



A DIFFERENT GLASS OF MEXICAN WINE

by RACHEL DELROCCO TERRAZAS

"Some people haven't had a Mexican wine in their life," says Mathieu Girard, who lists several at Broken Spanish in Los Angeles. "I can serve them Bichi—the biodynamic and 'weird' guys of the Mexico wine world—or we can go in a different direction." This would have been a challenge even five years ago, as there weren't many Mexican wines in the market. Today, however, importers such as José Pastore Selections, La Competencia and La Misión are bringing a new wave of Mexican wines over the border, and sommeliers are responding: In our April 2019 Annual Restaurant Poll, eight Mexican wines made respondents' lists of their Most Popular pours, including everything from pét-nat to chenin blanc and listán prieto.

While Bichi has generated the most interest in the US, they're just one part of a growing community of *enólogos* defining the terroir of the desert southwest in Baja California. Drive from the border town of Tecate to Ensenada on the Pacific Ocean and the route winds over brown and red hills with elevation signs marking the 3,000-foot climb, then descends into the Valle de Guadalupe. While many of the roads in this rural area remain unpaved, inns, tasting rooms and spas have cropped up alongside newly planted vineyards. Offering less expensive accommodations than Napa or Sonoma, the region has become a popular spot for Californians and Mexicans to take weekend wine getaways.

Camillo Magoni may be the best local resource for a perspective on the past and the future of this region. Originally from a winemaking family in Valtellina, in Italy's Lombardy, Magoni came to Baja 49 years ago, when he was offered a job with L.A. Cetto. At the time, the company was one of the two large-scale grapegrowers, along with Domecq; both sold most of their wines within Mexico. In addition to working the Cetto vines, Magoni purchased land throughout the 1960s, 285 acres in all, and started making his own wine for family and friends in 1999. Fourteen years later, in 2013, he established Casa Magoni and released his first commercial vintage.

He says his decision to market his wines coincided with the new restaurant culture that was developing in the area: A new generation of chefs were focusing on Baja-Med cuisine, offering visitors a chance to explore the local terroir through food and drink.

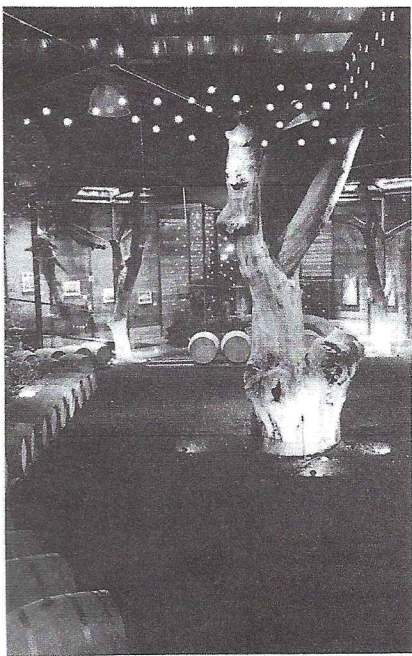
At his own estate, Magoni is experimenting to learn what grape varieties might work best in the hot and dry climate. He grows 70 varieties he's culled

from vineyards around the world, and blends them in unusual combinations, like viognier with fiano, or chardonnay with vermentino. He picks twice—once in July to capture acidity and again in September to get the texture he wants for each grape variety. The blends find a balance between structure and flavor that's distinctly coastal and desert at the same time. Meanwhile, he hopes his diverse vineyard may provide some options in a changing climate.

Inland, into the mountains, the Bruma hotel offers a view over the valley. It's also Lulu Martínez Ojeda's workspace, where she ferments wines for three labels—Bruma, Ocho and Henri Lurton. Martínez Ojeda grew up in Ensenada, then spent 17 years in Bordeaux, at Château Brane-Cantenac, Henri Lurton's Margaux estate. When Lurton proposed developing a project in Baja, Martínez Ojeda volunteered to take it on. She's now working with fruit her uncle grows in the volcanic soils of San Vicente and Santo Tomás, along the Rio de Santo Tomás, making wines that stand out for their freshness, like a clean, lean carignan blanc de noirs. It's the kind of freshness that interests David Castro-Hussong, the chef at *Fauna*, inside the hotel. Hussong, who's worked at *Noma* in Copenhagen and *Eleven Madison Park* in New York, focuses on locally sourced ingredients for his fresh ceviches and hearty moles. "David is constantly pushing the bar up and I want to be right there with him," says Martínez Ojeda.

Sergio Salgado takes a different approach to grape-growing at Viños del Sol. "I'm a hippie from Mexicali," he tells me on the deck of his tasting room, looking out over his vineyards in the benchlands at the base of the hills. "I married a girl from Baja and I loved what I saw here. In 2007, this was all dirt roads,

THE BARREL ROOM
AT THE BRUMA HOTEL.

