



The terrace of the newly remodeled Roederer Estate Hospitality Center boasts a sweeping view of the Anderson Valley.

A ROEDERER ESTATE

Renaissance

A RENOVATED
HOSPITALITY CENTER
AND A PACKAGE REFRESH
SIMULTANEOUSLY
AFFIRM THE WINERY'S
CHAMPENOIS HERITAGE
AND ANDERSON
VALLEY TERROIR

by Ruth Tobias

CHAMPAGNE MAY BE THOUSANDS OF MILES from the West Coast of the United States, but there's one place in California where it doesn't feel quite so far away: Roederer Estate. Nestled in the gently rolling hills of the Anderson Valley in Mendocino County, the acclaimed 43-year-old sparkling wine house has obviously always honored its Gallic parentage—that would be Champagne Louis Roederer—through its gorgeous portfolio of méthode traditionnelle bottlings, made exclusively from estate-grown Pinot Noir and Chardonnay by two French-born winemakers to date: first Michel Salgues, a Champenois himself, and then Arnaud Weyrich, an Alsatian who's held the role since 2002. Yet there are other ways in which it aims to show its roots even as it luxuriates in its Golden State milieu; most recently, these include a hospitality center renovation completed in February by none other than designer Julia Rouzaud—the daughter of winery founder Jean-Claude Rouzaud and sister of seventh-generation Louis Roederer president Frédéric Rouzaud—and a package update that subtly blend elements of the Old World and the New.

With respect to the former, said Roederer Collection U.S. president Nicole Carter as we took in the views from the estate terrace on a balmy summer day, "What I love about it is we've retained our California redwood barn feeling with this beautiful juxtaposition of French influence and [more broadly] European influence." Lined with comfy banquettes and umbrella-shaded tables, that terrace couldn't feel more at one with its surroundings; Weyrich pointed out some of the native plants—manzanita, arbutus, coffeeberry, coast buckwheat—among which hummingbirds flitted as well as the sand-colored terra-cotta tiles beneath our feet, which Rouzaud has said were chosen to "reinforce the idea that soil is at the heart of winemaking; just as it shapes the grapes and the character of the wine, it also grounds the experience of the tasting room, creating a strong connection between the space and its terroir."

Likewise representing the soil is the colorful bar at the center of the tasting room built by French artist Aurélien Veyrat, who according to Carter "goes on the French version of Craigslist and finds bricks from abandoned factories, starts collecting them, and then shapes them with rainwater." A team of Belgians installed the polished concrete floor of the room, whereas the handmade terra-cotta tiles in the entryway came from Italy; local craftspeople, meanwhile, contributed the upholstery and did all the woodwork, including the stunning door to the facility. As Weyrich fascinatingly explained, "It's called sunk redwood. In the 19th century, the way they were able to ship redwoods from inland was either to move them through railroads ... or send them [down] rivers. And some of those redwoods, [due to their] thickness and the density of the grain, they would actually sink. There was no way to retrieve them from the water; and they'd be covered by the silt and the mud. They've been recovered in the last many decades."



PHOTOS: DAWN HEUMANN

Arnaud Weyrich has been winemaker at Roederer Estate since 2002.



The focal point of the tasting room is a bar built by French artist Aurélien Veyrat from reclaimed bricks.

Indoors and outdoors, the new space addresses the concern that, in Carter's words, "the dynamics of how people taste wine at tasting rooms during COVID changed. Obviously, people want to be outside. . . . And then people started to crave education. They wanted more storytelling; they wanted to learn more about wine." To that end, Roederer Estate offers (in addition to selections by the glass and bottle) three flights: Priced between \$30 and \$125, they're designed to showcase everything from the difference between multivintage and vintage cuvées as well as between multi-site and single-vineyard expressions to varying dosage levels and formats—not to mention the impact of all those factors on how the wines age.

As for the packaging, said Carter, "Around 2021 or 2022, we started to hear from our distributors and salespeople that they felt like the packaging had gotten a little outdated, which happens"—but because "the brand equity for Roederer Estate is so strong and you want to retain it," they decided to tread carefully toward the goal of modernization on the one hand and making "a stronger connection to our parent" on the other: On matte instead of glossy front labels, the logo is now a little more pronounced and the lettering a little larger for easier legibility amid fewer embellishments; as Carter put it, "We wanted Anderson Valley to be more prominent than it was previously, and we wanted the

The Clark Road Vineyard is located on the cooler west side of the Anderson Valley.

