

DE LOACH VINEYARDS



Participants in the DeLoach Vineyards somm camp are pictured from left to right. Top row: Jennifer Knott (Head Bartender, 312 Chicago, Chicago); Natalie Clement (Sales Rep, Carolina Wine & Spirits, Boston); Jason Charles (Sommelier/Beverage Manager, Deloitte University Benchmark Hospitality, Westlake, TX); Harris Coble (GM/Sommelier, Glen Ridge Country Club, Glen Ridge, NJ); and Chris Schneider (Certified Sommelier, Dickie Brennan & Co., New Orleans, LA). Bottom row: Michelle Ball (Contributing Editor, The SOMM Journal); Emma Safavi (Territory Manager, Lifford Wine & Spirits, Ontario, Canada); Amanda Streibel (Head Sommelier, Charlie Palmer Group, New York City); Meaghan Hughes (Bar Manager/Wine Director, Alchemy, Edgartown, MA); Noah Reagan (Buyer, Capital Grille, King of Prussia, PA); and Fred Ghiassi (GM, Terra Restaurant at Eataly L.A., Century City, CA).

THE UNDULATING RUSSIAN RIVER

DELOACH VINEYARDS CELEBRATES THE DISTINGUISHED REGION
DURING A TWO-DAY SOMM CAMP by Michelle Ball / photos by Jeremy Ball

THE SOMM JOURNAL
CAMP



California's disparate geology has created a vast landscape of microclimates that produce some of the world's most distinguished wines. The Russian River Valley in Sonoma County is one of the state's many gems: Its five microclimates, or neighborhoods, each have their own distinctive terroir.

The county's own DeLoach Vineyards works with many small growers throughout both the Russian River Valley and Marin County AVAs, in addition to its own estate in Santa Rosa. This allows the winery to produce wines with a broad palate of fruit profiles. In September, *The SOMM Journal* and DeLoach Vineyards, part of Boisset Collection, hosted ten enthusiastic sommeliers from across the country (and one from Canada!) so they could learn more about the winery's vineyard partnerships and experience a full day "on the job" during harvest.



Joe Papendick, Garden Manager for Boisset, shows off the local flora he has planted in the garden within DeLoach's vineyards.



Assistant Winemaker Katie Carter leads the winery tour at DeLoach Vineyards.

DAY 1 After being greeted with glasses of the 2016 Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir rosé—a refreshingly floral wine that helped relieve the afternoon heat—the group was given a brief overview of the DeLoach estate vineyard by Assistant Winemaker Katie Carter. Carter's education in biology

strongly influences her philosophy for winemaking. "We are but stewards of the microbiological environment, ensuring the most optimal conditions for activity," she explained. This set the tone for our edification at DeLoach: Cultivating wholesome relationships, both environmentally and socially, produces higher-quality wine.

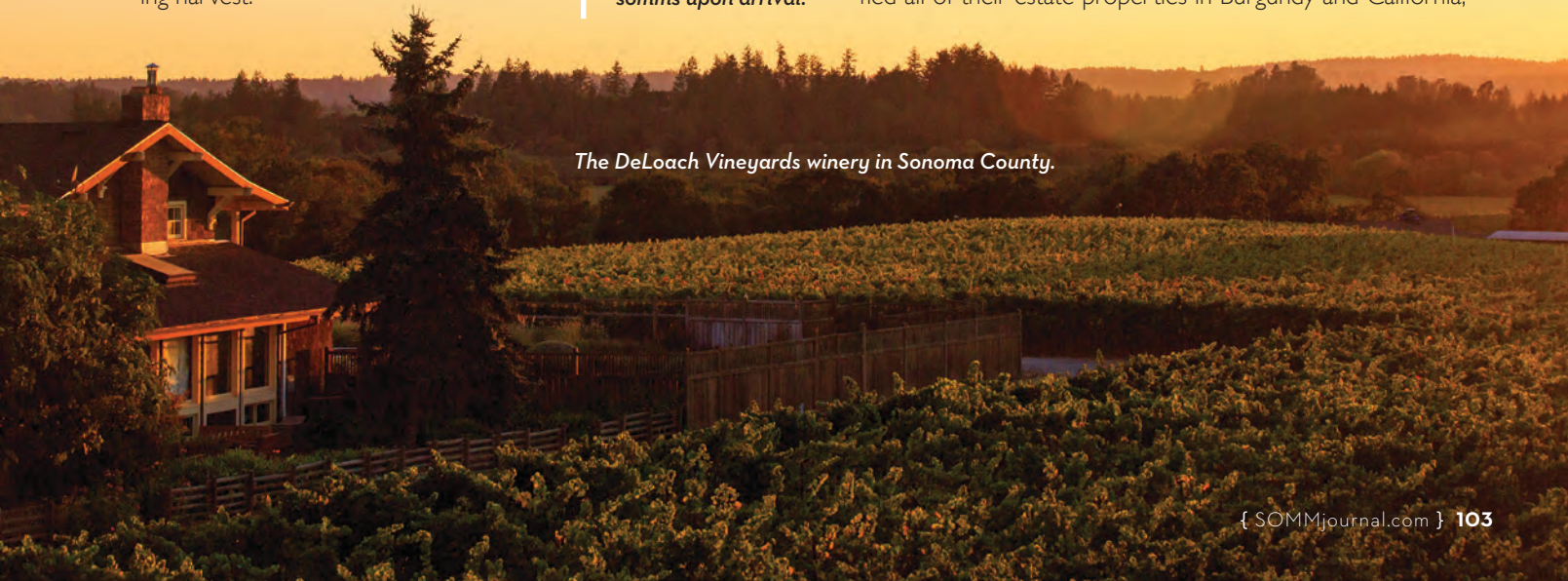
After purchasing the property in 2003, the Boisset family determined the land was better suited for growing Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. They removed the existing Zinfandel vines and allowed the land to remain fallow for a year before rejuvenating the soil with cover crops.

