

# THE BUYER

CONNECTING THE PREMIUM ON-TRADE

## The Buyer & Jackson Family Wines California Chardonnay & Pinot Noir Roundtable

How Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines are evolving around the world and how do Californian styles compare?



### Setting the Scene

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It's human nature to want to go and discover something new. Be it in a new restaurant, the latest style of food, or music, the next big social media site, or box set on Netflix.

But for all our exploring and searching for the next big thing, there comes a time when you actually want to do the complete opposite. Go back to the tried and trusted, something you know you will deliver what you want and not let you down.

It's all very well dining out at the latest hip and happening restaurant to open up, but how often do you wish you had just gone to the local Italian and had that bowl of reliable pasta you know they do so well?

We are seeing it more and more in the premium on-trade where on the one hand there is big demand amongst diners to try something unusual, unfiltered, and unknown. But there is equally a need for any wine list to ensure it also has the classics, the usual suspects if you like, that customers can fall back on knowing they are on safe ground and their money is going to be safely spent.

Which brings us very much to the theme of the latest The Buyer trade debate, and a chance to shine the spotlight on two of our most classic, prestigious, and global of grape varieties: Chardonnay; and Pinot Noir.

Two varieties that are the beating hearts of some of the most famous and well known wines ever made, and are the foundations on which Burgundy, arguably one of the most influential of all global wine regions is based.

Two varieties that are also very important to Jackson Family Wines, our partners for the debate, who as well as being one of the most important Californian wine producers, has developed an international portfolio of wineries where it has been able to explore how these two unique varietal styles are able to make award winning, quality wine in different parts of the world.



### The Opportunity

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This was an opportunity to assess the opinions of leading buyers, sommeliers and distributors and how they are seeing trends direct from the restaurant floor. How are the classic, varieties, the Premier League of wine styles if you like, fairing against the new breed of alternative wines that are taking ever larger shares of wine lists?

If customers are interested in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir which styles of each do they prefer? Northern or southern hemisphere? Oak-driven, fresh or mineral? Classic or new wave?

This was also a time to look at what sort of role global wine producers, particularly those that are still independent, family controlled wine businesses like Jackson Family Wines, have to play in helping both distributors and sommeliers have a wider, and better understanding of how wines are being made around the world. From a producer directly involved in making them.

How are leading buyers and trade influencers working with family producers to build and consolidate ranges and use their experience and know how of different terroirs and regions to offer something new for their lists.

## The Panel

The debate looked to canvas opinion of leading buyers from both across the premium on-trade including the supplier and distributor side as well as the independent merchant sector and premium restaurant operators. The line-up included:



**John Graves, on-trade channel director at Bibendum, now part of the Conviviality Group**

John Graves is a highly respected and experienced buyer who has worked closely with premium restaurants and operators right across the country and is now looking to further rubber stamp Bibendum's premium and fine wine credentials.



**Ignacio Campos, Hawkmoor Guildhall**

Ignacio, or Nacho to his friends and colleagues, is the wine manager at the new Borough addition to the growing Hawkmoor stable. He is also one of the senior members of the group's wine team and has worked across different sites including Air Street. It is a far cry from his previous career as an IT consultant. @Campos\_nacho



**Lowri Jones, sommelier, Terravina Hotel**

Lowri Jones is a member of the highly regarded sommelier team at Gerard Basset MW MS's Terravina Hotel in the New Forest. Californian wines, and Napa in particular, are very much part of the wine list at Terravina, which is part based on the relaxed style of hospitality in Californian hotels first discovered by Basset and his wife, Nina. @Lowrijones91



**Jon Kleeman, head sommelier and wine buyer for new opening, Four Degree**

Formerly head sommelier at Social Eating House, part of Jason Atherton's wider restaurant and bar group. Jon Kleeman has certainly made big strides in what is still a reasonably fresh sommelier career having enjoyed time at the Ritz Hitz, where he was deputy head sommelier, and Quatro Passi in London and Orwells in Henley. @Jonnykleeman