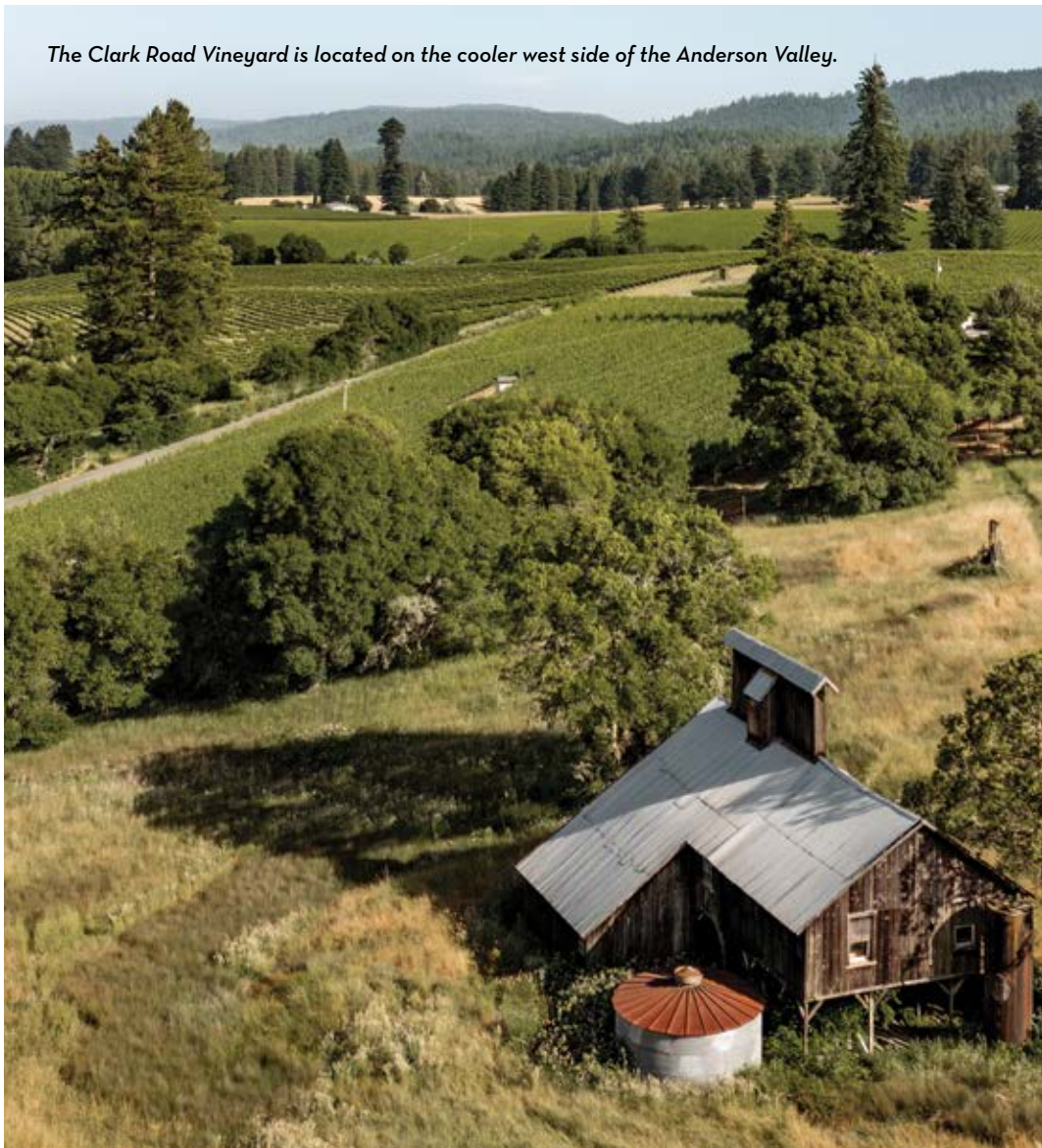


PHOTO: LAUREN SIEGEL



French heritage to come through" at the same time. The result, she asserted, is "so much cleaner; brighter; fresher." The back label, meanwhile, now lists such key information as the disgorgement date and, in the case of the vintage cuvées, the dosage level. "If it matters to you to buy *méthode traditionnelle*, how long it was aged is important," Weyrich pointed out, adding that "most customers, when they see 'brut' on the label, they don't always . . . know what to expect, because brut goes from 6 [grams of residual sugar per liter] to 12. So am I at 12, [or] am I at 6?"

Those numbers are relevant with respect to another change Roederer Estate has made over the past couple of years, in this case to its lineup: Noted Carter, "For me, the renaissance is about introducing new wines for the first time in three decades"—namely two single-



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PHOTO: LAUREN SIEGEL

vineyard vintage-dated bubbies, Clark Road and Apple Alley. We tasted them together along with the winery's other core expressions, including the classic Brut, alive with green apple, white peach, and a hint of pecan brioche, and Brut Rosé, structured around aromas and flavors of red apple, cherry, blood orange, and toast; the bright, fresh, and salty 2019 L'Ermitage Brut, showing apricot, cream, and pear; the 2019 L'Ermitage Brut Rosé, which soars amid notes of strawberry shortcake and a tinge of smoke; and the gobsmacking 2007 L'Ermitage Late Disgorged Brut, rich and creamy after more than 16 years on the lees yet thrumming with tarte tatin, Fig Newton, and salted caramel plus a pinch of walnut and white pepper.

Presenting the 2021 Clark Road, disgorged in December 2024, and the 2020 Apple Alley, disgorged in February 2024,

Roederer Collection U.S. president Nicole Carter with Weyrich.

Weyrich mused, "It's going to sound very geeky what I'm going to say, but if the [Brut and Brut Rosé] are sparkling wines, these two single vineyards are really made as wines that [happen to] become sparkling. So there's something more vinous about them." From the cooler west side of the Valley, where according to him "I can let the Pinot hang longer to get more skin development but . . . still keep a fair amount of freshness," the Clark Road is an extra-brut (5.5 grams per liter) blend of 77.6% Pinot Noir and 22.4% Chardonnay, a small amount of which (7%) was fermented in oak with some bâtonnage; the result is wonderfully velvet-textured for the style, abounding in white strawberry, golden apple, and honeyed almond. From

a slightly warmer site, the Apple Alley, for its part, sees full malo, which is atypical for the house but gives the blend of 74.2% Chardonnay and 25.8% Pinot Noir with 6 grams per liter of dosage "that nice, crusty, soft, round, pleasant, very Champagne-like feel," in Weyrich's words, along with sun-drenched notes of apple and apple blossom, yellow plum, and slivered almond.

"It took me 20 years to make a single-vineyard wine—it's been a very slow process," Weyrich acknowledged, noting that intimate knowledge of a given site takes time. That said, he added, "We're a 40-year-old brand, so we're still very young compared to the mothership, which is 250 years old. We're learning as fast as we can." Of that there can be no question. **\$**