

ADVANTAGE

Live Unconventionally



EMBRAER QUARTERLY
VOL 14 ➤ 2021

Wild Pursuit

Behzad Larry's high-altitude
photographic series

10-Year Anniversary

Embreaer celebrates 10 years
on Florida's Space Coast

Home Sanctuaries

Designing spaces for meditation
and contemplation

A SINGULAR DELIGHT

Sonoma County is home to California’s most talked-about restaurant and farm, where talented duo Kyle and Katina Connaughton are putting Healdsburg back on the map with Michelin-starred SingleThread



EMBRAER TIP

The Praetor 500 is a true corner-to-corner aircraft that can quickly span the continent of North America with a non-stop range at long-range cruise speed of 3,340 nm.

For decades, Sonoma County has been overlooked in favor of its flashier neighbor, Napa. Now, America’s most hard-working wine region has grabbed back the spotlight—and Healdsburg, in particular, is basking under all the attention.

This small agricultural town is surrounded by sun-warmed vineyards and barrels of ripening grapes. With mountains in the background and rolling hills surrounding the pretty houses, it has always been lovely to look at, but now offers gastronomic delights as well.

There are world-class restaurants peddling a back-to-nature fantasy on every street corner, although few can compete with the Japanese-inspired SingleThread. This is the first restaurant from ex-Fat Duck chef Kyle Connaughton and his wife Katina—an horticulturist extraordinaire—along with an accompanying hotel and farm, which has gained three Michelin stars and more critical acclaim than most other establishments on the West Coast.

“Katina and I opened SingleThread when we were 40 years old, so each of us had long careers working in restaurants and farms,” shared Kyle. “I had been working in other three-star Michelin establishments for many years in the U.K. and Japan. We have also been together since we were 15 years old and have had a life together to share so many different types of dining experiences all over the world.”

Fittingly, as it was a labor of love for both of them, there is something romantic about this restaurant. Kyle talks about how he and Katina spent years discussing what kind of establishment they wanted to open and which food trends to align themselves with while ironing out all the details of where to build.

“We stopped in Healdsburg when we were 23 and grabbed lunch while coming to the Mendocino coast to get married,” said Kyle. “We really fell in love with Sonoma County. Katina wanted to be here for her farming, and it’s the perfect destination for travelers coming for a food and wine experience.”

As a pair, they bring two very different skillsets to the table. “Kyle set the precedent that the farm comes first and has so much reverence for the hard work and dedication that my team and I pour into everything that we grow,” shared Katina. “In turn, I feel so incredibly inspired by the beautiful dishes that Kyle and his team create for our guests. We rely on each other and wholeheartedly want to make the other proud.”

Critics highlight the couple’s famous attention to detail. “I have never been to a restaurant that understood its customers’ needs so swiftly,” said a reviewer for the Financial Times. “No European one—even with its offer of bread or amuse-bouche—can compare. I haven’t even encountered this style of service in Japan, the model for SingleThread.”

Japanese cuisine and etiquette are woven into every aspect of this restaurant. Not least because Kyle partly grew up in the Asian country and the couple later lived in Hokkaido with their children, drinking up the culture and clearly taking notes.

At SingleThread, customers follow the Japanese tradition of transitioning from the hectic outside world to the inner sanctum of a peaceful restaurant. Instead of one big meal, small Japanese doll-like dishes are served; there are 11 courses in total, and each is more delicious than the last. Food is nearly all taken from Katina’s farm and other small holdings in Sonoma County, and the menu includes superbly seasoned Wagyu beef tartare and a cauliflower panna cotta topped with salmon roe. The Connaughtons have worked hard to ensure that the entire experience feels less like a formal restaurant and more like a—particularly delicious—dinner party.

“We really fell in love with Sonoma County. Katina wanted to be here for her farming, and it’s the perfect destination for travelers coming for a food and wine experience.”



