

# Beverage Journal

JULY 2024

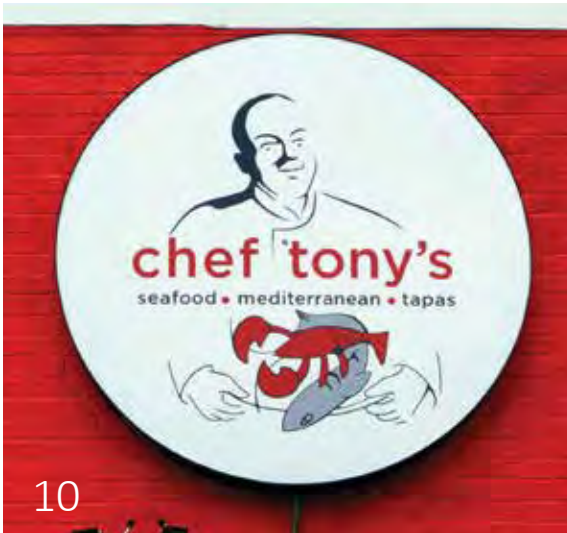
## ★ THE STATE OF ★ AMERICAN WINE



ARE U.S. WINERIES  
IN TROUBLE?

AN EAST COAST  
WINE REVOLUTION





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Cover Credit:  
Courtesy of  
Beneduce Vineyards

**CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE DAY:  
INFUSE PATRIOTISM WITH  
LOCAL HISTORY**

Independence Day, our quintessential American holiday, offers an opportunity to create memorable experiences that blend patriotism with Maryland’s rich history. Leveraging local brands, you can craft unique promotions that celebrate both national pride and Maryland’s storied past.

**Embracing Local Heritage**

Maryland has a deep historical connection with America’s fight for independence. Celebrating this on July 4th, you can draw from local narratives and historical figures to design your promotions. For instance, establishments can highlight Maryland’s role in the Revolutionary War, such as the bravery of the Maryland 400, who played a pivotal part in the Battle of Brooklyn.

**Showcasing Local**

Maryland boasts a vibrant craft beverage scene, with several notable brands that can take center stage in July 4th promotions. By featuring local products, you support local businesses and offer unique tastes that patrons may not be familiar with.

**Breweries**

Creating flight samplers of Maryland brews or pairing specific beers with special Independence Day menus can provide a distinctive local flavor for your customers. Consider a special brew for the holiday, such as a “Patriot Pale Ale” or a “Freedom Lager.” By collaborating with local breweries you can create exclusively named offerings for your event.

**Distilleries**

Maryland’s distilleries produce re-nowned spirits that can be used to craft signature cocktails. Highlighting these spirits in cocktails named after historical



events or figures (e.g., “The Battle of Baltimore” or “The Star-Spangled Sipper”) can add a fun and educational twist to the beverage menu. Hosting tasting events or mixology classes featuring these local spirits can also draw in enthusiasts eager to learn and savor Maryland’s liquid heritage.

**Wineries**

Maryland’s vineyards provide excellent options for patrons who prefer wine. Feature local wines in special July 4th pairings or tasting menus. A “Patriot’s Wine Flight” could include a selection of red, white, and blue (berry) wines, celebrating the holiday’s color theme while promoting local products.

**Engaging Events**

Independence Day-themed events, historical reenactments and firework-viewing parties will be happening all over. Entice attendees at these events to visit your establishment to continue the patriotic celebration.

Effective marketing is crucial. Utilizing social media platforms to share stories and trivia about Maryland’s historical contributions, along with sneak peeks of special menus and drinks, is a recipe for success.

By intertwining the spirit of Independence Day with Maryland’s rich history and local brands, you can create a distinctive and memorable experience for your patrons. Celebrating with local brews, spirits, and wines not only enhances the festive atmosphere but also strengthens community ties and supports local businesses, making July 4th an event that honors both the nation’s and Maryland’s proud heritage. ■

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# HAPPY 4<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY



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# NEW PRODUCTS



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3



4



5



6

## 1. TELIANI VINEYARDS

Straddling Europe and Asia, Georgia boasts centuries-old winemaking traditions that stretch back some 8,000 years, such as the use of qvevri, egg-shaped earthenware vessels, for fermentation and storage. To pay homage to that rich legacy, Teliani Vineyards has released the full-bodied 8K Ancient Red, made from the Kakheti region's well-known Saperavi grape and laden with notes of wild berry, sugar plum, and ripe cherry.

**\$** SRP: \$11.99 per 750-ml bottle

**🌐** [telianivalley.com](http://telianivalley.com)

## 2. FABLE

Eager for a non-alcoholic, THC-infused cocktail just as tantalizing as its boozy counterparts, husband-and-wife team Ben and Kristin Kennedy created Fable. The initial flavors of the ready-to-drink beverage include the rosemary- and peach- accented Into the Woods, the Best Zest warmed by Sichuan pepper, and gingery Night Flight, all buoyed by five milligram micro doses of Delta-9 THC and three of CBD.

**\$** SRP: \$34 per six-pack of 12-oz. cans

**🌐** [drinkfable.com](http://drinkfable.com)

## 3. COCONUT CARTEL

Brother and sister Dani and Mike Zig, the masterminds behind Coconut Cartel rum, have launched a blanco that expresses white pepper, unripe banana, and dried pineapple. It unites rum sourced from the distillery's own sugarcane farms in the Dominican Republic with rum matured in American white oak barrels that previously held bourbon. In a signature brand move, it's cut to proof with coconut water, this time from locally harvested Brazilian Green Dwarf varieties.

**\$** SRP: \$28.99 per 750-ml bottle

**🌐** [coconutcartel.com](http://coconutcartel.com)

## 4. RIBOLI FAMILY WINES

Sauvignon Blanc has a mighty presence in the Riboli Family Wines portfolio, spanning selections from California, Italy, France, and New Zealand. New to the lineup is the eco-friendly Les Glories. Produced primarily from grapes grown in the Loire Valley's Southern Touraine and rounded out with no more than 15 percent from other regions, it exhibits minerality heightened by tropical fruit and tart citrus flavors.