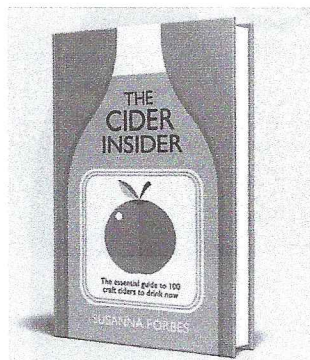


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no houses, lots of coyotes, and we just watched it change." His vines stretch north and west with oats growing between the rows, the vines netted to protect them from the birds. To the east, his vines are planted in a Fibonacci spiral, looking eerily like a crop circle, matching the logarithmic spiral pattern of certain trees and flowers.

"I don't want to be too involved with grape varieties," he says, having chosen chardonnay for his love of Chablis, and tempranillo in

honor of his grandfather, who hails from northern Spain. "I want to focus on the land and I want to make these two wines the best that they can be." His white wine is lean, structured, full of tart green-apple flavors. It's a tight stainless-steel style with warm herbal notes. His tempranillo sees little oak, its flavors lifted and peppery, smelling of kicked-up sand. It's the kind of distinctly Mexican wine that's coming to define the new Baja. ■



The Cider Insider

Susanna Forbes has compiled a list of the best ciders across Europe, North America and Oceania in *The Cider Insider* (Quadrille Publishing, \$20). She's organized them by style, from fruity and fun to rustic and structured, so you can quickly find a choice to fit your mood or palate; she's also included tips on cider festivals, farmers' markets and other apple-related activities in each place.—R.D.T.



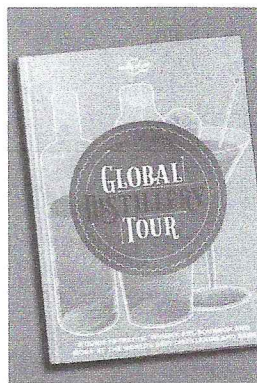
Summer Spritzers

Austin-based Sean Cusack joined forces with Deep Eddy Vodka's Clayton Christopher and Treaty Oak Distilling's Daniel Barnes to create Mighty Swell, on-the-go spritzers made from natural cane sugar and fresh ingredients. Their newest flavor, cherry-lime, is refreshingly frizzante, and drinks like an easy cocktail. \$16 per 12-pack at mightyswell.com —R.D.T.

Global Distillery Tour

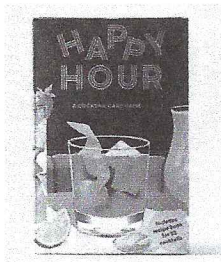
For the avid traveler with an affinity for spirits, Lonely Planet offers a guide to distilleries in more than 33 countries. The *Global Distillery Tour* highlights the best stops for whisky in Japan, Tequila in Mexico, Bourbon in Kentucky and much more. It also includes tips on top bars for local spirits, as well as primers on what they are and how to drink them (louché your absinthe in Switzerland)—and how not to (avoid that 96 percent abv in Bolivia).

Lonely Planet Global Distillery Tour (Lonely Planet Guides, \$20) —R.D.T.



Happy-Hour Cards

Pack this 52-card deck in your beach bag for a Go Fish-style game of matching cocktails. Laura Gladwin's recipes cover all the classics, each illustrated in watercolors by Marcel George. \$18 at laurenceking.com —R.D.T.



LA: THE MANUFACTORY

At 40,000 square feet, *The Manufactory* complex from San Francisco's *Tartine* restaurant group is by far the largest food and wine option at RowDTLA, the massive warehouse development in LA's Downtown Arts District. There is, of course, *Tartine*'s famous bread, as well as cakes, cookies and croissants, and coffee from beans roasted on the premises; there are cheeses from Neal's Yard Dairy and a full menu of toasts and tartines to take away or enjoy in the café. Then there's the *Alameda Supper Club*, with the most sophisticated menu within the complex, where Lee Foden-Clarke marries Italian and Californian flavors, offering strozzapreti with Meyer lemon, and spice-rubbed lamb belly with salsa verde. Jake Malmberg runs *The Manufactory*'s wine programs, with input from consultant Taylor Parsons: It's a compact list with options for every meal of the day, from brunchtime bubbles (Barrat Masson Brut Nature Champagne) to rarities to savor over dinner, like Federico Curtaz's Etna Bianco Gamma, or biodynamically grown Santa Barbara gamay from Hollyhock Lodge. —PATRICK J. COMISKEY
The Manufactory at RowDTLA, 757 S. Alameda St.; 213-375-3315, tartinebakery.com/los-angeles/the-row

Photo of The Manufactory and Lee Foden-Clarke by [unreadable]