**Tom Gilbey, founder of The Vintner**

Tom Gilbey has enjoyed a lifetime in wine having followed his family that can claim a history in wine, and wine importing, going back to the 1850s. He hopes to build a legacy of his own with his own unique wine merchants business that stands out in that it only has 100 wines available (and to drink now) on sale at any one time. @TomGilbey



**Julien Sahut, head sommelier at Sexy Fish**

Julien Sahut's daily challenge is to find wines to pair with fine Asian dining at Caprice Holdings' flagship Chinese restaurant, Sexy Fish in Berkeley Square, London. Formerly of China Tang and Hibiscus Sahut is also part of the team that has set up the new Wine Picker app that hopes to help customers choose the right wine for them in restaurants without a sommelier. @SahutJulien



**M Restaurants' Lenart Cernelic**

joins the successful, and growing M Restaurants, group from Sketch. He has taken over the ambitious retail and online side of the business, the M Wine Store at its Victoria Street outlet where it has built up a growing range of Californian wines.



**Julia Jackson**

Representing Jackson Family Wines was the middle daughter of the late Jess Jackson and Barbara Banke, who supports the international sales team helping to tell the Jackson Family Wines story around the world.



**Dimitri Mesnard MS**

Brand ambassador for Jackson Family Wines, working closely with premium and fine dining restaurants in providing personal selections of wines from across the family's global estate.



## A Global Family

Jackson Family Wines has evolved its winemaking and production facilities around the world over the last century. It is now making quality, premium and fine wines in the US, Chile, Italy, South Africa, France and Australia and now has 52 separate wineries, producing around 6 million cases.

It is most famous for its home Californian range which it now makes across wineries in Mendocino (including Champ de Rêves, Copain, Edmeades, Maggy Hawk) Monterey (Carmel Road), Napa (Bootleg, Cardinale, Freemark Abbey, Galerie, La Jota, Lokoya, Mt Brave), Santa Barbara (Brewer Clifton, Byron, Cambria, Nielson) and Sonoma (Anakota, Arrowood, Capture, Cenyth, Fortress, Hartford Family Winery, Kendall-Jackson, La Crema, Liberated, Matanzas Creek, Murphy-Goode, Siduri, Silver Palm, Stonestreet, Vérité and WindRacer.

Not forgetting its not insubstantial foray in to Oregon and its wineries in Willamette, including Siduri, Gran Moraine, Penner-Ash, WillaKenzie, and Zena Crown.

## California Chardonnay & Pinot Noir Roundtable

Julia Jackson was able to set the scene and give her own personal context to what role the Jackson family would like to play in helping buyers and sommeliers select the right Californian wine range for them.

Crucially, she says, the family remains truly independent. It is not controlled or influenced by outside financial forces. “It is a hard industry to be in if you are dictated to by your share price. We have, as a family, to be patient. We are after all working with mother nature,” she explains. “But it’s also down to hard work and building longstanding relationships.”

It’s why it is “so hands off” with its winemakers around the world. There is certainly not a Jackson wine recipe that they have to follow. The wineries they have in different countries have been acquired for the sole reason the family believes it can make great, quality wine there. How those wines are made is down to the soils they come from and the local knowledge and expertise of the winemaker and their team, stresses Jackson.

“Each of our boutique wineries has its own philosophy. We do not micro manage our winemakers at all,” she adds. “Instead we are able to give our winemakers the tools to make the wines they want to make to their own philosophies.”

It’s why it will look to keep and work with the existing winemaker at any new property that it acquires.

Jackson says the family started off humbly selling grapes, and has “evolved over time” to reach the point it is now. But it remains very much centred on the importance and quality of the fruit you have to work with.

“It’s why we pride ourselves on the fact we own the fruit in the majority of our wines. We have 14,000 planted acres of vines in California,” she adds.

