In 2013 we launched our "20 Most Admired" issue to shine a much-deserved spotlight on the most admired people in the North American wine industry. With the thoughtful input of our nominating committee—comprised of respected winemakers, grapegrowers, wine writers, consultants, wine buyers, sommeliers and educators across North America—we celebrated wine professionals from just about every aspect of the industry.

This year, we’re highlighting the 20 Most Admired Winemakers.

Our committee had just two rules to follow: 1) nominees must be living; 2) they must be based in North America. While some committee members quickly returned short-lists of their winemaking heroes, others agonized over how to whittle down their nominees to less than 50.

Once the nominations were in, we reduced the field of contenders to 40 finalists based on the number of nominations each person received. Names of the finalists were then submitted to the committee for a vote (members could vote for as many people as they liked).

The 20 winemakers who came out on top reflect a wide range of wines, styles and regions. Some produce hundreds of thousands of cases each year; some make only a couple thousand. While many craft some of North America’s finest wines and represent the continent’s most successful wineries, there are many other reasons to admire the men and women on our 2014 list. These are the pioneers; the innovators; the trend-buckers; the standard-setters and the leaders.

Here, in alphabetical order, are the Most Admired Winemakers in North America.

**Peter Bell**

Fox Run Vineyards

For going on 20 years, Peter Bell has been the winemaker at Fox Run Vineyards on Seneca Lake, turning heads not only with his artfully made Finger Lakes rieslings, but also his pinot noir, cabernet franc and lemberger wines.

Bell’s most notable wines include Fox Run’s “Geology Series” rieslings, which highlight the ancient geological terroir of two distinctive vineyard blocks; and the celebrated Tierce Dry Riesling, his collaborative effort with fellow Finger Lakes winemakers Johannes Reinhardt of Anthony Road Wine Co. (also one of 2014’s “Most Admired”) and David Whiting of Red Newt Cellars.

Born in Boston and raised in Amsterdam, Berkeley, Cali., and Toronto, Bell was the winemaker at Dr. Konstantin Frank’s Vinifera Wine Cellars for five years before joining Fox Run in 1995.

It wasn’t until his late 20s, after he had already earned a degree in cultural anthropology, that Bell developed an academic interest in wine. He first set his sights on the enology program at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga.

After graduation, he found his way to the Finger Lakes—via New Zealand. Bell had been working as an assistant winemaker in Marlborough and looking for a way out, when he met an American harvest intern at neighboring Cloudy Bay winery. When Bell confessed his desire to move on, the intern suggested he go to the Finger Lakes, because of its potential for producing world-class riesling.

Bell took the advice. When he arrived in the Finger Lakes in 1990, he contacted the only company in the region he had heard of—Taylor Wine Co. As it happened, Taylor was about to go bankrupt, but the receptionist told him that Dr. Frank’s down the road was looking for a winemaker. Bell got the job.

He stayed with the winery until 1995, when Fox Run owner Scott Osborn—who’d had Bell got to know while judging V&WM’s International Eastern Wine Competition—asked Bell to become his winemaker.

At Fox Run, Bell takes a science-based approach to winemaking, but doesn’t consider himself to be a hard-core traditionalist. While he likes the control of using commercial yeasts and prefers to filter his wines, he’s also willing to experiment with things like native fermentations—as long as they don’t get in the way of pure varietal expression.

One of the things Bell says he loves most about being a winemaker is the sense of community. He considers his fellow Finger Lakes vintners as collaborators and co-creators, rather than competitors.

“Peter’s intelligence, humbleness, passion for great wine and willingness to share his wealth of knowledge,” enthused Reinhardt of Anthony Road. “… these qualities make him a man to be admired deeply.”
Bob Bertheau
Chateau Ste. Michelle

Many winemakers say that it's more difficult to make large volumes of consistently good, well-priced wine than it is to make small batches of expensive wine. Bob Bertheau, head winemaker at Washington state's Chateau Ste. Michelle (CSM), oversees the production of several million cases of wine per year and 50-plus different wines, turning out both great values at the lower price-points and high-end reserve and single-vineyard bottlings, all showing remarkable quality and consistency.

Founded in 1884, Chateau Ste. Michelle is the oldest winery in Washington and owns 3,500 vineyard acres in the Columbia Valley. Sold to be the world's largest producer of riesling (1 million cases), CSM's other strengths are chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, merlot and cabernet sauvignon. It's the big dog in the Ste. Michelle Wine Estates pound, which includes Washington brands Columbia Crest, Northstar, Spring Valley Vineyard and Col Solare (a partnership with Tuscany's Polo

Cathy Corison
Corison Winery

This is the second year that Cathy Corison has graced our "Most Admired" list and it's no mystery why: She makes some of the Napa Valley's finest cabernet sauvignon wines.

