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BOWLER

IMPORTS E-ZINE

A Magazine Exploring Bowler Imports:
New Faces in Old Places in the World of Wine and Spirits



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- 3** **WELCOME**
A word from David and Gab Bowler!
- 4** **SPIRITS EXPLORATION**
Full Steam Ahead with Viejo Indecente Mezcal
- 8** **BEYOND WINE**
Chiara Condello and the Sentience of Animals
- 10** **PAST. PRESENT. FUTURE**
Learning and Relearning German Wine
- 14** **CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT**
Dandelion Wine: Greenpoint, Brooklyn
- 18** **A CLOSER LOOK**
Germán Blanco (*Milú, Bicicleta*) on his Bierzo Winery, Casa Aurora
- 21** **GLOU GLOU**
Austria - Two Newbies from Hoch
- 22** **DEEP DIVE**
Burgundy - The Evolution of Chandon de Briailles

Cover Photo from Domaine de la Tour du Bon in Bandol, France.

Hi Everyone,

Welcome to Bowler's first e-magazine ever. But it isn't really an entire "Bowler" magazine per se, because it is focused exclusively on the import side of our business. We never intended to become an importer in the traditional sense of



the word; we began as a distributor, which was a great way for us to start, but even when we opened up for business back in 2003, we had a number of so-called "direct-imports" in our portfolio. As we grew, we continued to discover new and exciting wine and spirits producers who needed an importer for the U.S. And after a few years, we realized that in addition to building a strong local identity as a distributor, we had accumulated a sizable and impressive portfolio as an importer and so we began in earnest to sell to other markets across the United States. It has been very successful and we now sell in 28 states. This magazine celebrates the import side of Bowler.

Why call it a magazine? Isn't it just another piece of advertising? Well yes, of course it is, but we want it to be more than that. Our crack team of talented brand managers, led by Michele Peters, has put together something that we believe you will find both informative and entertaining. Let us know what you think and stay safe out there!

David and Gab

Full Steam Ahead: An Introduction to Gabriel Pacheco and Viejo Indecente Mezcal

by Rick Long *Spirits Portfolio Manager*

The name of this mezcal was inspired by Charles Bukowski, the writer and poet.

With the proliferation of mezcal and agave-based spirits around the world, Bowler is committed to finding and working with brands that are taking the necessary steps to ensure a future for the families who have been making their mezcal for generations, and for the industry as a whole. I recently had a conversation with Gabriel Pacheco of Viejo Indecente to help me understand their specific methods to support the control of deforestation in Oaxaca.

Gabriel is from Mexico City and spent many years working in Colombia. He loves traveling and has been all around the world. He is a certified rescue diver and an avid golfer. He became an environmentalist and started to invest in sustainability projects. One of those projects was a mezcal. He bought out most of the original investors and dedicated 100% of his energy to Viejo Indecente.

Viejo Indecente is produced in the small community of San Isidro Guishe. San Isidro Guishe is located in the Municipality of San Luis Amatlán in the State of Oaxaca. José Lucas, a third-generation distiller, currently oversees the family-run operation.

Viejo Indecente sits in a unique location within the district of Miahuatlán, with an average elevation of 5,165 feet above sea level. Its fields are among the driest in Oaxaca, with no more than twenty inches of rainfall per year, but the land's proximity to the sea and exposure to the sea winds in the spring and fall contributes subtle marine and salty notes.

Viejo Indecente is cooked in a handcrafted steam oven, then fermented in Montezuma wood tanks. Finally, it is distilled twice in a copper alembic. Currently, there are three unique mezcal offerings from Viejo Indecente.

STEAM VS. TRADITIONAL ROAST



Viejo Indecente Espadín Mezcal

100% Espadín, or agave angus-tofilia, naturally harvested after an eight-year growing term. Steam cooked in a handcrafted steam oven, then fermented in wood tanks and distilled twice in a copper alembic. The most commonly used agave in mezcal. It generally takes about eight to twelve years to mature. The nose is sweet and clean with aromas of green vegetation and menthol. Herbaceous and salty on the palate. Pure cooked agave. A little minty with sweet caramel notes on the finish. No smoke.

Viejo Indecente Ensamble Mezcal

Two varieties: Madrecuishe and Espadín, naturally harvested, steam cooked in a handcrafted steam oven, then fermented in wood tanks and distilled twice in a copper alembic. Maguey Madrecuishe is part of the Karwinskii family. It grows mostly in dry climates, and typically takes a tall, cylindrical shape. Due to the agave's dense core and low water content, mezcal made from agave Madrecuishe typically has high minerality with vegetal and floral notes. Bright madrecuishe flavors are well-defined, fruity with a velvet spiciness. Notes of green apple, orange, plum, and cream. Nice salinity on the finish.

Viejo Indecente Tepeztate Mezcal

100% Tepeztate- cooked agaves in an underground oven, crushed the cooked agaves by hand, and ferment the agave fibers along with water in wooden tinas. Tepeztate takes as many as 25 years to mature in the wild, and sustainability efforts are needed in order to keep mezcal production of this agave in the future. Despite all odds it seems to flourish best on the sides of steep rocky cliffs. Floral on the nose with hints of green peppers and tomatoes, Spicy and salty with a velvety texture.

A Q & A with Gabriel Pacheco on the use of steam & indoor fermentation.

Rick Long: What prompted the use of steam for your agave? Was it out of any need or necessity? What year did you start using steam?

Gabriel Pacheco: The Lucas family's eldest son, Mario, realized after a trip back from the north in 2000, having crossed Jalisco and Zacatecas, that they could build a simple oven that could cook the agave without so much loss in the process. Additionally, they would avoid buying/chopping trees that are needed to make the traditional earth pit. Miahuatlán region is the driest in the state of Oaxaca and trees are scarce, therefore most of the wood used to produce mezcal comes from illegal or unsustainable sources. The decision they took was a mix of necessity and flavor preference. They don't like smoky mezcal and in order to produce a smokeless mezcal in the earth oven, they need to peel off a lot of charred fibers, hence losing a lot of precious raw material that took many years to grow.

RL: What particular notes do you feel using steam instead of wood do you find in your mezcal?

GP: With this process, it's easier to find all the original flavors from the agave, even the most fragile fragrances usually covered by the smokiness are easier to find. Herbal, flowers, and many more depending on the variety. Flavors of the species can be completely different.