Clearly the success of the Kendall-Jackson business has provided the foundation on which the family has been able to build and develop and ultimately nurture what is now a global business. But it’s also clear from Julia Jackson that the family is still very much rooted in the origins of the business, when it did not have the winemaking skills and instead had to ensure the quality of its fruit was good enough for the big producers to want to buy.

“Our own philosophy is to simply make the best quality wine we can,” she stressed. Whether that is in California, St Emilion, Chianti, McLaren Vale, the Willamette Valley or Stellenbosch.



It is an approach, she says, that can take some of the local wine communities a while to understand. The perception, she added, is that we are some big conglomerate that is marching in to their area with our set ways. The reality could not be any more different. “They are surprised by how hands off we are,” she said.

“We love to make acquisitions with other family winemakers who share the same philosophy that we do. It is hard for a corporate business to do that.”

It also works right across the spectrum of wine. Whilst it has the mass production of Kendall-Jackson at one end of the scale it is also working with wineries that are only producing 200 cases of a particular wine a year.

It is also what California does best, added Mesnard. “California is important at the high end, but it is also performing very well at the lower end too. It is why it has some of the most diverse wines in the world.”

Which is why Jackson Family Wines, he explained, works with such a wide variety of distributors in the UK. Each with their own clear markets and channels of distribution, be it Matthew Clark, Boutinot, Friarwood, Fells, Corney & Barrow or The Wine Treasury.

“Our primary focus, of course, is working with premium wines,” added Jackson. “Where you can help educate consumers about your wines in the kind of restaurants and outlets where we would like to see our wines sold.”

Family producers operating in different markets also have the advantage in that they can see what is happening directly in the vineyards, she added.

## California Chardonnay & Pinot Noir Roundtable

### Working with a family producer

It was interesting to initially hear the views from the panelists on what it is like as a wine buyer or sommelier to work with large family wine producers. Does it make a difference? Is it relevant to them at all?

Absolutely, said John Graves, who could not have been more enthusiastic about the role family producers have to play. “It’s very important, particularly when you are looking for wines from different countries if there is a family influence,” he explained.

“There is a fine balance between a corporate wine range and a family one. A family can bring an influence to the wines in so many ways and you really do notice when you lose that personal touch, that willingness to go the extra step,” he added.

Having the scale that the Jackson family has means it has the ability to be able to invest properly and genuinely in high end wineries, stressed Graves.

It’s an image and story that comes across well to sommeliers and buyers, said Julien Sahut. “I think what is key is the message they pass on to us. Their passion for quality wines and a strong work ethic shines through,” he explained.

“They are also all very approachable and humble and you fill you want to be part of the family.”

Sahut was impressed with the news the Jackson team will look to work with the current owner and winemaker when it makes a new acquisition. “It’s good they respect the core of the estate and look to grow together rather than change all the structure.”

Jones said it was a “pleasure to meet Julia and see the real passion there is at Jackson Family Wines”. “It’s easy for customers, as well as ourselves, to see only the wine in the bottle. So it was a breath of fresh air to see and hear the history, the spirit and future goals for the company. For themselves but also for the communities that they are based within.”

For Jon Kleeman a large family producer with a respected name can make a big difference to customers ordering wine. “The average customer will know a region, or a style of wine they like, like Barolo, but it is very much down to us, the sommelier, to then recommend a particular producer for them. Which is clearly very much part of our job and what we spend so much time advising people on.”

It is also important, added Kleeman, for restaurants and sommeliers to have a balanced wine list, which again is where larger producers come in. For whilst it is nice to have “wines that are made from only two hectares of land” they can’t make up the bulk of your list as there is simply not enough wine from there to sell. “You also have to realise that you need wines that have scale, that come from a 90 hectare property and are also able to make a lot of quality wine.”

It is certainly something he has learnt during his time in the trade, when the tendency at the beginning of your career as a sommelier is not to trust anything from a brand. “But the more experienced you are, you see the value that comes in working with family producers, provided they are making quality wine.”

He added: “It can be an easy position to take to be against a big family producer, but you have to also appreciate that they also have access to vineyards with the most exceptional soils.”