Corison's prized estate vineyard, Kronos, was planted in the early 1970s and is home to some of Napa Valley's oldest cabernet Sauvignon vines. The Corison vineyard's well-drained, bale gravelly loam soils and rare St. George rootstock combine to produce what Corison calls "full, rich and delicious" wines.

With a rare combination of power and elegance, Corison's flagship Kronos and Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon wines (sourced from benchland vineyards between Rutherford and St. Helena) have earned her a reputation as a top-notch winemaker—not only among critics and trade members, but also fellow winemakers.

Corison distinguished herself by harvesting at lower sugars, and credits a touch of redleaf virus in the Kronos vineyard with slowing down sugar accumulation. Her winemaking technique has remained largely the same over the years, emphasizing minimal intervention and gentle handling.

Corison spent 30 years honing her skills at wineries including Chappellet Vineyard, Stag's Leap Vineyard, York Creek Vineyards and Long Meadow Ranch. In 1987 she produced the first vintage of Corison cabernet, and in 1999, she broke ground on the Corison Vineyard in St. Helena.

Despite Napa Valley's stylistic shift toward richer, higher-octane cabernets in the 1980s and 1990s, Corison refused to follow the trend. Throughout her winemaking career, her cabernets have retained their signature balance, power and elegance, along with alcohol levels well under 14%.

Corison achieves this style by harvesting at lower sugars, and this year she is using a touch of redleaf virus to slow down sugar accumulation. Her winemaking technique has remained largely the same over the years, emphasizing minimal intervention and gentle handling.

Corison's Kronos and Napa Valley cabernets are made from hand-picked grapes and aged in French oak barrels for at least 18 months. The Kronos cabernet, and in 1999, she broke ground on the Corison Vineyard in St. Helena.

Despite the demand and critical acclaim for Corison's wines, she has few regrets. Look up integrity in the dictionary and there she'll be.
Paul Draper
Ridge Vineyards

From the information in Paul Draper’s bio, one can easily glean that he is a man of avid intellectual curiosity and great intelligence—and not one to shy away from life’s adventures and opportunities.

Before becoming Ridge Vineyards’ winemaker 45 years ago, Draper graduated with a degree in philosophy from Stanford University, then studied French at Paris-Sorbonne University. He returned to Stanford to continue coursework in political science and Spanish, and worked in Chile for four years to help communities establish sustainable businesses.

While in Chile, Draper was asked to make wine for a community assistance program. Despite having no winemaking training, he accepted the challenge and produced his first wine. Once back in California, he met Dave Bennion, a Stanford research scientist, at a wine tasting. Bennion and his partners had just purchased Ridge Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and in 1969, they hired Draper as their winemaker.

Ridge was sold to Japanese businessman Akihiko Otsuka in 1987, but Draper has steered the winery and its Sonoma County sister, Ridge Lytton Springs, since the beginning.

Whether it be merlot and cabernet sauvignon from the Carpenteria vineyard, or old-vine zinfandel from Lytton Springs in Dry Creek Valley, Draper’s wines have always been complex, balanced and elegant, signatures of the site, and beautiful agers.

Draper believes that wines that are lush and fruity when young won’t last long, and that overripeness masks vineyard character. With special sites such as Ridge’s co-ops de Bordeaux Monte Bello Vineyard, planted in 1959, and the Geyserville Vineyard in Sonoma County, with its 80-year-old zinfandel and carignane vines, he doesn’t want to mess with their personality.

With that same reasoning, Draper shuns the use of commercial yeast, micro-oxygenation and other manipulations. Beginning with wines from the 2011 vintage, he lists on labels the ingredients used to produce them.

Draper is a Zinfandel Advocates & Producers pioneer, a cherisher of old vines, and a proponent of single-vineyard wines. In addition to landing a spot on our 2013 “Most Admired” list, his honors include 2000 Decanter (magazine) Man of the Year, 2000 Wine Spectator Distinguished Service Award and 2013 Winemakers’ Winemaker, from the Institute of Masters of Wine.

He is a favorite with European wine press and trade, who appreciate the Bordeaux-like structure of his wines and the flagship Ridge Monte Bello Cabernet Sauvignon’s remarkable showings in blind tastings against the world’s best.

“Despite being inexorably linked with the history of modern Californian wine, Paul is not one to rest on his laurels or dwell on the past,” said Tim MacRae, MW, buyer for Global Wine Co. “Nevertheless, he has stuck doggedly to his winemaking philosophy over more than four decades, eschewing fluctuating fashions and changing attitudes towards ripeness levels, use of American oak, and technological interventions in the winery, favoring wines that display the same legacy of highly expressive, world-class, ageworthy wines.”
**Merry Edwards**

**Merry Edwards Winery**

Merry Edwards left Mount Eden in 1977 to be the founding winemaker at Matanzas Creek Winery in Sonoma County. That same year, a visit to Burgundy convinced her that clonal diversity and matching clones to sites led to more complex wines—a thoroughly foreign concept at the time, igniting the skepticism of her peers, she persevered, and in the 1980s finally began convincing growers to plant a mix of clones.