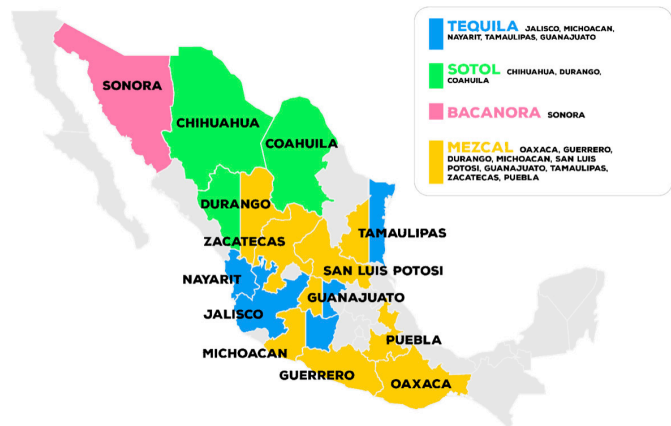
RL: How you are helping by using steam to control deforestation?

GP: Not using trees for production and also planting trees in their organic managed land (232 acres), helps the local ecosystem to thrive and offer even more flavor to the agave while keeping the temperature controlled in the valley.

RL: You moved your fermentation indoors. Why?

GP: Fermentation is a crucial process in spirit production. The Lucas family has a unique natural yeast that allows them to have consistent flavors between batches but temperature can affect yield and acidity very easily, so they ferment indoors in an insulated room inside the distillery. In Miahuatlán, temperatures in winter can range from 46°F to 85°F, then controlling it, even with a rustic system, like sliding doors, gives them a more predictable result and quality.

RL: Gabriel, thank you so much for answering my questions and I look forward to the time when we can meet in Oaxaca and share a mezcal together. Salud!



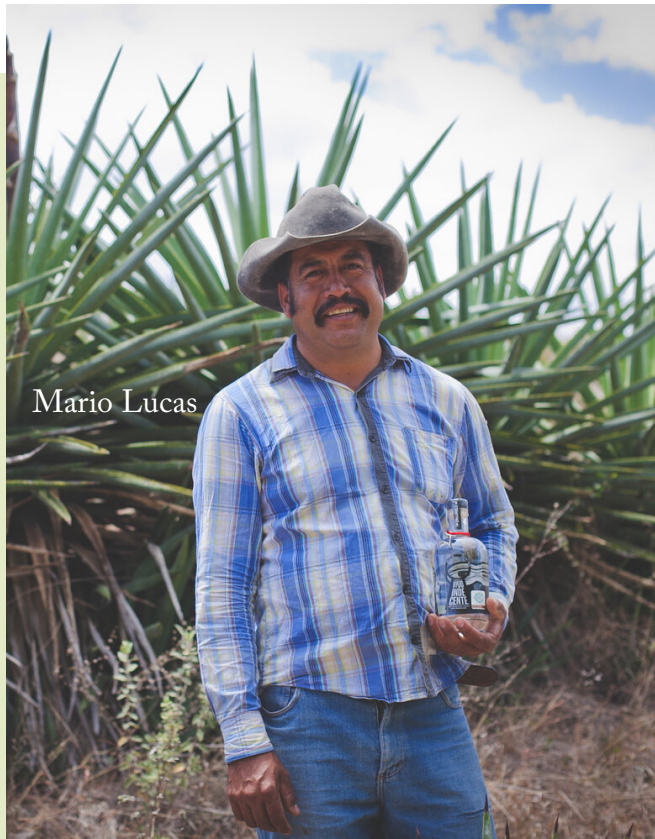
MEZCAL NEGRONI COCKTAIL

Ingredients

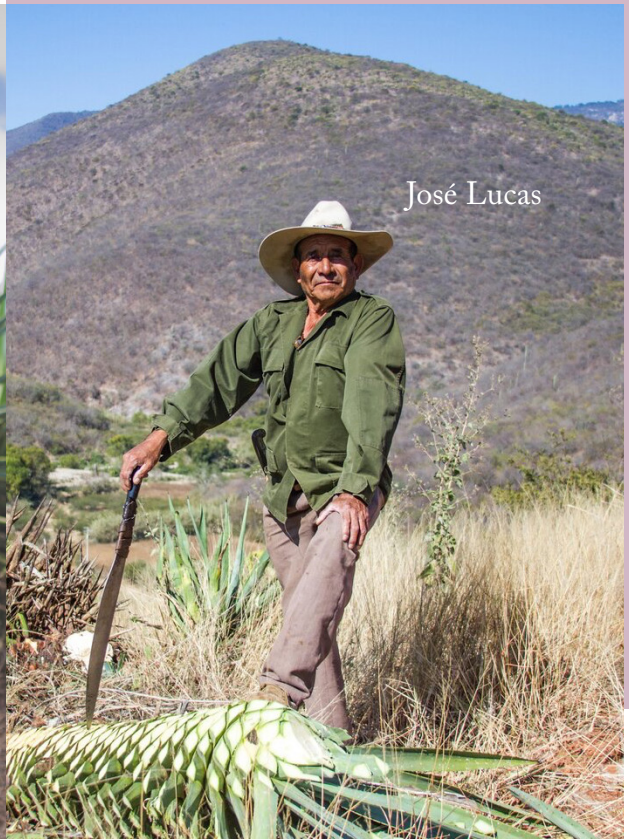
1oz Viejo Indecente Mezcal Ensamble
1oz Capitoline Tiber Bitters
1oz Sweet Vermouth Primitivo Quiles
Dash of Orange Bitters

Directions

Place in a mixing glass with ice. Stir until chilled. Garnish with a flaming orange peel.



Mario Lucas



José Lucas



The Sentience of Animals

Thoughts from Emilia-Romagna's Rising Star, Chiara Condello

by Kevin Russell *Italian Portfolio Manager*

During this pandemic, there have been many unanswered questions. One thing that has been crystal clear, though, is just how connected each creature on this planet is. A novel, microscopic contagion can bring the human world to its knees, and this can trigger the reemergence of birdsong or whalesong that we hadn't realized we missed.

It was in this mindset that I reached out to Romagna Sangiovese producer, Chiara Condello. Chiara makes just two red wines and is also a long-time vegetarian. I wanted to hear more about that.

Kevin Russell: How long have you been vegetarian? Was it a shared family decision or your own?

