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BOWLER

E-ZINE

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



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Cover Photo from Matthew Christoff - Vineyard in Volnay, January 2016.



To say the story of David and Goliath is an over-used metaphor would be putting it mildly. Yet as I look through our second edition of the Bowler E-Zine, that is what comes to mind. The people with whom we work, from the growers to the importers to our distributor partners, are mostly small organizations—sometimes as small as a single person working alone. For the most part they operate without marketing budgets, the latest equipment, in-house laboratories, and highly paid marketing directors.

Some are women working in what has mostly been a man's world, others are outsiders, bringing a fresh perspective to a traditional region. Or how about a young distributor presenting natural wines to a market that has had minimal exposure to them before? Or maybe it's a traditionalist in Bordeaux competing against the larger world of "the market" with its scores and overblown wines. Or perhaps they are mavericks, looking to revolutionize and improve the farming practices of their traditional regions, unafraid to break a few rules and find their version of truth expressed through their vineyards and in their wines. And in some cases, such as Jutta Ambrositsch in Vienna, you will find all of these scenarios combined!

It is with these thoughts in mind that we mention how onerous are the current tariffs against French, Spanish, and German wine, and how unfairly and cruelly they impact the smaller wineries and distributors who are already fighting to keep their market share from shrinking against the Goliaths of the world.

But whatever the challenges, these winemakers, agents and distributors will continue to follow their own vision. And the good news, like David (good name, by the way) in the David and Goliath story, they will succeed despite the odds. It's these stories and these people who keep us going and inspire us at Bowler. So it is with pleasure that we share them with you here.

Please let us know if you are enjoying our little electronic magazine. We'd love to hear from you.

David and Gab



Conversation with Cellar Master, Yamile Abad Weingut Staffelter Hof - Mosel, Germany

by Evan Spingarn *German Portfolio Manager*

I met Yamile Abad in July 2019 when I made my first visit to Staffelter Hof in the small village of Kröv, Germany. Housed in an impressive riverside manor house on a sweeping bend of the Mosel with a shaded garden and a labyrinthine cellar, this is one of the most ancient wineries in the world, established over a millennium ago in 862 CE. Its owner Jan Matthias Klein took the reins there seven generations and exactly 200 years after his ancestors bought it from the French government under Napoleon, who had decided the church shouldn't own any farming properties during secularization in 1805. The hand of tradition rests heavily in such places, but starting about ten years into his stewardship of the estate, Jan had a bold idea: in addition to making classically proportioned, prädikat-labeled Rieslings from steep sites in Kröv and Dhron, he created a line of natural wines under his own name in 2018. In 2019 he also founded Pandamonium Ltd a trading & exporting company which he uses to make project wines with fellow winemakers and to export his own wines worldwide. The Jan Klein wines are organically grown and vinified from a range of non-traditional grapes, bottled unfiltered with no sulfur at all, and sold in Burgundy bottles with fun, naughty names (e.g., Little Bastard) and wildly drawn cartoon labels, they look, feel, and taste utterly unlike anything I have ever encountered in German wine. How both lines of wines could exist in the same

cellar was a puzzle I intended to unlock on my initial visit there. Unexpectedly, however, I found another. The person who had the main hand in making them was the remarkable Ms. Yamile Abad, Jan Klein's winemaker and cellar master, whose entire persona and life history flies counter to the staid, homogeneous, deeply entrenched culture of the Mosel – and in fact, German wine itself. Almost a year-and-a-half after our first meeting, I had the immense pleasure of conducting this interview with her.

Yamile Abad: I just want you to know that this is the first time someone has asked me questions, so....

Evan Spingarn: Oh really? That's crazy!

YA: (laughs) Yes!

ES: Well, I just think you're incredibly interesting. I went to visit the estate last year and I was expecting to meet Jan... and then out YOU come, and you're a woman... Latina... young... Just totally not what I was expecting at a German winery on the Mosel. So, I thought this is a really interesting story. I gotta find out about this woman. So, you're Peruvian, right?

YA: I'm Peruvian, yes. I was born and raised in Lima. I left when I was twenty-one.

ES: And why did you leave? Did you go to school?

YA: I actually studied in cooking school in Peru, and that's when my passion for fermentation and wine started. I left because I wanted to go to Argentina to study winemaking, and because I wanted to grow. I felt like if I stayed in Lima I wasn't going to see what the world had to offer me. So, I traveled in the south of Peru and Bolivia. I had some money, and I wanted to go and study

winemaking, so I moved to Argentina and went to the Universidad Juan Agustín Maza in Mendoza to study enology. I went for the whole program, which takes four years and a half, but because I was traveling and working harvest in other places, it took me seven years to finish.

ES: And when you got out, did you go right to Germany?

YA: No, when I got out I continued doing harvests. I went to New Zealand, I went to the United States several times. Then, I actually was going to start my own gin project in Peru with a friend and several associates. But that didn't work out. Then, a friend of mine from England who I'd met in Mendoza asked me if I wanted to come to Germany. She was the one who put me in contact with Jan. That was in 2018.

ES: Wow, so this was all really recent then? I met you less than a year after you moved there.

YA: Yeah, 2018 was my first harvest. Before that I worked in New Zealand for three harvests [at Spy Valley].

ES: And then you went to Germany of all

places. Did Jan hire you for both jobs, to make Staffelter Hof and Pandamonium?

YA: Pandamonium appeared AFTER I was already here. I was employed to work at Staffelter Hof, that's what gave me my visa. And then Pandamonium was created, because that gave Jan flexibility to separate both of the wine styles that he makes. I have to say, when I came for harvest I didn't even know he was making natural wines. I came here for the Riesling.



ES: What is your title at the winery? What do they call you?

YA: Well, my contract says “cellar master and winemaker.” But I have to say, here in Germany the titles are completely different from the United States or Argentina. I am called the winemaker because I'm the one in the cellar who makes the wine. But in the United States, you have the First Winemaker, the Second Winemaker, the Assistant Winemaker, you know? For United States standards, the winemaker would be Jan. I would be the Assistant Winemaker.

ES: Is Jan there too, though? Is he down in the cellar doing things?

YA: During harvest he's really hands on. I am mainly working alone or with the help of people from harvest. But he's there filling up the press, doing the crushing, etc. I am more inside doing the rackings and transfers. We work as a team, but we don't actually work together. A lot of this project happens outside. But inside is like my kingdom... my QUEENDOM.

ES: Ha! I'm quoting you on that!

YA: But Jan is like, everywhere. Sometimes in the vineyard, sometimes in the cellar, and in the office doing paperwork and legal stuff. He figures out what he wants and how he wants to create it, then he comes and he talks to us and we do everything as a team.

ES: How big of a winery is this? How many hectares?

YA: Right now what we are using is twelve, but with projects and everything it's fourteen.

ES: That's a pretty good size, and a lot to manage, especially with two completely different styles of winemaking in the cellar, right?

YA: Yeah, but they are small batches. It's like having a lot of kids around.

ES: Do you feel differently about the natural wine side than the traditional wines? Is your heart sort of more in one or the other?

YA: Actually, all of them are approached in the same way. Even our traditional wines are low intervention. We don't do any additions, the way we clarify the juice is the same way,

we bring the grapes in the same way, our vineyards are treated the same way. I don't make a difference between them. The only difference is the traditional wines get sulfured and they get filtered. But everything else is basically the same.

ES: Are you certified organic or just practicing?

YA: We are certified organic.

ES: Spontaneous fermentations?

YA: Yes.

ES: I'm just so fascinated that one winery can exist with two completely different ideas going on. I mean, the traditional wines and the Pandamonium wines are REALLY different. But it sounds like that's not confusing for you, that it's not a big deal for you?

YA: It's a beautiful mixture between tradition and personal expression. So, you have wines that express the tradition of the place where I am, and they're beautiful wines. And then you have the crazy natural wines that are more like an artistic expression of the same person. The way we give love to them is the same.

ES: Let me ask you a different kind of a question. You're a young Latina woman, working on the Mosel—not just in Germany in a place like Berlin, which is a cosmopolitan city with a lot of immigrants. You're on the Mosel, which is really traditional, and really white, and really male-dominated. I mean, let's not kid ourselves. Was that challenging

for you?

YA: Wow, it was challenging. Even with my relationship with Jan. Because he is really open-minded, but he's still from HERE. Also, I think I didn't know how to approach the new experience. First of all, I speak another language, so we communicate in English (now with a little bit of German). But my English and his English have a different background. There was a lot of misunderstanding. Small things like, sometimes I saw the areas of the surface of the vineyards and there was an "A," not an "HA." Acres? Ares? I had no idea when I saw that. And I had to ask. I felt like they kept telling me the answer was obvious. But I said, if I am asking, it's not obvious! Also, if you think about it, I didn't just come to a winery to work; I came to a FAMILY. It's like they adopted me to live inside of their family.

ES: You must have felt very alone at first. Did you know anybody?

YA: No!

ES: The whole thing seems incredibly hard to me. Did race play a role at all? Did you feel any of that?

YA: I don't know if race itself did. I for sure felt that I'm in a male-dominated industry, I'm 31, I'm female, and [as the Germans see it] I come from a "third world country." I never felt that before. I had people explain to me how to use a spanner, a screwdriver, a hammer. Are you kidding me! I've been working in wineries for so long, and you are explaining to me what's the best way to use

a spanner?

ES: Yeah, men like to explain things. Have you made friends in the Mosel with other women in the business, or is there a group of women who get together?

YA: None that I know of. I've talked to a lot of women who want to be winemakers. I met a winemaker here who just gave up on the wine industry. She had problems in one of the wineries where she was because of tradition and gender issues. It's a big thing. I have a lot of friends who travel around the world and make wine, and we have the same issues everywhere. It's something that I always speak up about because I believe through knowledge, we can change it. It depends on how you are, as well. How you look, how you dress, how you behave. It marks if people respect your words or not. I have stories about going to a tasting with Jan and Jean-Philippe and people asking me if I work in marketing.