**\$** SRP: \$19.99 per 750-ml bottle

**🌐** [riboliwines.com](http://riboliwines.com)

## 5. ROUND 2 SPIRITS

Blue Weber agave unconventionally takes center stage in Weber Ranch Vodka. For this inaugural product from Round 2 Spirits, founded by Patrón Tequila alums, agave is hand-harvested and distilled in Jalisco, then brought to the distillery in Muenster, Texas, where it undergoes a second distillation and filtration, and then water from the Trinity Aquifer is introduced. Tropical notes make it ripe for incorporating into such agave-based quenchers as the Paloma.

**\$** SRP: \$27.99 per 750-ml bottle

**🌐** [weberanch.com](http://weberanch.com)

## 6. EIGHT BEER

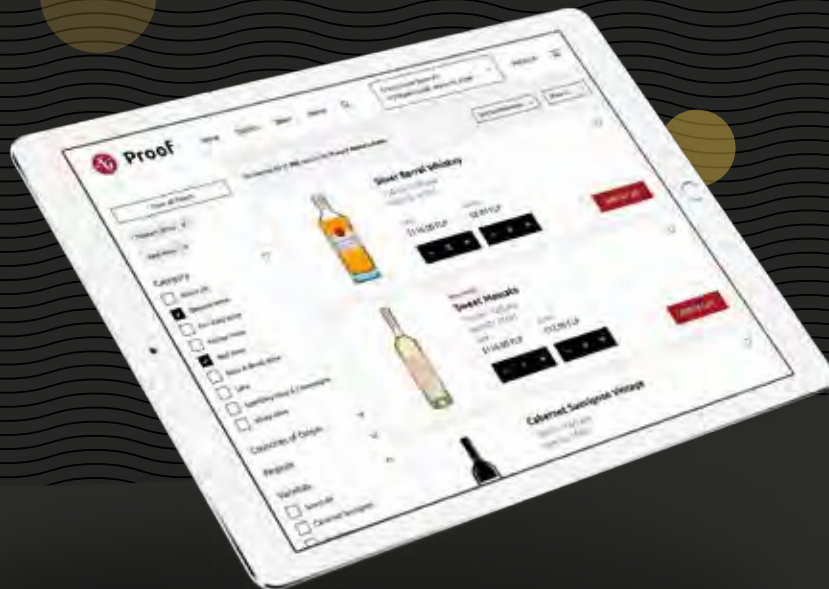
Conceived by NFL Hall of Famer Troy Aikman, Eight is a light lager that donates one percent of its profits to causes that uphold the brand's mission of pursuing greatness. Eight's refreshed packaging now prominently showcases the product's highlights—90 calories, 2.6 grams of carbs, 4% ABV, and 100 percent organic grains—that reinforce the tagline: Light Beer Made Right. It's bolstered by a diagonal cut-out of blue and white cans and a story panel featuring a note from the founder.

**\$** SRP: \$14.99 to \$16.99 per 12-pack of 12-oz. cans

**🌐** [eightbeer.com](http://eightbeer.com)

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### 7. WOODCHUCK HARD CIDER

Demand for robust, imperial-style ciders has prompted Vermont Cider Company's Woodchuck Hard Cider to roll out the 8% ABV Chuck Imperials. The variety pack of playfully designed cans brings together semi-sweet Big Crush, the cherry- and lychee-tinged Cheeky Cherry, and Wild Tropics, defined by notes of passion fruit and dragon fruit.

**\$** SRP: \$10.99 to \$12.99 per six-pack of 12-oz. cans  
[woodchuck.com](http://woodchuck.com)

### 8. JUNIPERO GIN

Juniper-forward San Francisco-made Junipero Gin was a pioneer when it debuted in 1996. Nearly 30 years later, Hotaling & Co. distillery has spun off the original recipe with Smoked Rosemary. Also distilled in copper pot stills, this complex sibling illuminates smoky-herbal layers courtesy of dried rosemary and lapsang tea.

**\$** SRP: \$34.99 per 750-ml bottle  
[juniperogin.com](http://juniperogin.com)

### 9. POGGIO DEL CONCONE

The 2022 vintage of Poggio del Concone's Toscana IGT Rosso balances rusticity and elegance. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Sangiovese, the grapes in this Super Tuscan blend, hail from the hills of Tuscany but are then matured in barrels in Piedmont. A well-structured wine with refined tannins and aromas of blackberry and plum, it is an ideal accompaniment to meat dishes.

**\$** SRP: \$19.99 per 750-ml bottle  
[poggiodelconcone.it](http://poggiodelconcone.it)

### 10. ETTE SPIRITS

Distilled six times from corn in a zero-waste facility where all water is cleaned and reused, the Flora Rosa vodka from New York City-based Ette Spirits is infused with Damask rose petals hand-picked at full bloom in Bulgaria's Rose Valley. This fresh, floral spirit, which can be woven into riffs on the Martini or Collins, is also housed in a bottle that utilizes recycled household glass.

**\$** SRP: \$32.99 per 750-ml bottle  
[ettespirits.com](http://ettespirits.com)

### 11. ALIZÉ

Grape is the latest flavor innovation from Alizé. The sweet, versatile fruit is infused in a base of French vodka, culminating in a moody, purple-tinted liqueur that is easily mixed with ingredients like pomegranate juice and ginger ale to hatch breezy, summery concoctions.

**\$** SRP: \$22.99 per 750-ml bottle  
[alize.com](http://alize.com)

### 12. EMPRESS 1908 GIN

Canada's Victoria Distillers has expanded its Empress 1908 gin collection with a bright cucumber-lemon iteration inspired by leisurely afternoon tea spreads. Along with its namesake botanicals, the spirit is produced in small batches with the likes of juniper berries, jasmine, and star anise, and is best paired with tonic water and simply garnished with a cucumber slice and lemon wheel.

