



Angela Osborne



Leo Hansen



Craig Haarmeyer



Lisa Togni



Dana & Scott Frank



Scott Schultz



Todd & Kelly Bostock



Jamie Kutch



Michael Roth



Rory Williams

American wine is having its well-deserved moment of confidence. Our current generation of winemakers has found a particular sweet spot between quality, and The Chronicle's 2015 class of Winemakers to Watch perfectly reflects that.

You may notice some changes this year. The main one: We've doubled the size of the group, from five to 10. There's so much talent right now that it's important to broaden our roster. (In some cases, we are resurfacing talents who've appeared in our pages over the past year.) The net effect, hopefully, will give you more names and wines to seek out.

I lobbied for this expansion in part because of the other change. For the first time, our annual list includes winemakers from outside California: Todd Bostock of Arizona's Dos Cabezas, and Scott and Dana Frank of Oregon's Bow & Arrow.

In part, this simply matches the full West Coast scope of our **Top 100 Wines** — and a broader spirit of innovation on this coast. But it also reflects couples' crucial work in defining, or redefining, their local wine cultures.

The Franks dared to ask whether Pinot Noir, and Burgundy, should be Oregon's only inspirations. The Bostocks have advanced not only Arizona wine but also its accessibility. Local wine on tap in Phoenix? Now a thing.

Our California vintners are equally pioneering, whether it's Angela Osborne asserting that Grenache from the high desert could be the base material for an exceptional wine; or Craig Haarmeyer being a true believer in the potential of inland California.

Some, like Lisa Togni and Rory Williams, are continuing important family legacies. Others, like Jolie-Laide's Scott Schultz, have managed to pursue their passion while crafting wines that are equally pleasing to amateurs and experts.

Viewed as a group, they represent the daring, questioning spirit that exemplifies the best of our current wine culture. And yet all demonstrate a deep respect for history and tradition in both the Old and New Worlds.

In other words, they are precisely the sort of women and men who will guide American wine joyously into the future.



Angela Osborne at a vineyard in Ventucopa (Santa Barbara County) where she picks Grenache grapes for her label, A Tribute to Grace Wine Company. (Erik Castro / Photo By: Erik Castro | San Fra

Angela Osborne

Age: 36

What she does: Makes some of the best examples of California Grenache.

Backstory: Osborne speaks in nearly spiritual terms about her winemaking, but she is nothing if not focused. A New Zealand native, she worked in the London wine trade before returning to San Diego, where she had spent time growing up. While working in a wine shop, she became entranced by Grenache and discovered a remote vineyard high in the desert north of Santa Barbara where it thrived. In 2007, while working as cellar and assistant winemaker in Santa Barbara and Sonoma, she launched her own label, **A Tribute to Grace**, with a single wine from that vineyard, Santa Barbara Highlands.

Five years later she dropped the other jobs to focus on Grace, which may have been wise since her repertoire has expanded to seven Grenaches, including rosé, using vineyards everywhere from Dry Creek Valley to Rancho Cucamonga (San Bernardino County).

Her work in the cellar is both precise and defined by a light touch, one reminiscent of the approach at the Rhone's legendary Grenache source, Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The resulting Grace wines show a rare purity and subtlety of flavor, which might explain how they also attracted an influential fan base, including

only in these pages but on wine lists around the world, from New York's Eleven Madison Park to Stockholm's Ekstedt.

Quote: "I don't think that big, muscular, firm style necessarily lets a graceful expression speak. That's what got me from the beginning, was a pleasure. And to do that, you have to be very delicate with every part of making it."

Harvest fuel: "Long blacks (coffee) and the best English muffins I have ever had, from Bob's Well Bread in Los Alamos."

Dream project: "To find a virgin valley close to the coast — Santa Barbara or Hawkes Bay (New Zealand) — with hillsides perfect for Grenache. I would be conscious, with more than a nod to Rudolf Steiner's teachings. And there would be other crops, of course, produce and animals."

From the notebook: Osborne's Santa Barbara Highlands Grenache (\$45) remains the most nuanced of her offerings, while the fruitier, more im Barbara County Grenache (\$30) is a great introduction to her style.



Winemaker Leo Hansen amid mustard and vines at Healdsburg's Stuhlmuller Vineyards. Hansen also makes exceptional Chenin Blanc under his Leo Steen label. (Erik Castro / Special To The Chronicle)

Leo Hansen

Age: 42

What he does: Makes exceptional Chenin Blanc under his [Leo Steen](#) label, and top-notch Chardonnay and other wines for the established [Stuhlmuller Vineyards](#).