ES: Do you think that's changing? I think there are already more women who are taking over their family wineries, like Dorothee Zilliken and Katherina Prüm; there are some very high profile ones. Is that happening in other places in Germany also?

YA: Sure, here in the Mosel there are a lot of wineries where there are females taking over. I've met people from Spain as well, everywhere in the world, more and more. I had a beautiful conversation with a woman from a winery in the Canary Islands, and I asked her, because this is a question I ask every female winemaker that I've met, "Has

it been difficult for you to be a female wine-maker in the wine industry?" What she said to me was, "There's an advantage. Because no one expects anything of you. So, you can do whatever you want."

ES: That's interesting.

YA: That for me, was just like, "wow." As a woman, they don't expect anything of you. And that is bad, but it is good at the same time. But there is a part of me that says, it shouldn't be like that.

ES: Are there other men or women of color – Latino or anything else, Asian, or black or anything – working on the Mosel? I've literally never met anyone.

YA: There are.... There was a guy living here in Kröv. I never actually spoke to him. And recently another Peruvian girl has moved to town... and I know there's a Colombian male winemaker. I don't know where exactly... in the Mosel or in the Rhein.

ES: So, that tells me what I need to know. One person here and one person there. It's really rare. You're a pioneer doing this. Did Jan talk about that when he was hiring you?

YA: No. I think it was more of my work ethic, and the fact that I was actually trying to understand him. Because I kept asking questions. When he said something, I was trying to make sure I understood well what he was saying, so I would ask again and repeat what he just said, and I think that gave him the feeling that we could work together, because I was interested in understanding him, not just

going around and doing whatever I wanted. It's really important for teamwork, and it's really important because he needs to trust me. Because at the end, it's his wines and his decisions. I'm just the babysitter.

ES: I think you're a little more than that. But if that's what you want to call it, okay. (we both laugh) [Later she emailed me to correct the word "babysitter" to something more permanent, like "nanny."] Okay, so we've touched on your personal story and your winemaking for Jan. Tell me about all these insane fermentation projects that you're doing for YOURSELF, like kombucha and other stuff.

YA: Well, I actually was always interested in fermentations. When I was 19 in cooking school I did my first fermentation. For our final exam, we were required to make an alcoholic beverage. I have no idea why, but I wanted to do a passion fruit spirit. And that's when I Googled "How do you ferment passion fruit?" (laughs) It's not like there were a million websites explaining how to ferment passion fruit. But I knew there needed to be sugar to create alcohol. So, I bought fifty kilos of passionfruit and I grabbed one kilo of sugar and put it inside the juice of the passionfruit... I didn't measure anything, you know? I just put in one kilo. And I talked to one of my dad's friends who makes pisco and he said I could talk to this girl who would give me the yeast that I needed. I don't even know what I put in, I just imagined I was making bread and I put it inside of the juice. And that's how everything started! I put it inside of a still, I made a spirit out of it, and



it was MINDBLOWING. Then I made a spirit out of mandarins. Then I started fermenting grapes, and that took me into learning about all kinds of fermentations, like beer and vinegar. I had a friend from Poland who told me about this soup that they make there with beetroot. My first fermentation I tried that wasn't wine-related was a beetroot fermentation.

ES: You made kvass?

YA: Yeah, yeah! Then, I tasted for the first time in my life a kombucha in New Zealand. So, I started making kombucha last year. Then I did pickled cucumbers.... And then I just started experimenting.

ES: Where do you do this, in the winery or your room or what?

YA: In my room. You have no idea how my room smells.

ES: Does any of what you've learned doing these fermentation experiments inform your

winemaking?

YA: For sure, because before I only had the vision of what went into the wine and how wine “needs to be done.” I never saw it as a LIVING thing. When you make kombucha, you see that that thing is ALIVE. I knew that the yeasts make fermentation, but I didn’t close the cycle of how alive it is. All my fermentations changed the way I think about everything.

ES: For instance....?

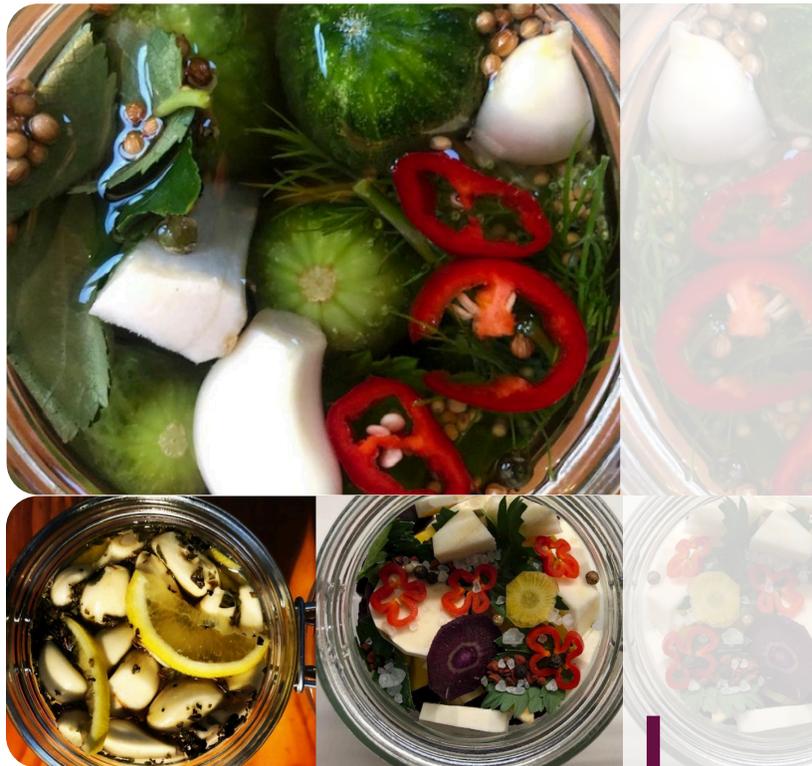
YA: For instance, if you change one variable, like temperature, the microbes behave completely differently. People call it “controlling” temperature, but for me it’s more like asking them how they are doing. “Oh, you’re eating your sugar? Or you’re not eating? Maybe I need to turn the cooling off.” Or for example, racking. From the first racking of a wine, when you let the solids fall to the bottom, it reduces the amount of nitrogen that is available. It is also the first selection of the microbes, because some of them sink to the bottom. If you have really clear juice from the first rack, it means your wine has almost no nitrogen and your bacteria are not going to survive because they need food. If your wine is dirty, you didn’t select the bacteria, and there are a lot of other things present that can give you dirty aromas or maybe VA. So, whatever you do is going to select which microbes stay alive in your wine. That’s something that I knew before, but I never really closed the loop in my brain like I do now because of the other fermentations that I’ve done.

ES: Have the experiments had any creative applications on your winemaking?

YA: Yes, for example, with “Kiss Kiss,” the pet nat. We had a different approach for three years, but this year I said to Jan we can try and do this in the way I want to do my kombucha, by fermenting at a lower temperature. Put it in the fridge and the heavy solids are going to sink, even if you have CO2. We said we can try it with wine, why not? So, the new “Kiss Kiss” was made at a lower temperature to try to get less solids in the bottle. That’s the wine you are going to get in 2021.

ES: Great! I can wait, I’m not going anywhere. I look forward to tasting the difference.

YA: That’s why I like the natural wines so much, because you have to TASTE and SEE. You can never copy something from last year. Microbes decide what they want to do in the end.





A Spirit's Sense of Place

Fanny Fougerat - Cognac, France

by Rick Long *Spirits Portfolio Manager*
and Matthew Christoff *Westchester Sales Representative*

Can there be terroir in a spirit? Can a spirit embody a sense of place beyond the laws dictated for its region? There are many different opinions on the subject, as many feel that the distilling of spirits and the machinery employed in its production immediately negate any notion of terroir, while many others strive to capture terroir when producing their spirit.

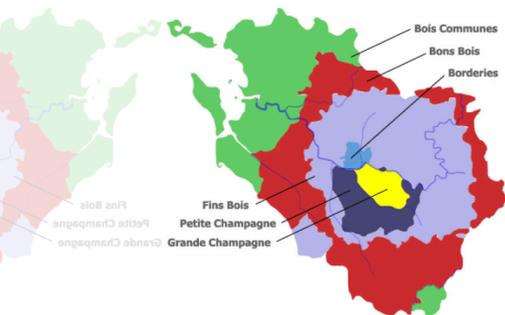
Very few dispute terroir in wine. The environmental factors on the grapes such as vines, soils, weather, elevation, and sunlight are all important contributions in the production of wine. Spirits, on the other hand, are a different matter. The process of spirit production is far more mechanized. Spirits require a still and the hand of a maker and this intervention can often take center stage. With a closer look, however, terroir can be found in spirits.

In order to expose terroir in a spirit, a few key questions must be considered at each step of the production process. What raw materials and farming practices are being implemented? Are they heirloom grains or fruits? Are they sourced from a single farm or a specific growing area? Do they use organic or sustainable practices when farming? What type of yeasts are used for fermentation? Do they use open fermenters to encourage more natural wild yeast? How long are fermentations? Does a skilled distiller attempt to create a sense of place during

distillation by making precise cuts from heads, hearts, and tails? Are they careful not to distill too much of the spirit, by which they would sacrifice texture and mouthfeel? Combined, these questions and more express the personality of the producer and, in turn, become part of the fabric of a region's production identity.

The contribution of the aging is no less important, as the maturation process of a spirit should provide balance. The location of the warehouse and temperature fluctuations are factors as well, since the flavor profile can be influenced by warm or freezing temperatures. Proximity to the ocean can bring on ocean influences of salinity and iodine. Barrel selection, too, can impart a variety of different flavors. Most importantly, at Bowler we look for little to no adulteration before bottling. The use of additives for coloring or flavor should be avoided.