**\$** SRP: \$39.99 per 750-ml bottle  
[empressgin.com](http://empressgin.com)

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## WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW



### GRAIN TO GLASS

Joyce and Autumn Nethery, the mother-daughter duo behind Kentucky's **Jephtha Creed Distillery**, have rolled out a 93-proof, six-year-old wheated bourbon that opens with aromas of brown butter and toasted almond. Its mash bill is dominated (75 percent) by sweet, nutty Bloody Butcher corn, a non-GMO heirloom varietal grown on the family farm, and is rounded out with 20 percent malted wheat and five percent malted barley.

SRP: \$59.99 per 750-ml bottle



### PERFECT MANHATTAN UPGRADE

Rife with notes of cherry and macadamia nut, the newest arrival in **George Dickel's** Bottled in Bond whiskey series is the limited-edition Spring 2011 expression. Aged for 12 years, the 100-proof cocktail-friendly spirit was born from a blind tasting of barrels conducted by Nicole Austin, the director of George Dickel & Luxury Whiskey, and comprises a mash bill of 84 percent corn, eight percent rye, and eight percent malted barley.

SRP: \$44.99 per 750-ml bottle



### 19TH-CENTURY NOD

In 1810, Abraham **Overholt** created his eponymous whiskey in West Overton, Pennsylvania. The recently launched A. Overholt Monongahela Mash, a 95-proof straight rye whiskey that tastes of honeysuckle and clove, was distilled by Freddie Noe at the James B. Beam Distilling Co. in Kentucky, but the warm, spicy character and embrace of the original 80 percent rye and 20 percent malted barley mash bill honors the spirit's Keystone State roots.

SRP: \$39.99 per 750-ml bottle

### REPLENISH THE FOREST

Previously, the single pot still Irish whiskeys in **Teeling's** Wonders of Wood series were matured in virgin Chinkapin and Portuguese oak. Now, the 100-proof third edition puts the spotlight on virgin Swedish oak, which imbues the whiskey with layers of candied ginger and almond treacle. Through Teeling's partnership with The Tree Council of Ireland, each Wonders of Wood release culminates in an acre of native Irish trees planted across the country.

SRP: \$99 per 700-ml bottle



### LIVING HISTORY

Kentucky and Tennessee are synonymous with modern-day American whiskey production, but long before this boom, the spirit thrived in Maryland. Capturing that heyday is Baltimore distillery **Sagamore Spirit's** 93-proof small-batch offering, starring 100 percent Maryland-distilled rye whiskey that uses non-GMO grains sourced from local farms. A fusion of triple distilled high- and low-rye mash bills, the liquid matures for four to six years before it's blended into small 20-barrel batches.

SRP: \$39.99 per 750-ml bottle

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IF SEAFOOD HAS A NAME  
IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY,  
IT HAS TO BE

# CHEF TONY'S

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

**W**hen opening a restaurant, bar, or tavern and you decide to use your own name and likeness out front, there is definitely a heightened sense of responsibility to deliver tasty food, great drinks, and top-notch customer service. Just ask Tony Marciante who operates not one, but two Chef Tony's Seafood restaurants in Montgomery County – one in Bethesda and the other in Rockville.

"The buck always stops with you," he said, during a recent interview with the Beverage Journal in our ongoing series chronicling Maryland and D.C. eating and drinking establishments named after their owners or family. "If it's called Texas Roadhouse, no one really knows who [the proprietor] is, do they? But when your name and your face are on the front, you have to field calls for all kinds of things. Of all the people we serve every day, 99 percent are going to leave happy. But there's always going to be something that happens – that 1 percent – and they're going to want Chef Tony!"

A former Executive Chef for the upscale McCormick & Schmick's seafood restaurant chain, Marciante believes in keeping things straight-forward, even simple. "We've been doing high-quality



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## Tony and Sonia Marciante of Chef Tony's

---

Mediterranean seafood for 17 years in a relaxed environment. We're not a super high-end bar either. [Chuckling] We're not shaving our ice cubes daily or anything fancy like that. We have a drink called a Tony's Tea, which is a modified iced tea, vodka, peach schnapps kind of thing. We do a number of martinis, including an espresso martini, that are well-liked. We have a couple of gin-based drinks that are especially refreshing in the warmer months and pair well with seafood. We do try to be playful and have fun. Cocktails can be a lot of fun. People need a break from life, and they want to escape with something interesting. So, we try to provide that."

He continued, "Like our food, we try to keep our beverage service simple. We highlight the flavor of each drink, the freshness. I am not a fan of too much complexity in food or in drink. We use really good brands. They're not the highest end, but they are certainly not the \$5 a jug type stuff either. We also like to offer value. We could probably raise our prices, but we like regularity. We want our guests to be regulars and come back time and again, both for our food and for

drink. We'll make price increases where we have to, but we try to stay reasonable."

If you talk to Marciante long enough, you are won over by his reasonable good sense, his love of the job, and his commitment to his clientele. One of the biggest joys of his chosen occupation is indeed customer service. He stated, "I love when we create something, whether it's beverage or food, and the guest really enjoys it. Seeing someone enjoy your product and enjoy your environment, that's the best. I believe that when you get together over food and drink, it's a really magical experience even if it's a simple sandwich and iced tea for lunch. We're creating memories of some sort, and that creates a warm spot in my heart."

But the job is not without its share of challenges. At the moment, Marciante said business is going very well. But he is aware of certain headwinds blowing in from the near-future. "The workforce is changing," he said. "As a veteran of the restaurant industry now, I'm concerned about how many quality people will get into the business willingly and appreciate the amount of hard work it is. It's hard

work with challenges every day. As time goes on, I am worried that it will become harder and harder to find good employees."

He added, "There's also the technology angle. Back in the day, a customer would raise his or her hand and say, 'Can I speak to a manager? I didn't like my fish or my soup or whatever.' Now, people run and go online and don't even give you the chance to correct it. We always want to get you what you want. It's not



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like we start the work day saying, 'Let's see who we can piss off today!'"

