



Copper Cane Wines & Spirits director of fruit supply Matt Heil, Paul Hobbs director of winemaking Jeremiah Timm, Benziger Family Winery vintner Chris Benziger, DeLoach Vineyards VP of winemaking Brian Maloney, Handpicked Wines market manager Adam Dromi, Legend Imports owner Jane Lopes, and SOMM Journal VP of education/moderator Lars Leicht.

# Cool

## AS COULD BE

AT DE LOACH VINEYARDS, WE EXPLORED  
 THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE ON THE WINES OF  
**SONOMA COUNTY AND VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA**

story by RUTH TOBIAS photos by ALEXANDER RUBIN

*Kicking off the first seminar* of SOMM Camp, "Crossing Borders and Common Threads: A Comparative Tasting of Cool-Climate Wines From Sonoma County and Victoria, Australia," SOMM Journal VP of education and moderator Lars Leicht made a seemingly simple point that nonetheless clearly resonated with our audience at host winery DeLoach Vineyards: "Similar' means 'different.' ... And that's what we're going to see in the glass today."

At times in recent history, both California and Australia have been pigeonholed as producers of big, broad, even bombastic wines. But that overgeneralization doesn't account for—well, a lot of things, including relatively cool growing regions like Sonoma and Victoria; as guest Shannon Saulsbury, corporate wine manager for the multistate Flagship Restaurant Group, put it, "If you are a lover of restrained, complex, and refreshing wines, the wines of Victoria and Sonoma ought to delight you all the same."



Presenting Benziger Family Winery's **2022 West Rows Chardonnay** from the Sangiacomo Vineyard in Los Carneros—which Saulsbury called “opulent and concentrated with crispy

Bartlett pear notes, some cedar and spice, and jaw-clenching lemon-curd acidity”—vintner Chris Benziger explained what makes the subregion special. “In Carneros, the fog comes in June, July, and August and parks itself there,” he said, leading to longer hang times during which “the acid kind of hovers; it doesn't really fall [even as] the fruit ripens. . . . The acid is staying alive,” allowing it to balance out the richness imparted by barrel fermentation (“We don't want Château Two-by-Four,” he joked) and lees aging with regular bâtonnage.



Also “showcas[ing] Sonoma's richness along with beautiful minerality,” in the words of Dallas-based wine expert Nicole Haarklau, was the Paul Hobbs **2022 Char-**

**donnay** from the Russian River Valley. In addition to “relying on the coastal influence from the Pacific Ocean to slow down the ripening,” noted director of winemaking Jeremiah Timm, “we're selecting sites that are [set on] predominantly Goldridge soil. Why that's really important to Sonoma County is because Goldridge soil has nice drainage; it is a fairly fine soil. So it [also] gives you slow ripening conditions . . . that give us this beautiful concentration of flavor,” from grilled lemon to almond blossom to sea breeze.



Representing Attwoods in Victoria subregion Macedon Ranges, Legend Imports owner Jane Lopes recounted, “I texted [wine-maker] Troy [Walsh] yesterday and said, ‘Anything you

really want me to get across?’ He said, ‘It's cold. It's cold here. It's very cold.’ In fact, she added, it's Australia's coldest growing zone outside of Tasmania: During this year's harvest, while “other cool-climate regions were picking in the beginning of February, Macedon was just starting to go through veraison.” Accordingly, about 90% of its 245 vineyard acres are planted to Burgundian varieties, the latter of which we tasted in the form of Attwoods' **2023 Glenlyon Estate Chardonnay**, a linear and lovely expression of green orchard fruits and just-ripe nectarine as well as more luscious “white chocolate, jasmine, and preserved lemon,” in Lopes' words.



SOMM Campers gathered for the seminar at DeLoach Vineyards in the Sonoma County town of Santa Rosa.