Chiara Condello: I've been vegetarian since I was 14, since my parents and I were stuck in a traffic jam on the highway and next to our car there was a truck full of animals on their way to the slaughterhouse. I looked in their eyes and they were scared, and I thought that they weren't different at all from my pets at home. And from that day I decided that I wouldn't be part of their suffering. It was my decision. Everyone else in my family eats meat, even if my choice has clearly influenced them and their dietary habits. My reason is purely

ethical: I love animals so much and I can't bear their suffering.

KR: Italy, from abroad, is often seen as an oasis of healthy agriculture, also with regards to the rearing of animals for meat. Give us a broader idea of what's happening in Italy with the production of meat...the problems, the challenges, the successes...

CC: In Italy, as in many other countries, the situation is quite different from what is advertised. There are small producers raising animals while respecting them, but unfortunately the meat industry is the vast majority and it's as present in Italy as it is in other

countries. Fortunately now a lot of investigations are revealing the problem and even national television news is showing what's truly happening inside the farms: the animals are not seen as beings that feel pain, fear, and that above all have a right to a life that can be called a life. They're huddled together and stripped of every freedom, even that of having natural light or natural growth. They're filled with medicines and subjected to continual cruelty, horrible but routine practices that transform the life of an animal into something devoid of value. The challenge, I believe, is to bring animal rearing to an acceptable ethical level. The *contadino* has respect for his own animals and raises them in a natural way. Industry does not. I think the future lies here, to bring back a "peasant" dimension to animal husbandry.

KR: Do you keep a garden at home?

CC: I unfortunately still don't have a true and proper garden, but my uncle does, so I'm lucky to be able to always eat fresh fruit and vegetables grown really close to home. At home, however, I do have fruit trees--cherries, figs, pomegranates, jujube--which we use for fresh fruit and for making marmalades. I also like to cook with aromatic herbs that I grow and like to use spontaneous plants, fruits, and flowers, like wild asparagus, which are perfect for frittatas, or acacia flowers for deep-frying.

KR: What correlations do you see between a garden and a vineyard?

CC: I believe a vineyard has a strong correlation with everything that surrounds it, be it a

garden or a forest, and that the balance that is created is more always more interesting when the conditions are not exclusively viticultural. And in vineyards, as well as in gardens, you need time, patience, respect, and dedication.

KR: Will you recommend a trattoria or restaurant, even outside of Romagna, that specializes in vegetables?

CC: Close to Predappio there's an osteria that I really love. It's called La Campanara and they do a lot of vegetable-based things, among which a fantastic onion soup made with special Romagna onions that grows in water. On the other hand, if you want to try "haut vegetarian cuisine," in Milano there's Joia, exclusively vegetarian and Michelin-starred.

KR: Sangiovese, like many other red varieties, is immediately associated with meat pairings. What do you think when you see the umpteenth "to be paired with wild game, roast meat, steak" etc on a back label?

CC: I don't believe much in the generic pairings listed on back labels. I think everyone's perceptions are different and each of us has to find our own heartfelt pairing. A marvelous book came out last year in Italy, it's called *Vini Artigianali Italiani*, in which each wine is paired with an artwork. I found that the perfect pairing!



A scenic landscape of a German wine region. In the foreground, there are rows of green vineyards. A river flows through the middle ground, reflecting the sky and the surrounding greenery. In the background, a small town with white buildings and a church spire is nestled in a valley. The hills are covered in lush green vegetation under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Learning and Relearning German Wine

by Evan Spingarn *German Portfolio Manager*

There is a kaleidoscopic quality to German wine knowledge. Every few decades or so it shifts and fractures, keeping its colors but re-arranging them in new patterns. Supposedly each change is self-corrective, but somehow the labels always seem to leave German wine fans struggling. Here is a quick history of the biggest systemic changes in German wine and wine labeling, plus a “state of the state” currently and where it seems to be leading.

The War

WWII decidedly wrought the most seismic changes in German wine in the 20th century, although the effects of National Socialism and six years of catastrophic destruction didn’t change German wine labeling laws as much as it reversed the survival tactics of the growers. In a time when few wine lovers abroad would buy fine wine anymore from Germany and finding money or resources to make it was desperately hard, the Germans fell back on cheap, sugared, gluggable wines that proved easiest to sell on the international market. It was a short-term life-saver perhaps, but a terrible long-term plan. Those of us who traffic in German wine today are still recovering from the poor reputation earned by German wines in those decades.

The 1971 Wine Law

The 1971 Wine Law was the next most famous shift in German wine culture, sorely needed at the time but troublingly executed. In simple terms, the law codified the *pradikat* system unique to German wine—Kabinett, Spätlese, Auslese, etc.—but strictly prioritized it, thus emphasizing the primacy of ripeness over site. Its details proved riddled with injustices, such as expanding vineyards egregiously to fit political ends, sacrificing the idea of *terroir*, and glorifying sugar over

all else. No one likes to admit their fathers once voted for it; yet that fifty-year-old law stays stubbornly in place because the will to change it has remained buried by politics, money and the big growers whom it mostly benefits.

The VDP

The less well-understood and long-arc-ing change in German wine was the rise to prominence of the VDP (Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweinguter). The group was established in 1910 to guard against fakery and promote “natural” wines, which in those more innocent times simply meant a wine made without chaptalization. Only unadulterated, naturally ripened wines reaching minimum quality standards could earn the prädikats on their labels. Well and good, the country needed that, much like France needed the AOC system. Unfortunately, the VDP was never a governmental organization. It’s instead an exclusive fraternity of about 200 winemakers, mainly wealthy ones. They cannot make laws; they can only make rules which their members have to follow and hopefully others aspire to. That dual (duel) system of labeling on German wines, the VDP “private” system and the government’s “public” one, has been the source of much of the confusion that surrounds German wine today.



GG

Spawned by the Charta movement in the Rheingau in the 1990s, the GG (*grosses gewächs*) concept of top tier dry wines made from approved grand cru sites “went big” around the year 2000 when the VDP decided to coalesce similar ideas floating around the rest of the regions – namely, EG (*erstes gewächs*) in the Rhein and EL (*erste lage*) in the Mosel. It took over a decade to get everyone to agree on terms, but by 2012 the GG idea was standardized, put to a vote, and accepted. The only problem? It was for VDP members only. The rest of Germany, for reasons of intellectual property rights, could not use it. As a winemaker, you still today cannot emboss your bottle with the GG logo if you’re not a VDP member. Nonetheless—and this to me is the most interesting part—the good growers outside the VDP are still expected to emulate the GG idea. The thinking is that where the VDP goes everyone will eventually follow. “This is our ‘GG-style’ wine,” many winemakers now say, referring to their fullest-bodied dry wines from vineyards declared grand cru by neighboring VDP members. In other words, they derive an authoritative glow from the VDP’ers who also own vines in those sites. Most growers tacitly agree to the arrangement because everybody wins when the prices on GGs and their “equivalents” are assessed. Needless to say, they’re high.