When dealing with such change, Marciante always believes in returning to the basics. He often falls back on counsel his late father once gave him: "He would tell me, 'Just because it can be done doesn't mean it should be done.' There is a lot of stuff that we can complicate our business with. But sometimes, you just need to keep it simple. I am a person who does like to stay on the cutting edge of things, but not to where it over-complicates things."

And, yes, the best advice he still takes to this day is "always remember that it's your name on the door. When you put your name on a business and you sign on the dotted line for that loan, you are going to a whole other level. You suddenly have to remember a thousand things a day. You go to sleep thinking about the business, and then wake up and immediately think about it then, too."

And for those reading this who want to open John or Jane Smith's Restaurant one day? Marciante advises, "You have to ask yourself, 'Do I really love this work?'" That's because owning a business is 10 times whatever your current job is. You have to know all of the jobs to be an owner, too. You don't want to put your business in someone else's hands, then they leave and you're stuck. And most importantly? I would never open a restaurant if I wasn't a chef!" ■



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## VODKA COCKTAILS



### KENTUCKY WOMAN

1 ¼ oz. Smoke Lab Saffron Vodka  
1 ¼ oz. Ume Plum Liqueur  
1 oz. Basil Hayden Bourbon  
2 oz. Twinings Pure Peppermint Herbal Tea, cooled  
1 lemon peel

**Method:** Combine liquid ingredients in a mixing glass with ice and stir until chilled. Strain over fresh ice into a large rocks glass. Run the lemon peel around the rim of the glass then express over the cocktail and discard. Garnish with a skewer of raspberries and a slapped sprig of mint.



### TIA ESPRESSO MARTINI

1 oz. vodka  
1 oz. Tia Maria Cold Brew Coffee Liqueur  
1 oz. freshly brewed espresso

**Method:** Fill a martini glass with ice and set aside to chill. Pour the ingredients into a cocktail shaker with ice and shake. Empty the martini glass of ice. Pour the contents of the shaker into the chilled martini glass using a strainer. Garnish with three coffee beans.



### VESPER MARTINI

3 oz. Fords Gin  
1 oz. vodka  
½ oz. Lillet Blanc

**Method:** Stir all ingredients over ice, then strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with a lemon peel.



### THE BIRDBATH MARTINI - THE CLASSIC

*Created by James Grant, the director of mixology at Fairmont Royal York*

2 ¼ oz. Quill Vodka or Gin  
¾ oz. vermouth blend\*  
2 dashes orange bitters\*\*

\*vermouth blend:  
1 oz. Tio Pepe Fino Sherry  
1 ¼ oz. Martini Dry  
1 oz. Cocchi Extra Dry  
1 tsp bergamot liqueur  
1 tsp Umami Gin

\*\*orange bitters:  
17 oz. Regan's Orange Bitters  
10 g sweet grass  
Vac seal and sous vide for two hours at 55 degrees

**Method:** Stir ingredients in a mixing glass with ice. Strain into a pony glass. Garnish with olives, onion, and a lemon coin.



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# ARE AMERICAN WINERIES IN TROUBLE?

**INDUSTRY ANALYSTS AND WINEMAKERS ALIKE REPORT CHALLENGING TIMES FOR U.S. WINE, BUT DOLLAR SALES DATA PANTS A BRIGHTER PICTURE, ESPECIALLY FOR PREMIUM PRODUCERS**

BY TINA CAPUTO

**T**he first six months of 2024 have seemingly broadcast a tidal wave of woe for the American wine industry, starting with the release of the 2024 Silicon Valley Bank State of the Wine Industry report in January. After years of sounding the alarm about the industry's need to adapt to demographic shifts and a slowdown in growth, the latest annual report showed an alarming decline in domestic and international wine sales and laid out the many headwinds facing the industry—namely, declining consumption, inflation, anti-alcohol messaging, competition from other beverages, and an oversupply of grapes and wine.

Soon, more emerged about the U.S. wine industry's downward spiral, from existential crises among small producers and calls to rip out thousands of acres of grapevines, especially in California's Central Valley and Lodi regions. But does this torrent of doom reflect the big picture of what's really happening with wine in the United States—and is this an issue that is impacting the American wine industry in an outsized way?

OPPOSITE PAGE: In Lodi, as in many other U.S. regions, some producers are struggling to make ends meet.

The answer is complicated. Though overall volume sales are down and many small wineries are struggling, there are bright spots in the market, and some savvy producers are finding ways to weather the storm.

## A GLOBAL WINE INDUSTRY CHALLENGE

The crisis of diminishing wine consumption isn't relegated solely to the U.S. market and its domestic wine industry. The OIV State of the World Vine and Wine Sector in 2023 reports that worldwide wine consumption declined 2.6 percent compared to 2022. In the U.S., it dipped three percent, while Europe saw a 1.8 percent decrease.

This report attributes the global decline to several factors, including a decrease in China's consumption, inflation, geopolitical tensions due to the conflict in Ukraine, and disruptions in the global supply chain that led to surges in production costs and price increases for consumers.

"It's not just us," confirms Tacoma, Washington-based wine economist Mike Veseth. "Inflation has risen around the world in all of the major consumer countries, and wine isn't an absolute necessity."

Veseth adds that other countries are seeing the same kinds of headwinds that the U.S. industry is experiencing. That includes younger consumers gravitating toward other alcoholic beverages. "Competition is a big thing," he says, "and it's not just our thing."

Data confirms many of the challenges that both U.S. and international wineries face. According to figures compiled by Danny Brager, the head of Brager Beverage Alcohol Consulting and the former head of NIQ's beverage alcohol practice, 2023 sales volumes declined for global wine shipments, depletions, retail, and on-premise sales; direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales volumes of American wine dropped as well.



ABOVE: Many boutique producers like Monte Rio Cellars increased production due to pandemic-era demand.

His sources include Gomberg Fredrikson, SipSource, Wine Business Analytics, and NielsenIQ (NIQ).