Left page
Kyle and Katina Connaughton are the proud owners of Michelin-starred restaurant SingleThread in Healdsburg, Sonoma County

Right page (top)
Highly focused on sustainable agriculture initiatives, the food at SingleThread is nearly all taken from Katina’s farm

Right page (bottom)
In 2022, SingleThread is opening a new farm for guests to visit and participate in educational workshops

WORDS Melissa Twigg. IMAGES (left page) © Erika Cole, (right page) © John Troxell

The couple is also highly focused on sustainable agriculture initiatives. In 2022, they will be opening a new farm to the public. “We are really eager to be able to bring our guests, colleagues and friends out to connect more deeply with the agricultural side of SingleThread,” said Katina. “Along with a farm store that will highlight everything from the field, we are excited to host educational workshops, floral design classes and other hands-on opportunities in support of healthy food systems.” It also includes creating biodiversity in an area that’s heavily focused on growing grapes and taking all heavy machinery off their land. “We tend to the land by hand to create a positive impact by preserving the microbiology of the soil,” she added. “With less disruption, we are able to better maintain soil moisture, organic matter and reduce erosion.”

Over the last year, while so many other establishments like theirs struggled to stay afloat, SingleThread seemingly adapted with ease. As well as working with Sonoma Family Meal to produce 1,000 donation meals, they increased their takeaway capacity and worked with designer Ken Fulk to create an extraordinary outdoor dining experience for four months last winter and spring. “It was called Usu-Zan, and it was built to look and feel like you were in a Japanese forest,” said Kyle. “For that, we explored *Donabe* hot pots and other dishes that were influenced by our time living in Hokkaido. In June, we slowly moved back indoors.”

This slow, steady approach infuses everything they do, including an upcoming plant-based cafe and wine bar called Little Saint one block away from the restaurant. It is also how a simple concept in a sleepy town in America’s wine country has become one of the most thoughtful establishments to open its doors. ◀



Above
Japanese etiquette is woven into every aspect of the restaurant, where guests are treated to an 11-course tasting menu

Left
SingleThread’s luxurious dining room where the experience feels more like a private dinner party than a formal restaurant



WINE TASTING GALORE: THE BEST SPOTS TO STOP FOR A TIPPLE

Flowers Vineyard & Winery

With a design as delightful as the array of wines on offer, this vineyard is ideal for any architectural lover. Located in Healdsburg, Flowers now boasts a variety of intimate gatherings areas to savor its Sonoma Coast wines both inside as well as outside. With floor-to-ceiling windows looking out at the rolling vineyards, sleek wooden walls and tables, and an interior and exterior designed by Walker Warner Architects, Maca Huneeus Design, and Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, there can be few better places to while away an afternoon. flowerswinery.com



Freeman Vineyard & Winery

Husband and wife duo Ken and Akiko Freeman met under trying circumstances: during a life-threatening hurricane. Happily, their relationship has had a more peaceful ending. Now, he is the manager of the vineyards and distributors, and she is believed to be the first Japanese-born winemaker in the U.S. Their wine farm and restaurant are also some of the loveliest in the county—don’t miss their pinot noir or the tale of their extraordinary meet-cute. freemanwinery.com

Kistler Vineyards

Famous for its delicious chardonnay and pinot noir, Kistler Vineyards began in 1978 and celebrated its 40th vintage this year. Guests are welcomed at the Trenton Roadhouse vineyard in the town of Forestville in Sonoma County. While sampling vintages, guests are regaled with stories of the vineyard, farming practices and the grape’s lifespan in an experience individually curated for each visitor. During the pandemic, to the delight of local residents, Kistler Vineyard partnered with SingleThread for a four-month pop-up, serving dinner in the vineyard. kistlervineyards.com



Jordan Vineyard & Winery

Discover an epicurean excursion at Jordan Winery’s Alexander Valley estate in Healdsburg, where guests are welcomed by appointment for distinct wine tastings and food pairings on the scenic 1,200-acre estate. Mastering the art of entertaining since its vintage debut in 1980, Jordan Winery pays particular attention to guest experiences, where seasonal alfresco lunches, hilltop wine tastings and pairings in a hidden cellar are on the menu. Those interested in joining an estate tour or vineyard hike can visit the infant pollinator sanctuaries, considered the largest dedicated pollinator habitat of all Bee Friendly Farming-certified vineyards in the U.S. jordanwinery.com

IMAGES (left page from top) © John Troxell, © Garrett Rowland, (right page from top) © Douglas Friedman, © Hiro Wakimura, ©Jimmy Hayes / JBH Photo, © Jordan Winery