

FOOD & WINE

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NICK OTTO PHOTOS, REGISTER

The owners of Croccante Pizza in downtown Napa, Hakan and Devrim Kostek, pose for a photograph on Friday, Aug. 4.

Detroit-style pizza? In Napa?

Croccante Artisan Pizza serves it up in downtown

HILARY WENDEL
For the Register

It's not the traditional Napoleon-style pies, nor the Chicago or St. Louis types you'll find at Croccante Artisan Pizza, an eatery on Pearl Street in downtown Napa. Instead, it's the rare-in-this-time-zone Detroit-style pizza, a square slice that's drawing in high praise from both locals and visitors.

Owned by Hakan Kostek and his wife Alice, the restaurant opens its doors in May. Its signature dish is served in an 8x10-inch rectangular pan and sliced into six squares. There are the three elements that define it, Haken said.

First, there is the caramelized cheese, baked into the crispy edges of the pizza. These are not crusts that will not be discarded on the plate, and families may squabble over who gets the corner pieces.



The garlic knots at Croccante Pizza in downtown Napa are seen on Aug. 4.

Second, it has a fluffy and almost buttery crust made from imported Italian flour that Hakan ferments for three days. He says this fermentation process makes it a lighter, more easily digestible crust.

Third, the pizza is topped with high-quality ingredients, including homemade sauces, locally sourced organic vegetables, house-made meatballs, and local cheeses.



The burrata cheese appetizer at Croccante Pizza in downtown Napa are seen on Aug. 4.

The restaurant offers a wine menu that features local vintages or patrons are free to bring their own. (Mondays are free corkage days.) In addition to pizza, the menu offers fresh salads, meatballs, and garlic knots. Where possible, the couple sources their ingredients from the nearby Napa Farmers Market, many vendors of which they know personally from their years of selling freshly baked loaves, German-style pretzels, and pizza under the Napa Baking Company banner.

Hakan is from Turkey, but proudly identifies as Kurdish. He grew up covered in flour. "When I was young, I played with dough and flour in my uncle's bakery" in their small town in the northern part of the country.

"I loved the smells," he said. Later, his family moved to Istanbul, and his father opened two bakeries. Kostek was studying to become a public school teacher, but he was also working alongside his father.

He met his wife while at school, and upon graduation, they both began teaching jobs in Istanbul. But Hakan quickly realized his passion was baking and returned to the family bakeries. Alice continued her teaching job, they had a baby, and it seemed their paths were set as a teacher and baker in Istanbul.

"Until one day, a friend suggested we try the lottery for a green card to go to America," says Alice.



The owner of Croccante Pizza in downtown Napa, Hakan Kostek, removes a pizza from the oven.

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NAPA FARMERS MARKET

History, mystery, and delicious olive oil

SANDY SAUTER

In 2020 (when the Napa Farmers Market moved three times in one year), I spent many early mornings on Saturdays and Tuesdays helping set up vendors before the market opened, shoe-horning each vehicle into the intricate puzzle that is a farmers market set up.

This is when I first met Rena Frey, whom many of you have probably seen, smiling and laughing, at the Atlas Peak Olive Oil booth over the years. We bonded as I helped guide her big white truck into the space allotted for her vehicle, adjacent to her booth space. Let me just say, there were many jibes, ex-

pletives, and belly-laughs in the process.

Since then, we had many conversations covering many subjects, and it was wonderful to learn more about her history with Atlas Peak Olive Oil, and the history of the company. I was fascinated to learn that Atlas Peak Olive Oil's owner Cathy Hammond and her husband moved to the ranch, that has been in the Hammond family since 1882, more than 25 years ago to find the mission olive trees that were planted in 1882 by "Great Grandpa John" as Frey referred to him.



JL SOUSA

Learn more about Atlas Peak Olive Oil, a longtime vendor at the Napa Farmers Market.

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ON WINE

Greg La Follette

When I decided to create a philosophical statement by making a tiny amount of bone-dry Riesling from a great vineyard, I needed a great winemaker. My choice was a man who rarely made Riesling, but who is one of America's best winemakers.

His name isn't widely known even though he has notable credentials, has labored through 69 harvests in a long career, worked four years with the late, esteemed winemaker André Tchelistcheff, and is widely recognized in the wine industry



DAN BERGER

worldwide for his skill.

Also, he possesses a key factor that made him a perfect choice. Greg La Follette, 64, not only knows as much about wines of all kinds

as anyone I ever met, but his one skill that supersedes his knowledge and life experience is that he loves the stuff.