"No matter what you look at, it's not great," says Brager. "But at the same time, I feel like when you say that the industry is down, people jump to the conclusion that everyone's doing terrible. That's also not the case."

NIQ off-premise scan data of wine sales in the U.S. for the 52 weeks ending May 4, 2024, show a relatively flat market, with wine down 0.5 percent by dollar sales and 3.3 percent by volume. In the first quarter of 2024, dollars increased 0.4 percent and volume declined 2.1 percent compared to the same period the previous year.

Wines under \$12 performed worst, continuing the entry-level segment's downward trend, while sales increased slightly for those in the \$35 to \$39.99 and \$45 to \$49.99 ranges.

Brager sees the most strength and stability in the \$11 to \$25 price category. "The

mid-range is where there's a little more reason for optimism," he says.

Rob McMillan, the author of the Silicon Valley Bank report, points to destocking—the active reduction of inventory a business has on hand—as an area of concern. Many consumers who bumped up their wine purchases during the pandemic have since curtailed their wine purchasing, leaving distributors and retailers with too much inventory and little incentive to take on more.

"It's really hard to ignore the reality that if you have that much backed up in inventory, discounting is sure to follow," McMillan says, particularly for high-volume producers. "That's about the only way you're going to be able to move those inventory stocks."

## DOLLAR SALES AND PREMIUM WINERY GROWTH

This data might seem to confirm the picture of doom and gloom that has been portrayed, but there are silver linings as well.

"We ended up having a very good Q4 in 2023 [for premium U.S. wineries] and the premium wine division ended up in positive sales growth territory again," says McMillan, who generally defines "premium" as lower-production, handmade wines over \$12. Though domestic winery visits were down last year, the 2024 Silicon Val-

BELOW: Rob McMillan, Silicon Valley Bank Wine Division.



ley Bank report predicts a comeback now that affluent Americans have gotten European “revenge travel” out of their systems.

A newly released report shows an even brighter outlook. The 2024 BMO Wine Market Report, which aims to capture all wine sold in the U.S. market, presents findings from the BMO Wine & Spirits Group in partnership with bw166 and Gomberg Fredrikson, Wine Business Analytics, and Full Glass Research.

Though volume sales were down for both on- and off-premise channels, dollars increased from \$102 billion in 2022 to \$107 billion in 2023. This is an important metric, says Karen Daenen, the director of research and consumer insights at Jackson Family Wines (JFW); the wine industry should assess its own health using value sales rather than just volume sales.

“The wine industry has never really focused on talking about dollars, and we actually see that dollars have gone up,” she says. “Looking at off-premise, dollars for domestic table wine are up 56 percent since 2018.” Similarly, on-premise dollar sales increased 65 percent between 2018 and 2023. Daenen and JFW marketing senior vice president Shilah Salmon

BELOW: Stuart Spencer, the executive director of the Lodi Winegrape Commission.



RIGHT: Though most data shows diminished volume sales, value sales for domestic table wine are up.

launched an initiative this spring to provide media and trade with a broader picture of the industry’s health—which includes data from the BMO report.

“We are afraid that this echo chamber of negativity based on partial facts is going to create a self-fulfilling prophecy within the wine industry and it’s going to sabotage itself,” Salmon says. “We already feel that. We see that in some industry layoffs. We see people cutting their marketing spend. We hear it at our distributor level.”

Despite the negative news, sales for JFW’s brands are healthy. “The only places that we have seen downturns are where we have raised prices,” says Salmon, “but we’re seeing positive turns now where we had forecasted.” Kendall Jackson Vintner’s Reserve Chardonnay sales are currently up 12 percent over the previous year, following price increases strategically rolled out across the U.S. starting in early 2022.

“There are absolutely headwinds in the wine industry,” Daenen says, “but if you can accept where they are and what they actually are being driven by, there’s a lot of opportunity in there.” Some of those opportunities lie in the on-premise channel, the BMO report suggests, in the form of wine-based cocktails, more affordable by-the-glass options, and new packaging formats.

Daenen also points to positive data about younger generations. A Numerator survey of 90,000 wine shoppers for the year ending December 31, 2023, found that younger generations spend more per bottle. Together, Gen X, millennials, and Gen Z account for 59 percent of sales at \$20-plus price points.

### THE PROBLEM OF BULK WINE IMPORTING

Earlier this year, California vineyards were reportedly being ripped out “en masse” due to poor demand, mainly in the Lodi and Central Valley regions. These areas



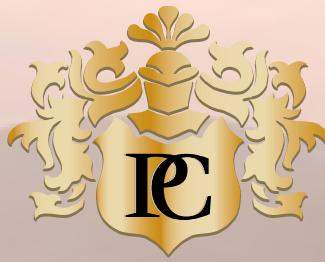
are the primary suppliers of grapes for the underperforming under-\$12 category.

Stuart Spencer, the executive director of the Lodi Winegrape Commission, says declining wine demand isn’t the only reason behind the oversupply. Some large California brands are blending imported bulk wines into their products and labeling them with the American appellation of origin. Federal law allows U.S. wineries to include up to 25 percent foreign wines in appellation products labeled as “American.”

“From their perspective, that may be beneficial and diversify their risk,” Spencer says, “but some of that is being done on the backs of California grape growers.”

According to Gomberg Fredrikson, foreign bulk wine imported by California wineries totaled nearly 68 million gallons in 2022, up from 53 million in 2021 and 51 million in 2020. The 2022 figure translates to about 400,000 tons of grapes, Spencer says, which happens to be the same amount of tonnage growers have been told they need to remove.

He would like to see better labeling transparency, so consumers know what they’re buying. “When you look at the regulatory side of things,” Spencer says, “the American appellation is deceptive.”



# Italy's New Nobility

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ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Patrick Cappiello, Monte Rio Cellars; Monte Rio's Lodi vineyards.



