still in the early stages of development. Many non-alcoholic winemakers don't feel they have mastered the category. In fact, they are very open about the ongoing learning process.

"This is a learning process, and we are looking forward to every new vintage to bring in my ideas and learnings from the past vintage," says Patrick Bernegger.

Taittinger and his wife Maggie Frere-jean-Taittinger, who cofounded French Bloom, have been working on research and development for more than four years with an eye for continual improvement. Their latest innovation, which aimed at creating an alcohol-free sparkling wine akin to a vintage Champagne, took several years to get right.

With more winemakers dedicated to increasing the quality of non-alcoholic wine through research and development, this has become one of the most exciting categories in the industry—and the potential is limitless. ■

BELOW: Patrick and Katja Bernegger of Zeronimo. Photos courtesy of Zeronimo.