So, WWII and the 1971 wine law drove German wine internationally into a sweet wine ghetto and the VDP has done its best to reverse that damage and steer back toward terroir-driven labels

and dry wines. What is the next disruptive change to come in German wine?

The Climate Crisis

Unlike in our blinkered culture, the Germans have accepted and understood the realities of the climate crisis for some time now, and increasingly effect green policies and strategic plans to adapt to it. Faced with the ill effects of industrialized farming over many decades and a newfound interest in working *with* nature rather than *against* it, about 8% of growers certified bio in 2018. Germany's Federal Environment Agency has declared an ambitious political target to reach 20% certification. At first one might not predict this to have a direct effect on how German wines are labeled and sold; but in fact the changes are likely to be profound. How different growers choose to “go natural” and what that implies can be illustrated by three of our estates at Bowler: **Gunderloch, Materne & Schmitt, and Jan Klein.**

THE CLASSIC GUNDERLOCH GG PETTENTHAL LABEL



At **Gunderloch**, an old-line Rheinhessen house that actually helped found the VDP, they are effecting change from the inside. Johannes Hasselbach, the young and forward-thinking owner/winemaker at the estate, in addition to certifying organic for the first time this year, was just named President of the Rheinhessen VDP chapter and will be focusing his efforts on the Sustainability Committee. With 25% of VDP members already identifying as organic, he hopes to talk as many VDP members as he can into heading that same direction. At his legendary estate, he follows the VDP model by producing three exemplary GGs and a range of clear, sculpted wines vinified dry through sweet. For him, organic certification fits logically into what he is already doing.

THE WHIMSICAL MATERNE & SCHMITT LABEL



It's a different story but similar in purpose and dedication at tiny **Materne & Schmitt** at Winningen in the Mosel. Rebecca Materne and Janina Schmitt decided to go hard-core bio from the beginning, earning their chops as cellar masters at the legendary biodynamic estate Heymann-Lowenstein before opening their own winery. Their wines are all dry—emphatically so—and identified by village level or vineyard name, along Burgundian lines. It's a mainstream model gaining popularity in Germany. The wines however, are decidedly NOT mainstream. Spontaneously fermented with native yeasts, extremely low sulfur, and no manipulation of any kind, they are burnished in color, rich in phenolics, vinified and matured way longer than typical Moselers, and clearly follow the “natural wine” philosophy. As Paul Grieco has said of them, “these wines are telling a new and different story in the Mosel.”

THE RADICAL JAN KLEIN LABEL

At the same time, there is a growing vanguard of winemakers who completely reject Germany's traditional laws, labels, and *prädikats*. They don't give a tinker's cuss about GG, VDP, QbA, or the rest of Germany's alphabet soup. For them, the ideas of terroir and responsible land stewardship are combined with a de-emphasis on *control* in the



cellar and an embracing of *unpredictability*. The results include unsulfured, skin-contact whites, pet nats, amphora cuvees, blends of unfamiliar grapes, and cloudy wines in varying hues of orange. The ultimate example of this is **Jan Klein**, the renegade madman of Kröv on the Mosel. His popular white blend "Little Bastard," for instance, is 60% Riesling, 25% Sauvignon Blanc, 10% Müller Thurgau, and 5% skin fermented Muskateller, fermented naturally, matured dry, and bottled unfiltered with no SO2 and a high probability of cloudiness in any given bottle. The label is cartoon-like, hilarious, and mildly insane. Is this really "German wine?" It can be now... thanks to a very small handful of *avant garde* bio vintners like Klein.

The arrival of such wines—and even the very discussion of organic going mainstream in Germany—would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. This is a healthy development, I feel. Some of the current wine rules seem hidebound and the labeling remains inscrutable to 90% of the wine world. It's time for an injection of new ideas—and a re-appraisal of the existing ones. If climate change and its attendant trend toward natural and organic winemaking is the disruptive motivator, so be it. We may see it become the legacy of this new generation of winemakers.



Johannes Hasselbach



Rebecca Materné
Janina Schmitt



Jan Klein



Dandelion Wine: Greenpoint, Brooklyn

Lily Peachin discusses opening her shop, Dandelion Wine, on a sleepy street in Greenpoint, Brooklyn

by Gab Bowler *Owner*

Gab Bowler: Tell me how this all started!

Lily Peachin: Hmm, I don't know where to begin. Well, when I moved to New York City I worked for Restaurant Associates for less than six months, I think. The corporate world really didn't agree with me. And then I got a bartending gig at the Village Idiot, which was a notorious dive bar located on 14th street and 9th Ave – it's no longer there. I had bartended in college and I loved the independent life of a bartender, especially at a bar like that where you could really just be yourself...like 1000% (laughs).

GB: What wine did you serve there?

LP: Wine??!! What!!! I never served wine to

people, I always recommended something else. We did have a magnum of cheap white and cheap red in the speed rack(!) that were mostly used to catch fruit flies. I did have a wine background because I had studied it at Cornell.

GB: You went to Cornell? I didn't know that.

LP: Yeah, I went to the hotel/restaurant school at Cornell. I'm actually in the industry which I studied, it's pretty incredible. I took every wine and beverage management course I could, and then moved to NYC and was a bartender at this really raunchy bar (Village Idiot) for almost six years...everyone was really worried about me, kind of. But

I learned so much working there.

GB: Like what?

LP: I learned how to run a small business in NYC - I started managing and did the hiring. Just the hardships of owning a small business in New York that I didn't learn in school. This was a whole other kind of business school. Dealing with garbage maintenance, dealing with customers of ALL kinds, learning that patience and kindness mean different things to different people, working with sales reps, working with distributors.

GB: So, you worked at the Village Idiot for six years and what happened after that?

LP: I needed a change, so I got a job with a wine distributor, Paramount Brands, do you remember Lester Eber? Eber Brothers?

GB: Kind of...I remember Paramount Brands.