Jones said Terravina worked with a number of family producers as it was still important to give some customers the reassurance of what wines they are buying. “Particularly for a region like California where customers can still be a little nervous about and are looking for our advice. They will go for names that they recognise.”

Tom Gilbey said a family producer making a quality wine should be at the heart of the best wine stories. “To produce a quality wine you have to some level of authenticity and a family should always be at the heart of that story. Consumers will quite rightly pay a high price for those wines.”

As a wine merchant he was also very aware of the demand from customers, both in the trade and privately, for more choice of premium wines from outside Europe. “Be that more premium Australia or California. The opportunity is certainly there.”

That was also very much the case at Hawksmoor, confirmed Campos. “We are seeing younger customers taking a bigger interest in New World wines. A lot of that is being driven by technology and using wine apps where they can see different wines being recommended,” he explained.



### App-ealing to younger consumers

This is very much the opportunity that Sahut wants to capitalise on with his own new wine app platform, Wine Picker. He says it is like having a sommelier in your pocket where he is able to build up wine lists from different London restaurants and then offer his recommendations for certain dishes. It also gives users the chance to post up and share their reviews and feedback. “The more information people have the less afraid they become at trying these different wines. Younger people can afford to buy good wine and this is a way to help them. Technology is definitely taking a lead.”

“Younger drinker want to learn more about wine. How else has Vivino got 20 million users? This is the perfect opportunity for us all to help do that. A more knowledgeable customer is better for all of us. Let’s stop the non-Chardonnay drinker, who always buys Chablis.”

Lenart agreed: “People trust technology more sometimes than the recommendations we can give them.”