During this time, the family also began the tedious process of Demeter certification. Jean-Charles Boisset observed first-hand the positive effects Biodynamic farming had on their Clos Blanc vineyard in Vougeot, so the family has since certified all of their estate properties in Burgundy and California;



The DeLoach 2016 Pinot Noir Rosé from the Russian River Valley was served to somms upon arrival.

The DeLoach Vineyards winery in Sonoma County.





Beehives are installed in the Theater of Nature at DeLoach.

they also offer incentives to vineyard partners who'd like to make the transition themselves. "Jean-Charles believes in homeopathic methods, but also feels that they better respect the terroir by farming in a way that's natural to the land and amplifies the flavors of the location," noted Joe Papendick, the Boisset Garden Manager who oversees everything "that's green, alive, and not a vine."

We continued to discuss the certification process as we walked with Papendick through the vine rows and snacked on clusters of Chardonnay bursting with honey and lemon. Demeter certification requires that the estate set aside 10 percent of the land to promote biodiversity; this designated area at DeLoach, referred to as the Theater of Nature, is planted

with native flora to attract beneficial insects. It also contains hives for honey bees to assist with pollination for their chef's garden. "Biodynamics look at the estate as a living organism," explained Papendick, adding that the goal is to promote the health of the land so it can bolster its own fertility and immune system. We often look at Biodynamics as odd or even supernatural, yet our afternoon with Papendick converted a few non-believers. "I've read about Biodynamics and I really thought a lot of it was hocus pocus, but it makes sense now. I'm really coming around to it," admitted Chris Schneider, Sommelier at Dickie Brennan & Co. in New Orleans, Louisiana.



The lunar calendar, featured here in the DeLoach vineyards, is an important part of Biodynamic winegrowing.



Brian Maloney, Director of Winemaking at DeLoach Vineyards, leads a comparative Burgundian and Californian terroir tasting.

BURGUNDY AND BEYOND

When it comes to their winemaking background, the Boisset family comes from humble beginnings. In 1961, Jean-Claude and Claudine Boisset purchased grapes from a neighboring vineyard in Burgundy to make their first barrel of wine, which they sold door to door. Three years later, they bought Les Evocelles in Gevrey-Chambertin—their first vineyard plot. "Today, Boisset has 25 properties across California and France and is the leading producer in Burgundy," stated Vice President of Sales Ken Hoernlein.

After our tour of the estate, Hoernlein and Director of Winemaking Brian Maloney led us through a comparative terroir tasting of wine from Boisset's Burgundy properties and their "neighborhood" wines of DeLoach. We started with the 2014 white Burgundies, which did not disappoint. "Really, what makes good winegrowing regions in this area is upheaval, and that whole area was an ancient sea bed," Hoernlein explained in an introductory overview of the region's soils and tectonics.

Maloney followed by reigning the somms back in to California, where he pointed out the similarities in geology (albeit with younger

soils). “To the west of us, you’re looking at almost entirely sandstone-based soils from the uplifted Pacific Ocean plate,” he explained. “To the east of us, we have this mix of soils and it’s very much driven by these volcanic forces that have been going on for tens of millions of years.”

When the Boissets purchased DeLoach, the desire was to expand their reach into different areas in a manner that parallels the Burgundy *négociant* model. “We believe this Olivet Bench area [a warmer part of the Russian River Valley with sandy, Huchica loam soil] is one of the best sites in the world, but it’s always good to have a couple other flavors to put in the glass,” added Maloney.