One such spirit in the Bowler portfolio that captures a true sense of terroir is Fanny Fougerat. Fougerat is a fourth generation distiller and one of very few female distillers in the Cognac region. She returned to the family business in 2010 after traveling the world. In the past, her family sold their cognacs to the big houses to be blended; she became the first in her family to bottle Cognac under the Fougerat name. It's a rare find, as most family distillers have either been bought out or sell finished cognac or eau-de-vie to the large houses. Fougerat farms her family's thirty hectares of Ugni Blanc vines, which are primarily located in Borderies, with some additional holdings in Fin Bois.



Borderies is the smallest cru in Cognac, though what it lacks in size, it makes up for in immense quality. Clay and limestone soils offer ideal sun exposure, good drainage, and allow for deep root development, making the fruit from this region some of the most prized and sought-after in all of Cognac. Eau-de-vie from Borderies are known to be floral and elegant, offering complexity even at a young age.

Fougerat's philosophy takes a Burgundian approach, as she endeavors to create terroir-driven Cognac. She understands the unique nature of each vineyard, harvest, distillation, and barrel. She oversees every aspect of her production to maximize the full potential of her finished

product. In order to create a balanced and harmonious final product, vineyard and vintage designated eaux-de-vie are blended in small batches and then aged in barrel. There is variation from one release to the next because each bottling is an expression of a single barrel. To ensure the proper balance and structure, Fougerat prefers *quercus sessiliflora* (commonly known as either sessile oak, Cornish oak or durmast oak), which is a less porous oak; therefore, Fanny's Cognac offer gentler wood tannins. Each bottle is labeled with its barrel and bottle number. She never adds any sugars or caramel coloring. Since Fanny has so much control over each aspect of her production and rejects unnecessary intervention, she captures a unique expression of terroir in Cognac.



Petit Cigüe is the youngest of the expressions. 100% Ugni Blanc, harvested in 2010. 15% of the batch is aged one year in new oak, the rest is aged in neutral oak. No filtration, no caramel, no sugar added. The fruit dominates. Everything is transparent and on display: the grape, the distillation, the barrel.

Laurier d'Apollon is Cru Petit Champagne, distilled in an alembic still in 2010 on heavy lees, non-chill filtered, no caramel, no sugar added. Young and masculine in style, this cognac offers strong aromatics and on the palate a richness and power shine through. Limited - only five barrels produced!

Iris Poivré XO is 100% Ugni Blanc and 100% Borderies fruit.; 15% of the batch is aged one year in new oak, the rest is aged in neutral oak for 12 years. No filtration, no caramel, no sugar added. This bottling was made to discourage the oak aromas; very floral nose complimenting the highlights of strong fruit.



Grower Bordeaux with Frédéric Leydet of Château Valois - Pomerol, France

by Michele Peters *French and Austrian Portfolio Manager*

Mid-October, in the middle of our full-blown pandemic, I opened up a bottle of wine that I had been holding onto for more than ten years. It was a 2005 Pomerol from Château de Valois, imported by Bowler. Immediately when I popped the bottle and poured just a small taste into my glass, the nose told me it was the right time to open it up. It smelled of forest floor, leather, and spice. On the palate, it was similar at first—it had shed its jubilant fruit and offered tertiary qualities that had developed beautifully. Over dinner, the wine continued to surprise and open up. With air, fruit that had seemed to drop away was coming back step-by-step; an incredibly pretty black cherry fruit, with unstoppable freshness and the tannins were perfectly integrated. It's one meal that I will remember from this year of denying ourselves of so many special things- time with friends, family, winemakers, and my colleagues.

Bordeaux has an incredibly rich history and was the first commercially successful wine region in France; the first to be shipped internationally. I won't attempt to cover hundreds of years of history here, but my question is, how does a wine like the Château de Valois fit into the grand scheme of Bordeaux today?

An ocean of wine is made in Bordeaux annually, from the wine sold *en vrac* (bulk) to grocery store chains, all the way up to the “first growths” (grand cru classé), which can fetch some of the highest prices in the world per bottle. Bordeaux's system of Château classification dates back to 1855. John Gilman in his magazine, *View from the Cellar*, boldly re-writes the Classification of 1855, stating that it is “woefully out of date.” With very few changes since its' founding (most famously Mouton-Rothschild was elevated from a second growth to a first growth in 1973), he makes a compelling argument for updating the list. He names names;

demoting and declassifying some well-known châteaux, while promoting others—all unofficially of course. It's one person's opinion, but Gilman is not just anyone—he's been writing about wine for more than a decade and has a loyal international following. One of the most well-known appellations, Saint-Emilion, updates its list of classified châteaux every ten years. It's an improvement but unfortunately, it's also open to criticism. For example, one of the qualifications to be included in the top ranks of St. Emilion's producers is how well-equipped your tasting room is to receive visitors. As a wine drinker in the United States, the status and grandeur of someone's tasting room has very little impact on what I find in the glass. And then you have the "Cru Bourgeois" system for wineries on the left bank who are excluded from the Classification of 1855 entirely. Not to mention, the Grand Cru Classé de Graves and the Crus Artisans du Médoc. These all operate within the French Bordeaux appellation system and of course, they only cover a fraction of the wine made in Bordeaux each year.



Gilman, who got into the wine business in the eighties, stated that Bordeaux is where you started when you entered the wine business and one of the reasons that Bordeaux was so popular at the time was that it provided tremendous value for the quality, even for the classified growths. Gilman remembers that the 1982 Château Latour sold for futures at \$360 a case. When the 85's came out, Gilman was purchasing for a shop in Massachusetts and he remembers that Médoc First Growths averaged \$59.99 a bottle and, "other notable 1985 retail prices when they first landed in the market were Meyney for \$10, Sociando-Mallet and Chasse-Spleen at \$12, Lynch-Bages at \$19, Pichon-Lalande at \$22 and Trotanoy at \$35."

As the popularity of the classified growths exploded in the eighties and nineties, most shops simultaneously sold other lesser-known producers of Bordeaux, as well as cheap, quaffable, entry-level Bordeaux. The two worlds have always co-existed, with the latter riding on the coattails of the reputation of the Bordeaux name, but unfortunately not making very delicious wines.

In the eighties, Robert Parker's newsletter, *The Wine Advocate*, famously drew attention to the magnificent 1982s. In the nineties, some winemakers chased Parker's palate (as they perceived it) and Bordeaux became extracted, over-oaked, oozing a large-and-in-charge style. Gilman points out that Parker's palate changed at some point in the nineties—leaning more classical early in his career and then moving toward bigger, more fruit-oriented styles. The

now famous winemaker consultants, Michel Rolland and Stéphane Derenoncourt, made their names working with wineries who wished to “improve” their wines and get a high score, but this is a numbers game: a higher score sells more wine and makes the company more money, but it loses touch with the traditions of Bordeaux.

In the late nineties and early 2000s I lived in France, first studying then working. I drank wine, of course, but the first bottle of exceptional wine I ever tasted was a bottle of Bordeaux from 1976 that a colleague opened for me. It was striking -and so began my fascination with wine. Curiously when I moved back to the US, I found it difficult to find a bottle of Bordeaux that captured my interest like that 1976 and that matched the classic qualities of Bordeaux that I read about...that is, until I met Franck Agostini in 2008.



Agostini is an agent, who spends half of his time in the US and the other half in Bordeaux, putting him in the unique position of understanding both the US market and the regions of Bordeaux like the back of his hand. His company, Promex, otherwise known as Franck’s Selections, sells wines from all over France, but after that first meeting, David and I were really drawn to his Bordeaux wines. We have been working with Franck and relying on his insider’s knowledge of Bordeaux, ever since.

Agostini started his company, Franck’s Selections in 1992. He wanted to start in Bordeaux, but every winemaker he met told him that he would never make it, that he would be viewed as an outsider in this traditional region because of his Italian last name (never mind that he was born in France on the Ile de Ré, a magical island off the Atlantic Coast!) So Franck decided to start with wineries in the South West region, representing his uncle’s winery in the Côtes de Duras, Gilles Brisson in Cognac (now imported by Bowler), and Château Montus in Madiran. Franck had the chance to get these wines in front of Parker in the nineties and Parker gave the wines rave reviews, which kicked open the door for “Franck’s Selections “in the US market.

Eventually, Agostini was able to source some wines from Bordeaux, including classified growths, but his strongest suit in the US is a collection of small, traditional, family wineries in Bordeaux. Over the years, his customers in the US, including Bowler, have turned to him to recommend Bordeaux because of the time and care he takes to find these unheard of,

excellent, traditional family wineries- this has become his niche. From our first tasting with Agostini, we began representing three wineries, Château Rocher Corbin in Montagne Saint Emilion, Château de Valois in Pomerol, and Château Leydet-Valentin in Saint-Emilion. The latter two wineries are both owned by Frédéric Leydet and they are only a couple of miles from each other (each winery needs to be independently maintained to have the appellation status under French law). David Bowler and I recall being struck by how effortlessly these wines represented the traditions of Bordeaux. There was no flash, no cellar tricks, just honestly made wines that represented the appellations beautifully. It was a revelation back then.

Frédéric Leydet of Château de Valois and Château Leydet-Valentin said that the two biggest differences between his winery and the other Grands Châteaux is first of all, price (the Grands Châteaux MUST charge more per bottle so they can afford to hire a large team of workers) and secondly, the terroir. Admittedly the terroir of his neighbors, Pétrus and Cheval Blanc, are unique. And while Leydet himself works just as hard as his famous neighbors, he is the first to admit that he does not have their terroir. Their vineyards are on the plateau, his are not. He wishes he could afford just a half a hectare on the plateau to see what he could do with it! But Leydet welcomes the recognition that the Grands Châteaux bring to the appellations of Pomerol and Saint-Emilion and says that it is beneficial for him, even if he cannot justify charging the same prices.