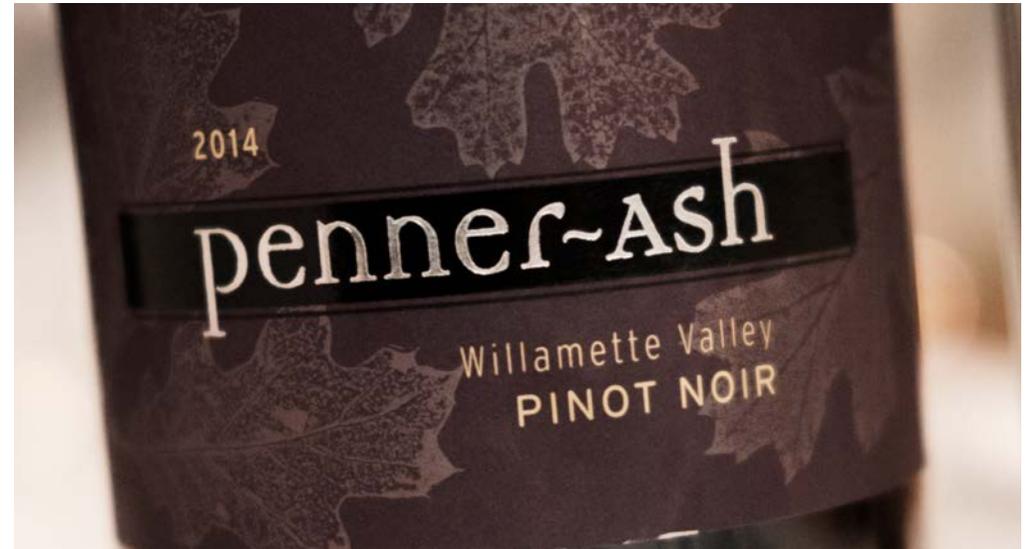
## Spotlight on Chardonnay & Pinot Noir

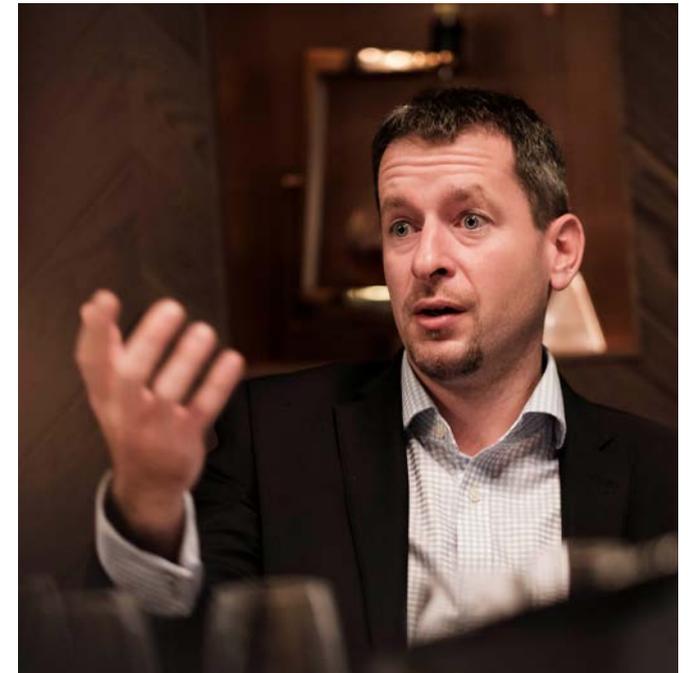
With so many properties around the world the Jackson family is in a rare position to be able to make different styles of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in both the traditional Old and New World wine producing countries. The ability to take these two classic grape varieties and explore how they can make very different wines around the world. “Every winemaker also has their own style,” adds Jackson.

But the Jackson family is still very much Californian at heart, which is why it was keen to showcase the styles of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir it has been able to make across different estates and to demonstrate what California can also do.

Jackson reminded the group of one of Robert Mondavi’s pledges that Californian producers were not competing against each other but “were all brothers and sisters building up this region together”.

She added: “There are so many great producers in the world. It’s not a case of thinking you are the best, but rather you all collectively working together and learning from each other.”





## The Debate

Tom Gilbey said he was particularly interested in taking part for two main reasons: firstly the chance to taste and discuss these leading wines from California and to benchmark the Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs under discussion. But he was also as a wine merchant, and supplier to the on-trade, interested in hearing the views and feedback from leading restaurants and sommeliers about how they see the wines, California and the trade in general.

Lowri Jones hoped to give an alternative view to what was happening out of the rarefied world of the London premium on-trade and look at how customers are behaving out in the New Forest.

“It’s an amazing opportunity to see points of views from all areas of the wine trade. It’s good for myself as a sommelier to hear the views of wine buyers, restaurateurs, merchants and other sommelier on all these topics as it becomes quite easy to rely on ones personal preference or opinions.”

In particular it was interesting for her to hear how other sommeliers work with Californian wines in their restaurants and introduce wines to customers nervous about buying their wines.

For John Graves, California has long held a fascination with California, from his days as a sommelier at the Savoy where it only one Californian wine on the list, to his role now at Bibendum where it has such a wide selection.

## Chardonnay Tasting

- 2014 Gran Moraine Yamhill-Carlton Oregon Chardonnay
- 2014 Freemark Abbey Napa Valley Chardonnay
- 2013 Hartford Court Russian River Valley Chardonnay
- 2014 La Crema Sonoma Coast Chardonnay
- 2015 Nielson by Byron Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay



For the Chardonnay tasting the panel were invited to taste across six styles of Chardonnay from different Jackson Family vineyards in California focusing in on and also in Oregon. The six wines were:

Mesnard said the idea was to show the “diversity” of its Chardonnay range but to also to show “the investment that has taken place across the different wineries”.

As the panel assessed the wines they are also shared their views on Chardonnay in general.

For Kleeman California’s biggest issue with Chardonnay is that is often with some customers “wrapped up” with Australia and seen as still producing big oaky, Chardonnays. The reality and the perception of what California is now producing can be very wide apart. “We also know that when some customers say they don’t like Chardonnay that is the type of Chardonnay they are referring to. The cheap, oily Californian Chardonnays. Not the modern, fresh, elegant Chardonnays we are now seeing.”