I know of no other winemaker with such an abiding passion for wines of place, varietal composition, and experimental innovations. He loves almost any wine you could throw at him. Eclecticism is welcomed. I've known Greg for nearly 40 years. The Riesling I wanted to make was one that he disagreed with, yet he agreed to do it.

Even though we had some edgy chats during which he suggested I alter my strategy, I knew the grapes I was buying were from a superb vineyard and I trusted that my blueprint and his skills would coalesce. Greg solved every issue with aplomb, a skill widely known to dozens inside the industry for decades. The result was precisely what I had envisioned.

La Follette knows that great wine can be the result of using great fruit grown by great growers. It calls for sensitive guidance, which takes a village to reach excellence. Directing the cast must be a winemaker with vision, passion, and skill.

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THE WINE EXCHANGE

Exploring the Iberian Peninsula, Part 3

Departing Barcelona and the Catalan wine region was bittersweet. During our time there, our group of 25 experienced the country's natural beauty, wines, food and cultural discoveries along with the gracious hospitality

of our hosts and of course the great adventures we experienced. Porto, Vila Nova de Gaia and the Douro Valley were our next stops with a whole new set of adventures and locals awaiting our arrival.

Since formally joining the EU in 1986, Portugal's wine industry has grown and been upgraded several notches both in the vineyard, with newly adopted farming regimens, and in the winery with the acquisition of modern technology and equipment. Over the last decade or so, the international market has



ALLEN BALIK

Please see BALIK, Page A6

WINE TO SAKE

The debut of Tequila Loco

Amongst the Rutherford vineyards we were invited recently to celebrate the United States debut of Tequila Loco. “The name ‘loco,’ which translates to crazy or misfit, celebrates the pioneers and characters that have broken the mold,” Juan Pablo ‘JP’ Torre-Padilla said.

EDUARDO DINGLER

Founded by JP, his uncle and a couple friends, Loco thrives by

producing an unadulterated and pure Tequila that elevates the category.

In order to do so, JP and team enlisted Maestro Tequilero Alberto Navarro who’s spent the last decades studying and educating the art of agave distillery and is also the author of “Larousse del Tequila,” a highly recommended comprehensive tequila guide.

The evening was composed of a tasting of the lineup, opening remarks by JP, Alberto and Eugenio Jardim who amongst his many wine ventures is an official ambassador of Loco.

The location was ideal, at the Sullivan Rutherford Estate which is dressed with a quaint lake along with striking weeping willows and thoughtful architecture. Worth noting that the Sullivan Estate is now owned and operated by JP and team for a few years now and it serves as an excellent sibling project to Loco Tequila.

The evening progressed under the stars with classical music in the background in the hands of a solo harp player setting the tone for the celebration.

A tasting side by side consisting of some marquee Tete de Cuvee brands in a blind setting which proved to shock all the attendees.

The guests included fellow journalists, food and beverage personalities and educators like Master Sommelier Andrea Robinson and accomplished writer Virginia Boone which made for an enticing and inquisitive conversation with Alberto Navarro and JP.

To further elevate the occasion, JP and team invited local Chef Rogelio Garcia from the newly Michelin Star minted Auro Restaurant at the Four Seasons Napa. Rogelio’s mastery of the culinary art stems from years of working at some thrilling restaurants like Angele Napa and Spruce in San Francisco.

Rogelio was tasked with pairing the various Loco expressions with a variety of dishes tying in seasonal California and Mexican ingredients.

The menu included Loco Blanco paired with Hawaiian kampachi sashimi with cucumber, jalapeño vinaigrette, peaches and mint that embraced the lively spirit of this tequila.

The next course consisted of a Brentwood yellow corn soup with Maine lobster and wild watercress successfully matched with Loco Puro Corazon, an expression produced only with the initial heart of the distillation embodying purity and elegance which danced with the sweet aspects of the dish.

Loco Ámbar was next served along with a masterpiece of Australian Wagyu, Xico Mole and Roasted Jimmy Nardellos. Simply breathtaking and enchanting to match the intensity and complexity of the mole along with the fatty bits of the Wagyu and toasted notes of the tequila.

For dessert a chocolate flan with Rainier cherries and hazelnuts. Which carried along with the crème caramel notes of the Ámbar.

The Loco brand is ultimately an ode to old school tequila production, the kind that you feel right about enjoying anytime.