LP: Well, being a sales rep for me was really hard, I didn't believe in the book as much as I would have liked...it was hard...I wasn't good at selling products I didn't believe in, to buyers who could care less. The company dissolved as Southern kept buying up parts of it, and eventually I got laid off after two years. I got to see a different side of the industry, and at some point, I realized that owning a wine shop was kind of a cool gig.

GB: I agree, but how so for you?

LP: I had always planned on owning a bar or restaurant, but after working in a bar for so long I realized how challenging that is, in

terms of having a personal life as well, and with a wine shop you can choose the hours that you want to be open, customers didn't stay for too long, and also I could curate the shelves with wines I love and get people to try new things. It's difficult to do that at a bar.

GB: When did you decide Greenpoint was where you wanted to open a shop?

LP: After I got laid off from Eber Brothers, I certainly didn't want to apply for a job at Southern, so I was going to either leave town or open my own place which is when I thought of opening a wine shop in Greenpoint. By then I had moved to Greenpoint and there was this sleepy little street called Franklin Street that had very few businesses on it but there were a couple that were popping up - there was a café and a record store. I thought, "Wow, we really could use a wine shop here."

GB: What was your vision for the shop?

LP: At the time, wine shops were pretty sterile, uncomfortable, fancy, or they had a ton of stuff, big brands and no one would talk to you. I wanted to be a friendly, dive-y wine shop, and that's what I did. I signed the lease in 2007 but didn't open until 2008. It took me nine months to open (laughs) but I did all the work myself. I mean, I hired guys from the local bar to do my shelves...yeah...very small budget.

GB: How did the neighborhood respond to Dandelion opening?

LP: When I first opened, I really didn't want to come off as a snobby store, so I mostly

focused on...almost all of my wines were under 25 bucks. We had a few special occasion wines, but I wanted to get people to drink wine on a daily basis and not think of it as a special occasion beverage. One of the best compliments I ever got was this woman, who lived across the street, came in and said, "I never realized how much I loved wine until you opened your shop." We would always have wine open, always pouring wine for people...I felt that since I got to taste the wine before buying it, so should the customer. We've always focused on education.

GB: What was important to you when hiring staff for the store?

LP: Um...(laughs)... (laughs more). That's

so funny, um, kindness is key, being genuine, being a real person. Obviously knowing things about wine is helpful, but that can be taught on-site. My staff is such a unique mix of people, always has been, but I LOVE THEM ALL, most become family.

GB: How did you come up with the name, Dandelion Wine?

LP: (Laughs). Ok, so you see all of these cookbooks behind me? (Lily is sitting in front of a large bookshelf)

GB: Those are all cookbooks?!

LP: Yes! I loooooove cookbooks, and I had this idea, because I was so naïve about the laws in New York, I wanted to open a wine shop that also sold cookbooks. Like a used cookbook store on one side and wine on the other, it was a terrible idea, but it was what I wanted to do. But because of the liquor laws, I found out I could only sell wine. But there was a loophole - you could sell books about wine. I thought maybe I could have a wine store/wine bookstore so...this is the dumbest story...so I googled "wine book" and Ray Bradbury's "Dandelion Wine" book popped up. I saw the title and my head almost exploded... "that's the name of the store!!!". And then I went on to research Dandelions, and they happen to be thought of as a weed, but they offer so many medicinal and nutritional values that nobody really gives them credit for, so the more I read about Dandelions the more sure I was that it was the name of the store. I was really thrilled by it until a year or two after opening, and then I HATED the name. I



wouldn't even tell people what the name of the store was, we didn't even have a sign!

GB: (Laughs) Why?!

LP: I don't know! I just hated it. For years. It just sounded so cheesy. So, I started calling it Dandy wine shop. But as time passed, I came back around and appreciated it for what it is.

GB: What was it like working with distributors and sales reps early on?

LP: Well I have to give a shout out to your dad because, since we're recording this, I was a little star struck when I first met him because he was the first person whose name was on a

wine book. He invited me to a Steve Edmunds dinner, and we sat next to each other, and he just made feel like I really belonged there... and I'll never forget that. And I've always felt that welcoming vibe from everyone I meet at Bowler, and I'm not just saying that because we're doing this interview!

GB: Great, I'm definitely keeping all of this!





Germán Blanco (*Milú, Bicicleta*) on his Bierzo Winery, Casa Aurora

by Vinicius Rodrigues *Iberian Portfolio Manager*

Mountain man Germán Blanco is reaching new heights in his creative life. After making his name producing some of the most pure and immediate wines from Ribera del Duero in Aguilera, under the label Quinta Milú, the Gijon native started a project rehabilitating old vines in Bierzo Alto, where he spent his childhood. That project is called Casa Aurora, and he is now launching a new wine under that label: La Nave.

Paradoxically, while the new wine nods to the future, it is all about the past. “Bierzo has always followed a Burgundian pyramid of classifying its wines under parcel wines, and single vineyards, and village level wines (*vinos de pueblo*). To these, we are now adding a regional wine, La Nave, from fruit from all over Bierzo and not only from village-specific vineyards and single-parcels. It is what we were missing and it is nothing less than our vision of what a wine from Bierzo should be”, says Germán.

Blanco spent his childhood between mountainous Asturias, and Bierzo Alto, specifically in the tiny village of Albares de la Ribera, where his great grandmother Aurora García lived, the namesake of Casa Aurora. It was there, among her ancient vines, that the sparks first flared. “The majority of the people in the village had tiny vineyards that they treated as gardens, and everyone made a *vino de consumo*”, says Germán.

The *vino de consumo* was literally a ‘consumption wine’, a wine made artisanally and drunk

daily by the villagers. La Nave is an effort to recreate those wines, making them “easy, living and fluid”. Being a mining area (Bierzo’s soils are rich in minerals and iron) the vast majority of the villagers had vineyards as a hobby. “I saw the love with how they took care of their vines, and how proud they were of them”. The miners’ pride for their vines resonated with Germán, and it was that feeling coupled with the “enormous devotion” he had for his great grandmother that got him started.

Aurora, herself a miner who lived until she was 104 years old, had a vineyard called La Galapana - a magical spot planted with centenarian old vines of Mencia, Alicante, Palomino and other varietals. “I think when I started studying and making wine I did it just to impress her,” he says. La Galapana, remote and surrounded by chestnut trees is still there, and it was the first vineyard that Germán worked on when he started Casa Aurora. After La Galapana, there are three other single-vineyard wines on the range, La Vendañona, Valle del Rio, and Valdecontina. Two village-level wines, Poula, and Clos Pepín, and two whites (of minimal production) Biba and La Bota Biba round out the whole line.

