

# Turning Terroir

# INSIDE

# OUT

OUR REPORT ON THE  
**DIGGING IN PANEL AT  
SOMMCON SAN DIEGO**



by **Brandon Boghosian**  
photos by James Tran



*The Digging In panel at SommCon San Diego from left to right: Mark Macedonio of M Imports; Ioana Benga of Jidvei; Kristina Sazama of Santa Margherita USA; Ken Hoernlein of Boisset Collection; Rachel Macalisang of Frederick Wildman; Pedro Garcia of Félix Solís Avantis; Megan Casserly of The Wine Group; and Kevin O'Brien of Kangarilla Road.*

Any of the elements of climate, weather, and earth that affect the life of a wine seem to get lumped under the umbrella of "terroir." Soil types, rainfall, temperature, and wind are all classic representatives of the term's definition, but, in reality, that definition doesn't *technically* exist.

Like "vigneron," terroir comes with a bit of ambiguity, as there's no direct translation from French to English—or any other language, for that matter. Although generally agreed upon, it can be an entirely subjective matter: Is a winemaking style (solera aging, for example) an element of terroir? What about Biodynamics? With vineyards planted prolifically on six of Earth's seven continents, the topic is certainly worth digging into, which prompted SommCon to host an entire panel on terroir at its San Diego event late last year. Read on to see how the eight participating wineries channel sense of place into their respective labels:

## DEEP HISTORY:

# Casa da Passarella

One of the four founding wineries of the Dão DOC, which was established in 1904, Casa da Passarella has more than two centuries of winemaking history. Only roughly 99 acres of the 247-acre estate are vineyards, which are mainly planted to Touriga Nacional vines that are 60–100 years old. At 2,300 feet above sea level, these are some of the highest plantings in Portugal.



**M Imports CEO Mark Macedonio with the Casa da Passarella 2014 O Fugitivo Vinhas Centenárias Tinto from the Dão.**

Striving to show the world what the Dão can do as a global winemaking region, winemaker Paolo Nunes founded O Fugitivo Vinhas Centenárias in 2011 and collaborated with four 80-year-old winemakers to revive the area's ancestral winemaking techniques. This respect for history affects every action he takes toward achieving his ultimate goals: preserving the viticultural heritage of the Dão through a minimalistic approach in the cellar while exploring the potential of modern vineyard sites. In short, he thinks reconnecting with the past plays a vital role in protecting the future of the region.

Paolo chose four very similar old-vine vineyards to harvest in the “old ways” to produce a field blend of native varieties, including Baga, Touriga Nacional, and Alvarelhão. His approach was to make a terroir-driven Casa da Passarella wine that was simply a living expression of its vineyards rather than the direct result of contemporary viticultural techniques.

As attendees of the seminar discovered, the results are beautiful. The 2014 Casa da Passarella is a youthful expression with powerful body, bright acidity, and notes of brambly red and black fruit, black pepper, and mushroom. The wine, which spends 12 months in 2,000-liter casks followed by 24 months in bottle before release, is easily compared to a Syrah from a high-quality producer in the northern Rhône. Superbly enjoyable and delicious, it also shows how philosophy can serve as a component of terroir that's equally as expressive as the vineyards themselves.

## FIVE GENERATIONS OF FAMILY:

# Raymond Vineyards

Established as a 90-acre Rutherford estate in 1974, Raymond Vineyards has expanded to nearly 400 acres over five generations of family ownership and is deeply rooted in the modern era of Napa winemaking. Located on the valley floor, Rutherford straddles the Napa River and is slightly warmer than the neighboring Oakville and Stags Leap District AVAs.



**Ken Hoernlein, Vice President of Sales for Boisset Collection, with the Raymond Vineyards 2014 Rutherford District Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley.**

The sublayer of heavy clay present in parts of the area—absent from the

rest of the valley—retains water, which in turn produces vines with thicker skins and more concentrated fruit.

Napa Valley is a dichotomy of sorts, with a seemingly infinite number of disparate terroirs melding with both house styles and prevailing trends to influence a final product. The region encompasses nearly half of all the known soil types on the planet and ranges from sea level to more than 2,600 feet in elevation—all within an area roughly half the size of Bordeaux, whose style it mimics when it comes to crafting its own world-class Cabernet.

Of the single-varietal wines that make up the Raymond Vineyards District Collection, the 2014 is in almost every way a classic, showing notes of dark plum, cherry, coffee, and cocoa with pronounced minerality, firm tannins, and a balanced structure. Given its origins, it's arguably everything it should be: a high-quality, powerful Cabernet built from deep, nutrient-rich soils, long summer days, and aging in new French oak barrels.