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A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black strapless dress and a long red beaded necklace, is smiling and holding a wine glass. She is sitting on a wooden barrel in a cellar filled with many other barrels. The lighting is warm and focused on her.

# C the Menu

## Bay Area Tastemaker

An entrepreneur with a fine-tuned palate, San Francisco's Courtney Cochran is giving the world of wine collecting a modern makeover

BY MELISSA CERIA

Courtney Cochran will soon publish her first book, *Hip Tastes*, a modern guide to wine collecting.



Medlock Ames' Bell Mountain, winery and chardonnay.



**I** try and look extra hip at trade wine events. I think it's an ice breaker," says Courtney Cochran, the fashionable wine consultant and founder of Your Personal Sommelier, a San Francisco-based wine consulting company. Dressed in sleek black with Chanel earrings, Cochran hardly fits the profile of an old-world, stodgy oenophile as she reaches for a glass of rosé, her manicured nails painted fire red. A Los Angeles transplant, Cochran moved to the Bay Area almost two years ago to be closer to the industry in Northern California and to put a cool spin on wine tasting.

Cochran's passion for wine education, coupled with a knack for savvy marketing, helped her launch her business in 2005. The company organizes tasting events, offers wine list consulting and helps individuals with cellar development and management. In just over a year, she has already enlisted corporate clients such as Cisco Systems, IBM and McKinsey & Company.

"She's very knowledgeable and her explanations are exquisite," says Donna Lam, who organized a birthday party for her husband in Los Angeles, where Cochran gave a presentation on white wine and champagne to a group of their friends. "Like many in her generation,

Courtney thinks outside of the box and has a fresh approach," adds Lam. (Since the bash, Lam says her husband will only drink bubbly.)

Cochran has also launched a subsidiary of Your Personal Sommelier called Hip Tastes Events, a monthly party where

twenty- and thirty-somethings mingle in a bar with pourers and winemakers serving interesting vintages. But this isn't your classic jacket-and-tie Bordeaux tasting. Rather, Cochran designs the events around current trends. Recent themes have included The Green Tasting, Get Your Grill On, and Young Guns, which highlighted young winemakers. After each event, she posts photos of the evening online and blogs about these trends on her website and in her weekly wine column at [winecountry.com](http://winecountry.com). "I've always gone to wine events and felt a little marginalized," says Cochran, who graduated from the UCLA Anderson School of Management and is now working toward receiving the Master Sommelier title. "There weren't a lot of things about these kinds of occasions—whether it was the venue or the gimmick—that I could grab hold of and connect with. I wanted to create an experience for young people where they'd want to buy wines and integrate them into their lives." [courtneycochran.com](http://courtneycochran.com).

## COCHRAN'S PICKS

A fresh crop of young winemakers has drawn plenty of attention, primarily because of the high quality of their wines, but also for the unique positioning of their brands. Here, Cochran reveals four of her favorite winemakers in this category and recommends some perfect pairings.

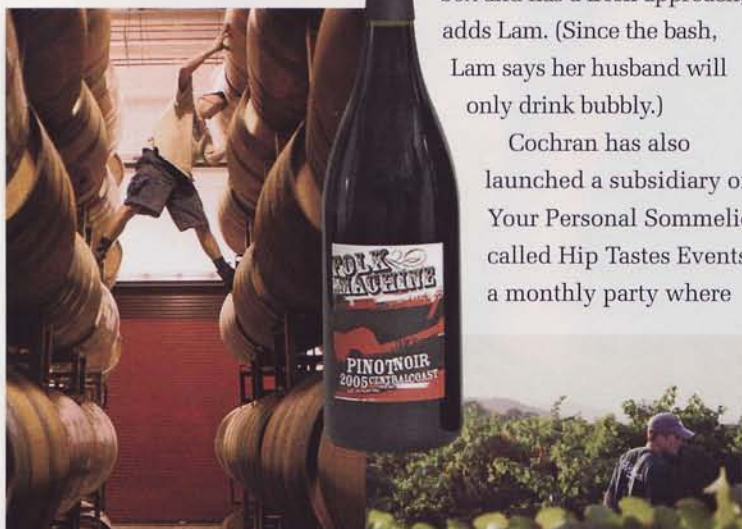
### ROSHAMBO WINERY

Having recently sold its wine facility, awaiting completion of its new digs in Healdsburg, Roshambo has relocated part of its business into a 38-foot R.V. called the Roshambus. The bus tours the country, promoting the brand in towns everywhere. "You have people drinking Cabernet with Cuban cigars, but we'd rather serve wine to adults at a family gathering in the park," says Managing Partner Lamarion Spence. [roshambowinery.com](http://roshambowinery.com).