The launch will be strategically focused in the California market and slowly roll to other markets in the United States, thrilled for the opportunity to experience this first hand and in such a memorable evening.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

TUESDAY, AUG. 15

NAPA FARMERS MARKET

8 a.m.-noon. Napa Farmers Market provides vendors offering seasonal produce, meat, eggs, seafood, locally prepared foods and hand-crafted wares. Located at 1100 West St. at Pearl. Info: napafarmersmarket.org.

MUSIC AT THE GRILLE 29

6-8 p.m. Local musicians perform at Grille 29 at the Embassy Suites Napa Valley, 1075 California Blvd., Napa. No cover charge. Info: 707-253-9540.

KNITTING

6 p.m. Want to learn about knitting but don’t know how? That’s OK! This beginner’s class at the Napa Library, 580 Coombs St., will teach you how to knit and lay the foundation for future projects. No registration required. Limited space available. Info: 707-253-4241; napalibrary.org/events.

THURSDAY, AUG. 17

CALISTOGA CONCERTS IN THE PARK

6:30-8:30 p.m. Latin tribute band MAYA performs at Calistoga’s Pioneer Park, 1320 Cedar St. Free admission. Info: visitcalistoga.com; 707-942-6333.

BAILEY CALLAHAN

4-7 p.m. Bailey Callahan performs country songs at Cuvaison’s Los Carneros Estate, 1221 Duhig Road, Napa. Tickets are \$25. Info: cuvaison.com/winery-events; 707-942-2455; carnerostasting@cuvaison.com.

STAND-UP COMEDY

7-9 p.m. Be Bubbly, 1407 Second St., Napa, presents an evening of stand-up comedy hosted by comedian Marcus Mangham. Tickets are \$25 in advance; \$30 at the door. Must be 21 or older. Info: 707-637-4532; bebubblynapa.com/events.

OUT OF THE FIRE GALA

5:30 p.m. The annual Out of the Fire gala supporting the Napa Salvation Army Culinary Training Academy will be held at Raymond Vineyards, 849 Zinfandel Lane, St. Helena. Info: napa.salvationarmy.org.

GEEKS WHO DRINK TRIVIA

7 p.m. The Hollywood Room at Napa Valley Distillery, 2485 Stockton St., Napa, hosts Geeks Who Drink Trivia every Thursday. Join in seven rounds of audio, visual and live hosted trivia. Teams have up to six players. Info: napadistillery.com/events/live-events.

SAVOR AFTER HOURS

8 p.m. J&M Cellars Ballroom, 1030 Main St., Napa, presents Savor After Hours, a wine tasting cabaret starring Maks and Val Chmerkovskiy. Each of the performances immerse audiences in the way wines make us feel through an electrifying blend of dance, music, close-up magic, illusions and more. Additional shows are Friday and Saturday at 6 and 9 p.m., and Sunday at 3 p.m. Info: jamcellarsballroom.com.

FRIDAY, AUG. 18

ST. HELENA FARMERS’ MARKET

7:30 a.m.-noon. Visit Crane Park for

the St. Helena Farmers’ Market offering fresh produce from a variety of local growers. Activities include a free produce tasting, kids’ story time, and face painting. This week’s market features a chef’s demonstration with chef Jeff Libunao of St. Helena’s Harvest Inn at 10:30 a.m. Info: sthelenafarmersmkt.org.

SHOW & SHINE CAR SHOW

5-8:30 p.m. Prior to the big Main Street Reunion car show on Saturday, check out the smaller Show & Shine event – featuring 150 vintage cars – in the lot at Soscol Avenue and Pearl Street. Free admission. Info: donapa.com/event/main-street-reunion-2023.

DRAG, DRINKS AND DANCING

8-10 p.m. Join Ava LaShay, Jolie Vega, and Avery Night for A Blush & Bubbly Evening of Drag, Drinks & Dancing at Be Bubbly, 1407 Second St., Napa. Info: bebubblynapa.com.

STEVIE CORNELL TRIO

7-10 p.m. Stevie Cornell Trio performs at The Hollywood Room, 2485 Stockton St., Napa. Free admission. Info: napadistillery.com/events/live-events.

DAVID RONCONI

5-7 p.m. David Ronconi performs at Merryvale Vineyards, 1000 Main St., St. Helena. Info: merryvale.com; 707-963-7777.