Leydet is the type of person who is always looking to improve. He does not follow fashion when it comes to wine, so he never went the “Parker” route. Believing that fashion always comes back around, he sticks to making the type of wines that he himself wants to drink. He wants to make wines that people enjoy, wines that when you taste them, draw you in -where finishing the bottle is easy. Stylistically, this means a wine that has freshness, is *gourmand*, balanced, and that has acidity. Leydet compares acidity to using salt in food—it amplifies the flavors.



To achieve this pure expression with freshness and a salty quality, Leydet has made some changes over the years

since he started with his dad in 1998. In 2002, they stopped racking, making the wines in a reductive environment, on the lees in barrel the entire time; a complete differentiation from the style that the consultants were pushing at the time, micro-oxygenation to soften tannins. For Leydet, the less intervention, the better. The only “modern” technique is putting their wines through a gentle filtration.

In 2006, Leydet’s father passed away and it made him start thinking more seriously about organic agriculture. He thought about the impact that chemicals might be having on his health that the health of his workers. It took some time, but in 2009, he started working with homeopathic products in the vineyards. In 2010 he moved to fully organic agriculture and in 2015 the winery became certified organic. It was never a question of marketing and it was always about a safe work environment for himself and his workers. Of course, he did notice a difference in the balance of the fruit when he changed as well. He began working the soil, which pushed the roots deeper. Leydet said that today there are more and more people farming organically in the region, maybe 15-20% of growers in Pomerol.



He gets barrels from a variety of coopers because he believes each has their own touch and flavor profile. In 2007 he hired a local sommelier and together they determine how much time to keep the wine in barrel and also what the final blend will be. Of his total barrels in rotation in any given year, about 40% are new, but it does not mean that the final blend is 40% new oak. He keeps his barrels for two to three vintages. Fermentations start in tank and he’s not using any sulfur during vinification. The total maceration and alcoholic fermentation lasts two to three weeks. The wines are aged in barrel for 12–16 months depending on the vintage.

I asked Leydet what he thought the future would hold for small family wineries like his own. He said that the first challenge is whether the children want to take over. Leydet is excited that his 14 year-old daughter is already helping him and intends to run the family business eventually. She loves being outside. Once you know there is someone to pass the winery to, the biggest challenge for the future is the inheritance tax. The tax is determined



by the value of the land and investors are currently driving up prices. It can be difficult for a family winery to pay the tax, and many sell for this reason. For his family, Leydet said that, “l’argent est un moyen, pas un but,” (Money is a means to an end, but not the goal.) The goal for them is to keep doing what they love; making wines that give a pure expression of terroir.

The stars may finally be aligning for growers in Bordeaux and the US market. In Bordeaux, perhaps the biggest change over the last fifteen years is farming. And wineries are pulling back on the over-the-top style. There



are still oceans of wine being made as cheaply as possible, but there is a growing movement to grow vines with fewer chemicals, some going organic, and a very small number practicing biodynamic farming. There are different reasons for the change. Agostini noted that growers saw how using chemicals hurt the vineyards and made their families sick, so for some it’s a normal reaction that they would move away from it. Gilman noted that when Pontet-Canet (fifth growth) moved to biodynamic farming the wines became so much better that it garnered the attention of other famous Châteaux who became interested in what they were doing. Now there are even a handful of classified growths who follow biodynamic farming including: Château Palmer, Smith-Haut-Lafitte, and Château Latour.

Wine drinkers in the US are more and more knowledgeable and curious about wine. And now with the help of people like Franck Agostini, the growers of Bordeaux will find a voice in the US because of the curiosity of sommeliers, shop owners, and consumers who care about traditional wines that expresses a sense of place. While Bordeaux may remain a maze of different classification systems, it has now become possible and easier to find true-to-terroir Bordeaux -and there is no time like the present to discover and explore the renaissance of small, conscientious growers who are changing Bordeaux, by looking backwards in order to move forward.





Plant Wines

with Owner, Steven Plant (Richmond, VA)

by Jessica Gualano *National Sales Manager*

In this customer spotlight, our national sales manager, Jessica, sat down over Zoom for an informal chat with the owner of Plant Wines, Steven Plant; a former member of the Bowler team turned distributor now serving three markets in the mid-Atlantic: Virginia, Washington DC and Maryland.

Jessica Gualano: Let's start out by talking a bit about how you got your start in the wine business.

Steven Plant: I've always loved wine, even as a teenager, drinking friends' parents' wine. You know, like big jugs of Carlo Rossi. But it all really started for me working in restaurants on Long Island. I ended up in New York City because I saw a show on the MSG Metro Guide station. It was Ed Levine and Jeffrey Steingarten, they did this New York

Eats thing where they profiled of all these city restaurants and they did one on 71 Clinton Fresh Foods. To me it looked like the coolest thing ever. Now, this is back in 2001, it was just after 9/11. I decided I wanted to go into the city and get a job there. I got dressed up, walked in, and talked to the wine buyer there. He said, "Actually, somebody just quit today, so you're in luck." And that was that.

JG: Very cool. I know you spent several years

working at Bowler! How did that come about?

SP: I was at 71 Clinton for about four years, that's where I met Alex Miranda! Those were some fun times! When Alex took the job as the GM and the wine buyer and everything else, I was kind of like, "Who is this guy? Who is this freak?" Ha, ha. He was just very, you know, outspoken and loud and interesting. And he was also very professional, he knew tons about service, he came from a really great restaurant background and he taught me a lot about wine. Alex became a friend, a mentor and somebody I looked up to. He eventually got a job [selling wine] at Bowler. By this time, Evan Spingarn was my Bowler Rep at 71 Clinton and I was also doing the list at Alias restaurant across the street. I knew the book well. I remember speaking to Alex on the phone one day and I said "if you talk to David, I would love to represent his wines in Brooklyn." This was back in 2005 or 2006, I believe. The Bowler team was much smaller back then!

JG: That's a great story. And then what brought you to Virginia?

SP: After being a sales rep in Brooklyn and on Long Island for nine or ten years, [my wife] Laura and I were talking about what our next move would be. We were thinking about having a kid and I had wanted to move upstate, but we weren't feeling it. Richmond [Virginia] came up because she went to school down here and then a job opportunity came up for her. It was too good to pass up. It all made sense, so we made the move in 2015.

JG: Was there a moment when you were like, hey, I wanna start my own distribution company?

SP: You know, that's something I thought I would never do, frankly. I don't like the spotlight. I don't want to be head honcho, the big cheese. I like to be number two. But after coming down here and working as a sales rep for a couple of smaller companies that were just okay, I felt that I could do what they were doing and I could do it better. And I missed being in contact with David and my former colleagues. I had maybe an epiphany moment on my way back home after a trip to New York with my wife. I just realized that my sales rep job here [in Virginia] wasn't going anywhere. I'd given it a year and it just didn't have the same fun feel that it had for me in New York. We talked about it on the ride home and she was like, "Why don't you start your own thing, what are you waiting for?" Like, man up, do it! And I thought, "You're right, I should give it a shot. Because if I don't try, I'm going to always regret it." I called Bowler a few days later and said "I'd love to represent your imports down here [in



Virginia and DC].” It all worked out!

JG: The timing was pretty serendipitous for us since we were looking for a partner there, too!

SP: Yeah, and there’s just so much good stuff to choose from in the book. It’s fun to explore.

JG: What are you hot on right now? What are you exploring these days?

SP: Portugal is super exciting. I think what Vinicius is doing with the book there is great and I love all the producers he’s working with. My wife and I took our honeymoon there. It’s one of the best trips I’ve ever taken, special for many reasons. And I really like the wines because they’re not pretentious, it’s not trying to be Burgundy or Bordeaux. The wines are like the people, they don’t really reveal themselves at first. They’re not showy, they can be kind of firm and stoic. But I find them very pleasing. They pair well with good, simple food. Another thing that I think we’re seeing more of is field blends, red and white grapes together. The whole idea of people going back to the way things used to be done.

JG: Do you think there’s any trend that might be on its way out?

SP: We’ve been riding this no-sulfur wave and I feel like there’s always going to be experimentation and there will always be no-sulfur wines, but it seems to me you’re seeing a lot more judicious winemaking where sulfur is being used in the finished product for stabilization. I think winemakers have stopped trying to outdo each other in that regard. I

feel like the whole sulfur thing is going by the wayside as people are focused more on the entire picture and more important things like farming. It’s good to have wines that are unique and trying to do something different, but not overly so. In the end it comes down to drinkability.



P L A N T T W I N E S

JG: How would you define the Plant Wines portfolio?

SP: It’s a tough question. Someone asked me recently if we’re a natural wine company. I mean, we sell natural wines, but I don’t want to be pigeon-holed into one thing, because I just don’t believe that I need to. And I also like wines that aren’t necessarily natural, or even farmed organically. I want to work as much as possible with winemakers that are not using chemicals and herbicides, but if they’re going to use some yeast, I mean, who am I to judge them? Our portfolio is focused on terroir-driven wines from people that I enjoy working with and from importers I enjoy working with.

JG: So, after a long career in the city, how would you compare the NY market to the markets you’re in now?

SP: That’s a good question. Completely

different. And it all comes down to state-controlled liquor and wine stores. Here, you don't have as many small, boutique shops. There are a lot of bigger stores and supermarkets that sell wines. Any supermarket can sell wine and a lot of people do their wine shopping there. I'm amazed when I see people putting tons of this complete garbage in their carts. But we're lucky to work with a handful of great small shops in Virginia. It's just a bit more competitive because other small companies are also trying to get into these smaller shops and there's limited shelf space. So yeah, it's different. But I also find it relatively easy to sell wine here. People are very open to trying new things and everyone is really friendly and easy to work with.