**SIP** The 2002 "The Reverend" Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel. "It's a full bodied Zin with mouth-smacking fruit, backed-up by a rich elegance that's totally appealing," says Cochran.

**TASTE** Perfect with BBQ chicken pizza, beef brisket or a dynamite burger with ketchup (which brings out the sweetness in the Zin).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 62



Hobo Wine Company's Kenny Likitprakong checking the barrels and grapes.



**STUDIO CITY**  
**SUBLIME SCOOPS**

Frozen yogurt may be having a moment, but creamy gelato is a timeless classic. Gail Silverton—sister to Nancy, she of Mozza and La Brea Bakery fame—quietly opened **Gelato Bar** late last winter with plenty of artisanal flourishes. The 24 ever-changing flavors of custom-made gelato and sorbetto (including classic nocciola, cinnamon-basil and a luscious sugar-free chocolate) from Venetian master Alessandro Fontana are the draw to this arcade-like spot reminiscent of the hangouts on piazzas near Silverton's Umbrian summer home. *4342 1/2 Tujunga Ave., Studio City, 818-487-1717.*

**EMERYVILLE**

**CHARLES AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY**

Opened in April adjacent to the factory where his small-batch goodies are handcrafted, the first retail store of Chuck Siegel's **Charles Chocolates** offers candy kitchen views and frothy mugs of hot cocoa. And if the Emeryville choco-complex is a bit of a schlep, the company's online store is up and running. *6529 Hollis St., Emeryville, 888-652-4412; charleschocolates.com.*



**SAN FRANCISCO**

**Perfecto Perbacco**

It's no surprise Staffan Terje and Umberto Gibin chose the name **Perbacco** (kind of like "ooh la la" in Italian) for their new S.F. restaurant. With their respective culinary resumes reading like a "Best Of S.F." list, Perbacco is one newcomer sure to have staying power. *230 California St., S.F., 415-955-0663; perbaccosf.com.*



BY ALISON CLARE STEINGOLD

THE TASTEMAKERS CONTINUED

**MEDLOCK AMES**

Vintner Ames Morison, who served in the Peace Corps, and his friend and business partner, Christopher Medlock James, are committed to the environment. Their vineyard in Sonoma's Alexander Valley is farmed without insecticides, chemical fertilizers or herbicides and relies on solar energy. *medlockames.com.*

**SIP** 2002 Alexander Valley Bell Mountain Ranch Red.

"It shows layered notes of plums, dried cherries and figs alongside butterscotch, baking spices and toast."

**TASTE** A simple, rustic charcuterie platter and some crispy bread to enjoy as an appetizer wine. Decant for even more aromatic impact.

**HOBO WINE COMPANY AND BANYAN WINES**

Started in 2002 by Thai-American Kenny Likitprakong when he was just 27 years old, Hobo wines produces reds, while its sister label, Banyan, makes whites. "I make wines for younger people who don't have a cellar beneath their houses. I put a lot of value in each bottle," says Likitprakong. *hobowines.com; banyanwines.com.*

**SIP** Banyan: 2005 Santa Lucia Highlands Riesling. "It's made from a cool part of the California coastline and offers up notes of limes, peaches, flowers and minerals."

**TASTE** Pair up this pretty white wine with the likes of Pad Ta Lay, an intense blend of seafood in hot chili sauce backed up by sweet basil and lemon leaves.

**LAVA VINE VINEYARDS**

Located on a steep hillside in the Knights Valley of Sonoma, Lava Vine Vineyards was established in 2004 by Nile Zacherle and Joe Cabral. They produce Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon from grapes grown on the area's volcanically derived soil. Zacherle uses old-school methods, such as harvesting without the use of tractors, and the farming is exclusively organic. *lavavines.com.*

**SIP** 2004 Zacherle Syrah Knights Valley Lawer Vineyard. "It's made from volcanic soils and boasts gorgeous notes of blueberries, dark chocolate, pepper and molasses in a big body."

**TASTE** Great with meat, roasted game or a really concentrated Osso Bucco. ●



Lava Vine grapes, Syrah and Port.

