

2021

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS FROM

10

INDUSTRY LEADERS

**DRINKS PROFESSIONALS
SHARE THEIR BIG GOALS,
AND HOW THEY PLAN TO
ACHIEVE THEM**

BY RACHEL TEPPER PALEY

The year 2020 didn't play out like any of us imagined. From the devastating physical and economic tolls of the pandemic to an overdue reckoning with diversity and inclusion in our industry, leaders across the drinks space are grappling with new realities and difficult choices. But from great adversity comes possibility. We spoke to 10 forward-thinking drinks professionals to learn their New Year's resolutions for 2021 and how they plan to forge a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future.

ALISHA BLACKWELL-CALVERT, SOMMELIER AND WINE CONSULTANT, ST. LOUIS

Coming up as a sommelier in St. Louis, Alisha Blackwell had tremendous mentors who helped put her on the right career path. Now, she plans to pay it forward.

“I want to be that person for the next class of somms,” Blackwell says. “I know that I am looked at as a leader in the community, so I definitely want to make sure I’m fulfilling expectations.”

Blackwell is currently developing a St. Louis-focused mentor-mentee program alongside sommelier Matthew Dulle and sommelier-turned-wine-maker Michael Kennedy, which they hope to debut in 2021. She was also recently accepted as a mentor for the prestigious Bâtonnage Mentorship Program, which pairs wine industry hopefuls with experienced professionals.

Blackwell believes mentorship will not only benefit individuals, but help the suffering St. Louis restaurant community. Once considered a third-rate food city generally dismissed by the trade elite, St. Louis has become increasingly creative and sophisticated in

NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION: PROVIDE MENTORSHIP FOR YOUNG ST. LOUIS SOMMELIERS AND WINE PROFESSIONALS

the last decade with nationally-recognized restaurants, and wine programs, she explains.

“COVID has taken a lot away from what we’ve built,” Blackwell says. “It’s going to be important for the next class of somms and beverage professionals to have a good grasp on what we’ve done in the past, [so they can] add or improve on it and make sure St. Louis is still a contender in world-class dining.”



JEFFREY PORTER, FOUNDER OF VOLCANIC SELECTIONS AND HOST OF ‘SIP TRIP,’ NEW YORK CITY

“I’ve always been very lucky,” reflects sommelier Jeffrey Porter, host of the SommTV-streamed wine travel show “Sip Trip.” After holding a handful of high-profile positions, including the wine director at New York’s Del Posto, this past September Porter launched his own import distribution business, Volcanic Selections, which spotlights sustainably-minded producers. Bringing Volcanic Selections to life in the middle of a pandemic has been “the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life,” but Porter still recognizes that he’s been fortunate.

“I’m a white, middle-aged man, so I live in a world of privilege,” Porter says. In 2021, he’s keen to leverage his fortunate position to elevate others. “I want to make sure there’s an inclusive identity to wine.”

With fellow sommelier Kenneth Crum, beverage director for Ariel Arce’s New York City properties Air’s Champagne Parlor, Tokyo Record Bar, Niche Niche, and Special Club, Porter is developing a nonprofit that seeks to draw underrepresented communities into the hospitality space. This spring, Porter and Crum hope to visit job fairs at historically-Black colleges and minority student unions, where they’ll help connect young people to jobs and mentors in the hospitality space.

“We have about 20 to 30 people aligned with us across the U.S. who will add their voices and input, be it restaurateurs, import-



NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION: HELP MAKE WINE INDUSTRY INROADS FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR

ers, distributors, graphic designers who work specifically in the food and wine space, [or] journalists,” Porter says. “The goal is to show that all of us make the hospitality industry what it is.”



**JANE LOPES,
COFOUNDER OF LEGEND
IMPORTS, LOS ANGELES**

“As normal as it is for sommeliers to ask winemakers about hand-harvesting, native yeast, and sulfur regimes, I’d like to see it become standard to ask about labor practices,” explains Jane Lopes, cofounder of Australian wine importer Legend Imports. In 2021, Lopes plans to develop a certification program that will highlight wineries around the world that are committed to fair labor practices. “I’d rather buy a wine made from

machine-picked grapes than one that requires exploited labor,” she says. She believes consumers will, too.

The idea began to form three years ago, when Lopes was the wine director for the lauded fine-dining restaurant Attica in Melbourne. She was struck by the differences: In Australia, minimum wage was far higher than in the U.S. and everyone—

**NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION: LAUNCH
A WINERY-FOCUSED CERTIFICATION
PROGRAM FOR FAIR LABOR PRACTICES**

from dishwashers to grape pickers to vintners—had health insurance. And all employees were required by law to pay into a 401K-type retirement fund.

“When you grow up in the U.S., there’s so much propaganda about [the superiority of] capitalism and individualism and the American dream,” Lopes says. Witnessing how much better workers were treated in the Australian system made her see otherwise.

