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California Dreamin'

Orla Murphy-LaScola, co-owner of American Seasons in Nantucket, on her annual wine hunt out West

SINCE TAKING THE REINS at American Seasons 10 years ago, I've applied the same ethos to the restaurant's wine list that my husband, executive chef Michael LaScola, applies to our restaurant's food: Push boundaries, be different than anything else on the island and source as locally as possible. For wine, this means showcasing unique, small-production American wineries—some so small they're relatively unheard of on the East Coast. To track down our favorites, we travel to California every winter to visit wineries and meet with winemakers. Considering the respectable followings these vintners have right at home, it's no small feat to convince them to part with their wine. But with some gentle Irish persuasion, a few choice cases always seem to make it back east and onto our wine list.

To get a taste of how wonderful and cutting-edge our American winemakers really are, keep an eye out for the following producers.

FAILLA WINERY, ST. HELENA, CA

Winemaker Ehren Jordan is one of our absolute favorites. While he has worked with a couple of different wineries, his solo project at Failla is the real standout—particularly the Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir from both 2007 and 2008. faillawines.com

MARTINELLI WINERY, WINDSOR, CA

American Seasons is hosting Martinelli Winery during this year's Nantucket Wine Festival (May 19–23; nantucketwinefestival.com). Out of its entire portfolio, one of my consistent favorites has to be the 2007 Zinfandel Giuseppe & Luisa. martinellivinery.com

ERNA SCHEIN-BEHRENS FAMILY WINERY, ST. HELENA, CA

Producers of what I consider quintessential American wine, Erna Schein makes a 2007 Cemetery Cabernet Sauvignon that I absolutely love, as well as a 2007 Kick Ranch Petite Sirah. Both wines just happen to be favorites of owners Les Behrens and Lisa Drinkward, too. ernaschein.com

DONELAN FAMILY WINES, SONOMA COUNTY, CA

Keep an eye out for the Kobler Family Vineyard Syrah. This wine is one to buy and sit on for a while—it's big and delicious. donelanwines.com



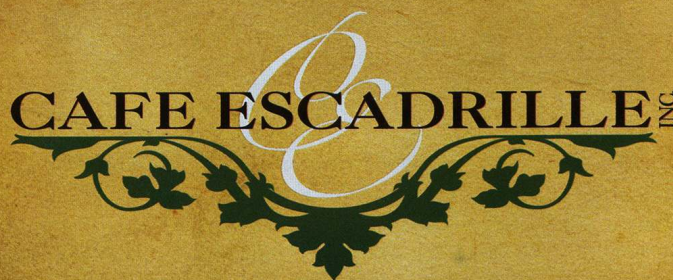
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