All Casa Aurora wines are made of a variation of percentages of the same grapes: there is the ubiquitous Mencia, but also Merenzao, or Portuguesa (which is really Trousseau), Garnacha Tintorera, Garnacha, and some whites, like Palomino, Godello, and Doña Blanca. As with every other wine Germán makes (the Milú, and the Bicicleta Voladora, his project from Rioja Baja) the vines are farmed organically, with no addition of chemicals, and the winemaking is gentle. Usually grapes are foot-stomped, lightly pressed on clusters, which Germán is doing away with slowly (“they mark the wine as it ages”). He rarely filters them, and the wines rest in clay, tank, or old oak before bottling, for at least a year.



Here’s a quick Q & A with Germán where he talks a bit about the differences between his other projects and Casa Aurora.

Vinicius Rodrigues: Well Germán, it seems unavoidable, let’s talk about COVID and how it has affected you.

Germán Blanco: It’s been hard. Really hard. The initial impact on our lives and business was absolutely dramatic. With time we started to float, and slowly started to swim,

very slowly. Business will be hard and it will be a while until we feel some normalcy, but we’ll be here. I always wanted to grow and be all over the world, and I know the plan will slow down now, but I refuse to let my vision go.

VR: Where are you at now with your different projects? How does your work differ from region to region?

GB: We're at a really good spot right now. Really, my way of working in all three regions is basically the same: complete respect to the grape, and minimal intervention. The terroir differs, and that is the fascinating part, but not really my approach. Bierzo Alto fascinates me, for instance, for many reasons. The old vines in mountainous terrain, the variety of grapes co-planted in these fields... I have to pay attention to the maturation process which is much slower here because of the altitude. My work in Bierzo is very much one of rehabilitation of these old vineyards, because so many are abandoned, and the woods keep encroaching.

VR: And Ribera?

GB: In Ribera, particularly in Aguilera, I only have good things to be honest. The greatest risk is frost. When we have frost we can lose years of work.

VR: And how is the work in Rioja, with la Bici?

GB: We still have work to do down there to get where we really want. We don't own the vines, which can be an advantage or a disadvantage depending on the point of view. We're looking for some hillside spots now, some vineyards with altitude. The greatest challenge there is to keep an eye on yields, that can be very high.

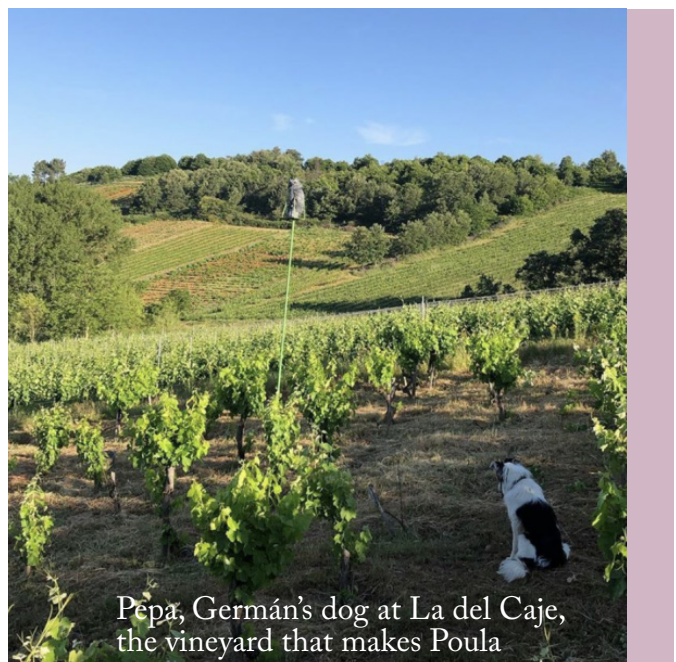
VR: How do you see the current moment of

Spanish wines now?

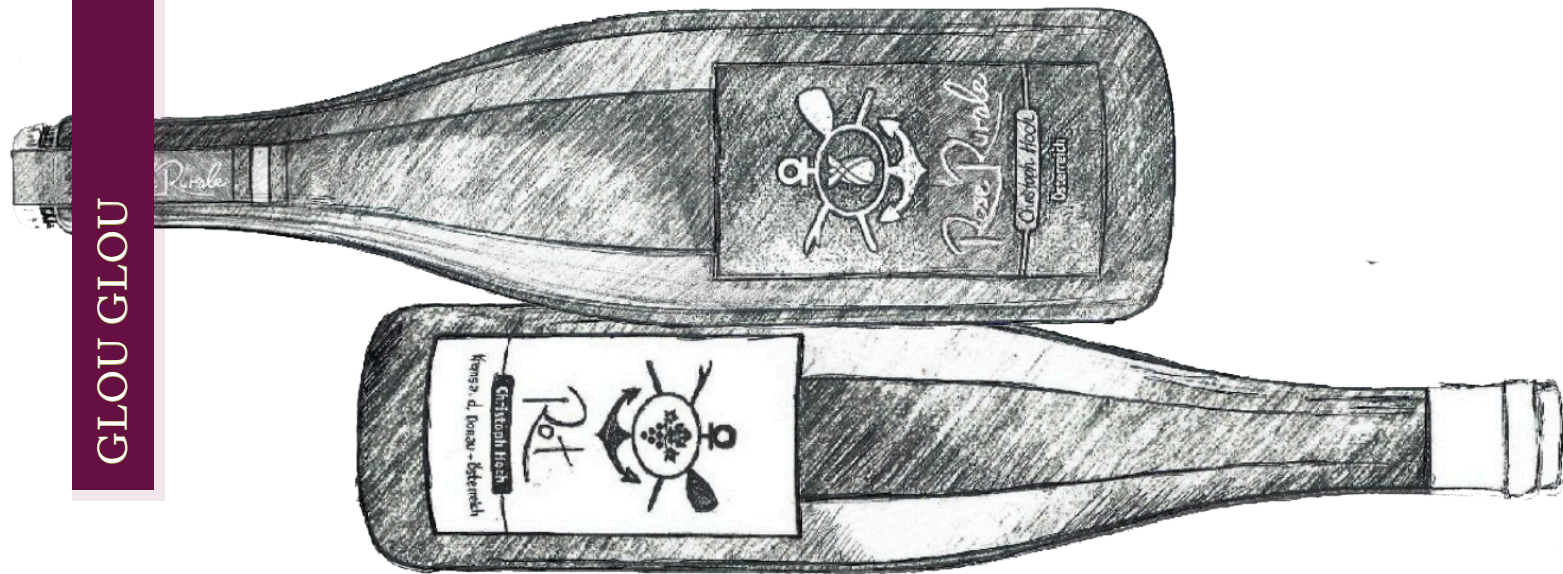
GB: I'm very proud of our moment, with so many winemakers that I admire doing amazing work in Spain, new ones as well as old ones. Think of Charlotte Allen (Bodega Almaroja), Ramón Parrera (Celler Pardas), Manel (Clos Lentiscus), Raul Perez, Álvaro Palacios y Ricardo Pérez (Desciendente de Palacios) Rafa Palacios in Valdeorras, César Márquez (Bierzo)

VR: You're an avid mountaineer. I guess given your background that would be natural.