Campos thought California had a big opportunity to capitalise on the big gap that is now emerging to replace Burgundy. “People do not want to spend the sort of prices we are seeing for high end Burgundy,” he said.

He also stressed there was still a lot of demand for the more traditional oaky Chardonnay styles from some customers. “It’s a matter of balance and making sure you have both styles for customers to choose from.”

California and other New World countries will always have an issue with Chardonnays - and Pinot Noir for that matter - because the higher up the price ladder you go, the tendency is for customers to go to France, claimed Graves. “That’s the crux of the matter. Where do we go when we want to spend a little more money? California still needs to explain its premium offer more, make its case better.”

Sahut said it was certainly the case at Sexy Fish. “If they are going to spend more on a Chardonnay then people want to go to France,” he said.

Kleeman agreed: “We can be accused of being a little close minded in the UK. But it is changing. We all just have to work harder at it.”

Gilbey said he sees a clear difference between those that are familiar with Californian Chardonnay and those that like Chardonnay in general. For the Californian enthusiasts



there is still a lot of love out there for the rich, buttery styles and also an awareness of the more elegant, fresher styles as well.

Lenart Cernelic agreed it was hard to pin down customers to a certain style of Chardonnay. It is definitely one of the more personal and subjective choices that consumers have. “You have to be open minded and have different wines to suggest to them,” he said.

The panel agreed that there was much more awareness amongst customers about the different styles of Chardonnay, even within Burgundy.

“It’s important to have a broader range,” said Sahut. “From lighter to oakier, to more full bodied. Customers can also then see that it can be a lot cheaper to go for a New World style. Where there is potentially more value for money.”

Cernelic said that some customers will start off asking for a classic Burgundy “but when they see the prices they are willing to spend that much”. “It means we are able to push New World Chardonnays a lot more. We also get a lot of US guests coming in to the shop and who are always surprised, and pleased to see the prices that we can offer here compared to what they can get in America.”

### Put to the taste

When looking at the wines on show in particular, Julia Jackson was keen to again stress how each winery is not looking to copy each other, but to make a wine that is the “best expression of their terroir”. “We are not being copy cats.”

Lowri Jones was very familiar with the 2015 Nielson by Byron Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay as it is one of the most popular wines on the list at Terravina. “When we do a tasting menu we often serve this wine blind to customers and people love it.”

Kleman thought it was a “classical tasting Californian Chardonnay. It’s a very moreish style and offers what people expect from California.” That said, ironically, it was also the style of wine that a lot of customers don’t think that California can do, he added.

Gilbey agreed: “It’s just a lovely wine. That said I am not sure I could drink a bottle of it.”

Campos could see this being a “very food friendly wine”.

La Crema 2014 was one of the highlights of the tasting across the panel. For Campos it was a “super delicious style of Chardonnay.” Gilbey agreed: “It’s a great wine.”

Mesnard explained how a lot of the grapes for La Crema are sourced from the Sonoma Coast where there is a strong maritime influence which comes through in the salinity of the wine.

“It’s a great match with lobster,” added Jackson. “It has so much acidity.”

Freemark Abbey was seen as being representative of the fresher styles of Chardonnay coming from Napa.

The Chardonnay flight also included Gran Moraine, the Jackson’s property in Oregon, again a good illustration of what that region is now capable of producing. “It’s certainly a real focus for us now in Oregon,” said Jackson.

Kleman thought the Oregon Chardonnay would be “hard to distinguish from a line-up of Burgundy wines. “It also tastes a lot older than it is.” But conceded Oregon is still a hard sell in to customers.



Reflecting on the flight in general Graves found them all to be “drinking well” and was particularly pleased from a commercial angle to see that they were all young wines that can be drunk now. “For our business it can be hard to get hold of these kind of wines. La Crema is just one of those wines you definitely want to drink.”

Jones said she had been “pleasantly surprised to find that there was such a diverse range of styles on offer”. “I think this is the most important thing for the future of Californian Chardonnay,” she added.