In 1984, Edwards left Matanzas Creek to become a consultant and focus on her own small vineyard in the Russian River Valley. But in 1989, the bank called in its loan and Edwards' Merry Vintners went bankrupt. The following year she joined Vintech, which had purchased Domaine Laurier (also in the Russian River area) and built a winery to Edwards' specifications. Within a year, Vintech, too, had gone under, and Edwards' prized phot noir lots were sold on the bulk market.

She relaunched a consulting career until 1997, when she and her husband, Ken CooperSmith, found investors and purchased an underutilized Russian River property that would become Meredith Estate Vineyard. A vineyard and focus on her own small winery in the Russian River Valley.

**Josh Jensen**

**Calera Wine Co.**

A long time ago and in a galaxy far, far away, Josh Jensen ended his search for the ideal spot in California to grow pinot noir grapes.

He spent years poring over geological maps and scouring the state for the one element he knew was crucial to the production of classic pinot noir. A place that loved from Burgundy, it was limestone in the soil, and the problem was, California was considered a mediocrity. Jensen’s 40 years of pinot devotion can be considered prescient.

Today, he remains the lone grape grower on Mt. Harlan, now an AVA, and supplements production with purchased Central Coast grapes that go into a moderately priced line of wines. But it’s the estate pinot noirs that are Calera’s shining stars, consistently graceful, with stony earthiness, refreshing acidity and capacity for long lives in the cellar.

So how did Jensen find his holy grail? It’s not what you might think.

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Daryl Groom

Groom Wines

This award is one of many such acknowledgements for Daryl Groom. During his 30-plus years as a winemaker in his native Australia and in California, Groom has won multiple “Winemaker of the Year” awards for his work at Geyser Peak Winery in Sonoma County, and was named in 2013 as one of Intovine.com’s 100 most influential people in the U.S. wine industry.

Groom took an interest in wine at age 12, while living with his brother in Australia. His parents had been beer drinkers, but his brother—a newly minted lawyer with some disposable income—was exploring wine. The tastes Groom was allowed on special occasions inspired him to attend a day at Roseworthy Agricultural College—the only winemaking school in Australia at the time—and sign on to its enology program.

However, Groom considers the time he spent working in the cellar for Australian winemaker Peter Lehmann and Rodney Chapman to be his true wine education.

He went on to become the senior red-wine maker at Penfolds, where he oversaw the making of Grange—Australia’s most celebrated and iconic wine. From 1990 to 2005, Groom was the executive winemaker at Peak Wines International, which owned Geyser Peak and Wild Horse Winery & Vineyard, and was the senior vice president of operations and winemaking for Beam Wine Estates in 2006-2007.

In 1996, he founded Groom Wines, a small Barossa Valley winery focused on shiraz and grenache. In addition to his role as a “flying winemaker,” traveling back and forth from his home in Sonoma County to South Australia, Groom recently began working with DRG to produce wines under the DRG label.

In Groom’s estimation, his most meaningful winemaking achievement to date is a $13 blend called Cobly Red, created to raise money for heart research. Launched in 2011, the wine was inspired by Groom’s son, Cobly, who endured two open-heart surgeries before age 10 to repair a congenitally faulty heart valve. So far the wine has raised more than $200,000 for heart-related charities.

Groom is admired not only for his winemaking ability but also for his warmth and approachability. “He’s the best winemaker I’ve ever worked with,” said Willa Kenison, formerly production and vineyard manager for Inglenook Winery in Napa Valley. “He’s always been there for me. I can call him at any time.”

Groom is also a well-known philanthropist, having raised more than $500,000 for heart-related charities. Groom’s son, Colby, who endured two open-heart surgeries before age 10 to repair a congenitally faulty heart valve, has a foundation in his name, the Colby Red Foundation, that raises money for heart-related charities.

Jim Klein

Navarro Vineyards

It could be said that Jim Klein takes the concept of humbleness a little too far. The Navarro Vineyards website barely mentions his name, there’s little information to be found on the Internet. And at press time—just as harvest was ramping up—the winery folks were just too busy to dig up anything more recent than an article published in 2002, when Klein was named the San Francisco Chronicle’s “Winemaker of the Year.”

What is universally known about Klein, however, is that he makes some of Mendocino County’s— and indeed, California’s—most beautiful wines. His pinot noirs, along with Alsace-style rieslings, gewürztraminers and muscats, have earned Navarro countless medals in international wine competitions.

Klein joined Navarro as winemaker in 1995, beating out more than 100 candidates for the job. Mendocino County is a long way from the San Fernando Valley, where Klein grew up as the son of a glass cutter and a bank teller. With no intention of pursuing the agricultural life, he took a job auditing the books for Bing Crosby Productions as a young man; I do that with no one else.”

