

2020 NORTH OF THE GATE WINE COMPETITION JUDGES

DEBRA DEL FIORENTINO



International Wine Judge, Sommelier, Certified Wine Professional and Certified Specialist of Wine, Debra Del Fiorentino is a consummate wine professional who brings a dynamic energy and expertise to every endeavor she undertakes. Debra is a familiar face at numerous prestigious wine competitions.

She also is President and Owner of Wine Competitions Management & Productions and Libation Logistics.

She is one of the Founders of Spirited Magazine, as well as the Food and Beverage Director. Debra also serves as an independent wine educator and partner in Russian River Vineyards.

BARRY HERBST



Barry has more than three decades of experience in the wine industry, ranging from sommelier and wine shop owner to high-level retail and private cellar acquisitions. He was raised in Southern California, where he earned his stripes in some of LA's most celebrated restaurants, among them Chinois on Main and Osteria Angelini. Most recently, Barry was General Manager of the Rare Wine Company in Sonoma, as well as working with Soutirage and Bounty Hunter Rare Wine & Spirits in Napa Valley. Currently, he is the wine buyer for Bottle Barn in Santa Rosa, CA, a 15,000 square foot superstore and arguably has the largest and

finest selection of fine wines north of San Francisco. Barry blames a bottle of 1980 Jayer Vosne-Romanée Cros Parantoux for having sent him down the rabbit hole many years ago. Today, he lives in Petaluma, CA with his wife, two children, to whom he happily dedicates every spare moment outside of work.

BILL MCNABB



Wine journalist Bill McNabb has traveled and tasted in all the major wine growing regions of the world from Europe to Australia and New Zealand to South Africa. For the past fifteen years, he has served as the Wine Editor for the Piedmont Post newspaper. Bill has judged at the San Francisco International Wine Competition and at the Grand Harvest Awards.

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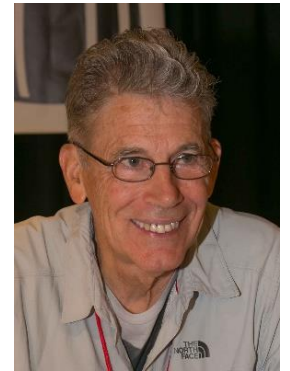
LARRY VAN AALST

Retired sommelier, Equus Restaurant and Host of The Sonoma Report, CRN Digital Talk Radio the Equus Restaurant wine list was judged "Best of Show" in the 1995 and 1998 Sonoma County Harvest Fair. The Gallery of Sonoma County wines, nearly 300 bottles hand-picked by their winemakers, sets the tone – wine country splendor in a classic setting. Larry Van Aalst, Equus Sommelier, has been selecting wines for Equus for over a decade. Larry has been judging at the Cloverdale Citrus Fair/San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition for over a decade.



MIKE DUNNE

Retired food editor, restaurant critic and wine columnist of The Sacramento Bee, Mike continues to contribute a biweekly wine column to The Bee, as well as occasional other features. During his 30 years as a feature writer at The Bee he focused primarily on food, wine and restaurants, but also wrote travel features, ranging from Idaho to Morocco, Guadalajara to the Finger Lakes. In retirement, he has been judging up to 18 wine competitions a year, from small regional contests (Amador Calaveras, Lake counties) to larger international roundups (Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas). He and his wife Martha live in Sacramento most of each year, but we also spend three to six months annually at another home in San Jose del Cabo, Baja California Sur, Mexico.



KAREN BENNETT

Karen has worked in the wine industry for 29 years, opening one of the first California wine bars in 1991. In 2004 she became the manager and wine buyer for Bill Hoppe's renowned Hoppe's Garden Bistro on the Central Coast. In 2009 she spent 2 years in San Diego before returning to the Central Valley where for the past 7 years she has directed the wine list for Meir Brown's Cafe' Med Restaurant and Gourmet Shop in Bakersfield, California. Karen is certified WSET Level 2 and Court of Master Sommeliers.



RICH COOK

Rich Cook has been writing about wine since 2008 and is currently a lead reviewer at the internationally renowned e-publication winereviewonline.com. Rich is the Founding Director of the Toast of The Coast Wine Competition at the San Diego County Fair, and also serves as Director of Robert Whitley's Challenge Series, Monterey International, and the San Diego County Fair's Distilled Spirits and Homemade Wine competitions. Rich judges several major competitions, and is also a panelist with the California Grapevine. When he's not swirling and spitting, he can be found teaching music or leading worship.



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ELLEN LANDIS



Ellen is a published Wine Writer, Certified Sommelier, Certified Wine Specialist, Wine Educator and Professional Wine Judge. She is the author of the blog EllenOnWine.com and writes for the AWS Wine Journal (AmericanWineSociety.org), Wine Press Northwest, Great Northwest Wine, Spirited Magazine, and Michigan Uncorked.

Ellen is a moderator for the highly acclaimed Vintner's Holidays annual event at the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite, and participates as a key speaker, moderator and panelist at various other wine events. For the past sixteen plus years, she and husband Ken co-owned award winning Landis Shores Oceanfront Inn where Ellen served as Wine Director and Sommelier. They recently sold their Inn to devote more time to the world of wine. Ellen was also a Sommelier at the Ritz Carlton for several years. Ellen has traveled many wine regions throughout North America including California, Oregon, Washington, Virginia, Michigan, Ohio, Connecticut, New Mexico, Arizona, New York and Canada, and several international wine regions including Bordeaux, Champagne, Burgundy, Rhone, Tuscany, and wine regions throughout Spain, Portugal, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

In addition to an MBA, Ellen's wine education includes UC Davis viticulture course work, CSW certification from the Society of Wine Educators program, and holds the credential of Certified Sommelier (CS) from the Court of Master Sommeliers. Ellen serves as a judge at numerous national and international wine competitions including the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, Great Northwest Invitational Wine Competition, Finger Lakes International Wine Competition, Mid-American Wine Competition, Great Northwest Invitational Wine Competition, California State Fair Wine Competition, American Fine Wine Competition, Amador County Fair Wine Competition, Sonoma Harvest Fair Wine Competition, West Coast Wine Competition, Grand Harvest Wine Competition, Long Beach Grand Cru International Wine Competition, Riverside International Wine Competition, Michigan Wine & Spirits Competition, the Jefferson Cup Invitational Wine Competition, the Mendocino County Wine Competition, Monterey Wine Competition, and the Central Coast Wine Competition.

MIKE KUIMELIS JR.



Mike Kuimelis Jr. is the winemaker and founder of Mantra Wines and Mobius Wines. He knew from age 10 being a winemaker is what he wanted to do. He first made his own wine in his converted garage in 1995, with the first barrel of Cabernet Sauvignon. In 2000 his obsession for winemaking became a career and Mantra Wines was born with 200 cases of Cabernet Sauvignon from the Alexander Valley Estate vineyards. His wines are now distributed across the United States, Canada, and parts of Asia. Mike has made wine for 23 years, and still makes wine in Healdsburg close to the family vineyards. He and his wife opened a tasting room in Novato 2 years ago, which was awarded *Best Wine Tasting* in Marin County by the Marin IJ Readers Choice Awards and *Best Wine Tasting Room* by the Pacific Sun.