### Pinot Noir Tasting

- 2014 Cambria Benchbreak Pinot Noir
- 2015 Carmel Road Monterey Pinot Noir
- 2013 La Crema Russian River Valley Pinot Noir
- 2014 Penner-Ash Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

As the debate moved to discussing the opportunities for Californian Pinot Noir the panel was united in one area - the door was wide open for a recognised region like California to step in and take some share away from Burgundy and the huge rise in prices on the back of consecutive short vintages.

The challenge, said Sahut, was to ensure sommeliers and buyers were recommending California and Oregon as possible alternatives. "There is some really good value for money to be had here," he said. "I can see more and more opportunity both for California and Oregon over the next two to three years."

California is also producing a style of Pinot Noir that consumers naturally like, claimed Mesnard. "If you give California Pinot Noir to a 100 people, 95% will like it."

That's down to how "open" the wines are, added Campo. "You can straight away taste the fruit and freshness, far more so than in Old World styles."

Perhaps not surprisingly Terravina, which owner Gerard Basset MS MW based on the hotel and wine resorts you can find in the Napa Valley, has a strong following for Californian Pinots amongst its guests, said Jones.

"A lot of our customers will go straight to California Pinot Noir, but there is also a lot more interest in New World Pinot Noir in general."

Kleeman said it was becoming an increasing bigger issue for classic, greenier-style Burgundys that customers can find a challenge once they have tried and liked what California, New Zealand and Chile can do with their fresher styles.

Pinot Noir is one of the most challenging varieties to buy as a merchant, said Gilbey. "It is what consumer want. Without doubt. Time and again they return to Pinot Noir, so it is one of our most important categories, but so hard get the right wine," he explained. But



if you can there is a lot of demand for customers looking to spend £40 to £50.

"Ten times out of 10 you can that generosity in fruit with Californian Pinots that you don't always get with Pinots," added Gilbey. "There's that style of Californian Pinot Noir that you can't get anywhere else."

Californian Pinots were selling very well at M Restaurants, said Lenart. "It's very much a go to wine for some people. They don't necessarily understand the differences between different regions, but tend to gravitate more towards the fruitier style of wine."

The buyers and sommeliers agreed there was a big opportunity also for Oregon Pinot Noir. "It's the big stand out trend for Pinot Noir," said Kleeman. "Every sommelier I know wants to put Oregon on their list. They have a very Burgundian style."

### Debate Summary

To help pull the debate together we caught up with some of the buyers to ask them to reflect on how they see Californian wines in their business.

#### Lowri Jones, Terravina



##### **How are Californian wines performing at Terravina?**

“We are seeing more of an interest now in Californian wines which I think also goes hand in hand with the fact that our sommelier team at TerraVina also enjoy these wines. We get asked on a daily basis to recommend wines and with California producing top quality, food friendly wines, it means we are able to recommend these and guests are always delighted by them.”

“I do believe people are coming full circle with California. We often hear customers claiming that for a while they avoided California as they were too heavily oaked or had very high alcohol reds. Even the whole Sideways era and ‘anything but Merlot’ image.”

##### **How do you help promote California with customers?**

“I think it’s up to us as sommeliers to help change this point of view and encourage and educate customers that this preconception is no longer accurate. California is producing so many different styles and varieties of wine that cater to so many different people’s tastes, that there will definitely be something for them.”

“I’ve seen quite an interest in Zinfandels over the last six months, ranging from the juicy, fruit driven, full of character Zins to the more elegant more savoury Zins. We have these ranging from mid £30s up to early £60s and they all sell as well as each other. Californian Pinot Noirs and Merlots do well in our restaurant.

“If people choose to have a Californian red they are usually happy to spend a bit more money. But we still have a wide selection at all price points.

“We have the Byron Pinot Noir all the way up to the Sine Qua Non Rhone Blends.