Backstory: Hansen was born into the restaurant trade — his father was a chef on the Danish coast — and he became a sommelier and manager at Michelin-starred Kong Hans in Copenhagen. He thought he might import California wine into Denmark — “I liked the style of the wine at the time, it was exotic and different” — but after coming to Napa in 1998, he decided to stay.

He worked at Souverain, both in the lab and at its Geyserville restaurant, and after working harvest in Australia, returned and took a job at Stuhlmuller in 2002, eventually convincing its owners to promote him to winemaker despite a lack of formal training. All the while he kept up sommelier duties at Healdsburg spots like Dry Creek Kitchen and Cyrus.

In 2004, stymied by the limited choices for interesting local wine to pour by the glass, he decided to make his own under the Leo Steen label. Chardonnay, being one of California’s also-rans, was affordable enough to work with and had a side benefit: Its South African synonym, Steen, is Hansen’s m

Hansen also has reds in his repertoire, both for Leo Steen and Stuhlmuller. At Stuhlmuller, he quietly pulled in the reins on the winery’s standard Chardonnay — picking earlier, opting for less oak and less intrusive winemaking. But Chenin has become his calling card, both from Sonoma and at Barbara’s exceptional Jurassic Park vineyard. The Leo Steen wines quietly outperform, which has been Hansen’s plan all along.

Quote: “There are no people who go on the wine list and look for the section on Chenin Blanc, because it doesn’t exist. But if you place it by the bar, they might try it.”

Harvest fuel: A German pilsner or wheat beer. A grilled breakfast sandwich from Jimtown Store in Healdsburg.

Dream project: “To make really good Oregon Pinot, or Cabernet Franc from calcareous soils.”

From the notebook: The green apple-tinged Saini Farms Chenin Blanc (\$18) is intense and long-lived, while the wood-and-concrete-aged The Saini Vineyard Chenin (\$28) is as stately a California example as you’ll find.





Craig Haarmeyer of Revolution Wines. (Kelly Haarmeyer | San Francisco Chronicle)

Craig Haarmeyer

Age: 49

What he does: Showcases what he calls “Sacramento terroir” in wines made from inland California vineyards.

Backstory: Haarmeyer’s father developed the Old Sacramento historic district, and his mother ran restaurants, which meant the Sacramento neighborhood was surrounded by culinary figures like Darrell Corti and Biba Caggiano.

He came to San Francisco to study at the Art Institute, and tried his hand at home brewing. But he followed his fiancée back to Sacramento, where friends introduced him to Charlie Meyers, whose Harbor Winery was one of the capital's only urban wineries after Prohibition.

Haarmeyer learned winemaking ropes from Meyers while continuing to paint and take IT jobs, but in 2007 a childhood friend was planning to open a winery that would become [Revolution Wines](#) in downtown Sacramento, and asked Haarmeyer to help. Two years later he was the winemaker and decided to focus on the region's vineyards — Chenin Blanc in Clarksburg, Sauvignon Blanc from Yolo, Zinfandel from Lodi and the foothills, both for Revolution's [St. Rey](#) label.

Today he makes an astonishing diversity of wines, from naturally sparkling Chenin to Sangiovese from the Cosumnes River area, with more to come in the form of dry vermouth. As such, Haarmeyer and Revolution (which operates a small bistro) have become focal points in the city's small crew of brewers and winemakers, helping River City to share in the sort of urban artisanship that thrives in the Bay Area.

Quote: "It's not like Sonoma or Napa, where growers for the most part understand the end result is pretty high-quality wine. Here, inland? The good crop is a big one. It's my task to convince these guys that we need to drop some fruit, we need to pick early. Some guys get it, other guys don't."

Harvest fuel: Charcuterie and cheese from the tasting room. And sparkling water — Perrier or Lurisia.

Dream project: "I would like to have my own vineyards in an area where I could dig my own caves and make only, or mostly, dry white wines. But I'd like to do some sparkling."

From the notebook: Haarmeyer makes an astonishing range, but his St. Rey Chenin Blanc (\$25) and a related sparkling version are some of the examples from Clarksburg. The balsam-y Revolution Celeste Red (\$30), a mix of Malbec, Cabernet Franc and Sangiovese, proves his point about the County's potential.