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Greg La Follette decided to become a winemaker when he realized his first career choice—bagpipe player—just wasn’t practical. That’s fortunate for the wine world, because for more than two decades La Follette has been using his scientific and artistic talents to create remarkable pinot noir and chardonnay wines.

With a natural aptitude for science and chemistry, La Follette earned a double bachelor’s degree in plant biology and chemistry from California State University Northridge. After a stint as a staff chemist at UC San Francisco, he went on to earn a master’s degree in food science and technology at UC Davis.

At Davis, La Follette found his true calling: seeking out the best possible winemaking methods and uncovering the mysteries of why they’re successful. While working in the cellar of the student winery, he became fascinated — some would say obsessed — with the scientific components of mouthfeel. With a wave of interest in new production techniques in California, he received funding from the Napa Valley Vintners to study sur lie and batonnage.

In 1991, he became a research viticulturist/enologist at Beaujolais Vineyard, where he spent a year working with legendary wine master André Tchelistcheff. After a stint in Australia, La Follette was hired as a consultant for Kendall-Jackson, pioneering himself in the company’s vineyards to analyze soils and determine the most suitable rootstocks and clones.

La Follette sealed his reputation as one of California’s premier pinot noir winemakers in 1994 when he became general manager and winemaker at Flowers Vineyard & Winery. The production facility he built at Flowers is still considered a model of gravity-flow, “green” winery design. He also undertook major replanting of the vineyards, switching to a cane-pruned, double-Guyot system, which resulted in more even ripening and better soil penetration.

He left Flowers in 2001 to found Tandem Wines, producing small-lot chardonnay and pinot noir from vineyards in the Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and other appellations. At the same time, he embarked on a career as a vineyard and winery consultant, helping to design “green” wineries around the world. La Follette also consulted on the design of the groundbreaking UC Davis teaching winery.

In 2003, Tandem Wines was purchased by Pete Kight, proprietor of Quivira Vineyards & Winery in Dry Creek Valley, who retained La Follette as a consultant. In 2010, Kight launched a new brand called La Follette to showcase outstanding cool-climate wines. In Mendocino and Sonoma counties, La Follette’s lifelong obsession with mouthfeel has paid off in the wonderful balance and texture of his namesake pinot noir and chardonnay.

“Greg La Follette has always put his background in biology and chemistry to the best possible use: coaxing barrels of pinot noir and chardonnay through long, wild fermentations,” said wine writer and V&WM columnist Tim Teichgraeber. “His wines are dramatic and consistently reflect their vineyard sites.”

Deborah Parker Wong, Northern California editor for The Tasting Panel, admires La Follette’s community-mindedness. “He’s part of a group of winemakers bound together by the Lookout Ridge ‘Wine for Wheelchairs’ campaign,”
Jim Law

Linden Vineyards

Admiration can be won by producing great wines, and Jim Law of Linden Vineyards qualifies in that respect. Yet he is just as respected in Virginia winemaking circles for mentoring up-and-coming winemakers as he is for his chardonnays and Bordeaux-style blends.

Jim Dolphin of Delaplane Cellars, Jeff White of Glen Manor Vineyards and Rutger de Vink of RoVé Vineyards are among those who worked at Linden before doing their own thing. A media-tasting of a vertical of Linden chardonnays and Bordeaux blends.

Ted Lemon

Littorai Wines

Despite his deep experience making wines in Burgundy, Ted Lemon isn’t intent on mimicking the region in the pinot noirs and chardonnays he makes for his Littorai label. Burgundy is Burgundy, and the western Sonoma Coast and Anderson Valley regions from which he now sources grapes have their own personalities and dictate the style of wines that will be made from them.

In every case for Lemon, that style is one of elegance and precision, restraint and age-worthiness, structure and all else expression of varietal character. His time in Burgundy informs his winemaking and viticulture decisions, yet California grapes are the key ingredients.

Lemon spent time at the University of Dijon as a study-abroad student while still in high school. He returned to France after college on a fellowship to study viticulture and enology, and apprenticed for such Burgundy domaines as Dujac and Roumier, returning to the U.S to work for Josh Janssen at Calera in California, then was called back to Burgundy to be the winemaker at Guy Roulot in Meursault.

In 1983, not only was Lemon the first American to oversee winemaking at a Burgundy house, he was just 24 years old. Once back in the States, Lemon made superb chardonnays for Chateau Wodner on Howell Mountain in Napa Valley (now Ladera), then founded Littorai Wines with his wife, Heidi, in 1993, while paying the bills as a consultant in California, Oregon and more recently, with Burn Cottage in New Zealand. They decided to purchase grapes from Mendocino County’s Anderson Valley and western Sonoma, for the sites’ diverse soil and cool coastal conditions (the Latin word littorai is plural for coast).

Littorai’s wines soon captured the interest of sommeliers seeking pinot noirs and chardonnays that were expressive without being flamboyant. Production grew slowly, from an initial 150 cases per year to 4,000 today. There is no public tasting room, as there simply isn’t enough wine to go around.