**DeLoach winemaker Brian Maloney.**



As VP of winemaking for DeLoach Vineyards, Brian Maloney introduced the first of two wines he was presenting, the **2021 Estate Pinot Noir** from the Russian River Valley—spe-

cifically the piece of property we were sitting on. “Where we’re located here is an area that we call the Olivet Bench,” he explained, a “natural uplift” set on shallow Huichica clay loam mixed with volcanic soils that original winery owner Cecil DeLoach planted to Pinot Noir way back in the 1970s; it has since been replanted and converted to organic and biodynamic farming under the current leadership of Jean-Charles Boisset. Enjoying “a very long, gradual growing season,” the vintage offered what Maloney described as “definitely that earthy element” as well as “brambly, dusty raspberry [that] I think is very distinct to this site in particular.”



The Russian River Valley-based Dairyman Vineyard, the source of Belle Glos’ **2022 Dairyman Pinot Noir**, is also set on shallow soils of sedimentary and volcanic origin—but, ac-

ording to Copper Cane Wines & Spirits director of fruit supply Matt Heil, “It’s a very fertile site . . . [with] pretty good

rainfall; we irrigate only as necessary.” He credited that terroir with imparting “richness and depth and structure” to the wine, full of blueberry, blackberry, and forest-floor notes, while noting that brand founder Joe Wagner’s implementation of cryoextraction prior to fermentation to preserve color and flavor and use of 60% new French oak also play a role in achieving the intensity he seeks. To balance it, Heil pointed out, “Sonoma County carries acidity really, really well.”



Handpicked Wines market manager Adam Dromi introduced the winery’s **2021 Wombat Creek Pinot Noir** with a charming description of the certified-organic source vineyard:

The highest in the Victoria subregion of Yarra Valley at 1,378 feet above sea level, it’s frequently visited by deer, kangaroos big enough to block roadways, and the namesake marsupials, which have special access to the site via “wombat doors.” It also sees occasional snowfall, Dromi noted by way of burnishing its cool-climate bona fides, as indicated by the juicy yet beautifully restrained Pinot it yields;



*Representing the Victorian contingent, Wine Victoria U.S. program manager Kate Kriven explained to the audience, “We’re here to show that Victoria—Australia’s coolest mainland state—produces world-class wines, with a particular strength in elegant cool-climate varieties.”*

hand-sorted and partially destemmed, the fruit for this vintage underwent fermentation in stainless steel to result in what he referred to as a “beautiful mixture of cherries, a bit of Campari, and some herbaceousness” as well as “pomegranate and rooibos tea,” in the opinion of camper Arthur Pescan, managing sommelier at Maxwell Park and Pop Fizz Bar in Washington, D.C. To the question he sometimes receives from buyers—“Why should I care about Australian Pinot Noir?”—Dromi had a ready answer: “Everyone always thinks of Australia as Shiraz, but . . . there is amazing Pinot Noir; [consumers] trust you guys to show them something new and different and unique.”



Returning to present DeLoach’s **2021 Maffei Vineyard Zinfandel**, sourced from vines planted in 1937, Brian Maloney acknowledged that “Zinfandel has become a variety that

has been more associated with warmer climates across California. But to me, its origins, especially when we talk about the great wines of California, really come through in places like this, here in the center of the Russian River Valley,” where the grape represents “part of our history. It shows a different profile when you grow it in a cool-climate region. . . . It isn’t just prune juice. It isn’t just strawberry jam. It actually has a fresh vibrancy [and] higher-toned aromatics.” Agreed guest Edan Ballantine, VP of operations, Americas, for Hyatt Hotels, “Zinfandel seems to be making a sneaky comeback, and it was great to see it made in a style less robust than it was in the early 2000s.”

Perhaps even more than an in-depth look at their respective terroir, Pescan mused later, the seminar provided “insight into the dedication of these winemakers and growers. [Coming from] opposite sides of the world, they all shared a common language in care for their craft.” That care would be highlighted in our next seminar on sustainability—read on for details.