GB: I've always been a mountaineer, since I was a kid. Now with social media it just looks like I'm climbing more mountains but that is not it. There are simply more photos of it. When I go through all the efforts of climbing a mountain, and reaching its peak, just to look at the distance, I don't know, I reach a balance that is hard to explain.



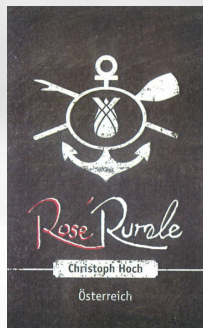
Pepa, Germán's dog at La del Cajé, the vineyard that makes Poula



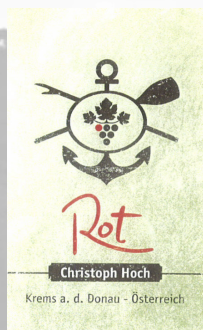
Austria: Two Newbies from Hoch

by Michele Peters *Austrian Portfolio Manager*

Christoph Hoch in Austria has two new releases this year and they have *JUST* arrived in the US. Hoch's wines are certified biodynamic by Demeter and all of his wines are NV blends, supporting his vision that the best expression of terroir comes from the blend rather than a dominant vintage.



Rosé Rurale Pet Nat NV The Rosé Rurale is made like the Kalkspitz - freshly fermenting zweigelt juice is eventually blended with the finished still wines from the previous vintage, skin contact saint laurent and muscat ottonel. Per Hoch, "it does not stop the fermentation, but strongly changes the aromas." The bubbles in the bottle are entirely from the first fermentation. Rosé Rurale is a bright and juicy wine, with ripe strawberry notes, a touch of blood orange, and a saline finish. Pure delight!



Rot (Red) NV The Rot is a blend of three vintages, 80% zweigelt and 20% blauer portugieser - stomped by foot with whole clusters and undergoes a semi-carbonic fermentation (about 75% of the total). About half of the barrels are not topped off and the wine develops *flor*, giving more depth and complexity. It's bottled without filtration, giving a slightly cloudy wine. It's a light red with piquant cherry and blueberry fruit, and notable, pleasing tannins. The final alcohol is 9.5%. It's joyous.



The Evolution of Chandon Briailles and a Look at the 2018 Vintage

by Michele Peters *French Portfolio Manager*

Claude de Nicolay at Chandon de Briailles was one of the first producers that I ever visited in Burgundy. I've been fortunate to visit every year for more than ten years now. Early on, I expected to learn the characteristics of a great Corton or Savigny, but over the years, I have gained so much more. After those first few visits, I quickly realized that there is always more to learn at Chandon de Briailles. Claude and her brother, François de Nicolay are constantly searching to do more to achieve the best from their vines. Each year the changes feel small, but over the last ten years, the style of the wines has evolved in a measurable way. The interview below covers the 2018 vintage and some of the changes that have been slowly taking shape over the last ten years.

Michele Peters: I've read that 2018 was an abundant vintage (maybe more so for whites than reds), sort of a reaction from the vines against the previous year's damage due to frost and hail. How was 2018 for you?

Claude de Nicolay: Quantity and fantastic quality; 45hl/ha for the village and 1er cru reds; 38hl/ha for grand cru reds; 50hl/ha for

village and 1er cru white 45hl/ha for grand cru white.

MP: Wow! How was the weather for you in 2018?

CdN: Quite warm, but enough rain in summer so no hydric stress for the grapes.

MP: How do you manage your yields? Do you take any actions like green harvest? Or are your yields limited by pruning and also biodynamic farming? How does pruning in the spring impact your yields?

CdN: The yields in 2018 were managed with green harvesting for some vineyards; 1/3 of our domaine, (clones especially). The biodynamic farming helps for the balance of the grapes more than the yields. Spring pruning prevents esca and helps us to pick later.

MP: The last ten years have been quite interesting and it seems that each year had different challenges, many attributable to global warming, extreme heat, early bud break subject to frost, violent storms. Do you see that your farming has helped with these extreme conditions?

CdN: Our vines are much stronger against all these extreme conditions thanks to biodynamics and ploughing by horse. The roots are deep enough to find water especially at the end of the season in summer.

MP: What are some changes that you have made over the years to deal with the warming temperatures? Is this one of the reasons that you stopped hedging (*rogna*)? Do you think this is a new trend in Burgundy?

CdN: We still do the hedging but we have lifted up our training system by changing the wooden stakes. No hedging at all is done only by Bize Leroy and DRC.

MP: I've read that some people are reporting a shorter, quicker growing season, an 80 day



cycle instead of 100 days. Are you seeing a shorter, quicker growing season?

CdN: Since 2018 our average green cycle is 85 to 90 days.

MP: You seem to always be innovating and trying new ideas in your vineyards, any new discoveries that you're excited about?

CdN: Yes it's very important to evolve every year and to see what works and what does not. Our most recent experiment is to plant 10 ares of Corton Clos du Roi in pole stake without training system last year....

MP: There are a few changes in your wine-making over the last several years and I'd like to talk about how it has impacted the character of your wines. In the cellar, have you switched entirely to the new vertical presses? How has it changed the profile of your wines?

CdN: Yes our vinifications have changed in order to get the fruit in front and the structure after on the palate! We no longer do a cool

maceration ! We help the extraction of the fruit character thanks to a half carbonic fermentation during the first five to eight days without doing anything then we start *remontages* [pump-overs] (by gravity, no pumps) and *pigeages* [punch-downs] still by foot! All the grand cru and Ile des Vergelesses reds are fermented in wood vats, which is very helpful for smoother tannins. We have exclusively used the vertical presses since the 2017 vintage for both reds and whites ! Big, big difference in the quality of the tannins using this type of press; it's less astringent and the wines clarify quicker in barrel as we don't dig up the pomace.