Devoted to sustainable and Biodynamic farming, Lemon now grows five acres of grapes at the Pyramid Vineyard west of Sebastapol and at The Haven, farther west near Occidental. He also has access to several vineyards, among them B.A. Thieriot, Charles Heintz and Hirsch in the Sonoma Coast, and One Acre and Roman in Anderson Valley. A straw-bale-walled, gravity-flow winery opened in 2009.

Lemon shuns the limelight despite his deep winemaking stature. Yes, he’s just a farmer and a family man. Despite his deep experience making wines in Burgundy, Ted Lemon isn’t intent on mimicking the region in the pinot noirs and chardonnays he makes for his Littorai label. Burgundy is Burgundy, and the western Sonoma Coast and Anderson Valley regions from which he now sources grapes have their own personalities and dictate the style of wines that will be made from them.
Dennis Martin

Dennis Martin has made wine for Mendocino County’s Fetzer Vineyards for 30 years, a street few others can claim unless they own their own wineries. He’s endured ownership changes, filled the huge shoes of Fetzer founding winemaker Paul Dolan, and worked with hundreds upon hundreds of California vineyards to continue the flow of Fetzer’s varietally labeled wines while maintaining quality, it’s not been an easy job, and he’s done it well, if the judgment is made based on the consistently delicious wines he and his team make at everyday-drinking prices.

Yet there is a new spring in Martin’s step, now that Fetzer’s new owner, Concha y Toro, has done it well, if the judgment is made based on the consistently delicious wines he and his team make at everyday-drinking prices.

For 23 years, Italian native Luca Paschina has produced the wines at Virginia’s Barboursville Vineyards near Charlottesville, earning the winery numerous gold medals, as well as preeminent Governor’s Cup and Monticello Cup awards. He’s a long way from the Piemonte vineyards in which he played as a child, yet Paschina has embraced Virginia as his home, and the state has enthusiastically embraced him back.

Before landing in Virginia, the third-generation winemaker produced wine in the Finger Lakes region of New York and California’s Napa Valley. He sold wine in Switzerland for two years before returning to Italy to work in vineyards with his father and uncle.

In 1991, he officially joined Barboursville Wines, and his experience has brought out the best in Virginia grapes, and other producers have taken note. Zonin’s financial support hasn’t hurt, either. With more than 250 wineries in the state, Virginia has gained national and international praise for its wines, and Paschina deserves much of the credit.

“Luca Paschina has spent the last quarter century setting the standard and pushing the envelope— for Virginia’s rise in prominence as the most exciting region in the world,” said wine writer Dave McIntyre. “He produces wine at a high quality level on a commercial scale, and as such has been Virginia’s leading wine ambassador to the world.”
Ravenswood’s “No Wimpy Wines” motto isn’t just a marketing tagline; it’s Joel Peterson’s personal winemaking philosophy. Known as the “Godfather of California Zinfandel,” Ravenswood Winery’s founding winemaker has been a passionate preserver of the state’s ancient zinfandel, petite sirah, carignane and other old vines since he first began working with Russian River Valley master Joseph Swan in the early 1970s.

An old photo on the Joseph Swan Vineyards website shows a bearded, long-haired Peterson soaking up knowledge from Swan and famed Beaulieu Vineyard winemaker André Tchelistcheff. Today, the hair is short and the beard is neatly trimmed, yet Peterson remains driven to produce site-specific zinfandels and “mixed blacks” field blends from vines that have been in the ground for as long as a century, some of them longer.

While working as a cancer immunology researcher at a San Francisco hospital and dabbling in wine on the side, he founded Ravenswood in 1976 with little funding and an ambitious desire to produce wines that would display the distinctive characteristics of the old-vine vineyards he discovered. His zinfandels earned such a following that the vineyard-designated bottlings — as well as the affordable county blends and state-sourced Vintners Blend — helped convince growers to keep their vines in the ground rather than replanting them to more lucrative varieties.

Peterson’s desire to take care of California’s old vines led him to become a senior advisor to the Historic Vineyard Society (HVS), a nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring them with the same spirit that historic homes are preserved. His son, Morgan, who owns Bedrock Wine Co., is a founding member of HVS, with Joel offering assistance.

Peterson was also instrumental in the development and rapid growth of the ZAP organization — Zinfandel Advocates & Producers — formed in 1991. Promoting a single variety was novel at the time, and while other varietal groups have followed the ZAP model, none have come close to drawing the 10,000 wine enthusiasts ZAP did at its annual event in San Francisco, until a more intimate format was introduced in 2014.

Although Ravenswood was sold in 2001 to Constellation Brands, and a senior vice president title has been attached to his name, Peterson continues to oversee Ravenswood fruit sourcing and winemaking, and gives special attention to the single-vineyard zinfandels, which include Barricia and Old Hill in Sonoma Valley, Big River in Alexander Valley, Teldeschi in Dry Creek Valley, Belloni in Russian River Valley and Dickerson in Napa Valley.