“It was only this month that I had a meeting at the hotel with a couple planning their wedding who said that they wanted a Californian Pinot and Chardonnay served as part of their wedding menu day as this particular producer had excellent consistency and they felt the wines coming from California were delicious.



#### Tom Gilbey, The Vintner.



##### **Which particular wines from California are working best on your list?**

Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir selling at approximately £10 to £15 wholesale with an RRP of between £15 and £20.

##### **What did you think of the opportunity for Californian Chardonnay?**

We can find them difficult to sell to restaurants. There is a market for super premium Californian Chardonnay, but there is a danger for general Californian Chardonnay that they fall in to ‘no man’s land’ where France, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand win over California. Ironically I would suggest some of those wines need to be more expensive. At the prices they are they find themselves amongst too many other Chardonnays with more desirable names and reputations.

##### **What did you think of the selection of Pinot Noirs?**

Very good indeed and very suitable for what restaurants are looking for. The wines were generally ripe and generous, very ‘punter friendly’ and accessible. They were also very well priced and we could easily sell them. We find Californian Pinots are very popular at these price points, often winning over their counterparts from Europe. They offer ripeness and approachability unlike that offered by any other country. It was a great tasting, thank you.

### Jon Kleeman, head sommelier, Four Degree



#### How did you find the event and tasting?

I think the debate was very useful and informative. It was great to hear from Julia about their family values. Very few countries have the range and style of Chardonnays that can please so many different tastes. It was also great to see such a range of styles amongst the Pinots as well. Not just light to heavy, but they had extremely varied flavour profiles as well which showed a lot of terrior and diversity in the region.

#### What Californian wines work best in the premium on-trade?

California Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon are still the strongest showing on lists. I am just putting a new list together for Four Degree (a new fusion and Japanese restaurant in London) that will have a strong American range, so I look forward to showing a lot more varieties.

I find California does well in the medium to higher price range as regions like Napa and Sonoma are highly regarded. I was extremely impressed with the diversity of styles of both the Pinots and Chardonnays. I think both price and styles work well with lighter and more simple styles at the lower end of the price range and then the more complex and weighty at the higher end.

I feel Californian Pinots get over looked in the UK and they need to be shown to the market in new ways to take away the stigma of heavy warm styles that many people in the trade think they still are.

### John Graves, Bibendum



#### What are your general thoughts about California's opportunity in the premium on-trade?

I think more acknowledgement of pricing and price points on a wine list is needed. Value is key as quality is not in doubt. The Parker points that are so important in US are less significant in the UK.

#### Which particular wines from California are working best from your range?

Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay at village Burgundy and second wine Cru Classe price points are what are selling the most. Riesling is also starting to do well at more entry level pricing. The big names, like Screaming Eagle and Ridge, always sell well.

#### What did you think of the selection of Chardonnays that you tasted?

Overall the quality was generally good and it was nice to see them toned down. They were all very suitable for the premium on-trade. What California Chardonnay does so well is it definitely bridges the gap between Old and the New world. There is a customer confidence there.

#### Any other thoughts?

I'd like to see more options from California at the mid range and entry point levels. Californian wines don't do well in the premium London restaurant scene, but wines at £30 to £40 on a wine list could do very well.

### Julien Sahut, Sexy Fish and Wine Picker



#### What opportunities do you see for California after the debate and tasting?

California and Oregon Pinot Noir are more attractive because of the price points. People will always spend two to three times more on a red wine rather than a white. That's very much the case at Sexy Fish. It is always going to be a lot easier to sell a £100 bottle of Oregon Pinot Noir to someone who would normally want a Burgundy red rather than having to sell a Chardonnay for £100 than a Burgundy white.

There is a great opportunity now for California to make its move. Particularly with the quality we saw in these Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from California and Oregon versus the bad vintages in Burgundy, smaller production and higher prices.

The quality of this style of New World Pinot and Chardonnay is becoming outstanding. These are very precise wines. So much so that why would you buy Puligny or Gevrey Chambertin when you can get a wine from the US west coast at better quality and more affordable prices.

# THE BUYER

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