MP: You've made a big change several years ago, in that you have reduced the amount of whole clusters that you use, although you are still at 100% if possible for the vintage. How do you decide how much whole clusters to use?

CdN: We have reduced the whole clusters only in cooler vintages (2011, 2013, 2014, and 2016) We decide every year and for every vineyard the percentage of the clusters we use depending on the ripeness of the stems and the pips and the age of the vines! We also press earlier compared to before and with vertical press so the taste of the clusters is far less strong!

MP: You are now incorporating some new oak into your 1er and grand cru wines. What inspired this change? Are you using new oak every year or just certain years?

CdN: We buy new barrels every year in order to introduce new ones in the cellar but never more than 15% of the total production! It's just important to have a good rotation of the barrels. Almost no influence on the wines, just smoother tannins on the reds.

MP: You are now releasing some wines without any SO₂ added. What was the first year you began making trials? Are you pleased with the results? And has this influenced how much SO₂ you use in your classic wines?

CdN: We started a few experimentations of no SO₂ added at the domaine in 2012. The results are very interesting, even if the wines are very different to the classic cuvées. Thanks to that we are using far less sulfur in

our classic wines because we keep the wines on the lees (the best protection) and we don't rack with air anymore, but we push the wines with nitrogen. So we use SO₂ only for the racking and bottling! No SO₂ this year during vinification... This experiment will stay in very small proportion but we have more and more clients asking for that.

MP: How do you find your 2018's in comparison to your 17's or 16's? Quick re-cap of each vintage please!

CdN: *2016:* Frost! No wine for village and 1er cru and very tiny yields in Grand Cru. Wonderful October vintage with amazing potential of aging.

2017: very Burgundy style. Perfect ripeness to produce balanced wines; very elegant and refined but long, great concentration on the palate. Pernand Ile des Vergelesses red is

the most impressive cuvée for that perfect balance!

2018: Warmer vintage but balanced with black fruits on every cuvée, smooth tannins and some typicity of each terroirs shows on the finish (for example: violets for Savigny and spiciness for Pernand ..) Early picking, end of August, for the whites was the right decision. The wines are expressing fresh citrus aromas and great acidity.

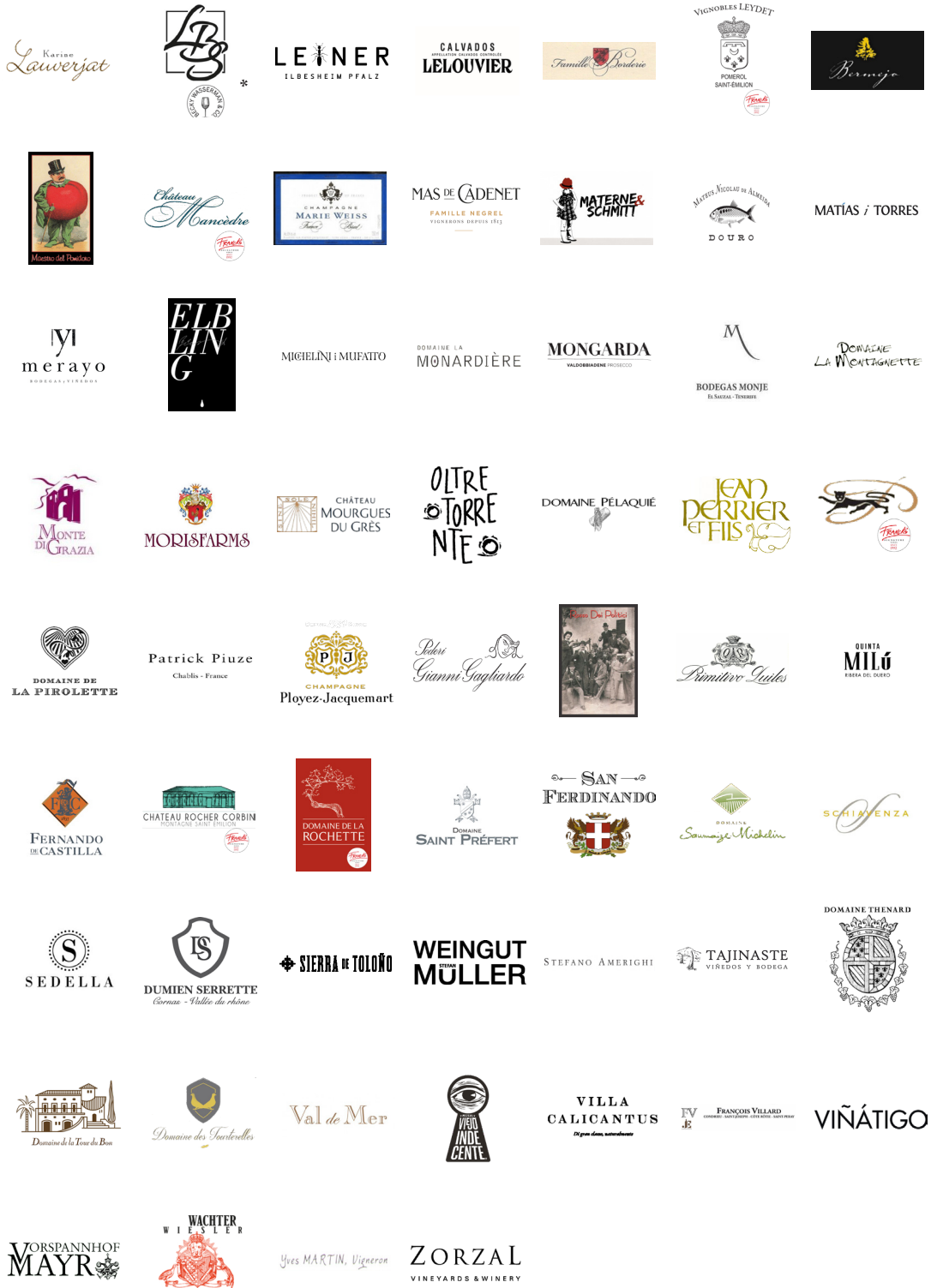
MP: We tasted through five different 18's from barrel last year when we visited and they were showing really beautifully. I can't wait to try them stateside. Thanks for all of your time!!



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