## STRUGGLES FOR BOUTIQUE WINERIES

Though U.S. wineries of all sizes are experiencing headwinds, many small, independent producers say they're getting the worst of it. Patrick Cappiello of Monte Rio Cellars in Sonoma County took to Instagram earlier this year to share his struggles and implore the trade to support small domestic producers.

While many of the issues facing American vintners are challenges for global winemakers as well, Cappiello says imports have an unfair advantage over U.S. wines because in many EU countries, the industry receives government subsidies and bailouts in tough years.

"In this country the subsidies go to corn, they don't go to wine," he says. "The fact that the agency that controls alcohol is also the one that controls firearms and tobacco is a big statement about how they see us."

Like many boutique wineries, Monte Rio increased production to meet surging demand during the height of the pandemic. Now, he says, distributors are

destocking and small wineries like his are scrambling.

"The reason I came forward is because I started talking to people who had been making wine a lot longer than me, and they were all feeling the same thing I was," says Cappiello. "This isn't just one crazy dude complaining on his Instagram about sales."

In the aftermath of his viral video, more than a dozen winemakers in California, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey have contacted Cappiello to commiserate. One such vintner was Olga Tuttle, the co-owner of Teutonic Wine Company in Portland, Oregon, which makes 4,000 to 6,000 cases annually, with 75 percent sold via wholesalers.

Business was great until the summer of 2023, she says, but then sales to distributors suddenly took a dramatic dive. Tuttle panicked and began slashing prices by 20 to 30 percent. By the end of last year, she was thinking of taking a second job to keep the winery going. Instead, she laid off Teutonic's lone tasting room employee and took on the extra work herself.

"Sales are picking up a bit now, but I am still miles behind on where we should be," she says. "I had to take on an additional loan to pay some bottling and fruit bills, putting me more in debt."

Fortunately, Tuttle and her husband Barnaby have a line of credit that gets them through rough patches and helps when large bottling bills come due. "I think we're okay," she says, "but I'm still not comfortable."

Brian Scott, the national sales manager at Quivira Vineyards in Sonoma County,

has spent much of the past year traveling the country, talking to distributors and account representatives about the market situation. The winery makes around 18,000 cases per year and distributes its wines in 25 states.

"The goal for most of the industry is to remain flat in 2024," he says. "Gone are the days of increasing goals by 20 percent."

One reason for the stall, Scott notes, is price increases. After years of holding steady, wineries had to raise prices to cover rising costs for everything from glass to labor to logistics to barrels. "There was no other choice but to bring up prices," he says, "and this put distributors into a panic."

Scott says he hopes the industry will heed Cappiello's call to rally around local wines. "Everybody's got to get together and promote your region," he says. "Wherever you live, you have to get your crew together."

With collaboration in mind, Cappiello is organizing a "Judgment of Paris"-style showdown between U.S. and European wines to reaffirm the quality of American wine. "I just feel like if I do the right thing for our community," he says, "we will work together to make things better."

## ADAPTING BUSINESS PRACTICES

Some small wineries have managed to weather industry challenges by redefining the room and making adjustments. William Allen, the cofounder of Sonoma County's Two Shepherds, reports that the winery's DTC sales for Q1 2024 reached their highest level in five years, and as of the halfway point of Q2, sales were up 31



percent compared to the previous year. Distribution has already exceeded Q1, and is trending up seven percent from the same period in 2023.

“There are just too many brands. It’s too easy with custom crush for people to come in with a hope and a dream and a prayer, with no clue of what to do and no capital,” Allen says. “The market can’t sustain all these distractions and competition for retail shelf space.”

Rather than experiencing an extinction-level event, he believes the industry is seeing a correction. “It’s sad that some people won’t make it. But I think it’s needed,” he says. “We intend to be mammals in the Ice Age and survive.”

Allen has cut back on expenses by reducing tasting room hours, and handling fulfillment and compliance in house. In the last two years, Two Shepherds has

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BELOW: William Allen, the cofounder of Two Shepherds, with porcine vineyard assistant Ginger.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF WILLIAM ALLEN / LINDEN VINEYARDS / LODI WINES

shifted its glass, cork, and label suppliers to a central location near the winery, so Allen can pick up supplies and save on delivery costs.

Another strategy is bottling several times a year instead of all at once. Not only does this allow Two Shepherds to bottle wines only when they’re ready, he says, “It’s been a godsend for cashflow.”

Rob Sinskey, the co-owner of Robert Sinskey Vineyards in Napa Valley, has also made changes to better position his family’s winery for the future.

In 2023, he sold his Silverado Trail winery and tasting room, and bought a farm in Carneros. In recent years, he cut annual production from 20,000 cases to around 10,000. “I saw a slowdown coming,” he says, citing generational shifts in wine consumption among the warning signs.

The sale allowed Sinskey to cut expenses and invest more in Earth-friendly farming. Eventually, he plans to open a tasting room and restaurant in downtown Napa, supplied by produce from his farm.

As Napa wineries grapple with skyrocketing costs for farming and insurance, and the uncertainty of fire seasons, he says, “The new abnormal is hard to predict.”

Jim Law, the cofounder of Linden Vineyards in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, counts the winery’s 4,000-case size and long standing reputation as advantages. “We are in a good position compared to so many other wineries,” he says. To keep up with market shifts, the winery has diversified its sales channels, including adding a new wholesaler last year to target high-end restaurants.

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ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Linden Vineyards in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley; Jim Law, Linden’s cofounder.

“The demographic shift for us is a big one,” Law says. “We’ve always depended on the baby boom generation. There’ve been our major buyers and visitors, mainly from the metro [Washington] D.C. area. But things are falling off, perhaps more quickly than I had anticipated.”

To help replace older customers who are cutting back on drinking or are retiring to other parts of the country, Law is turning to the next generation. Since his daughter and son-in-law joined the business a few months ago and added social media to the marketing mix, he’s already seeing a shift in tasting room demographics.

“I am optimistic [about the industry’s future], though perhaps not as optimistic as I was five years ago,” Law says. “As our distributor, who’s been around for a long time, says, ‘You just have to work harder.’ That’s all it is.” ■

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BELOW: Lodi has become a destination for those seeking out under-the-radar grapes—a bright spot for local growers.





# A CONTEMPORARY TWIST ON PROSECCO

**VOGA PROSECCO DOC STILL PUTS THE GLERA GRAPE CENTER STAGE, SHOWCASING THE REGION'S DELICIOUS STILL WINE TRADITION FOR MODERN CONSUMERS**



Pliny the Elder famously praised Prosecco wine in *Naturalis Historia*, applauding the wine for its effusive aromas and restorative properties. But Pliny and his Prosecco-loving peers weren't referring to the sparkling wine we know today. Rather, they piled accolades onto Prosecco Tranquillo—the Glera-based still wine VOGA Italia is introducing to U.S. consumers this year.

“Prosecco is one of the few growth levers in wine today,” explains Alberto Pecora, the president of Enovation Brands, which imports VOGA Italia. “VOGA Italia Prosecco DOC Still takes advantage of the Prosecco DOC name, while simultaneously offering something completely new.”

## VOGA ITALIA™

Innovation is intrinsic for VOGA Italia. The brand released a sparkling rosé of Pinot Grigio long ahead of the pink wine trend, and their Prosecco DOC Rosé was released immediately after the Prosecco Consorzio approved the category.

“VOGA Prosecco Still is more than a line extension: rather, we are introducing a wine category that has long been enjoyed in Italy to the U.S.,” says Giovanni Pecora, the CEO of Enovation Brands.

VOGA Prosecco Still is a contemporary take on the historic tradition, emphasizing the Glera grape variety's delicate aromatics and knack for yielding the lower-alcohol wines that modern consumers crave. Packaged in a chic cylindrical bottle, VOGA Prosecco Still exudes aromas of green apple, pear, and citrus with floral undertones, highlighting the signature zest and crisp character of the Glera grape.

Still Prosecco was the norm until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the development of the Charmant or Martinotti method—by which Prosecco wines gain their carbonation—

created a seismic shift in the region. As winemaking technology improved and Glera's penchant for elegant and aromatic sparkling wines emerged, tranquillo bottlings began to disappear.

Unhindered by carbonation, VOGA Prosecco Still displays the beloved character of the Glera grape. Thanks to its naturally high acidity and fruity characteristics, the wine offers a bright, dynamic interpretation of Glera, which also pairs well with a variety of foods, from vegetable-forward appetizers to richer, bolder options.

“Millennials are just now starting to drink more wine, despite the hand-wringing of recent years,” says Lisa Schuster, the national marketing director for Enovation Brands. “As Millennials transition to wine, they—along with newly minted Gen Z LDA consumers—seek easy-to-drink whites, new products, and appealing packaging. VOGA Italia Prosecco DOC Still delivers on every count.”

Combining exceptional winemaking with the Prosecco craze and stand-out packaging, VOGA Prosecco DOC Still has the look of a viral sensation yet the complexity to appeal to sommeliers and connoisseurs alike. ■

This content was produced in collaboration with our partner, Voga Italia.



Giovanni Pecora and Alberto Pecora of Enovation Brands

# VOGA ITALIA™

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# THE EAST COAST WINE REVOLUTION

IN STATES WHERE SERIOUS WINEMAKING WAS ONCE UNHEARD OF, LIKE VERMONT, MAINE, NEW JERSEY, AND NORTH CAROLINA, THE SCENE IS HEATING UP

BY BETSY ANDREWS

**C**amila Carrillo has nurtured solera-method wines for six years at La Montañuela, filling vessels halfway to encourage flor yeast and oxidation, and topping older vintages with newer ones, as is common in Jerez. Yet Carrillo is not in Spain, and the grapes she uses aren't Spanish. They're Frontenac

Gris and La Crescent, American hybrids bred to withstand cold because Carrillo makes wine in Vermont.

Winemaking is booming on the East Coast, as a new generation brings energy, innovation, and environmentalism. For decades, many Atlantic wineries focused on semi-sweet wines and conventionally farmed high-status vinifera ill suited to the terroir. But times have changed.

Unencumbered by the traditions of Europe and the West Coast, these newcomers are exploring what works here: native grapes, hybrids bred for the cold and humidity, apples and other fruits for co-fermentations, alternative vinifera. Increasingly, distributors, buyers, and consumers are welcoming their wines. It's an

LEFT: La Montañuela's pétillant naturel; Camila Carrillo, La Montañuela.

ABOVE: Pléb Urban Winery's vineyard in Asheville, North Carolina.

American wine revolution. Here's where it's happening.

## NEW ENGLAND

"Vermont is selling wines all over the country, we get good press, and other regions are looking to us," says Ethan Joseph, who makes wine at Shelburne Vineyard, which was one of the state's first producers when planted in 1998. Today, Vermont has 28 producers. Much of its growth is due to Deirdre Heekin, whose La Garagista burst onto the natural wine scene in 2010.

"She was the first to sell out of state," says Carrillo, who works at La Garagista. "She's had so much attention, and that helped me meet people," including José Pastor, who distributes La Montañuela.





ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: RAS Wines A7 Americano; NOK Vino wines; Beneduce Vineyards' Gewürz Pét Nat.

Heekin drew aspirants who are helping build the scene. “Everyone’s making it up as they go,” says Justine Belle Lambright, the director of external business for Vermont’s five-year-old Kalchē Wine Cooperative, whose wines are distributed by Jahdé Marley through her By the Hand portfolio under Zev Rovine Selections. Necessity is the mother of Vermonters’ invention. When frost and floods decimated her 2023 crop, Kalchē’s director of production Kathline Chery sourced 10 tons of Virginia-grown Vidal Blanc. The resulting skin-contact sparkling wine was the winery’s biggest production to date.

La Garagista employees have spread to neighboring states. In 2022, Nicholas Kimberly launched NOK VINO “to put New Hampshire on the map for natural wine.” One of two producers farming regeneratively out of 30 in the state, he makes 650 cases of wines like a wild-fermented Sabrevois–St. Croix blend. He’s planning to grow to 1,200 cases, a viable goal for sales, as



Marley just picked him up for distribution.

