



# The New Vintage

Winemaking is an ancient profession, but even thousands of years after we discovered the pleasant effect of fermented grapes, it's a pursuit that's ripe for experimentation and innovation. *Rhapsody* traveled up and down the West Coast to find the people who are pushing the process forward and creating the wines you'll be enjoying for years to come.

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WOODINVILLE, WASHINGTON

**Morgan Lee**  
Two Vintners

Washington state ranks second in the U.S. behind California in wine production, but without a clear identity, such as “Napa cab” or “Oregon pinot,” its producers often find themselves resigned to explaining that their world-class wines don’t come from the

“other” Washington. But, where some see frustration, Morgan Lee of Two Vintners saw opportunity.

In 2007, Lee, 37, was encouraged by his employers at Covington Cellars to pursue his—at the time unfashionable—belief in syrah and merlot. “It’s my conviction that syrah is the most exciting thing that we have to offer in Washington state,” he says. “It’s so beautiful and different from place to place.”

During harvest season, Lee travels to 13 vineyards in eastern Washington to source

grapes. “I literally take a tent and my dog, and I sleep in the vineyard,” says Lee, who covers more than 700 miles on those two-day visits. “You need to build a relationship with the farmer. They trust us to do the best with their fruit, just like we trust them to grow the best thing. And I’m very convinced that the nicer you are to your farmers, the better fruit you get.”

Aside from the careful sourcing, Lee is continuing to branch out creatively. His recent and upcoming projects include an

orange gewürztraminer, experiments with clay amphorae from Spain, and a syrah and riesling collaboration with German winemaker Dirk Würtz. Lee sees this sort of experimentation as a catalyst for Washington gaining recognition as a major world wine region. “The quality level has jumped in the decade since I’ve been here,” he says. “Farmers figuring out what grows best and winemakers figuring out how to do the most justice to the wines—all of that is still happening.”

PORTLAND, OREGON

**Kate Norris and Tom Monroe**  
Division Winemaking Company

“We love Portland, and we love being able to expose people to wine so easily,” says Kate Norris, 35, of Division Winemaking Company, explaining why she and Tom Monroe, 38, started an urban winery in 2010 in a city that had few winemaking operations despite its proximity to the Willamette Valley. “You see wineries in towns in France; that’s an urban model but on a smaller scale.”

Norris and Monroe were living in San Francisco when the 2008 recession spurred a move to Burgundy to learn winemaking. While some compare Oregon’s terroir to Burgundy’s (both are famous for pinot noir), it was as much the culture that drew them to Portland. “We have beautiful weather here—nice cool winters, warm summers, not too rainy—and we have great soil,” says Norris. “And we also have people who love food, wine, beer, cocktails, biking around, being

outside. It’s the best environment for not only making but drinking wine, too.”

Norris and Monroe—they’re divorced but remain business partners—have a seemingly unlimited enthusiasm for Oregon’s less famous grapes. They started Portland’s I Love Gamay festival, celebrating gamay noir, and launched Drink Chenin Day (June 17), which has caught on internationally. Norris also started her own line, Gamine, when Monroe gifted her with some Rhone varieties in 2013. She sees their shared belief in their adopted state’s limitless potential as part of the region’s essence. “Winemaking here is part of that pioneering spirit that is Oregon,” she says. “Can you imagine, 50-odd years ago, looking around and saying, ‘Let’s plant grapes here,’ when there’s not a single grape anywhere? That sense of risk and adventure—that’s uniquely Oregonian.”





DUNDEE, OREGON

## Maggie Harrison

*Antica Terra*

"The way I learned how to make wine was lean in, leave the fruit where it is, and do the most beautiful thing in front of you all the time, without compromise," says Maggie Harrison. "And do it with maniacal rigor. You're Chuck Close next to the canvas."

Just as Close's arrangements of abstract cells magically take human form, Harrison's powerful pinot noirs and chardonnays seem to jump from the glass with a force that belies their laborious composition of individual grapes. Many of these grapes grow on scrawny old vines on Antica Terra's 11 acres of rocky Willamette Valley hillside—actually a prehistoric seabed that rose to the surface as a mix of sandstone and fossilized oyster shells with no topsoil.

