

# THE tastingpanel MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

Max Arriagada is the national sales director for Santa Rita Estates, representing Cigar Box Wines.

## *rolling with* CONFIDENCE

CIGAR BOX WINES IS POISED  
TO SHAKE UP THE POPULAR  
PREMIUM CATEGORY



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



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

With some Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Cabernet Franc blended in, this standup Cabernet Sauvignon aged 17 months in primarily French oak, seeing some Hungarian and American oak as well. Sourced from the winery's estate vineyards (Mt. George, Silverado, and Oakville Station), the fruit yielded tight-fisted tannins of coffee and plum skin that hold this superbly

structured, concentrated, and elegant red together. Chewy, with earthy undertones and depth defined by dark chocolate and black olive. **94**



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

This cool-climate Syrah hails from a vineyard 16 miles from the Pacific at an elevation of 700 feet; it aged 16 months in 600-liter French oak puncheons before it was bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Co-fermented with 1% Viognier, it offers magnificent scents of boysenberry preserves and lavender. The palate is meaty and plush, with more lavender weaving

between chewy and mouth-filling notes of dark chocolate. White pepper, garrigue, and a taste of terroir serve as a nod to the Northern Rhône. **95**

MILLER FAMILY WINE COMPANY



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

# RED

*The Color of the Season*

92 POINTS

VIN. 2019

THE TASTING PANEL  
Nov/Dec 2021



VDRWINES.COM





# Shelf LIFE

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

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



## A NEW BRAND OF GARAGISTE:

# Paolo Dalla Mora and EnGINE

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

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

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



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

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

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



EnGINE  
founder  
Paolo Dalla  
Mora.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ENGINE



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

PHOTO COURTESY OF SCHEID FAMILY WINES



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

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

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

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

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

portion of Cabernet Sauvignon (28%), with 24% Petite Sirah, 18% Syrah, 17% Petit Verdot, and 13% other red varieties. Monterey County received an extraordinary 20 inches of rainfall during the 2019 growing season, some of it during bud break and bloom time; yields were impacted as a result. But despite the smaller portion of Petite Sirah compared to 2018 (83%), the soul of VDR remains as it highlights the best of the big red varieties grown on the estate. The winemaking team’s keen and confident approach to blending is a testament to the brand’s enterprise.



**VDR “Very Dark Red” 2019 Proprietary Red Blend, Monterey County (\$25)** The opaque red-black hue of this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Syrah, Petit Verdot, and other reds—produced with 100% renewable wind energy and aged in French and Hungarian oak for 14 months—denotes a concentration that aptly matches its moniker. A nose of blackberry preserves and dark chocolate also shows depths of soil. Tongue-drying roasted-coffee tannins are a driving force, taking the palate to a higher level: tarry, chewy, bold, and passionate. Within a balanced structure, VDR possesses power and energy that truly deliver. **92** —*M.M.*



## GOING THE GOLDEN MILE: **Stoneleigh**

If drinking a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc in the year it was made isn't on your wine bucket list, it should be. In 2021, harsh spring frosts significantly reduced yields in Marlborough—one of the world's top regions for the varietal—but, as it so often does, quality trumped quantity, so it's a banger vintage for Sauvignon Blanc producers like Stoneleigh. Stoneleigh winemaker Jamie Marfell calls it "fantastic," in fact, adding that "lighter crops and some great ripening weather leading up to harvest made for absolutely stunning fruit and resulted in gorgeous wine. It's the kind of vintage winemakers dream about."

Marfell's philosophy is simple: He takes a hands-off approach to allow the grapes and the characteristics of their vibrant terroir to speak for themselves. Working with sustainably sourced grapes from the prized Rapaura subzone of the Wairau Valley, he says, "We don't do much to [them] after we pick them other than crush them, ferment them, and filter the wine before

bottling, so the fruit has to be perfect." In other words, "I'm not trying to make a wine that reflects my hand as a winemaker—I'm after making a wine that reflects Rapaura, which is a really special place in the world to make Sauvignon Blanc."

That, he explains, is because of its distinctive stone-studded soil. Those stones capture heat during the day and slowly release it upward to the vines at night, steadily ripening the grapes while protecting the vines from frost. They also lower the soil's acidity levels, which makes for smaller vines with more concentrated fruit flavors, like the passion fruit and grapefruit that come through in Stoneleigh's Sauvignon Blanc.

Further solidifying Rapaura's ace reputation for viticulture is its location on the northern side of the Wairau, where slightly warmer temperatures make a big difference to producers in such a marginal climate. No wonder Marfell and his team consider taking care of the land a priority: Nature is



a compelling yet exacting partner in their winemaking program. That nature-nurture partnership especially shines through in Stoneleigh's impressive 2021 Sauvignon Blanc. As the year comes to a close, we can't think of a better way to send it off than by indulging in some of the best its vintage had to offer. —Allyson Reedy

Stoneleigh winemaker Jamie Marfell.



from the  
*holidays*  
to the  
**NEW YEAR**

# Honoring the **FAMILY NAME**

**HOW LINEAGE  
DISTILLS HERZOG  
WINE CELLARS'  
HISTORY AND  
PHILOSOPHY DOWN  
TO ITS ESSENCE**

by Amanda M. Faison



PHOTO: DOUG YOUNG





**Joseph Herzog is an eighth-generation viticulturalist and general manager of Herzog Wine Cellars.**

**D**oes serendipity happen in threes? Joseph Herzog, eighth-generation viticulturalist and general manager of Herzog Wine Cellars, might say it does. In 2018, the California-based winery bought a vineyard from which it had long been sourcing grapes on Herzog Road in the Clarksburg AVA. The name was a coincidence: The family who sold it was not related to the Herzogs, having long ago immigrated from Germany to farm the land since the mid-1800s. “We closed on the property in the middle of August,” Joseph says. “There were grapes to sell, but the harvest was hectic” due to the planting of 13 different varieties on one parcel. “We couldn’t bring in each [one] individually, [so] we decided we’ll bring it in as a field blend instead.”