After the whites came the reds. It was impressive for a winery to host a side-by-side tasting with some of the great Burgundies of the world; to do so, the winery must be able to stand on its own, and DeLoach exceeded expectations. “I made a note that I loved all the Californian Pinots. For me, that just doesn’t happen,” said Jason Charles, Sommelier and Beverage Manager at Deloitte University Benchmark Hospitality in Westlake, Texas.

The incredible day came to a close with bubbles and foie gras bites in the JCB Lounge, followed by an elaborate dinner with fresh market produce from the Theater of Nature. Hoernlein tested the somms’ palates with a game of “guess that wine,” stumping the group with rare vintages from Burgundy and a stunning Beaujolais-Villages Gamay.

DAY 2

The somms arrived at DeLoach remarkably alert and ready for harvest. We headed to Ferguson Vineyard in Green Valley, a colder sub-AVA located in the southwestern hills of the Russian River Valley, and met with Boisset Manager of Grower Relations Taylor Ramsey. Ferguson is a tiny, 1.25-acre site planted entirely to Swan clone Pinot Noir—not nearly enough fruit for a vineyard designate, “but it adds a wonderful flavor component for the Green Valley,” Ramsey noted.

DeLoach was nearly wrapped up with harvest by this time, and Ferguson was one of only three remaining Pinot Noir blocks left to pick. Maloney had warned us the previous day that a family of deer had recently moved into the Biodynamically-farmed vineyard. “We probably should have picked it last week, but we needed something for you guys to do,” he said with a laugh.

The Ferguson berries were small, dark, and intensely delicious. The somms clipped the cold fruit sampling clusters along the way (“It’s very meditative,” one of them murmured). After we succeeded in harvesting our

two rows, we headed back to the winery and split off into groups. Maloney put the somms to work digging out tanks of Pinot Noir and old vine Mission grapes for their Angelica while the rest of us sorted our Pinot Noir from the Ferguson vineyard, filled barrels, stomped grapes, and worked in the lab.



Jennifer Knott, Head Bartender at 312 in Chicago, carries the fruits of her labor.

The somms gather in DeLoach’s 17-acre Saitone Vineyard, originally planted in 1895.





Natalie Clement, Sales Representative for Caroline Wine & Spirits in Boston, digs Pinot Noir out of wooden tanks.

The fruits of our labor came in the form of artisanal sandwiches, rosé, and bubbles on the back patio overlooking the estate. The somms directed question after question toward Maloney, who openly discussed everything from color management to tannin extraction to alcohol. “At the end of the day, flavor trumps chemistry,” he explained in regards to Brix and alcohol. “If you’re picking on flavor, the sugar is going to change year to year.”

After lunch we made a quick stop at Saitone Vineyard, located in the Olivet Bench. The 17-acre own-rooted vineyard was planted in 1895 and is representative of the typical “field blends” of the day; it’s made up of primarily Zinfandel, along with scatterings of Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet, Carignan, and Palomino. The whites are separated out while the reds likely end up co-fermenting together, producing an intriguing Zinfandel that we enjoyed while walking through the property.

Our mentorship programming concluded with an insightful retrospective tasting from two of DeLoach’s vineyard partners located in the Sebastopol Hills of the Russian River Valley: Tom and Rebecca Kisaichi from Maboroshi Vineyard and Joe Pennacchio and his son, Mark, with

Pennacchio Vineyard. The two vineyards are situated very close to one another with essentially the same soil types, but Maloney asserted that “a very different aspect and exposure into that wind and fog coming off the Petaluma Gap, I think, makes for dynamically different wines.”

The somms had an opportunity to sit with the growers and enjoy the 2012, 2013, and 2014 wines side by side. Maloney was curious to see if the somms found similarities among the wines and added his thoughts: “To me, these wines, despite their geographic proximity, taste like they are structurally from a different world, and by that I mean the impression in your mouth. They both have a really pretty, satiny feel that I think you find in all Sebastopol Hills wines, but Pennacchio is just a bigger wine overall.”

Fred Ghiassi, General Manager for Terra Restaurant at Eataly L.A. in Century City, California, agreed and offered his own impression. “I think both wines have this really interesting, expressive tannin,” he said. “I think one year is a little longer and another a little softer, but they’re there. And I’m going to go ahead and say it—I think they’re Burgundy-esque.”

We said our goodbyes to the vineyard



Somms sort Pinot Noir from Ferguson vineyard.



Fred Ghiassi, General Manager of Terra Restaurant at Eataly L.A., offers his impression of the lab sample analysis from harvest activities.

partners and headed to the back patio for a casual sunset barbeque from the DeLoach garden; the meal featured a handful of very different wines from the Boisset Collection. The exemplary expressions of knowledge and hospitality our group of somms experienced at DeLoach were clearly fueled by the team’s passion for what they do, making the experience truly memorable.