JG: And you cover what I would assume to be a few distinct markets and demographics, each with its own vibe?

SP: Oh yeah, D.C. is more akin to the NYC market. They're a little more cutting-edge. It's bustling and fun and with the addition of Domestique, the wine shop, that's been huge. When I first moved down here, D.C. was not as great of a wine city as you might think. There were the old retail giants and they dominated the scene, but the last five years have changed a lot. Baltimore, for me, is kind of like Williamsburg or Bushwick. It's a little run down and beat up, kind of edgy. There's a bunch of cool hipster restaurants there and so far, we're doing pretty good.

JG: How have things changed for you this past year – first with tariffs and now in

pandemic times – and how have you had to adjust?

SP: It's been a challenge for sure with both of those, but more so with the pandemic. The tariffs you can work around. You guys have been great by keeping prices as stable as possible and we're not doing much direct importing. But the pandemic has been super challenging. Just getting out there and showing wines, that's been very difficult. You don't want to put your sales reps in harm's way, of course, but you have to stay in business. So up until now, we're dropping off little sample bottles with tasting sheets, lots of emails and offers, trying to stay on top of it all – I have my sales reps try to make as much face contact as they are comfortable doing, but also just picking up the phone! That's huge right now. If you can't see people in person, call and let them know you're there for them, that you have wine, and that you're genuinely interested in how they're doing. I think we're all a little bit lonely, I'm definitely missing going out and seeing people. But we're doing okay. There's been growth every month. I can't ask for more than that.



JG: How does being a sales rep differ from owning your own company? How has being the big cheese, as you put it earlier, changed you?

SP: I don't think I'd be in the position I am in without the experience of having been a sales rep first. The big difference is more stress, for one thing. You really have to be on top of your books. You have to strategize, meet with suppliers, the accountant – it's a whole different set of tasks and skills. I'm glad I did it. I thought I would miss being on the streets more, but I actually like this, at least in this stage of the game. I'm not in the car all the time driving and traveling anymore. I don't mind being at home and working from the office. It's been challenging but great. I really love what I do. And I do keep a few accounts, so I'm not totally out of the loop. I want to have one ear to the street.

JG: What do you think you would find yourself doing if you weren't in the wine industry?

SP: Maybe baking bread? Before I decided to do this, I was really getting into baking bread and it was to the point where people would come over and say holy shit, this is some of the best bread I've ever had. I love the process of fermentation. A loaf of bread is never really the same, unless you're some amazing baker like the guy from Tartine in San Francisco. For me, I love trying different types of grains, so long story short, that was one idea.

JG: And any plans for the future?

SP: Someone asked if I'm ever going to do direct imports, and I have thought about it,

but I don't really need to. I don't mind being supplier-driven. I'm a kid in a candy store. I don't have anything to prove to people anymore. All I want to do is sell really good wine and have a good time.

JG: Okay, final question, and one I'm sure you've been posed before: What is your desert island wine?

SP: Without hesitation, Champagne!





Granite Connections: Itata and Sierra Foothills

A conversation with Dani Rozman of Onda Brava and La Onda

by Vinicius Rodrigues *Iberian and South American Portfolio Manager*

The Itata Valley has caught the attention of wine lovers, professional or otherwise, for some time now. The region in the south of Chile, just north of Bío Bío Valley has all the attributes that are currently valued by contemporary winemakers and drinkers: it has a cool-climate, historical old-vines (very old!) which are almost all un-grafted, unirrigated, and bush-trained, and perhaps most importantly, granitic soils not unlike those found in some other favorite wine regions of the world like the Northern Rhône, parts of Beaujolais, the Sierra de Gredos in Spain, and the Sierra Foothills in the US. In Itata you also find some of the most talented growers and winemakers working in Chile now, Pedro Parra (Pedro Parra y Familia, Clos des Fous*), Roberto Enríquez, Marcelo Retamal (De Martino), Leo Erazo (Vinateros Bravos, Rogue Vine*), and a rising-star young American, Dani Rozman (La Onda*, Onda Brava*).

Dani Rozman is an integral part of the Bowler family, contributing with his wines – La Onda from the Sierra Foothills, and Onda Brava from Itata – two of the most dynamic and exciting sections of our portfolio.

The New Jersey-born winemaker found his way into the wine world after the typical post-college excursion taken by students who want to see more of the world before finding their true calling. For Dani it came in Argentina, when after working a series of jobs tangentially wine-related (“I was working in an office in Mendoza that happened to have a wine-bar”), he met Leo Erazo, the Chilean winemaker and soil scientist who had just started making the wines at Alto Las Hormigas, the pivotal Argentinian winery.

“I met Leo through a mutual friend in Mendoza. I had been reading a lot about organic farming and was looking to work somewhere and get some experience. He mentioned he knew a winemaker in Itata who needed help with the upcoming harvest,” Dani remembers.

*distributed by Bowler in the tri-state area

A couple of emails later he was on a flight to Santiago and riding a bus down south to meet with Juan Ledesma.

“I worked harvest with Juan in 2013 in Itata, and it was a complete crash-course in winemaking. I learned the full process from the winery’s perspective, hand de-stemming thousands of kilos of grapes with a zaranda. [Zarandas are large bamboo sieve-like mats rolled on top of containers where traditional winemakers in Chile de-stem their grapes.] We were working with País, Cabernet, Cinsault, and the oldest known Malbec vineyard in the south of Chile”.

After Juan pointed the way, teaching Dani about the history of Itata, Bío Bío, and other practical things—including “building a makeshift winery and fixing old Volkswagen Beetles”—he jumped into a couple of projects with Leo, working on Rogue Vine and A Los Vinateros Bravos.

The experience with Leo confirmed their shared interests, “working with organic farming, grapes from old, unirrigated and ungrafted vineyards”, and they decided to do something they hadn’t done yet, something “we weren’t producing.” That was when Onda Brava was born. “We decided to make a rosado from País, and a one-hundred percent Cinsault wine, made from a hillside vineyard, keeping a higher percentage of stems in the fermentation.”

Below Dani answers some questions about his experience making wines in Chile and in California, what he learned from Leo Erazo and Gideon Beinstock (from Clos Saron, another revolutionary winemaker and winery from the Sierra Foothills distributed by Bowler in the tri-state area), and some of the differences and the similarities between both terroirs he is involved with.

Vinicius Rodrigues: Dani, how do you start making wine? How do you fund a first project, for instance?

Dani Rozman: The best way to start is by working for a winery, gaining experience while getting to use their equipment and make some wine on the side, then slowly grow. The cards are really stacked against small producers given all the start-up costs and cost of goods that depend on scale.

VR: Is that how you got started in Chile?

DR: Yes, sort of. After working for Juan, Leo pushed me towards Itata, and I’ve tried

to soak up the experiences working with him, learning his thought processes and decision-making.

VR: What did you learn from him, and how do you divide the work?

DR: It’s kind of difficult to sum it up but a lot of my thinking about wine and vineyards comes from Leo. I was fortunate that Leo kept me working down there. I don’t think anything is easy but it’s been rewarding and we are always learning. So far, Leo has been in charge of the “on-the-ground-work” throughout the year and making a

harvest plan. I've been coming down to lead the harvest and then I head back to the growing season in California. I then import and sell the wines here. Like everything else, we'll have to look at how we can move forward with changes due to Covid. It also needs to be said that even though it's a partnership we rely heavily on other people to make this all work. Zjos Vlamnick, Leo's wife, does everything to make the project function and has become a winemaker out of necessity along with our friends Helen and Danny. We also get an incredible amount of help from Leo's neighbors who help with everything from picking to crushing grapes.

VR: And how do you make the wines of Onda Brava?

DR: We visit a lot of vineyards, sampling grapes and looking for certain elements that we like to see in the wines. The Rosado comes from a vineyard in Guarilhue, located fairly close to the coast where the grapes ripen later in the season. We stomp the grapes and transfer the must into a large wooden basket press, then press into a concrete Galileo tank. The wine ferments and ages in concrete until bottling. The Cinsault gets a combination of foot-stomping and hand

de-stemming with a zaranda. The wine ferments in either an open top rauli** fermenter or a concrete galileo tank. After fermentation the wine is pressed and aged in concrete tank until bottling.

VR: When you're in the vineyard, what do you look for? Do vines matter to you more than varieties?

DR: If you visit a vineyard before being able to taste fruit, you have to go off of the soil, exposure to the sun and the farming. You can stand in a vineyard and feel it flourishing or feel like you're standing in a manicured graveyard. If you believe in terroir and are trying to make fairly straightforward wine then varieties don't matter too much. Everyone has personal preferences and I've sought out grapes that can be found in both regions that I work in because I've wanted that to be a focus.

VR: Is that why you work on the Sierra Foothills in Cali and make La Onda there? How does your work there relate to the work in Chile?

DR: My main interest is to create a dialogue between the two regions because there's a huge gap in understanding the relationship between wines made on the American continent. There's a surprising amount of similarity and shared history between Itata and Sierra Foothills, especially when you look at the Gold Rush era - wheat exported in both directions, Chilean miners coming to California, vine material likely going both ways. In terms of broad strokes, they share



**Rauli is the Chilean native beechwood

similar climates, granitic soils, own-rooted vines, and are under-appreciated regions. There's still a long way to go in terms of raising awareness of the quality of wines coming from both places. Both areas are newer in the consciousness of wine drinkers but in the case of Itata, there are hundreds of years of viticultural tradition.

VR: How did you end up in Yuba after your experience in Chile? Was that when you met Gideon Beinstock?

DR: I was looking for an opportunity to continue learning about wine and start doing vineyard work in the northern hemisphere. I emailed a lot of people around the world from Chile, and Gideon was the one who responded and gave me a chance, mainly because he got interested in the story of Itata and wanted to know more about the vineyards there. So I first got an internship with him and Saron at Clos Saron and then continued working in the vineyard with them at various points over the years. At the time they had one of the few projects working truly holistically in the vineyard in California; they were also one of the few projects willing to hear me out given my interests and experience in a place no one had really heard of. They helped me understand the other piece of making wine and figure out how I would want to farm a vineyard.

VR: Talk to us a little about granite? Do you see a direct impact of that type of soil in the end result of a wine?

DR: I think granitic soils can make really

wonderful wines with great length and intensity, and I've been lucky to primarily work in two regions with really interesting soils. But it's just the case that these are the soil types I've had access to - I would kill to farm a vineyard in Anjou with all the schist. With wine, like anything else, you just have to do the best with what you have access to. I don't really want to wade into one of the endless wine industry debates so I would just say that soil type is an element of terroir and one of the things influencing the acidity and mouthfeel of the resulting wine.

VR: Thank you Dani!





From the Streets to Vienna

by Matthew Christoff *Westchester Sales Representative*

It's the morning of Thursday, March 12, 2020 and I'm running behind schedule.

I awoke this morning and my whole day was planned out with six appointments scheduled every 90 minutes starting at 10:00. I have to pull out of my driveway by 9:15, in order to get to my first stop on time. Selling wine on the road is invariably fluid (haha, get it?), with appointments changing, getting cancelled, delayed because of traffic, or just being really far out of the way, so when the schedule is set, it never really feels set.

I look at my watch. 9:02. The watch face buzzes to life with a phone call. It's my 11:30. Where is my phone? "Have you seen my phone?" I say through the doorway into our newly-minted, shared office, where my wife is setting up a Zoom call with her team. I think to myself, "WTF is Zoom?" My phone is in my pocket. "Hi, this is Matt..." I hang up the phone. 11:30 cancelled. I look around and there are two empty wine bags on the floor of my kitchen, an empty kid's lunchbox that has been repurposed to house spirits and canned wine, 13 unopened bottles of wine standing in a line, and five 375ml cans of wine in the crisper. I grab four of the 13 bottles and move them to another counter. "Won't be needing these," I utter in a sound of semi audible nonsense.

"What was that?" echoes from the office.

"Nothing." My house is usually silent at this time, save for the occasional pitter patter of cat paws. My office has just been reduced in size by half and it is going to take some getting

used to. Okay. Schedule. Let's move 10:00 to 11:30. That will buy me some time. I pick up the phone and call my 10:00, "Hey, it's Matt. I hate to do this, but can we meet at 11:30? My schedule is all kinds of wonky today. Give me a shout back as soon as you can."

Back to the bottles. I pop each of the remaining nine bottles and quickly taste through them, at this time checking only for faults. Not a bad wine in the bunch. Excellent. Having the opportunity to taste before my first appointment saves me the embarrassment of having to stuff a corked bottle back into my bag later in the day and apologize like a real bozo. I print ten copies of tasting sheets. Whites go into the big chilled bag, reds into the empty six-bottle bag, and unopened cans into the lunchbox. Lots of white wine. Spring is coming. Okay. Lunch? Banana, almonds, rice and beans, apple, water. Delicious.

Time? 10:08. Doing fine. I sit back in front of the computer and look over my note pad on my desk. "Offers: one liter bottles, Involuntary Commitment, Price Book, all Sancerre..." Only enough time to send out the current price book...Done.

I take two trips to the car and stuff the bags into the back seat.

When I return to the kitchen, I'm told, "I don't think you should go. This thing is pretty serious. Where are you going? Are you kidding? They are shutting down the entire radius of that city. They're talking about a state of emergency."

My watch and phone start buzzing. My 10:00 is calling me back. "Matt, I'm not going to taste any wine today. Too much to deal with. Let's talk next week." Well, three appointments still on the books.

I make a call. "Hey. My appointments are dropping like flies. Do you still want to taste today?"

Silence.

"Honestly, I think I'm going to cancel all of my tasting appointments with reps for the next few weeks." Two more phone calls confirm similar sentiments.

My day is shot.

I sit down at my computer for an unexpected day of office work. Inbox. Bowler VP: "in-store tasting—Hi Salespeople, Effective immediately, company management is not going to allow you to do in-store tastings. If a customer asks, you can tell them it is company policy. Any questions, let me know. —David."

I turn to my new office companion and ask, "How much toilet paper do we have?"

It's the afternoon of Wednesday, December 9, 2020 and I'm running behind schedule.

I approach Zoom appointments and webinars with the same degree of seriousness that I would an in-person tasting appointment or a public consumer tasting: if I'm not 5-15 minutes early, then I'm late. I look at my watch. 2:23. At 2:30, the Austrian Wine Marketing Board is holding a webinar called "Back to the Roots," featuring Brenna Quigley and Maria Heinrich, both of whom are expert geologists. I grab my Zalto (c'mon, this is Austrian wine after all!), my spit bucket, and four little 187ml crown capped bottles, each filled with equal parts wine and argon, that arrived via FedEx yesterday. I sit down in front of the computer and click on the link that was emailed to me early this morning, which brings me to a clock counting down to 2:30. 90 seconds to spare.



The webinar comes to life just after the numbers hit zero and I'm greeted by three smiling faces: those of the two geologists and mediator Michael Tischler-Zimmermann from Austrian Wine. A jazzy introduction sets the scene for the show and the wine professionals dive right into the material, first providing a brief thanks for all attending (roughly 115-160 people at any given time). A scrolling message board on the right side of the screen allows me to actively participate, while affording the presenters and mediators the opportunity to carry on uninterrupted. Michael describes the goal of this webinar and allows Brenna and Maria to introduce themselves, as well as offer their personal connection to the subject at hand. An important question is posed. "How do soils influence wine?" Terroir. This is the stuff that wine pros spend their lives dissecting, interpreting, and obsessing over.

In early December of 2019, I spent nearly every day out in my car, racing from account to account, doing my best to express the essence of the Bowler portfolio to as many customers as possible, through as few bottles as possible. At that time, "as few bottles as possible" usually meant a dozen or more. Sometimes these wines would make sense for a customer, but many just did not hit the right price point, margin, style, look, feel, taste, or *je ne sais quoi* (how do you say that in Viennese? Am I dropping knowledge in three languages right now? *Oida!*)

Fast forward to December of 2020, and here we are, in the middle of a Wednesday afternoon, covering an underrated wine growing country's terroir in incredible detail, attempting

to capture the essence and vast terroir through four wines, each representative of a different region and varietal selection.

To kick off the tasting, Bowler represents with Jutta Ambrositsch. This maverick winemaker enjoys views of Vienna while farming vines planted on the western edge of the Vienna Fissure, a geological formation that provides the definitive character of this appellation. In my glass is the Gemischter Satz “Ringelspiel” 2018, which is a field blend of 12+ varieties (that we know of), planted in the 1950s. I imagine Carol Reed’s postwar Vienna of *The Third Man*, with Joseph Cotton stumbling down piles of rubble, chasing around Orson Welles, and casting ominous and unnatural shadows, while not too far in the distance these vines find a home in the surrounding hills. While Grüner Veltliner is the undisputed king of Austria, I feel that this particular wine reflects complexity of this underappreciated corner of the world.

Visually, the wine has viscosity, suggesting that there is lees contact at play, and perhaps even a short skin maceration, which is supported by its bright golden hue. The nose offers a rubble-like mineral edge leaping out of the glass, followed by waves of yogurt, lemon custard, and powdered seashells. As it opens up, the wine shows creamy ripe pineapple, which is given lift by a hallmark mineral edge—almost like walking past a construction team pouring sidewalk on a hot day. The salty, saline, mineral tension reins in that ripe fruit. The nose brings me back to tasting decade-old Melon de Bourgogne with Marc Ollivier in his Muscadet cellar.

Brenna talks about how these marl soils contain soft and smooth clay components, as compared to some other compositions of marl. This smooth clay is offset by very hard limestone. With marl high in calcium carbonate, the soil is basic (not acidic) in composition. As a result, vibrant acids show on the palate, expressing more bright and fresh lemon than what I found on the nose. Overall, there is spectacular tension and weight for a wine that dials in at a mere 11.5% ABV. There is incredible length on the finish, as the acid just barely outlasts the salty tension. The wine is a delight.

Following the spectacular start with Ambrositsch, Brenna, Maria, and Michael continue onto Sauvignon Blanc from Gross (limestone and marl), Grüner Veltliner from Hirsch (chalk, clay, and loess), and Blaufränkisch from Jalits (green schist). Michael does a superlative job of keeping the presenters on track with time, while also allowing them to explore in-depth



aspects of each soil and wine. Questions are asked and questions are answered. The whole webinar ends inside of 61 minutes. I have found that setting and meeting time goals in the virtual format is very important to most people. As quickly as they came together, nearly over 200 wine professionals leave the room and retreat to their own corner of the globe, more educated, more elated, and presumably just as safe as when they signed on.

Connecting face-to-face online is nothing new. Robert Zemeckis envisioned a future where old man Marty McFly would be Zoomin' with Needles in *Back to the Future Part II* back in '89. We've had these interfaces available to us for years, but they have been grossly underutilized. Not until our hands were forced did we adapt and excel under immense pressure. We're finding fresh, new ways to connect with growers, winemakers, and thought leaders in our field. We're social creatures, so embracing media that taps into the brain space of socialization is a necessity for us all right now. I often feel an unwelcome and uncomfortable distance between myself and my customers, friends, co-workers, and family, but I continue to comb my hair, slap my cheeks, and look the best I can for them, because all of us seeing one another just can't stop. I suppose I'm just riding the wave and making the best of it.

Lately, I find myself diving deeper into individual wines, as opposed to trying to cram tasting and tech notes for a dozen or more into my head for a 25 minute appointment. Each of these wines have their own story to tell and every bottle represents the tireless efforts of a person or a small group attempting to make connections with its drinker. Terroir? Maybe. That's a small French word that carries big meaning, so much so that we Americans don't even have our own word for it. Can you imagine that? That seems thoroughly un-American. Even as someone who is steeped in small stories of terroir and wine family history, I sometimes forget that every bottle has so much to say on its own.

Producers like Jutta Ambrositsch speak through their wines. Single sites can express so much through the lens of the wine, but it's also important to take a bird's eye view to look at the history of its place in the world. A lot of winemaking is about the producer, but, as many of us at Bowler feel, the winemaker is a shepherd of terroir. It's helpful for me to be reminded that I'm the shepherd of our producers, even if, sometimes, this needs to be done through a computer.

With that being said, one question still remains unanswered: "How much toilet paper do we have?"

Here you can find the recording of the Austrian Wine: Down to the Roots webinar:

<https://www.austrianwine.com/events/awmb-events/events/geology-masterclass>



Regenerative Farming

Scratching at the Surface

by Kevin Russell *Italian Portfolio Manager*

Regenerative agriculture. Carbon farming. Permaculture. No-till. Do-Nothing.

Buzz words? Maybe, for now. Scientists estimate that intensive farming contributes to up to one-third of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. They also surmise that current practices will lead to a soil crisis in approximately sixty years; that is, they'll lead to a critical lack of topsoil in which to grow crops for human sustenance. Time is of the essence when it comes to re-thinking how we use arable land.

During the Democratic party's primary debates, we heard some fairly centrist candidates come around to the idea of carbon sequestration through farming as a means to combat climate change. Almost weekly, I've been roasting a heritage-breed chicken I like and only recently noticed the packaging lists it as 'regenerative.'

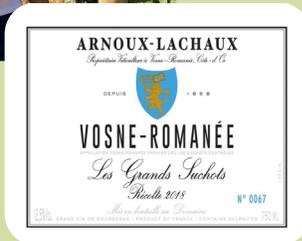
A dialogue is beginning and an awareness is growing that agriculture can continue to be a hugely destructive force on this planet OR it just might be its salvation. 95% of the planet's biodiversity resides in the first few centimeters of topsoil. In just a tablespoon of healthy soil there is an explosion of life—bacteria, fungi, archaea, protozoa, nematodes, arthropods, and on and on. When left in balance, this soil web can mineralize and immobilize nutrients for

plants, as well as trapping significant quantities of atmospheric carbon.

When it comes to the way we label how our wines are farmed, it's clear that the blanket monikers of sustainable, organic, or biodynamic are outmoded, or at least limiting. We all know the aphorism "wine is made in the vineyard." Yet, how often do we utter a few perfunctory words about what goes on in a particular vineyard, only to quickly segue to an at-length discussion about materials and techniques used in the cellar? I know I've been guilty of this.

Did anyone care about what type of camera or film Fellini liked to use? Where is the magic really happening?

I reached out to a few Bowler growers to know more, to hear what they do and what they don't do.



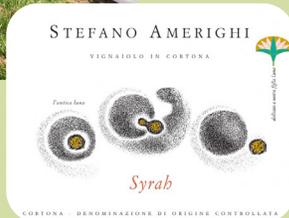
Winery: Domaine Arnoux-Lachaux
Winemaker: Charles Lachaux, since 2012
Place: Vosne-Romanée and Nuits-Saint-Georges (Burgundy, France)
Total hectares: 14ha
Hectares planted to vine: 14ha
Hectares for other cultivations: 0ha but some trees and other species are planted in the vineyards
Hectares left uncultivated: 0ha
First vintage: 1858



Winery: Candialle
Winemaker: Jarkko Peränen and Josephin Kramer
Place: Panzano in Chianti (Chianti Classico, Italy)
Total hectares: 42ha
Hectares planted to vine: 12.2ha of vineyards, of which 9.5ha are planted
Hectares for other cultivations: 5ha olive trees (400 trees), some pasture land for our animals--2 cows, 5 1/2 horses (the two Shetland ponies are a half count), 16 chickens
Hectares left uncultivated: 19ha of forest
First vintage: 2002



Winery: Sierra de Toloño
Winemaker: Sandra Bravo
Place: Villabuena de Álava (Rioja Alavesa, Spain)
Total hectares: 9.75 ha, of which a third is rented
Hectares planted to vine: 8.5ha
Hectares for other cultivations: 0.25ha of olive trees, which will increase in the coming years
Hectares left uncultivated: 1ha
First vintage: 2012



Winery: Stefano Amerighi
Winemaker: Stefano Amerighi
Place: Poggiobello di Farneta (Cortona, Italy)
Total hectares: 24ha
Hectares planted to vines: 11ha
Hectares for other cultivations: 2ha olive trees, 10ha of pasture for the cows/grains/fruit trees
Hectares left uncultivated: 2ha of forest
First vintage: 2006

Do you apply so-called permaculture or regenerative methods? How long have you been using these methods and what do they mean to you?

- Definitely. When I get a vineyard, I bring it back to a traditional way, as it was 50 years ago. Even today in Rioja a lot of glyphosate is still used. That kills everything—the flora, the fauna, and the microorganisms. The microorganisms are the ‘hands’ of the vineyard, for eating. Without them, vines can’t get anything from the soil. If you destroy them, you’ll need to add chemical nutrients, which, in fact, are salts. And then the plant has more

hydric stress, so you need to irrigate. Then there’s too much water being taken in by the leaves of the plants, and then you have problems with mildew and oidium. Because much of the flora and fauna are gone, you’re missing your secondary line of defense. So you need stronger and stronger products. If you’re in this vicious cycle, it’s not easy to get out.

-Sandra

- I would probably refer to regenerative agriculture in our case. Our aim is simply to not to cause too much harm for the environment we live in, and ideally leave it in better shape than when we started working in it. This we can do

mostly by trying to bind organic matter in the soil by composting, and by managing the land with methods that reduce all interventions. This started pretty much when we took over the farm in 1999 by slowly introducing grass cover in the vineyards, and then starting to rear domestic animals—horses, cows, hens—in the areas less suitable for viticulture. Simultaneously we converted the heating and hot water system of the farm from gas to sun and wood from our forests. -Jarkko

- I started immediately, from the beginning of the 2000s, when I finished studying and dedicated myself to the development of this 'agricultural organism' and my vineyards. For me, inspired by the "non-culture" of Masanobu Fukuoka and Permaculture, together with the application of the principles of biodynamics, these terms represent the way to put my soil and my plants in the position of finding their own natural fertility, inside a complex holistic system. -Stefano

- It is quite recent. In 2019, we started to let grass grow and started to practice regenerative agriculture. Permaculture doesn't speak much to me, but for regenerative farming, for me it symbolizes a search to have our soils back as they were before the intensive use of chemicals. - Charles

Do you plow or till? In which instances would you move or turn the soil?

- Now during the wintertime it's very

important to give life to the soil. So, no-till. You leave the natural flora that you have and you're helping the microorganisms.

Then when Spring comes and growth starts again, then you can work the soil a little, depending on your weather. I use a tool called a *cultivador*—it's like a comb. But there's not one rule for every vineyard or for every year. It's like making wine, it's not black and white. The most important thing is observation. When I need to make a decision, I look at what has happened in the year: was it very dry? Was there a hailstorm? Did the vineyard suffer a lot? -Sandra

- Never done ploughing. Never changed or altered the layers of soil. This is of even more importance where there is more clay. Working of the soil is left as much as possible to the plants and essences that grow spontaneously and which, with their roots, work and aerate the soil. If necessary, I'll work the soil with an aerator, but never with a plough. I think the aerator is a good tool. The plough is always, always wrong. Working the soil incorrectly just once can ruin its structure for years. -Stefano

True or false? The roots of the vine mostly grow in the topsoil/humus and this is the most important zone for the plant.

- True and false. Surely the most active part for the root system is pretty close to the surface where also the microbial activity is highest. However, the deeper-lying root

system is important for the hydric well-being and balanced growth of the vines. – Jarkko

- A plant has two equally important polarities for the health of its fruit and for the healthfulness of our bodies: a terrestrial polarity (the roots) which interacts with the soil and the humus, and a cosmic polarity, which is the foliage interacting with the celestial bodies and the entire cosmos, which is linked to light. -Stefano

True or false? The roots of the vine are able to take in minerality from the mother rock of the subsoil.

- Surely a vine is able to absorb nutrients also from the subsoil. How this happens depends then on variety of factors. What is sure is that the uptake of nutrients is most effective on the layer of soil with symbiotic mycorrhizal fungi. -Jarkko
- I'm not sure. It is something we like to think of as winegrowers. Surely the mother rock influences the wine. But how and when? – Charles

How much does the composition of the mother rock determine how the soil in a particular parcel is worked?

- It's almost everything if you understand it and manage it well. It's what makes it interesting, to get different flavors. And I don't

think there are good or bad types of mother rock. It's good understanding or bad understanding. It's good management or bad management. – Sandra

- A topsoil system has its own biological complexity that is more important than the pedological one. A healthy and energetic soil is the objective to pursue. - Stefano

How do you think about cover crops? Essential in a vineyard? Or only necessary when a spontaneous biodiversity is lacking?

- For us the real cover crop is the one that is born spontaneously with locally present species. I'm not sure how much sense I see in the concept of introduced biodiversity. On the other hand, we live in the luxury where our single vineyards are rarely bigger than a hectare, and the all the biodiversity one can imagine is just there over the ditch in the woods. It's a bit different compared to places where traditionally biodiversity tends to be a rose bush by the wall of a chapel in the middle of 2000 hectares of Chardonnay. Everything is relative. -Jarkko
- For me it's essential that the soil has a cover, but we don't sow anything. I prefer it to be endemic and naturally grow, which shows the health of a soil or a lack thereof. In the long term the species will vary because of the competition with the vines and everything, but it is a long process. This is the big difference between regenerative farming and

permaculture and the reason why I chose one and not the other. –Charles

How do you avoid compacting the soil? I can imagine, for sake of efficiency and cost, it's difficult not to use tractors.

