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# Discerning Palates

## SOMMCON DEBUTS ITS VIRTUAL BUYER'S FORUM

by Michelle Ball

Last fall, SommCon hosted a series of webinars and virtual tastings to continue its mission of cultivating a wine-education platform for sommeliers and trade professionals. It commenced the new year with its first Buyer's Forum, linking buyers from across the country directly with producers and serving as a much-needed source of connection in the midst of the pandemic.

Moderated by Jesse Rodriguez, who has worked as a sommelier for numerous restaurants and hotels since 2000, the virtual event gave representatives from seven wineries the opportunity to share more about their brands with the 60-plus buyers who tuned in to taste the samples they'd received in advance. "I've always seen these wines as places I could find a home for," said Rodriguez, referring to them as ideal candidates for by-the-glass programs, banquet menus, and premium flights. Though the wineries spanned two continents and ranged dramatically in style, they shared one commonality, according to Rodriguez: "I think these wines are textbook [with respect] to what every wine list should have."

A view of the Castello Banfi estate  
in Montalcino, Tuscany.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CASTELLO BANFI

# JORDAN WINERY

**PRESENTER:** MAGGIE KRUSE, WINEMAKER

**WINES:** JORDAN 2018 CHARDONNAY, RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY (\$35); JORDAN 2016 CABERNET SAUVIGNON, ALEXANDER VALLEY (\$58)

PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN WINERY



PHOTO: KENDALL BUSBY

Jordan Winery was founded by the parents of second-generation owner John Jordan, Tom and Sally, who sought to emulate the great estates of France in Sonoma County.

Wanting to produce a Bordeaux-style wine, they hired acclaimed winemaker André Tchelistcheff, who had crafted their favorite California Cabernet Sauvignon, as a consultant. Tchelistcheff enlisted the help of winemaker Rob Davis for Jordan's inaugural 1976 vintage, and although Davis initially planned on just a three-month stint, he stayed on as winemaker for 43 years. When he retired in 2019, his longtime assistant, Maggie Kruse, was promoted to head winemaker—becoming only the second person to hold the title in the winery's history.

"I really feel fortunate to have learned from Rob, because one thing we're really known for is our consistency from vintage to vintage," said Kruse, who spent 14 years working with Davis. The most significant change since Kruse's tenure with the company has been an effort, led by John Jordan, to establish relationships with growers of higher-quality fruit than was available a generation ago while also utilizing improved viticultural methods such as tighter spacing, more effective canopy management, and better clonal selection on their own estate sites.

The 2018 Chardonnay was sourced from roughly a dozen blocks throughout the Russian River Valley. "There's only one Burgundy, but we're trying to be as Burgundian as possible, so we're all about restraint," said Kruse, who fermented the wine in 50/50 oak and stainless steel and halted malolactic fermentation at 12% conversion in order to ensure bright acidity.

The second wine presented, the 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, comprised 93% fruit purchased from premium vineyards throughout Alexander Valley along with 7% from the best blocks on Jordan's estate; small amounts of Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec made up 20% of the final blend. "It's been such a treat to work with these different growers and really improve the quality of our wines," said Kruse.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASTELLO BANFI

# CASTELLO BANFI

**PRESENTER:** JGOR MARINI, WINE AMBASSADOR AND REGIONAL MANAGER

**WINE:** CASTELLO BANFI 2016 MAGNA CUM LAUDE SUPER TUSCAN (\$40)

Award-winning producer Castello Banfi was founded in 1978 by the Mariani family, who purchased an expansive 7,100 acres in Montalcino and planted roughly one-third of them to vine. "The vision of Banfi was to mark the road for pioneering agriculture and winemaking," said wine ambassador and regional manager Jgor Marini. "We base everything on studies and research to produce high-quality, premium wines and, at the same time, respect our environment and promote our territory."

Although the winery is known for its Brunellos, it also produces exceptional Super Tuscan blends. The 2016 Magna Cum Laude, Latin for "with high honors," blends 40% Sangiovese with smaller portions of Cabernet Sauvignon (25%), Merlot (25%), and Syrah (10%); each varietal is vinified and matured separately. Then the final blend—described as "voluptuous, rich, and full-bodied" by Marini—is assembled and aged for six to eight months in large barriques before release.

"[The wine] highlights the elegance and restrained terroir of Montalcino," said Marini, "linking the style of Old World winemaking to modernity with opulent flavors and [a] prolonged finish." With ample berry notes and soft tannins on a full-bodied palate, it's an ideal counterpart to rich meat dishes.