KEVIN HAGUE

8-11 p.m. Kevin Hague performs acoustic Folk and Americana at The Saint, 1351 Main St., St. Helena. Free

admission. thesaintnapavalley.com/events; 707-302-5130.

MOVIES IN THE PARK

6:30-10 p.m. Yountville Parks and Recreation screens “Jungle Cruise” at Yountville Community Park, 2900 Lincoln Ave. Info: townofyountville.com/calendar.aspx.

MUSIC AT THE MANSION TERRACE

6 p.m. Brett Matthews performs at Silverado Resort and Spa, 1600 Atlas Peak Road. Free admission. Info: silveradore-sort.com/napa-valley-events.

DUELING PIANOS

6:30-9 p.m. Monticello Napa Valley, 4242 Big Ranch Road, Napa, hosts Dueling Pianos as part of the Napa Valley Harvest Vintners Music Series. Sing along and dance the night away as two of the best pianists in the business battle it out with high-energy performances. Tickets begin at \$45. Info: cellarpass.com.

SATURDAY, AUG. 19

MAIN STREET REUNION CAR SHOW

10 a.m.-3 p.m. See hundreds of pre-1978 classic cars and hot rods at the Main Street Reunion car show in downtown Napa. Cars will be lined up on Main and Third streets. Free admission. Info: donapa.com/event/main-street-reunion-2023.

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WINE PRESS | NEWS FROM NAPA VALLEY

Mondavi opens Arch & Tower at historic Borreo Building

Robert Mondavi Winery recently opened Arch & Tower in downtown Napa.

“This is an exciting and historic moment for Robert Mondavi Winery, as we open our first ever offsite tasting room and continue to build on our deep connection with the Napa community,” says Lauren Larrabee, general manager of Robert Mondavi Winery, in a press release.

Located in the historic Borreo Building, Arch & Tower combines the energy of downtown Napa with experiences wholly reimagined to emphasize community and bring fresh perspective to the traditional wine tasting experience. “Robert Mondavi was a huge supporter of downtown Napa, an innovator, and the



SUBMITTED

The main tasting room at Arch & Tower now open in downtown Napa.

consummate host himself, so I think he would be proud of what the team has created at Arch & Tower,” says Director of Hospitality Philip Hansell.

Guests arriving for a tasting will be led to the open-air lounge overlooking downtown Napa. The Napa Exploration experience includes a tasting of Robert

Mondavi Winery’s Estates Collection and an array of à la carte bites created to complement the wines, including seasoned waffle fries paired with crème fraiche ranch with trout roe, and red wine braised beef croquettes with house-made mustard.

Within Arch & Tower will also live the To Kalon Collective, a private tasting room celebrating To Kalon Vineyard through offerings from Schrader Cellars, Double Diamond, To Kalon Vineyard Company and Robert Mondavi Winery. With a limited number of appointments available each day, priority access will be granted to club members when reservations open on Aug. 25.

Arch & Tower is open Wednesday through Sunday. Reservations can be made at robertmondavivinery.com/pages/arch-and-tower.

Berger

From A5

And it can’t be done from an ivory tower. Hands and boots must be dirtied. I see Greg often. He’s usually in his universal outfit – bib overalls. His hands are of a rugged outdoorsman, his visage is weathered. There are other telltale signs of someone who’s in the vineyard more than he is in the winery. He embodies a work ethic that can’t be taught in a classroom.

He does some of his own field work. He spends long in-winery hours solving mechanical and enological problems for his projects as well as those of others working nearby. He also drives trucks long distances to pick up grapes, much to the chagrin of his wife Mara and close associates.

Despite his age, he still does much of the hose-hauling, clean-up, and other physical chores that often are left to teenage “cellar rats.”

“I’ve given up most of my ‘consulting’ work,” he now says. “I’m too busy,” but continues his informal (unpaid) consulting with colleagues.

La Follette has made dozens of friends around the world. As such he’s as much an educator as a winemaker, similar to his mentor, Tchelistcheff, America’s greatest winemaker, with whom Greg worked for four years at Napa Valley’s Beaulieu Vineyard and from whom he learned to inject his passion into others.

He is easy to like, validated by his curious hobby of playing the bagpipes, which he has done at dozens of weddings, picnics, and other gatherings.

For me, the most amazing aspect of his skills is rooted in his wide-ranging education plus travel to distant lands to learn about how others do things.

As we drove up a canyon one morning to visit a Riesling vineyard, Greg pointed out the trees growing in an adjacent gully. He began naming them. I asked if trees were relevant to grapevines.