“Joel Peterson is someone I have looked up to for a long time and I know I’m not alone,” said Alison Crowe, winemaker for Plata Wine Partners. “Years ago when I was a winemaking student at UC Davis, I was impressed by Joel’s relentless championing of zinfandel and zinfandel quality, as well as his business and marketing acumen. No one has done more to put the California zinfandel on the map. He also gives a lot of his time to industry organizations and to budding winemakers and students.”
David Ramey

Ramey Wine Cellars

David Ramey’s resume is a long and distinguished one. It includes a UC Davis graduate degree and winemaking positions at Chateau Pauillac in Bordeaux, and Stelz, Matanzas Creek, Chalk Hill, Rudd Estate and Dominus in California.

At Ramey Wine Cellars, which he founded in 1996 with his wife, Carla, in Healdsburg, Calif., Ramey produces chardonnays, cabernet sauvignons and syrahs that are among the most acclaimed from the state, including in Napa Valley, Lake County and Virginia.

His early work with Christian Mouiex and family at Petrus informed Ramey’s winemaking sensibilities. Understanding that he could not replicate Bordeaux’s typical restrained characteristics, from super-star vineyards such as Hyde and Hudson in Napa Carneros, and Ritchie in Sonoma’s Russian River Valley. The sturdy yet supple cab依 are made from Napa Valley grapes, the minerality in another, and lasting ten until the year ended, he and Carla opened the Westside Farms vineyard on the Middle Reach of the Russian River Valley. They are converting an old hop kiln on the property to a tasting room, and intend to add caves and a winery, releasing the first vintage, 2012, in 2014.

“David Ramey is both an artist and a craftsman, helping clients reach new heights in terms of quality and management,” said winemaker, Rodney Strong Vineyards, in Healdsburg greatly improved its small-lot wines, thanks to Ramey’s expertise, and he has also advised clients elsewhere, including in Napa Valley, Lake County and Virginia.

“David Ramey is a sought-after winemaking and viticulture consultant, Rodney Strong Vineyards, in Healdsburg greatly improved its small-lot wines, thanks to Ramey’s expertise, and he has also advised clients elsewhere, including in Napa Valley, Lake County and Virginia.

Johannes Reinhardt

Anthony Road Winery and Kemmeter Wines

Johannes Reinhardt has been the winemaker at Anthony Road Wine Co., on Seneca Lake since 2000, yet his enological history dates to 1438, when his family began producing wine in Germany. Formally trained and with years of hands-on experience, Reinhardt sought a change of scenery and landed in New York to intern at Dr. Frank’s Viňehra Wine Cellars, then joined Anthony Road, in 2003. He was certainly not the first German to emigrate to the United States and make wine – Dr. Konstantin Frank and Hermann Werner come to mind – but he may have been one of the most determined. Reinhardt spent years heading through immigration red tape to remain in the U.S., and continue making wine in New York’s Finger Lakes region.

He achieved remarkable success with his rieslings, gewürztraminers, pinot noirs and pinot blancs made from Finger Lakes grapes, including winning the 2005 Governor’s Cup as the best New York wine for a 2008 Anthony Road Semi-Dry Riesling. Reinhardt is one of the trio of winemakers behind the acclaimed Tierce Dry Riesling. At the 2010 Riesling du Monde in Strasbourg, France, Anthony Road was the only non-European winery to win one of the seven Trophies of Excellence.

While all this was going on, immigration crackdowns put Reinhardt and his wife, Imelda, in peril of being deported. He toiled for seven years to earn a green card – permanent worker status – and was denied several times. The couple contemplated relocation to another country, until the volume of written testimonials to the importance of and contributions made by Reinhardt won immigration officials over in 2012.

In 2013, Reinhardt realized another lifelong dream: starting his own wine label. Last year he launched Kemmeter Wines on Seneca Lake named for his maternal grandmother and released a handful of rieslings and pinot noirs, riesling and pinot blanc on their property, Johannes will remain the Anthony Road wine maker while he bottles a projected 2,500 cases a year of his Kemmeter wines.

“Johannes Reinhardt has the remarkable ability to make riesling that seems more sublime elixir than ordinary wine,” said V&WM Eastern Correspondent Marguerite Thomas. “Never one to bask in the light of his own stardom, Johannes is a uniquely collegial vitner as well as an astute and talented Rae. He is widely admired for his generosity, his unpretentiousness and his absolute dedication to the excellence of wine, not just his own brand, but also to the success of his neighbors and the entire region.”
Rollin Soles
Argyle Winery / ROCO

Despite his Snidely Whiplash ‘stache, Rollin Soles is a gregarious guy with a Texas drawl, folksy jokes, and a good heart that would have him rescuing women from railroad tracks rather than tying them to trees.

