

We've partnered with Chef's Roll and Somm's List, the global culinary and wine professional networks, to learn more about beverage experts from across the country.

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Julie Lumgair

Wine Consultant and Winemaker, Napa Valley, CA

Q: What was the first moment you knew you wanted to pursue a career in the wine industry?

My college mentor was a collector of European and early Oregon/California wines who taught fine wine appreciation classes. I helped with his classes, which inspired me to start collecting a global cellar in my twenties. Multiple experiences I had while collecting spurred me to take the next step professionally in my thirties and make winemaking my second career. Years later, I helped my mentor auction his collection at Bonhams & Butterfields.

Q: What advice would you give to someone interested in learning more about and/or trying more wine who doesn't know where to start?

First, comparatively taste multiple wines with a common thread, especially with a wine educator, in wine shops, at group events, or while visiting key regions. Second, read more about regions, varietals, et cetera, you enjoy. Third, learn how to taste—the real sensory science—and keep notes. Believe in your own palate then try to understand it in context. Also, don't underestimate the importance of spitting when tasting so your palate and sensory memory are sharp.

Q: Over the course of your career, what's the most important lesson you've learned or piece of advice you've been given?

Growing up in a family business in a small town, I learned reputation is everything and your handshake is your word. That and the Golden Rule never go out of style. As a young wine collector, I learned that some wineries may take your business for granted or not pay attention too well. Feeling that way as a wine buyer deeply influenced my passion for personal VIP experiences and building lasting customer relationships once I was on the other side of the conversation.

Christopher Sawyer

SOMM Journal Wine Country Editor and Sommelier at Gravenstein Grill in Sebastopol, Sonoma County, CA

Q: How did you get your start in the wine industry?

Although I grew up in Russian River Valley, my calling to the wine industry really started when I was writing articles for the college newspaper about the Viticulture & Enology Department at the University of California, Davis, in early 1990s. Inspired by the interviews I did with the gifted professors, rising-star winemakers, and other wine pros along the way, I ended up taking ten wine classes and started working at *Wine X Magazine* in 1995. Around that same time, I also started taking classes from my three Master Sommelier mentors: Fred Dame, Evan Goldstein, and Bob Bath. At that point, there was no looking back!

Q: Which regions or varietals been punching above their weight in recent years?

To me, the next big grape variety is Marselan, a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache that has recently become popular in the Languedoc, China, India, and Uruguay. I love the naturally smooth, elegant, and refined flavors of wines made with this grape, which was first bred by Paul Truel near the French town of Marseillan in 1961.

Q: You are known for your pop culture-related wine pairings. What's your process for creating them?


While music can create a great background for wine experiences and deep conversation, pairing great wines and films allows you plenty of time to let the flavors of the wine open up in the glass as the plot and characters develop on the screen. While some of the pairings are based on varietals or blends that match the main characters, other times I'll pick the wine based around the time period or the country where the film is set. 



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