“The kinds of trees that grow here, in this climate and these soils, are an indication of what



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Greg La Follette

sort of weather patterns have existed here for decades, and that tells you how Riesling should grow here,” he said. “It’s obvious that this is a great area for Riesling.”

I’ve seen him identify vineyard maladies that grape growers who have farmed their properties for years never identified – and then make suggestions on how to improve the crops.

Fifteen years ago, I was an unpaid consultant for a tiny winery. One day, I detected an aromatic flaw in an unbottled wine. The winery’s winemaker smelled the same flaw, but neither of us could identify it.

I called Greg. Coincidentally he was only 15 minutes away. He drove over, walked in, took one sniff of the suspect wine, instantly identified the problem, and solved it by suggesting the winemaker do a simple procedure.

In five minutes, Greg solved a problem for which the winemaker otherwise would’ve had no solution.

La Follette is a lover of geriatric vines, mainly because they usually deliver a style all their own. He loves older vineyards that display unique characteristics, notably Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, the two grapes for which he has become world famous.

Some of his wines that are in great demand are exciting to people who collect wine and age them. How impeccable a Greg La Follette wine typically is, espe-

cially if it is properly aged.

One reason for this is his reliance on exceptional vineyards, some of which are highly regarded inside the industry, although often they’re not particularly well known to wine buyers.

“Mature vines are like mature people,” La Follette said. “Younger vines are ebullient and full of life, and I really appreciate them for their vigor. They’re like kids with a lot of energy and vitality. Young vines are like teenagers – you have to give them structure, discipline.

“But I really appreciate vines when they’re older. I have more respect them – for their wisdom, their hormonal balance. They’re like people – there is more to work with in terms of their depth.” He said mature vineyards “can regulate themselves a lot better.”

La Follette is a year-round winemaker, arising early in the first two months of every new year, when most winemakers take a hiatus from physical labor. Greg often is trudging through Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyards doing his own suckering of vines, removing unwanted shoots. It’s a sort of early-year vineyard manicure.

Not that he doesn’t trust his grower-partners to do the delicate task properly, but after working dozens of harvests, he knows how he wants it done. He knows that this arcane task might be done inexactly by novice vineyard workers.

Do growers ever mind his involvement in field work? “I’ve been with all my growers for so long that we’ve become old friends,” he said. “I mentor their sons and daughters, but new growers may not understand.

“I may end up in a wheelchair, but I’ll never stop being in the vineyards.”

La Follette earned a master’s degree in food science and technology at UC Davis, and degrees in plant biology and chemistry. He worked briefly as an AIDS researcher before turning to wine. After working at BV with Tchelistcheff, Greg consulted with Kendall-Jackson on its La Crema winery and later at DeLoach. He also helped establish

the world-famed Flowers Vineyard and Winery.

He counts as good friends dozens of winemakers, notably California stars like Michael Silacci (Opus One) and Rob Davis (winemaker for 47 years at Jordan).

One reason Greg abandoned consulting work, besides being too busy with his own Marchelle wines project, paralleled what he saw with his mentor, Tchelistcheff, who left BV in 1970.

Said Greg, “One of André’s complaints about his (post-BV) consultants was that young winemakers weren’t willing to listen to him in the 1980s. A lot of young winemakers don’t listen to their elders, which is frustrating.”

The Marchelle project follows some personal and financial setbacks not of Greg’s own making. Despite impediments, he has relied on his strong relationships with top grape growers statewide. His Marchelle wines are almost always limited in production.

One reason I love almost all Marchelle wines is that Greg and his associate winemaker Evan Damiano are excellent practitioners of crafting wines that have lots of personality as well as sufficient acidity so the wines go well with food when they’re young and also tend to age beautifully.

This is one key lesson that came from Greg’s tutelage under Tchelistcheff. Every wine must be balanced. As a result, most Marchelle wines reflect California history dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, when balance was considered essential for a classically styled wine.

Wine of the Week: 2021 Marchelle Chardonnay, “Tritone Cuvée,” 48% Mendocino County, 33% Sonoma County, 19% Santa Barbara County (\$45) – The aroma features tropical fruit, citrus, and the faintest hint of oak aging. The wine is relatively subtle and perfectly balanced. This is best displayed when it is served with lightly grilled tuna. The wine is better if decanted for at least two hours, or aged for three-plus years in a cool cellar. <https://www.marchellewines.com/>