Harrison, 47, first encountered this setting in 2006, when she was working as an assistant winemaker at the cult Ventura County winery Sine Qua Non. (Six years of backpacking around the world, which included a bout of malaria in Kenya, culminated with Harrison realizing wine was her true calling.) She first visited Antica Terra in an advisory capacity, as a favor to its new owners, with no intention of leaving her coveted California position. "There was a handwritten sign on a chain-link fence that said, 'No Trespassing' with a backward R, like an ax murderer wrote it," she recalls, "but it was like no vineyard I'd ever seen."

Eleven years later, she's still here. Although she uses a variety of innovative techniques, her work has nothing to do with trends. "New is not the interesting thing to me," she says. "I look at the people in the wine world who I love: They just perfect and refine, so they become not just the best winemaker in that region but the iconic representation of that place as a whole. Winemaking is a life's work."







CALISTOGA, CALIFORNIA

### Dan Petroski

*Larkmead Vineyards, Massican Winery*

When Dan Petroski decided to be a winemaker a decade ago, he had no clue how wine was produced. But the Brooklyn native dove in headfirst, apprenticing at Valle dell'Acate in Sicily and then at DuMol Winery in California's Russian River Valley before joining Larkmead Vineyards. In 2012, Petroski, now 44, became head winemaker at Larkmead, striving to give the Calistoga vineyard's already exalted wines an even sharper sense of terroir.

Larkmead's 110 acres have a diverse array of soil subtypes, and Petroski is on a mission to understand what lies beneath. "A lot of California is 'above ground' wine-making because we can ripen everything here to a level that the Europeans can't get to," he says. "Ninety-nine percent of wines here are on this plush, sunshine model; I'm actually trying to make wines that taste like the dirt and the scorched earth. It needs

to engage and attack your palate. I want to wake people up."

On the stylistic flipside, Petroski has also started his own winery, Massican, a pet project born of his love of refreshing Italian whites. These wines bear little resemblance to the viscous, oaky Napa style, with varieties like *tocai friulano* and *ribolla gialla* that are rarely seen in the Valley—and have become darlings of sommeliers and collectors alike. "My first year in wine was in Sicily, and we were always drinking Mediterranean whites," Petroski recalls. "They were refreshing, bright, and kind of reflective of the salinity of the sea and the orange blossoms and almond trees. I found that the southern Italian microclimate is very similar to what I was living with here in Napa, but you get into the Napa wines and they're all dark, rich, powerful reds—and it's 85 degrees at 9 p.m.! I'm not drinking Napa cabernet every day."

GLEN ELLEN, CALIFORNIA

### Caleb Leisure

*Caleb Leisure Wines*

Some of the world's oldest wines are from the country of Georgia, whose unique use of massive egg-shaped clay vessels called *qvevri* is the only winemaking method to make UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list. While concrete eggs and clay amphorae are popular in certain winemaking circles, no one in the U.S. has used real *qvevri*—until now.

"When I first tried them, they just totally beguiled me," says Caleb Leisure, 35, who imported from Georgia 10 *qvevri*—each with a capacity of between 300 and 600 liters—that currently hold his first foot-stomped vintage. "I loved them kind of instantly, if only for their strangeness and their complexity."

Aside from the wine, the vessels also hold several silver coins for good luck, per tradition. "We can talk about innovation, but this is sort of the opposite of that," Leisure says. "It's going back to the most primitive way of doing things—and understanding that it's worked for 8,000 years. One thing I've learned the hard way in the wine industry is how conservative it is. Everybody has investments, and they don't want to take a chance."

Beyond his passion project, Leisure works days as a winemaker at Coturri Winery, a pioneer in natural wine. He is also a fiction writer (he has an MFA from New York University), and he finds that winemaking satisfies the same creative inclination—and requires a similar sort of stamina. "Most of the time, it's just remembering that patience is the ultimate virtue and not making rash decisions," he says. "You have to be there and you have to be incredibly present, but it's about doing as little as possible."







SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA

## Michael Brughelli and Mikey Giugni

*Scar of the Sea*

“Great wine is made from great places,” says Scar of the Sea’s Mikey Giugni, who, with partner Michael Brughelli, makes wine from pinot noir, chardonnay, and ... apples (aka hard cider). The great place they claim is the Santa Maria Valley, just north of Santa Barbara, and their 5-year-old winery sources most of its grapes from the iconic Bien Nacido Vineyards (where Brughelli also works as a sales and acquisitions director) nearby. While Giugni, 29, and Brughelli, 34, are hardly the only vintners Bien Nacido supplies, their aromatic, complex chardonnays and pinot noirs are different from their competitors’, as the

Scar of the Sea men embrace vintage variation and the intrinsic personality of individual plots. “You can overmanipulate the vines, just like you can overmanipulate the wine,” Brughelli says. “Terroir is the site, but it’s also the human interaction with the farming.”