As a winemaker for Argyle Winery and his own ROCO Winery, Soles has the skills, personality, and industry respect to be a positive poster boy for Oregon wines. He founded Argyle in 1987 with famed Australian winemaker Brian Croser; turning the Willamette Valley winery into a world-class producer of traditional-method sparkling wines, pinot noir, chardonnay and riesling, ROCO, launched in 2003 with Soles’s wife, Corby Stonebraker, makes a more personal statement with its wines.

Soles left his permanent position as Argyle’s general manager and winemaker in 2013, staying on as a consultant. He still spends time in Argyle’s vineyards and makes the blending decisions with winemaker Nate Kastermann, shedding his managerial duties has freed him up to devote more time to ROCO, which produces pinot noir and chardonnay. The name is the combination of Rollin and Corby.

Soles and Stonebraker planted their Chehalem Mountain property to pinot noir in 2001 and bottled their first Private Stash Pinot Noir in 2003. This year, they built a winery in 2009 and in 2012 opened a tasting room. Purchased grapes supplement their 3,500-case production, with several vineyard-designates, including Marsh Estate and Clover Hill pinot noirs. The Stalker is a tiny-production pinot noir made with old-dilineated cluster stalks.

‘While I’ve never been a fan of whole-cluster fermentation for my wines, I am influenced by the way the Vipitoilles region of Italy already does whole clusters,’ Soles said. ‘And I have an abiding love of whole-berry fermentation. I took a bit of a “walk on the wild side” to produce a unique Stalker Pinot Noir. It’s a wine with subdued senses from the stalks, without the “greenness” of the fresh stalks.’

Soles is a founding member of the Oregon Chardonnay Alliance (ORCA), which works to produce distinctive Oregon chardonnay. ‘The early Willamette Valley chardonnays were mostly lackluster, due to the use of California clones and rootstocks. As for Willamette Valley’s infamous rainstorms during harvest, Soles has this to say: “When it rains in California during harvest, winemakers get all worried. When it rains in Oregon, we go fishing.”

“Rollin began the best sparkling wine house in Oregon and possibly in the U.S., at Argyle,” said Chalone founder Harry Peterson-Nedry, “and has been instrumental in organizing other-than-pinot noir varietal work on chardonnay and riesling. His ROCO is a new, strong brand.”

Wendy Stuckey
White Wine Maker, Chateau Ste. Michelle

Not a one-trick winemaker, she is also responsible for CSM’s sauvignon blancs, gewurztraminers, pinot gris and chardonnays – and they mirror the rieslings’ their superb balance.

Bertheau met Stuckey when she was an intern and he was the assistant winemaker at Chalk Hill Winery in Healdsburg, Calif. “We stayed in touch over the years and I remained a fan of her wines,” Bertheau said. “When she attended our Riesling Rendezvous event in June 2007, it led to an unexpected reunion and interesting discussions about Chateau Ste. Michelle and Washington winemaking. In Australia, most of the rieslings are on the drier side where a winemaker really has to pay attention to the balance of acidity. Wendy offers new and exciting ways to keep our wines in total harmony.”

For example, she uses a variety of yeasts in the fermentations, evaluating the aromas and fine-tuning the wines from pressing to bottling. Growing and purchasing grapes from cooler regions in eastern Washington is paramount.

“We’ve sourced grapes from everywhere and we can see how this wine has evolved from the early days,” Stuckey said. “When we once used fruit from warmer vineyards in the Columbia Valley, we’re now buying more fruit from cooler climates, including the Ancient Lakes region near Quincy.”

“An AVA, Stuckey also has a signature wine: Waussie Riesling (Washington + Australia) – that’s dry and nervy.

“After a career making stellar riesling for one of Australia’s largest wineries, Wendy was hired to work in Washington and her impact on the style and on Washington wine’s image cannot be matched,” wines writer Dan Berger said.

‘The rieslings being made at Washington state’s Chateau Ste Michelle – the largest producer of riesling in the world at more than 1 million cases per year – are better than ever, and Australian transplant Wendy Stuckey has had a decisive hand in that. There is a vibrancy and tension to CSM reislings that weren’t there before Stuckey’s arrival in 2007, and her winemaking experience at Wolf Blass in Australia’s Barossa Valley has influenced her stylistic decisions.