In Maine, Bluet and RAS Wines eschew grapes for a fruit that grows better there: wild blueberries. “It feels like the early days of the Willamette Valley when a handful of people were figuring things out,” says Joe Appel, the sales director and winemaker at RAS, whose dry, sparkling wines are featured on menus at wine bars like Manhattan’s Terroir.

### TRI-STATE AREA

The Finger Lakes and Long Island make New York the third-largest winegrowing state. Now, sleepier regions are waking up. In 2019, the Hudson River Region AVA had 35 wineries. Today, there are 59. “We’ve come a long way in a short time,” says Wild Arc Farm winemaker Todd Cavallo, who is distributed by Jenny & Francois. In 2018, he revived an old-style pomace wine called piquette in 2018, causing a sensation. “Now even older wineries are doing native ferments, lower intervention, and low-sulfur wines.”

Pennsylvania, the fourth-largest grape grower, boasts 376 wineries, including, recently, in Philadelphia. “We have so much community support, we went from 800 cases to 3,000 on neighborhood sales alone,” says Nicholas Ducos of Mural City Cellars, which launched in 2021. Zweigelt pét-nat, skin-contact Pinot Gris grown in the suburbs—“Because we’re in a beer

town, everybody expects something new all the time. We’ve never made the same wine twice.”

There’s a similar energy to the Berkeley scene of which Eli Silins is an alumnus. He made wine around the corner from Donkey & Goat, “until we couldn’t afford to live in California anymore.” Now, Silins farms grapes like the native cultivar Niagara on a South Jersey vineyard for his kosher-certified Camuna Cellars wines. “I’m still in disbelief that anybody cares about wine made in Philly from these grapes. But there’s a newer generation coming in and pushing that,” says Silins, who is distributed by Marley and Roni Ginach of California’s Roni Selects.

In New Jersey, where the number of wineries increased nearly 200 percent between 2000 and 2017, Beneduce Vineyards’ Mike Beneduce founded The Winemakers’ Co-op to pool resources toward improving quality. “I didn’t feel the average New Jersey wine was worth writing home about,” he says. “We need to concentrate on expressing our own terroir.” To support

BELOW: Camuna Cellars wines from New Jersey.



LEFT: Kathline Chery, Justine Belle Lambright, and Grace Meyer of Kalchē Wine Cooperative in Vermont.

RIGHT: Ben Jordan of Midland Wines, Lightwell Survey, and Common Wealth Crush; A tank at Common Wealth Crush.

the \$5-billion industry, the Garden State Wine Growers Association has been inviting press to the state to taste Traminette and Albariño from the maritime Outer Coastal Plains AVA, and Chambourcin and Blaufränkisch from the shale-heavy North Jersey hills.

## THE SOUTH

The number of Virginia producers has grown 600 percent in the past two decades, to 276 in total. But more notable has been the cultural change. “When I was working retail in 2017, the Virginia wine scene was different. Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay—It was difficult to put those on the shelf next to their international counterparts. People went for Sancerre over Charlottesville Sauvignon Blanc because it was cheaper and familiar,” says Erin Dudley, the wine director for the Washington, D.C.-area’s Neighborhood Restaurant Group.

Today, producers like the brothers Tim and Ben Jordan are focused, not on mimicking French wines, but on low-intervention varieties that express the state’s terroirs. “It shouldn’t be hard to grow grapes. That’s dumb. We should find grapes that grow well here and make wines that taste good,” says Ben Jordan, whose projects are Midland Wines with his brother and Lightwell Survey, distributed by Marley and Ginach. Midland’s crab apple-grape co-ferment; Lightwell Survey’s red-and-white co-ferment of Petit Manseng, Riesling, and four hybrids; a blend of Cabernet Franc and the Georgian grape Saperavi grown in the Shenandoah Valley, vinified at Tim Jordan’s Star Party Winery—“The East Coast excitement around alternative grapes has made it easier to sell wine.”

Now the brothers are working on Virginia’s future. Ben Jordan is collaborating

RIGHT: Chris Denesha, Pléb Urban Winery; wines from Pléb Urban Winery.



with the USDA on the development of hybrid grapes adapted to the Mid-Atlantic, and the brothers have partnered on the small-producer incubator Common Wealth Crush, whose wines Marley represents.

In North Carolina, where classic vinifera styles dominate, “people are doing 15 to 20 conventional fungicide sprays and still losing fruit to rot,” says Chris Denesha, the winemaker at Asheville’s Pléb Urban Winery. “If you can’t grow organic, I don’t think we should be growing it.” Instead, making wines like a barrel-rested blend of biodynamic Vidal Blanc, Seyval Blanc, and Traminette, he’s earned national attention and distribution through Marley and Ginach.

## SELLING THE EAST COAST

When she launched Roni Selects in 2017, Ginach recalls that “people in California were like, ‘Wine from Virginia? What are you talking about?’” That has changed. “It’s a new generation of buyers. Few were classically trained. Questions around typicity aren’t as relevant.”

The East Coast isn’t edging California off the shelf. With few subsidies and little infrastructure for East Coast winemaking, high production costs can make pricing prohibitive. In response, says Marley, “I make it clear to producers that it’s a partnership. Controlling your own market is the only way to overcome the pricing.” Appel drives wines to New York himself; Kimberly travels to the city to pour in shops.

With such can-do, success is possible. “Producers are ready, the industry is interested, and quality is improving exponentially,” says Marley. “Now it’s time to get consumers hyped.”

Festivals like Marley’s Anything But Vinifera build interest. On premises, “the tasting menu is an opportunity to put these wines in front of people,” says sommelier Jirka Jireh, who poured them at Manhattan’s Beut. “I sell it as a whimsical pairing where you try things you haven’t before. That gets them excited. Everything is a conversation piece, the wines are quality, and everybody’s happy.” ■