Both men studied engineering at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo before coming to wine. “I think as an engineer, a lot of times you’re stuck building one thing in a big project and you don’t get to see the whole picture,” says Giugni. “But in wine, we’re able to be a part of pruning, growing—we’re in the vineyard in the winter.”

An interest in sparkling wine led Giugni to Tasmania—home of the Southern Hemisphere’s best bubbly—which in turn brought about a cider-house revelation. “If someone didn’t tell me these ciders were apple wines, it would’ve been hard for me to know they weren’t sparkling wines,” he says. Scar of the Sea now produces vintage, single-origin ciders that are among the best being made in the U.S., using heirloom apples from trees planted in the mid-20th-century—so production is limited by design. “Our business doesn’t necessarily have the best five-year plan or 10-year plan,” Giugni says. “It just kind of flows to where it’s going to flow.”



SANTA YNEZ, CALIFORNIA

## Fabián Bravo

*The Brander Vineyard; Bravo Wine Company*

Fabián Bravo grew up on Chardonnay Drive in Salinas, California, but that doesn't mean he was born into the wine business. "I remember moving there when I was 13 with no idea what it meant or how to say the long spelling with double N," he says. "My English wasn't the greatest." But now, at 40, he's at the forefront of sauvignon blanc in Santa Barbara County as winemaker at Fred Brander's historic vineyard.

Bravo took a circuitous route to winemaking: He was trained as an engineer, tried law enforcement and teaching math, and almost opened a Mexican bakery with his mother before developing an interest

in wine while traveling for a job at defense contractor Raytheon. He visited the tasting room at Brander in response to a Craigslist internship ad, and started there the following Monday. "I went to engineering thinking I could escape agriculture," he says now, "and I was actually hooking up the tractor this morning."

At Brander—which pioneered planting sauvignon blanc and other Bordeaux varieties in Central California in the 1970s—Bravo has embraced investigation of the estate's 42 planted acres (individual lots of grapes are fermented separately by location, clone, harvest date, or ripeness level),

while heeding history. "My hope is that you, myself, and everyone else enjoys any wine I make more than last year's," he says. "But I want to ensure I stay true to the stylistic integrity that Fred Brander created over 40 years ago."

As much as he respects tradition, Bravo doesn't feel stifled. A fan of Italian wines, he recently launched a side project, Bravo Wine Company; his first vintages of pinot gris and sangiovese hit the market earlier this year. "I want winemaking to remain fun," he says. "The indirect path was important for me. I want to be certain I enjoy and love what I do."





TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA

## Olivia Bue

*Robert Renzoni Vineyards & Winery*

“Temecula is known for bachelorette parties and flavored sparkling wine, but there’s so much more to it than that,” says Olivia Bue, who earlier this year became head winemaker at Robert Renzoni, one of the area’s largest and best-regarded estates. Located within 90 minutes of Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange County, Temecula gets weekend tourist traffic but lacks recognition as a top wine region—something Bue, 28, is aiming to change.

“I knew what I wanted to do before I was legal to drink,” says Bue, whose visit as a

teenager to a family friend’s winery led her to apply to the enology program at UC Davis straight out of high school. She was on the Napa Valley career track, but her mind kept wandering back to her home north of San Diego. “I could have stayed in Napa and worked for years and years to get to a position where I wanted to be,” she says, “or I could come and grow with a region.”

While some might think she’s green, Bue considers her youth to be an advantage. “My cellar master is also on the younger side, and we’re willing to do everything,” she says.

“Heavy manual labor, lab work, taxes, blending trials, bottling. It gives you a good idea of what goes into the entire process.”

Although Temecula lends itself to big, user-friendly cabernet, syrah, zinfandel, and chardonnay, Renzoni—with a family heritage dating to 1880s Italy—takes a different tack, adding Italian varieties like sangiovese, pinot grigio, and barbera to the portfolio. But for Bue, it’s all about collaboration, not competition. “I’m focused on the region as a whole,” she says. “Even if it isn’t ours, I just want people to open their eyes to the valley.”