This act of get-‘er-done ingenuity led to the second auspicious moment. As Joseph recalls, “We brought it into the winery, we were tasting the wine, and I had a moment that took me back. It





was a taste memory [of] the Royal Wine Company”—more on that in a moment—and the Porto Cordovero. It's a dry, big, dark red wine; the spice and aroma [of our field blend] just took me back to that bottle. I was so excited.” And thus the Camouflage red blend was born, its release coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Herzog Wine Cellars’ establishment in California.

A legal battle quickly ensued over the name, and the winery was forced to cease using it in favor of a different name, Choreograph. That trademarking hiccup proved a third twist of fate, however, leading the family to launch a new brand of which the red blend would become a part; called Lineage, it would be a nod to their longevity in the wine industry.

Those roots indeed run deep: In the early 1800s, Rabbi Menachem Herzog built a distillery, winery, and brewery in the town of Vrbové in the Trnava region of Slovakia. Over time, the facility began to produce wines for the emperor’s court under the leadership of Phillip Herzog, who was named a baron by the Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Josef. In 1948, however, facing postwar upheaval, Phillip’s grandson Eugene was forced to flee Europe for New York City. He began making wine and driving delivery trucks at Royal Wine Company; within ten years, he purchased the company.

Eugene also founded Kedem Winery (the name means “ancient” in Hebrew) to produce bottlings from New York’s native Concord grapes. The pioneering move established both the kosher wine and kosher grape juice categories in the U.S. By the mid-1980s, the Herzog family was making premium, “delicious wines that just happen[ed] to be kosher,” to use their slogan, from California grapes.

And so, when a customer picks up some Lineage—which includes a Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Rosé, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, and Malbec as well as Choreograph and a newly released sparkler called Momentus—they are getting value in a bottle that resonates with the concept of heritage. The label’s background



spells out the names of the nine generations of Herzogs, along with their birth and (where applicable) death dates. “Lineage has really taken shape [along the lines of] history, pride, and family,” Joseph says. “It starts in the hands and names of our forebearers . . . in 1776, with almost 280 years of winemaking history generation to generation [since]. There aren’t many families that can say that.” With that legacy comes great responsibility, he adds: “We have to put [the wine] through that reality check—your name is on the bottle.”

Meanwhile, the purchase of the

Herzog Road vineyard in 2018 led Joseph to a newfound love of Malbec. “[One] of those 13 different varietals that were planted [there] were 400 vines of Malbec,” he says. “I started loving Argentinean-style Malbec, and I asked to bring in more and we planted it adjacent to [the original vines].” This organic experimentation underscores the Herzogs’ viticultural philosophy. Whereas many other wineries will use open acreage to plant whatever grape is in high demand, “we do the opposite,” he explains. “We wanted to own that property because of what was there. We only plant and produce wine

that the dirt has shown to do well. If the fruit does well, we'll buy the land and plant further."

The Malbec, as it turns out, features heavily on the Herzogs' holiday table. "I'm very proud of it," Joseph says, noting that the fruit characteristics and the spice notes pair well with celebratory dishes. He also recommends—for Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and every other occasion—starting a special meal with Momentus. "There's

nothing like bubbles to open the appetite and change the mood," he points out. "[A glass] really changes the moment from rushing and getting ready to relaxing into tranquil[ity]."

Moments are what the Herzog family hopes to create, capture, and highlight (as suggested by the very name of the bubbly). That doctrine was underscored by the pandemic, when we couldn't gather freely for daily or special occasions: Now, the company

stresses, is the time to reclaim what was lost. "Each one of those moments [is a] milestone . . . that makes up your own history," Joseph says. "If you're going out or having a favorite meal or eating at a favorite restaurant, these are the special moments that you celebrate." And really, there's no better brand to celebrate *with*, rooted as Lineage is in those moments, in family history, and in their combined ability to shape you. **W**

## On-Premise Pros Dish on Lineage

PHOTO: DOUG YOUNG



**Alessandro Giardiello** is director of operations at Reserve Cut in New York, NY.

### Alessandro Giardiello

*Director of operations, Reserve Cut, New York, NY*

"Herzog is a big line in kosher wine; it's very big in the Jewish community," Giardiello says. "[And] it's the best as far as the mevushal process," or flash-pasteurization, required to meet kosher standards.

**Bestselling varietal:** Pinot Noir

**Sells:** By the glass and the bottle

**Drink it with:** Appetizers, including beet salad

PHOTO: PATI BARRETO



**Koen Kersemans** is wine director of Casa D'Angelo Ristorante, which has locations in Florida and Colorado.

### Koen Kersemans

*Wine director, Casa D'Angelo Ristorante, Fort Lauderdale, Boca Raton, and Aventura, FL, and Aspen, CO*

"The [Lineage] Chardonnay and Cab do very well for us," Kersemans says. "Believe it or not, in Florida most people drink red wine. [The Cab] is elegant and soft, and it goes very well with our menu."

**Bestselling varietal:** Cabernet Sauvignon

**Sells:** By the glass and the bottle

**Drink it with:** "For the holidays we're doing some white-truffle specials. The Cab will pair nicely."