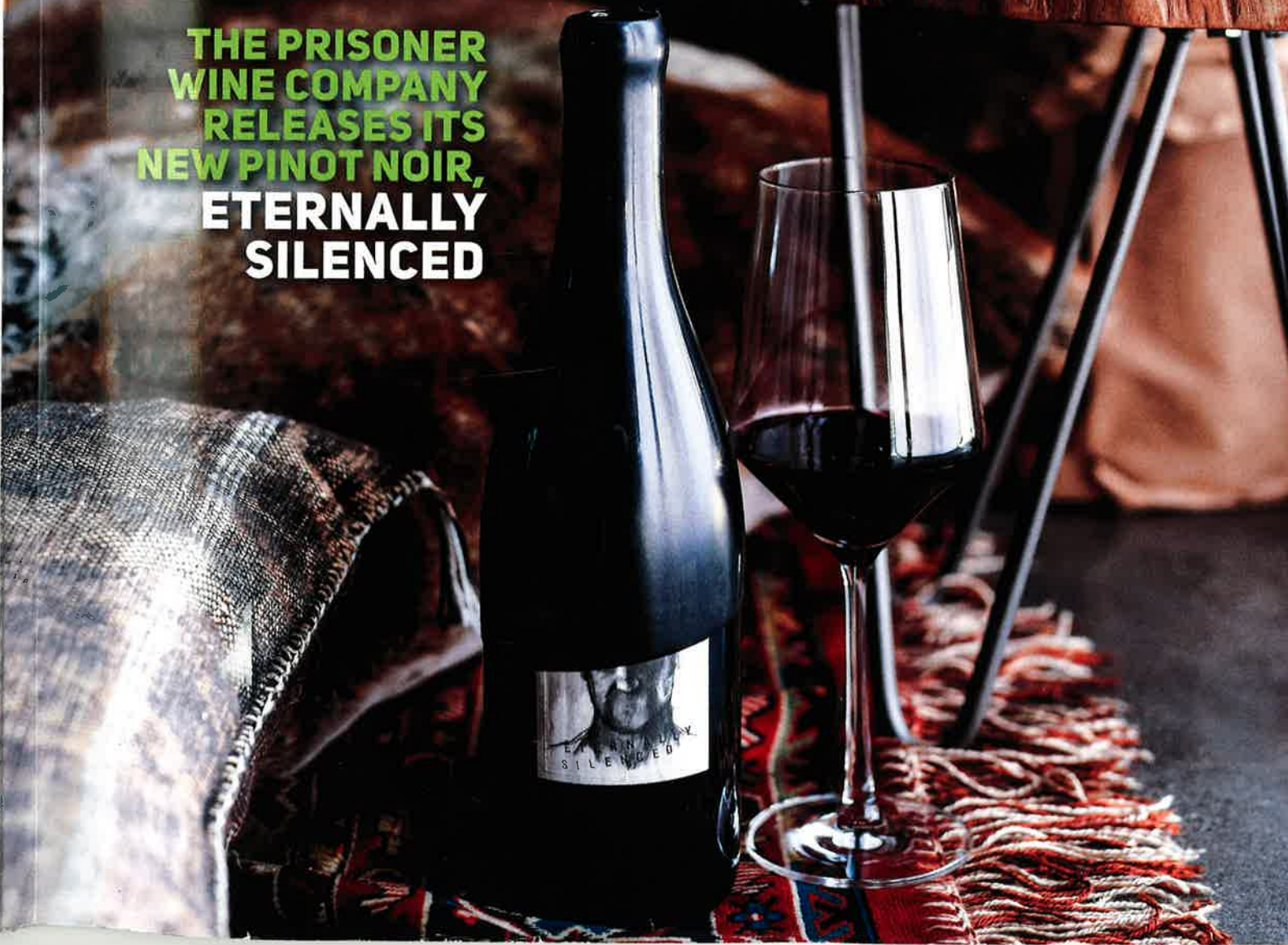


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A WINE *for the* **SENSES**

**THE PRISONER
WINE COMPANY
RELEASES ITS
NEW PINOT NOIR,
ETERNALLY
SILENCED**



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A WINE *for the* SENSES

by Lars Licht

THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY RELEASES ITS NEW PINOT NOIR, *ETERNALLY SILENCED*

TWO

decades ago, a wine that broke with tradition in just about every sense—from its edgy name and label to its unusual blend of red grapes—rocked the wine world. Upon its release with the 2000 vintage, The Prisoner all but single-handedly created the market for the domestic red-blend category, appealing to a new generation of wine drinkers unconstrained by vinous dogma. It spoke directly to the consumer.

In its first decade, The Prisoner grew its production by 200%. The best marketers in the business took note, paying what is called the sincerest form of flattery by creating similar products; meanwhile, the winery behind the phenomenon has evolved into a powerhouse brand that continues to lead by unconventional example.

The Prisoner Wine Company's latest national release, Eternally Silenced, is a case in point. The California Pinot Noir blend was first presented to round out the exclusive selections at the winery's Napa Valley tasting lounge, which opened in 2018. Designed by renowned architect Matt Hollis and interior designer Richard Von Saal, it's a far cry from the industry standard of wine-country rusticity, its gothic- and noir-inspired black-and-white décor based on The Prisoner Wine Company's game-changing labels—which depict everything from Francisco Goya's "The Disasters of War" etchings to cell-wall hashmarks and mug shots—and accented with the likes of shackles and graphite skeletons.



The Prisoner Wine Company opened its ultra-chic Napa Valley tasting lounge in 2018.

THE CONCEPT OF SENSORY DEPRIVATION ISN'T ONE YOUR AVERAGE WINERY WOULD CELEBRATE. BUT THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY IS NOT YOUR AVERAGE WINERY, AND IT PROVES AS MUCH EVERY DAY THROUGH NOT ONLY ITS PORTFOLIO BUT ALSO ITS ORIGINAL APPROACH TO CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT.



PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN

Chrissy Wittmann is Director of Winemaking for The Prisoner Wine Company.

If that sounds forbidding, rest assured that the staff more than meets Napa's highest hospitality standards. Reservations are strongly encouraged in the comfortable lounge, where the lineup includes exclusive expressions such as the Chenin Blanc/Viognier blend No. 39007, the Charbono-based blend Headlock, the ERASED Blanc de Blancs, and Syndrome Rosé, which combines Grenache, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Sangiovese, and Mourvèdre. Guests can also indulge in a wine-and-food pairing called The Makery Experience, held in a dedicated space in the lounge that displays the wine-inspired works of area craftspeople, including ceramists and zero-waste designers.

It all reflects The Prisoner Wine Company's dedication to grassroots production; Director of Winemaking Chrissy Wittmann relies on a network of more than 100 growers throughout California to obtain the most exceptional fruit for her expressions. In the case of Eternally Silenced, she

sourced grapes from Santa Barbara, the Sonoma Coast, Napa Valley, Edna Valley, and Monterey County, specifically seeking out vineyards with ideal growing conditions—including "just enough sunlight without too much heat," in her words—to ensure that "the terroir could shine through the transparency" of the fruit. The resulting blend of 95% Pinot Noir and 5% Syrah and Viognier shows rich, elegant dark-fruit flavors with notes of spice, clove, and brush, all heightened when served slightly chilled.

"People loved Eternally Silenced the moment it was introduced in the tasting lounge," says The Prisoner Wine Company's Direct-to-Consumer and Hospitality Director, Deja Harrington. "It quickly became one of the top-selling wines at the winery, which is when we began thinking about making

it more widely available." Its success was no surprise to Wittmann. "I spent many years making Pinot Noir on the Central Coast, so it was really fun for me to return to that world to craft Eternally Silenced," she explains. "The style matches the rest of The Prisoner Wine Company portfolio—ample structure, bold flavors—with the added finesse that Pinot Noir brings. I'm really excited to be able to share it with people all over the country; I hope they enjoy it as much as I enjoyed making it."

As Chief Marketing Officer at parent company Constellation Brands, Jim Sabia has no doubt of that, calling the new release "the perfect addition" to a brand portfolio that has seen double-digit growth in dollar sales year after year.

In keeping with its mission to offer thought-provoking guest experiences, The Prisoner Wine Company



marked the September debut of Eternally Silenced on the national market by hosting a sensory deprivation-themed dinner at a trendy pop-up venue in New York's Bowery neighborhood with the help of chef Abigail Hitchcock. As the owner of Greenwich Village bistro Abigail's Kitchen, Hitchcock has been serving what she calls "dinners in the dark" to patrons who don blindfolds to sharpen their other senses for 15 years; at this event, she exhorted guests to take advantage of their lack of sight to instead "notice [things like] texture, sounds, the temperature of the water, [and] the temperature of the wine."

First was the "foraging" course, which was presented without plates or utensils and consisted of a loose scattering of nibbles at each place setting: popcorn, cherry tomatoes, edible flowers, cashews, almonds, and hazelnuts. It was appropriately paired, as was later revealed, with The Prisoner Wine Company's 2017 Blindfold, a California white blend of Chardonnay, Roussanne, Viognier, and aromatic Muscat that was aged ten months in a mix of French and Hungarian oak and stainless steel. Nicely chilled, it featured forward flavors of lychee, stone fruit, and citrus that made for a refreshing yet sensuous start; in fact, tasted literally blind, the wine could have been mistaken for a rosé.

Plated New York steelhead trout in shallot cream sauce required diners to find and use silverware they couldn't see—fortunately not an insurmountable task for anyone who knew their way around a table setting. The dish was a perfect foil for The Snitch, a 2017 Napa Valley Chardonnay made from Oak Knoll and Carneros fruit with a touch of Roussanne. The wine's tropical-fruit flavors danced nicely with the trout, while fresh acidity lased through the cream.

The blindfolds came off for the fourth course, thankfully: Whole quail would have presented a distinct conundrum to the visually challenged, who also wouldn't have been able to see the wine they were drinking with it. Given that surprise celebrity guest host Maggie Gyllenhaal was on hand for the big reveal of the 2017 Eternally Silenced, that would have been a shame—all the more because the bottle's intriguing



The Prisoner Wine Company's lineup includes such provocatively named expressions as Blindfold, ERASED, The Prisoner, Eternally Silenced, The Snitch, and Saldo.



Acclaimed actors (and husband and wife) Peter Sarsgaard and Maggie Gyllenhaal hosted the September launch of Eternally Silenced.

label, partially concealed by a wax dip that leaves only the image of the lower half of an anonymous face, was the inspiration for the evening's theme.

The next course, however, took diners right back out of their comfort zone via earmuffs, leaving them to focus in silence on crisp duck breast paired with the wine that started it all: The Prisoner 2017 Napa Valley Red Blend. Inspired by early-20th-century field blends made by Italian immigrants, it combines Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Syrah, and Charbono, enticing with flavors of cherry, roasted fig, and ripe berries. And it made for the perfect

transition into dessert, when the 2017 Saldo California Zinfandel, voluptuously reminiscent of cherry, baking spice, and dark chocolate, meshed intimately with dark chocolate cake and blackberry compote.

The concept of sensory deprivation isn't one your average winery would celebrate. But The Prisoner Wine Company is not your average winery, and it proves as much every day through not only its portfolio but also its original approach to consumer engagement. No doubt Eternally Silenced is going to get people talking across the country. ■■

PHOTO: NINA WESTERVELT FOR THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY