

WINE BUSINESS MONTHLY

February 2017 • \$5.95

The Industry's Leading Publication for Wineries and Growers

www.winebusiness.com

REVIEW OF THE INDUSTRY

WBM 30



INNOVATION+QUALITY

A forum for ultra-premium wineries.

March 2, 2017 See page 12.



Hot Brands of 2016

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EVERY YEAR, WHEN *Wine Business Monthly* creates our annual list of Top 10 Hot Brands, we look for vintners, growers, wineries and wines that are making a statement in our industry. Quality is always an important consideration, but Hot Brands is more than a list of the “best” or most interesting wines we’ve tasted during the year.

Through the years, the definition of “hot” has changed for us. When the list was first created, an oversupply of wine created a market full of “critter labels” and high-production, low-priced brands that would sell like “hot”-cakes. Eventually oversupply part of the wine cycle ended and so did that particular meaning of this list. Now, the Top 10 Hot Small Brands list delves into what it means to be a part of the American wine industry, part of the American wine culture. And that culture is increasingly more diverse.

California is no longer the only wine-producing powerhouse. Wine is produced in every state and the number of wineries in each, pretty much across the continent, continues to grow. Consumers are increasingly becoming more educated about the wine they drink and are progressively asking for more local wines—just like they do for their food. To touch on a quote-unquote “Millennial” trend, consumers are looking for something new and, perhaps most importantly, something authentic.

This year, we’ve selected wines from pioneers, newcomers, long-standing winemakers and more. While each may grow a different grape



or go about making wine in unorthodox ways, all the winemakers selected reflect the diversity that is the wine culture in the United States and all have an innate desire to produce something they, and the consumer, will love.

Some other themes did present themselves in deciding on wines. Many of the winemakers have learned that following their guts are the best way to keep moving forward. They’ve decided that taking a leap and diving in are necessary risks. Taking cues from mentors, industry leaders, artists and visionaries, this group is a bunch of risk-takers. In the years that we’ve been choosing Hot Brands, never have we had such an enterprising group of winemakers.

And for many of them, the lessons that they’ve learned from their mentors has stuck. Don’t try too hard to make a wine, let the grapes speak for themselves and “try not to screw it up”

In the end, this list is comprised of wines that we here at *Wine Business Monthly* would serve to winemakers. That’s exactly what we do, as representatives from each of these wineries (oftentimes the winemaker) will be on-hand to serve their wines to winemakers, grape growers and industry members at our annual Bottle Bash party at the **Unified Wine & Grape Symposium** in January. Cheers!

Hot Brands of the Past

2015 • Napanook (Dominus) • Guffy Family Wines • Kinero Cellars • Lovington Winery • Mathis Wine • Naked Wines • Post Familie Vineyards • Savage Grace • Sonoma Collection, District 3 • Cacciatore Fine Wines • **2014** • Brys Estate Vineyard & Winery • Concrete Wine Company • Fiddlebender/Cellar 433 • Halter Ranch • Keller Estate • La Chertosa • McIntyre Vineyards • Skinner Vineyards • Treveri Cellars • Union Wine Company • **2013** • Cowhorn Vineyard & Garden • Drew Family Cellars • Frogtown Cellars • Lake Sonoma Winery • LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyards • Matthiasson • Rack & Riddle • Riverbench Vineyard and Winery • Rôtie Cellars • Vino Noceto • **2012** • Ca' Momi • Carr Winery • Hidden Ridge Vineyards • Jefferson Vineyards • Kunin Wines • Milbrandt Vineyards • Red Caboose Winery • Tinhorn Creek • Troon Vineyard • Two Shepherds • **2011** • Wine by Joe • Cecchetti Wine Company • JC Cellars • Truett Hurst • Barnard Griffin • Bennett Valley Cellars • Talbott Vineyards • Veritas Vineyard & Winery • Barrister Winery • Lone Madrone • **2010** • Cameron Hughes • Crew Wine Company • Dusted Valley • Twisted Oak • Black Ankle Vineyards • Salinia Wine Company • Bella Vineyards and Wine Caves • Persimmon Creek Vineyards • Willakenzie Estate • Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards • **2009** • Pacific Rim • Wines of Substance • Cambiata • Abacela • Cinder • Swanson Vineyards • L'aventure • Marynissen Estates • Bartholomew Park Winery • Raffaldini Vineyards And Winery • **2008** • Graziano • Four Vines Peasant • Becker Vineyards • Red Tail Ridge • Sojourn Cellars • Domaine Drouhin • Jeff Runquist Wines • Marilyn Remark Winery • Trio Vintners • Purple Wine Company • **2007** • Willamette Valley Vineyards • Ceja Vineyards • Tangent • Clos Du Val • Kutch Wines • Coro Mendocino • J.R. Storey • L'ecole N° 41 • King Family Vineyards • Gruet Winery • **2006** • A to Z Wineworks • House Wine • Liberty School • Shannon Ridge • Twenty Bench • Cycles Gladiator • Bedell Cellars • Artesa Vineyards & Winery • Black Star Farms • Buena Vista Carneros • **2005** • Parducci Wine Cellars • Solorosa • Cheapskate • Velvet Red • Incredible Red • Hard Core • Kunde Estate • Hitching Post • Andretti Winery • Esser Vineyards • **2004** • Red Truck • Cartlidge & Browne • Seven Deadly Zins • Oliver Winery • Angeline Wines • Rock Rabbit • Three Thieves Bandit • Sofia Mini • Screw Kappa Napa • Graceland Cellars • **2003** • Hrm Rex-Goliath • McManis Family Vineyards • Sebastiani Vineyards & Winery • Castle Rock Winery • Black Oak • Jewel Collection • Tin Roof • Three Thieves • Jest Red • J Garcia Wines

	 Amavi Cellars	 Dan Cohn Cellars	 Fujishin Family Cellars	 Illahe Vineyards	 Infinite Monkey Theorem
Winery	Amavi Cellars	Dan Cohn Cellars	Fujishin Family Cellars	Illahe Vineyards	Infinite Monkey Theorem
Wine	2015 Walla Walla Valley Semillon	2014 Bellacosa	2014 Amatino Red Blend	2014 Estate Pinot Noir	2013 Syrah
Vineyard/Winery Location	57% Les Collines, 28% Seven Hills, 15% Goff	Napa, Sonoma, Lake and Mendocino Counties, California	Rose Cottage and Williamson Vineyards, Snake River Valley, Idaho	Dallas, Oregon	Palisade, Colorado
Price	\$24	\$25	\$24.95	\$22	\$24.99
Case Production	869	N/A	198	5,500	875
Blend	88% Semillon, 12% Sauvignon Blanc	87% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Merlot, and 3% Petit Verdot, 2% Cabernet Franc	60% Syrah, 35% Petite Sirah, 5% Viognier	100% Pinot Noir	100% Syrah
pH	3.3	3.64	3.68	3.6	3.5
TA	6.2 g/L	6.1 g/L	5.4	N/A	6.2
Brix	23.8°	24.6°	27°	24.8°	26°
Residual Sugar	N/A	1.6 g/L	0.02	<0.2%	0
Alcohol	13.9%	14.2%	14.5%	14.4%	14.8%
Winemaking Data					
Picking Methods	Hand-picked	Hand-picked	Hand-picked	Hand-picked	Hand-picked
Sorting Methods	Optically sorted	Hand-sorted	Hand-sorting of clusters and berries	Hand-picked	No sorting
Crush Details	Whole-cluster pressed	Fully destemmed and crushed	Destemmed but not crushed	20% whole-cluster pressed	Destem only
Cold Soak?	N/A	5 to 7 days	N/A	2 days ambient	24 hours
SO ₂ Applications	None at start	28 ppm FSO ₂	30 ppm at crush, 30 ppm going to barrel; maintained at 30 ppm through aging	50 ppm	20 mg/L
Yeast	Native	N/A	Enoferm Syrah Isolate	Native	D254 and D80
Fermentation	16° to 18° C	N/A	88° F; whole-berry fermented, pressed at 1° Brix to stainless steel	90° F, 21 days to press	Peak 80° F; 1 ton open-top fermenters
Nutrients	N/A	N/A	Go-Ferm	None	FK at 25 gh/L, DAP at 200 mg/L
Acid Additions	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.75 g/L	1.5 g/L H2T
Malolactic?	N/A	Yes	100%	Inoculated, Chr. Hansen	VP41
Punch-down/Pump-over Methods	N/A	Pump-over daily	Manual punch-downs daily	Twice daily, one pump-over after start	Hand punch-down 4 times per day
Oak Program	100% neutral French oak	50% new; 100% French oak; 60% Medium Plus toast and 40% Medium toast	30% new American oak, 70% third- and fourth-year American and French barrels	15% new oak	Two- and three-year French oak, M+ toast
Barrel Aging	3 to 4 months		20 months	10 months	12 months
Racking	None	Twice	Three	Twice	Three
Filtration	Yes	Sterile-filtered	Sterile-filtered	None	None



Winery	LVVR Cellars	Mi Sueño Winery	Presqu'ile Winery	Senses Wines	Sleight of Hand Cellars
Wine	NV Blanc de Blanc	2012 Russian River Pinot Noir	2015 Pinot Noir Rosé	2014 Sonoma Coast Chardonnay	2014 "The Conjurer" Red Blend
Vineyard/Winery Location	Lockeford, California	Russian Rivery Valley, California	Presqu'ile Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley, California	Occidental, California	Walla Walla, Washington
Price	\$20	\$52	\$20	\$45	\$28
Case Production	200	220	1,071	420	1,250
Blend	Chardonnay and Viognier	100% Pinot Noir	100% Pinot Noir	100% Chardonnay; Charles Heintz Vineyard, Dutton Palms Vineyard	59% Cabernet Sauvignon, 28% Cabernet Franc, 12% Merlot and 1% Petit Verdot
pH	3.3	3.75	3.31	3.45	3.91
TA	9.5	5.9	7 g/L	2.6	0.56 g/100ml
Brix	19.5°	24.3°	21.8° - 22.6°	N/A	24.5° - 26.5°
Residual Sugar	1.5%	0.5 g/L	None	N/A	<0.2 g/L
Alcohol	12.3%	14.5%	12.8%	13.4%	14.8%
Winemaking Data					
Picking Methods	Hand-picked	By hand with clippers	Hand-picked	Hand-picked	Hand-picked
Sorting Methods	N/A	Done in vineyard and winery with leavers	Vineyard sorted	Hand-sorted	Lightly sorted by hand
Crush Details	N/A	Destemmed, minimal crushing	Direct-to-press	Pressed whole-cluster after sorting and into tank	100% Destemmed, roughly 50% whole berry, 50% lightly crushed
Cold Soak?	N/A	4 days	N/A	N/A	2-5 days in open top bins, no temp control, kept in our 54 degree barrel room
SO ₂ Applications	Minimal	35 ppm SO ₂ at crush	None before fermentation; maintain 20 ppm free SO ₂ at dryness	40 ppm	30ppm at crusher, 40ppm post MLF, kept at 25-30 during aging
Yeast	PDM/ DV10	Native	Native	Natural	Mostly Spontaneous, some FX10
Fermentation	70° F, 5 days; in tirage 9 months prior to disgorgement	85° F; very hands-off	65° F to 70° F in stainless steel	64° F to 72° F; in barrel	Peak fermentation temps between 78° F - 95° F; 1.5T open top stainless steel bins
Nutrients	Fermaid K and DAP/ Phosphate titres	25 ppm DAP and 25 ppm sugar food at fermentation	None	N/A	DAP and Super Food as needed
Acid Additions	Tartaric	0.5 g/L of TTA at fermentation	None	N/A	Between 0-1g/L depending on the lot. Average of around .33g/L
Malolactic?	Partial	100% native	None	100% through secondary	In barrel
Punch-down/ Pump-over Methods	N/A	Punch-down twice daily, pump-over once daily for first 5 days of fermentation	N/A	N/A	Manual punch-downs, twice a day, occasional pump-overs
Oak Program	N/A	45% to 55% new French oak	N/A	10% new French oak, 90% neutral French oak	15% new French oak; 2/3 225L barrels, 1/3 36HL oak tank
Barrel Aging	N/A	10 months	6 months stainless steel	15 months sur lees	12 months
Racking	As needed	One racking by gravity after malolactic	No racking until bottling stabilization	Once before bottling	Individual lots racked once post MLF (Dec.-March), blended in June 2015
Filtration	Polish prior to yeasting	None	Sterile through Cuno lenticular filter, using 3M maximizer Zeta Plus filter cartridges	None	Cross-flow

LVVR Cellars NV Blanc de Blanc Keeping it Local in Lodi

In the long-established wine region of Lodi, California, one man is forging a new category: sparkling wine.

That's not to say he's reinventing the wheel, or even the first to make a Lodi sparkling wine, but he certainly saw an opportunity to fill a gap in the region, and is capitalizing on it.

For **Eric Donaldson**, Lodi has been a great stepping stone. He has been welcomed by the Lodi community: with low barriers to entry, friendly winemakers and growers and high-quality fruit, Lodi was the perfect place for him to start his winery, and now he wants to give back.

Donaldson grew up in Ohio before attending the **University of Miami** to study botany and geography with a minor in entrepreneurship. While growing grapes is a bit different than mapping plant communities, which he had learned in college, his studies at least sparked an interest in the science of winemaking. He later attended the **University of Cincinnati** to study chemistry because he liked the winemaking side more.

Fast forward through some time spent at wineries in Healdsburg and New Mexico to 2014, when Donaldson received a license for his very own winery, **LVVR Cellars**. Named for four sisters—Leticia, Virginia, Vanessa and Rose—with whom he had done some winemaking consulting work back in 2012, the project is solely focused on keeping methode champenoise in Lodi.

"No one in Lodi is making it here. A lot of base wine for sparkling starts in Lodi but goes somewhere else. I'm going to keep it here in Lodi," he said. Each harvest, truckloads of Lodi-grown grapes are shipped up to crushing facilities in the Napa, Sonoma and Sacramento areas, and sometimes down into the Central Valley, later to be bottled under the "California" label. Donaldson wants to change that and give Lodi fruit the recognition it deserves by keeping it local. It can be a challenge, he said, but one that he is actively ready to meet.

Because of the hot climate, Donaldson spends a lot of time watching the chemistry of the grapes and is prepared to harvest a lot sooner if it means keeping the numbers tight. He's very careful to watch the pH—it's essential to keep it low. His Blanc de Blanc is a mostly Chardonnay base made from grapes harvested at Axle Vineyard.

"I ferment a little warm because I'm going for a more austere product," he said. Wine is fermented in stainless steel, goes through a partial



malolactic fermentation with standard heat and cold stabilization. With an eye for consistency from batch to batch, his wine sits in bottle for six to nine months, is disgorged and finished up with a dosage.

For the most part, he sticks pretty close to the traditional method, but Donaldson's main method for adapting the process to Lodi is to add a bit of Viognier to the base wine.

"You have to break away, know what's tradition and what's science. In Champagne, they do it by tradition, but there is a science behind it. Here I had to break out of traditional climates and figure out how to make it happen in a different climate region," he said.

"Working in the Southwest, in the desert, I picked up the trick of adding the Viognier. I thought it brought a nice element to the final wine. I wanted something to round out the palate and the bouquet, and I think Viognier does it nicely," he said.

His sparkling Rosé sees a 1 to 2 percent Alicante addition as well, and he's completely unfazed by how unusual it may seem. "It's totally unconventional, but it's the end product I have to look at and produce what I want to achieve."

Climate conditions aside, a pretty sizable investment was necessary to produce his Blanc du Blanc—a common barrier to entry for a lot of established wineries. It's often said that the cost of the specialty equipment is part of the reason there aren't many sparkling wine producers in California. Donaldson, however, was

propitious enough to be able to purchase some of **Woodbridge Winery's** older pieces, find a space at a reasonable price and meet a number of local winemakers interested in custom crush. "I'm very fortunate. I'm making it work," he said.

Current production is limited to 6,000 cases, but Donaldson has plans to increase his production capabilities with additional equipment pieces. But the increase in production is not just for his benefit. He wants to spread the wealth, as it were, and open up his custom crush program to more wineries as well.

LVVR wines are just starting to take off, with a lot of word-of-mouth selling and some retail placements locally. He says that though he hasn't hit the mass market yet, selling sparkling wine from Lodi shouldn't be a problem. "A lot of people will say, 'Sparkling wine from Lodi, that's odd.' And I'll tell them, 'Well, no, it's not.'"



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