CSM’s pre-Stuckey rieslings were mostly off-dry in style, with juicy tropical and yellow stone fruit flavors. Under her hand – and in concert with director of winemaking Bob Bertheau and Edna brand partner Ernst Loosen of Weingut Dr. Loosen of Germany – the rieslings are on the drier side and there is a balance of sweetness and acidity. From the Columbia Valley appellation, blends to the Cold Creek Vineyard Riesling to the Ethos Reserve Late Harvest Riesling, Stuckey’s imprint shows in the scrumptious personality of the wines.”
Margo Van Staaveren
Chateau St. Jean

Despite its name, Sonoma’s Chateau St. Jean winery has no connection to France, nor is it a wannabe-French affectation of some California winery owner. Its namesake, Jean Sheffield Merzoian, who married Central Valley table grape grower Ed Merzoian, Jean, Ed and her brother, Kenneth Sheffield, founded Chateau St. Jean in 1973 in Kenwood. It’s “St. Jean, not ‘St. Jeane’,” These days, the place is informally and affectionately known at Chateau Margo, for winemaker Margo Van Staaveren, who has had her hands on the wines for 35 harvests. She began as a lab technician in 1980, advanced to assistant winemaker, then associate winemaker, then winemaker, following in the footsteps of Richard Arrowood, Don Van Staaveren (her husband, they met at Chateau St. Jean) and Steve Heiden. She has seen several changes in ownership in those 35 years and through it all, her wines have continued the streak of excellence established from the start by Arrowood.

Initially known as a white-wine house, Chateau St. Jean has, over the years, expanded its portfolio to include dozens of wines, white and red, at several price-points, and sourced from vineyards throughout Sonoma County, vineyard designation, so important to CSJ’s early success, continues; Van Staaveren’s Robert Young, Bele Terre, Durell and Cold Creek vineyard chardonnays are stellar examples of vineyard-character presentation, coming from vines planted in Alexander Valley (Young, Bele Terre), Sonoma Valley (Durell) and Sonoma Coast (Cold Creek). The Le Parthe Brode (Russian River Valley) and Lyon Vineyard (Alexander Valley) tume blancs are from single vineyards as well.

On the red side, Van Staaveren’s flagship wine is Cinq Cepages, a cabernet sauvignon-based wine that demonstrates her blending skills, as the fruit comes from multiple sites. The 1999 vintage was Wine Spectator magazine’s No. 1 wine in the world in 1999. The county and appellation labels offer excellent value, estate-labeled bottlings are a notch up in quality, and the Reserves — merlot, cabernet sauvignon and malbec among them — are the wines Van Staaveren says are her most enjoyable to assemble.

“She combines great winemaking skill and vineyard knowledge with a warm, engaging personality. She’s confident yet without an obvious ego, and is fiercely loyal to her team. To continue to show great winemaking energy after 35 years at the same winery is pretty remarkable.”

E N D
In 1981, John Williams and his family established Frog’s Leap in the heart of Napa Valley, in the so-called sacred “dust” of Rutherford. Surrounded by iconic wineries such as Inglenook, Beaulieu Vineyard, Caimus Vineyards and Cakebread Cellars, Frog’s Leap took the lily pad less traveled, focusing early in its life on organic viticulture, dry farming, lower-alcohol wines and displaying a sense of humor in a most serious of winemaking regions.

The “ribbit” branding on the corks, the “time’s fun when you’re having flies” motto and clever website continue to be outrageously consumer-friendly. Upon learning that his property on Conn Creek Road was once a frog farm, providing legs to San Francisco restaurants around the turn of the century, Williams hit upon a marketing angle that has resonated with wine buyers for years.

More seriously, he is among the most devoted winegrowers to organic viticulture and limited, if any, irrigation, in California. His sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, zinfandel, merlot and cabernet sauvignon wines, made in concert with winemaker Paula Moschetti, are produced from organically grown grapes, either from the estate or purchased.

The fruit is harvested at modest ripeness levels, bucking the Napa norm driven by influential critics who adore ripe, hedonistic wines. Frog’s Leap wines are lean and elegant, not ultra-ripe and massive, and tend to reflect vintage variation over homogenity. It’s the John Williams way, to let the vineyards express themselves through the wines, with as little human intervention as possible — critics be damned.

The signature wines are those made from Rutherford estate grapes, merlot and cabernet sauvignon. They are released a year later than the Napa Valley-labeled bottlings, when Williams deems them ready. He might miss many publications’ annual vintage reviews, yet again — critics be damned.

Recently, Williams’ son, Rory, has joined the Frog’s Leap business (and that of his mother’s, Julie Johnson, at Tres Sabores), and established his own brand, Calder, where he’s taken on the challenge of making such obscure varieties (for Napa) as charbono and riesling. A chip off the old block in taking the less obvious path.

“John is uncompromising when it comes to allowing the wines to display varietal and regional characters that pay homage to the history of the Napa Valley,” said wine writer Dan Berger. “The Frog’s Leap style is based on organic farming, perfect balance and integrity.”

**HONORABLE MENTIONS**

With so many worthy winemakers in North America, it was a difficult task to narrow the field to just 20. Several nominees missed making the final list by just a handful of votes, and we feel they should be acknowledged. They include:

- Ross Cobb, Cobb Wines
- Paul Dolan (independent)
- Chris Figgins, Figgins Family Wine Estates
- Larry Mawby, L. Mawby Vineyards
- Sean O’Keefe, Chateau Grand Traverse
- Lynne Penner-Ash, Penner-Ash Wine Cellars