- The most important means to avoid soil compaction in long term is grass cover combined with quite specific interventions. For the compaction caused by the tractor the most simple way is to try to use lighter machinery (we have a Geier vineyard tractor that weights only 1300 kg) or types of machinery with lower track pressure (our bigger tractor is a semi-crawler Kubota that has 70% lower track pressure than a normal tractor of same size). Of course, it's important to try to time the use of the tractor to not use it when the soil is very wet. –Jarkko

- Even when we're doing pruning, we only enter the vineyard if the soil is dry, otherwise we don't work. And for doing treatments, if it's wet we don't use the tractor, but rather a backpack pump sprayer—two or three treatments a year are done completely manually like this, like one hundred years ago. Usually, we work the rows in an alternating fashion—one 'on' and one 'off.' In the 'off' rows, we don't work them or even step on them for a year, not even for treatments. They're resting. –Stefano

What's the link between animals and

permaculture/regenerative farming? Where are they most useful in a system of this type?

- All of these elements are linked by a large holistic vision. Everything is connected to help the 'agricultural organism' have a complex life at its core. The more complex the organism (animals, different cultivations), the easier it is to not use chemicals. –Stefano

- Animals can bring more diversity because they live on the land, they eat some species and poo some weed seeds. So, they sort, seed, and fertilize naturally because of their consumption. They can be useful anytime as long as they don't eat the vines or the grapes. – Charles

Have you noticed a correlation between a vital/healthy soil and the health of the plant in terms of fungal pressure and pest pressure?

- I'm in a great area, more or less pretty fresh, and we sometimes still harvest almost in November. But in some of the warmer areas or warmer years, there can be damage from the European grapevine moth (*lobesia botrana*). In the vineyards I have up in the mountains, in Rivas de Tereso, with the forest really close, you can see there's no damage. And there's lavender, thyme, rosemary, almond trees all around—it's great for the vineyards. But in Villabuena de Álava, where I have more neighbors' vineyards around, I am sowing some seeds of native flowers, which provide habitat for the grapevine

moth's predators. - Sandra

- Sure. The basic thing here is the proverb-like statement, the origin of which I don't know: "Empty does not exist, and if it exists, it doesn't resist". To simplify, the more the agroecosystem is filled with species and individuals that are either useful or indifferent for the vine, the less space there is for those that are harmful. -Jarkko

What differences have you seen in your wines since implementing these techniques?

- I think there's a huge difference. If you have soil that's alive, then you don't have to fix things in the cellar. Then you get wines that are alive, with lots of flavors, with a long life, with good acidity—the original flavor of the grapes. Many times we forget it, we talk about a lot of things, but sometimes I taste grapes from old vineyards, and they're not really tasty. Sometimes it's because, having been worked with glyphosate and potassium salt fertilizers, the grapes aren't taking anything from the mother rock, so you lose really typicity. It's not only the age of the vineyard or the altitude, but how you manage it. And managing the soil? For me it's 90% of the work. - Sandra

- This is quite hard question to answer. There are many parallel developments going on in any given winery, and it's pretty hard to single out which of them have had the most significant influences on the wines. It would be too

easy to go into usual hubris-loaded talk about "how we practiced biodynamics from our first vintage and saw the difference right away". Difference to what, to your -1 vintage? What I would maybe dare to say is that managing the vineyard with the aim of overall balance over the years, the vintage differences start to diminish. I wouldn't say that our 2014 was such a desperate vintage, or that 2017 shows all that heat and drought. -Jarkko

Are there things you know you would never do in the vineyard, lines you would never cross? Even if it meant saving an entire vintage?

- Anything that destroys the soil, like glyphosate. Or the systemic chemicals. I produce organic and some years I lose yield. If you work like this you know there are good years and others not. But it has to be like that. You cannot go against nature. I know it has to be this way if I want to make good quality, healthy things. And for me it goes all together, the healthiness and the quality. -Sandra

- It's not easy to imagine such a situation. One thing we would surely not do easily would be use of insecticides. We have never done that since we took Candialle over, and we have had less and less issues with insects, which we see as a result of certain balance between populations of different insects, prey and predators. The threshold to touch that balance and start from the beginning would

be quite high. -Jarkko

Are there a lot of people in your area thinking like you? How do you convince others to manage vineyards in a regenerative way?

- I try to explain my ideas to colleagues and this year I convinced one good viticulturist to move to *bio*. I've realized that often they think working in *bio* means only changing the products for treatments. When you work *bio* you have to go the vineyards more, be more careful, and always work in advance, because there are no treatments to stop things, only to prevent them. Many of my neighbors are great on their tractors and always on their tractors. In fact, it's sometimes strange to see them out of their tractors. Anyway, there are a few of us, and I guess more and more. But not as many as we should be. -Sandra

- Panzano is a quite particular area in that we have our SPEVIS, Stazione Sperimentale di Viticoltura Sostenibile (www.spevis.it), and the basic aim of this research station is to disseminate these sorts of ideas. Almost all of Panzano is organic by now, and some are also guiding their work towards the regenerative direction. There are a few who compost their pruning and cellar residuals, some have ruminants to support the process. I think Candialle and Fontodi are the two who do both. -Jarkko

- At the moment we are the only ones because there aren't tools to work this way on

high-density, narrow vineyards like we have here. When you do this work, you're getting a smaller crop. Nowadays a bottle of Burgundy works too well and fetches an expensive price, so growers won't try to reduce their crop size; we're seeing the opposite more... -Charles

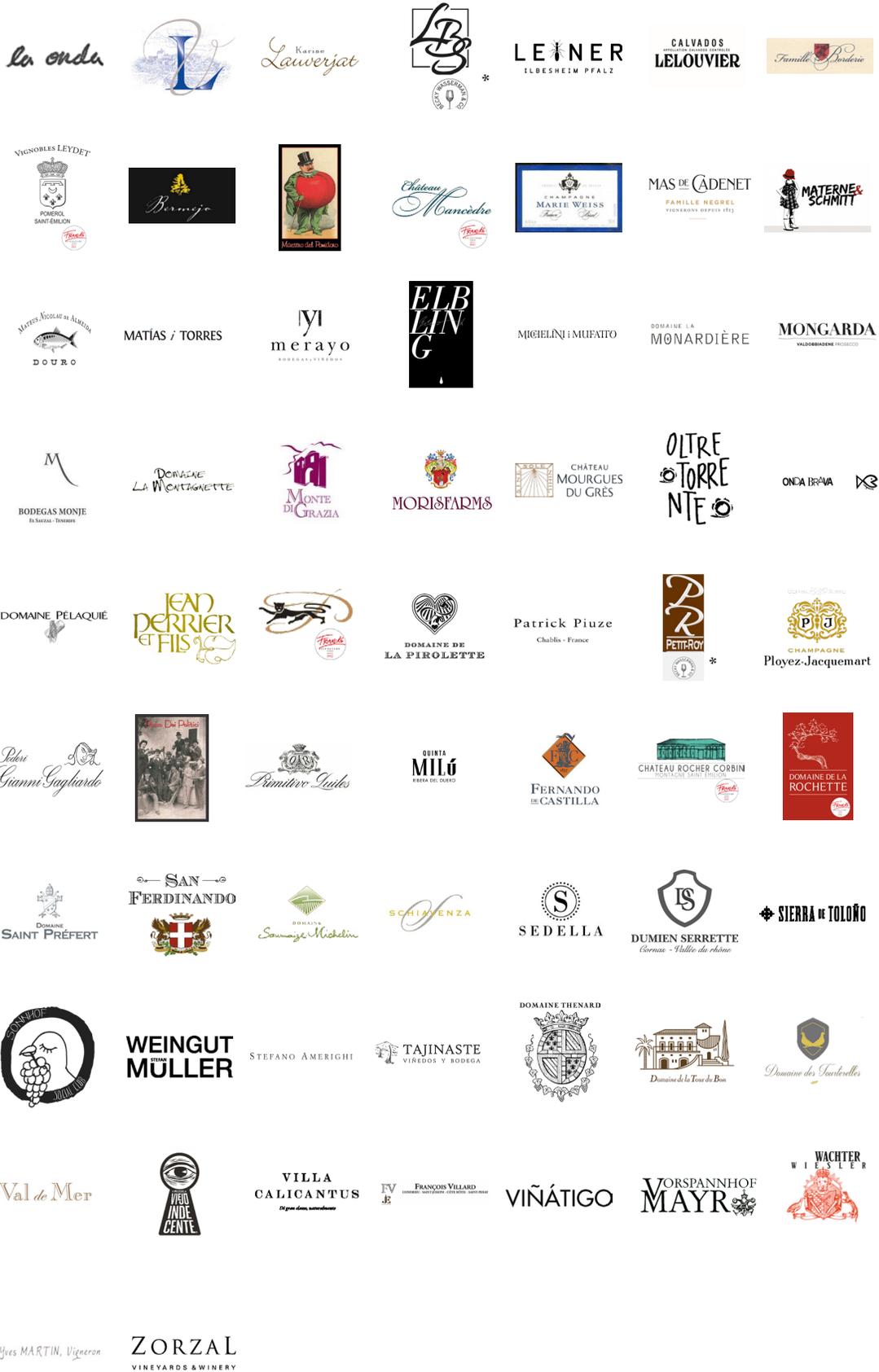
- This is complex work. When I started in 2001 with this project, a few people considered me a visionary, but most thought of me as a *bischerò* (KR: Tuscan dialect...literally a tuning fork but colloquially a fool). Now they've asked me to become the president of the consortium of the Cortona appellation. This is just to say that we can't give in. A good example always creates proselytes. It's certainly also true that we're living in a moment in which the market banalizes these things, but I think with one more generation we'll be able to really spread good agricultural practices. -Stefano



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