Lopes envisions the certification program as a nonprofit that will provide a badge or logo, which member wineries can emblazon on their labels. She plans to bring in partners that can offer financial incentives to members, ranging from discounts on printing wine labels to better rates for warehousing services. The goal, she says, is to encourage more wineries to adopt fair labor practices and give them a financial incentive to do so. Other industries—coffee, chocolate—have similar programs, Lopes notes. “They’ve been able to come together and encourage better practices. The wine industry should be able to stand behind our labor practices as well.”

**TERRY ROSTIC AND JAMAAL EWING, OWNERS OF
BLACK CALDER BREWING CO. GRAND RAPIDS, MI**

“Craft beer, in my humble opinion, can be the ultimate tool to unite people from all walks of life and backgrounds,” says Terry Rostic, who, with Jamaal Ewing, founded Michigan’s first black-owned brewery, Black Calder Brewing Co., in Grand Rapids earlier this year. “We want to be a major player in that uniting.”

Rostic and Ewing have major goals for 2021. “I dream big... sometimes too big!” Rostic admits. His dream? To sell Black Calder’s hoppy Black IPAs or fruited ales in sports arenas. “I see and read a lot about how major league sports want to support Black players and communities—I think there is a real opportunity for these franchise owners to create more pathways for Black-owned business.”

The pair, who are currently brewing at facilities owned by nearby breweries Broad Leaf Local Beer and Brewery Vivant, hope to open a physical location of their own in 2021. “Diversity will be a focal point of our hiring plan when we get to that stage of our busi-

ness,” Ewing says. The team also hopes to sponsor Black and Brown community college students interested in learning about brewing.

“Hopefully we can see more Black and Brown ownership and employment in the beer industry,” says Ewing. “I think that will ultimately translate into a more diverse consumer base as well.”

**NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION:
CREATE MORE PATHWAYS
FOR BLACK AND BROWN
BEER PROFESSIONALS**



MATT DEES, WINEMAKER AT JONATA, THE HILT, AND THE PARING, SANTA BARBARA

Before the pandemic, winemaker Matt Dees was already hyper-focused on sustainability. As the creative force at Jonata, The Hilt, and The Paring, a trio of cult wineries in California's Santa Barbara County, he saw the existential threat to winemaking posed by climate change. The devastating rash of all-too-close wildfires this fall made the threat more painfully evident. With life on hold due to the pandemic, Dees took the opportunity to elevate his sustainability goals, and plan ways to achieve them.

"I got time to think and focus," Dees reflects. "I got to see how vines change over the course of the day, because I watched them for a day—that just doesn't happen [in non-pandemic times]."

Dees's 2021 plans include upping the number of animals in his vineyards: more chickens to fertilize vineyard soils and more goats to chow down dry, fire-susceptible vegetation. He's also researching more drought-resistant grape varieties.

In the winery nursery, Dees will intensify his focus on cultivating vines with unusually long roots—a technique that lets Dees plant them in pure sand. At an impressively lengthy 32 inches below the surface, he explains, the roots are drawn to water deep below—a highly-desired ability in drought-prone California. "We haven't watered the vines once, and we are now in year three of one of our projects," Dees says. "We're going to increase the project in 2021."

"We can have a pretty instant and massive impact in our own backyard," he continues. "I want to be looking forward beyond just the next vintage and toward 2050 or 2100."



**NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION:
CULTIVATE INCREASINGLY
SUSTAINABLE VINEYARDS
THAT ARE MORE DROUGHT-
AND FIRE-RESISTANT**

DIANA SEYSSSES, WINEMAKER AT DOMAINE DUJAC, DOMAINE DE TRIENNES, SNOWDEN VINEYARDS, AND ASHES & DIAMONDS, BURGUNDY, SOUTHERN FRANCE, AND NAPA VALLEY

"Right now we are putting in the floors in the cellar, and we have done everything as locally as possible with as many renewable materials as possible," says winemaker Diana Seyssses of the new winery she's building at Domaine Dujac in Burgundy. "We're hoping to integrate carbon capture into the building as well."

Implementing this technology in a winemaking facility is still a novel concept, Seyssses explains, but it makes more sense than many might imagine. Fermentation, like many natural processes, creates carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas. But unlike other carbon capture initiatives, which must filter large quantities of air in order to pull in unconcentrated CO₂, Seyssses's system is more efficient. "What is beautiful about grabbing it off the top of alcoholic fermentation is that it is all in one place, in one building, at one time of the year," she says.

Seyssses hopes that the initiative will encourage other wineries to do the same. "The most important impact I can have is to raise awareness for my colleagues," she says.

**NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION:
IMPLEMENT A CARBON
CAPTURE PROGRAM IN
THE WINERY**



RYAN HARDY, CHEF AND OWNER OF DELICIOUS HOSPITALITY, NEW YORK CITY

“I want to make sure that our brands are around for people in 2021,” says Ryan Hardy, the head chef and owner of Delicious Hospitality in New York City, which includes Charlie Bird, Pasquale Jones, and Legacy Records. This year has been excruciatingly difficult, Hardy reports. Partners in his business have pulled out, and he and his team have had to shuffle staff between the Delicious Hospitality properties to accommodate unpredictable demand and decimated sales volume. Without a restaurant industry-specific relief package on the horizon, he worries about the long-term trajectory of his business and the entire restaurant industry. “To be honest with you, it’s getting pretty, pretty bad,” Hardy laments.

Survival has required diversifying Delicious Hospitality’s revenue streams. The restaurant group set up new websites to sell its merchandise—tote bags, hats, and shirts—nationally. It also started selling meal kits, and will partner with Goldbelly to ship upscale frozen pizzas across the country. Thanks to these shifts, the company managed to pull up from the devastating first months of the pandemic and even turned a tiny profit in October and November—all while pulling in just 45 percent of normal revenue.

**NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION:
KEEP AS MANY STAFF MEMBERS
EMPLOYED AS POSSIBLE**

Looking to 2021, Hardy plans to put 2020’s hard-learned lessons to good use. “A year ago, I would have lost my shirt if I’d done half of revenue in a month,” Hardy muses. “Maybe that’s what the brushfire has really taught us: We were able to get lean again.” He’s considering getting even leaner next year, perhaps shrinking the menu offerings by 25 percent and slimming down the staff. It’s all in service of keeping the restaurants alive—and their employees working—for as long as possible.

“We may break even or even lose some money, but keeping our core team employed yields immeasurable dividends,” Hardy says.



**STEPHANIE GALLO, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
E. & J. GALLO WINERY, MODESTO, CA**

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) has personal meaning for Stephanie Gallo, chief marketing officer for her family’s wine empire. “My mother is from Nicaragua, so I was raised in a multicultural, bilingual family where every day we embraced diversity and opportunities for all,” she says. “It’s at the core of who we are as a family.”

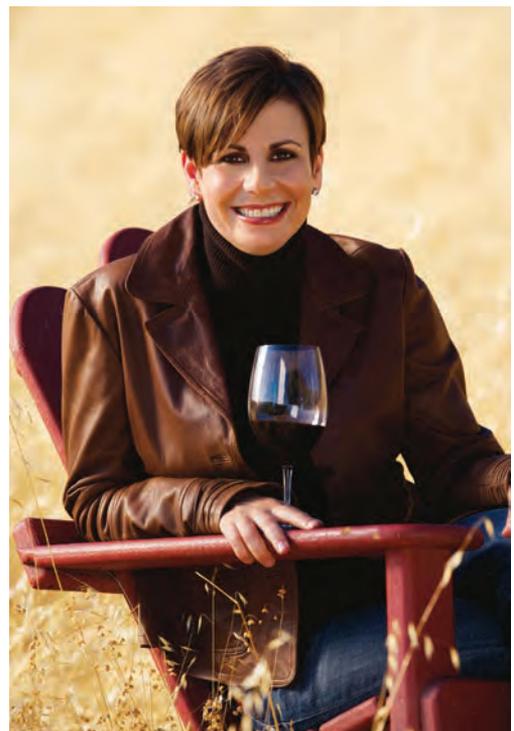
The Gallo organization has long been ahead of the curve in this work, named a Glassdoor Best Places to Work the last four years in a row, and named one of the Human Rights Campaign’s Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality for the last seven years.

But Gallo, who joined her family’s business over two decades ago, believes they can do even better. “We fully acknowledge that D&I is a journey with many steps. As a company, we’ve made conscious decisions about how we plan to improve,” she says.

Earlier this year, she spearheaded the creation of Gallo’s internal diversity and inclusion council, and serves as the executive sponsor. “This will bring accountability to all our D&I initiatives as well as connect these initiatives to our goals and strategies as a business.”

Being big is an advantage, she believes. “I get excited because with our size, scope, and scale, the potential of our impact is immense. Honestly, we have an obligation to be a leader and I truly believe that others in our industry will follow.”

**NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION: BE A WINE
INDUSTRY LEADER IN DIVERSITY AND
INCLUSION PRACTICES**



**JESSICA "RABBIT" KING,
CO-OWNER OF SAPPHIRE, KNOXVILLE**

When the world began to change in early March, a handful of employees immediately left Sapphire, the popular restaurant and cocktail destination in Knoxville. They wanted out of a volatile industry. But there were also employees who stuck it out, rising to meet an unthinkable challenge. "Those are the people that we as a small business have got to invest in," says Jessica King, "because they invested in us."

Working through such a difficult time has engendered a staff camaraderie unlike anything she's ever experienced at Sapphire, King says. When a few employees got sick with COVID-19 this year, the Sapphire team delivered soup and Pedialyte. Quarantined staffers were given at-home tasks to keep them on payroll. But the biggest shift yet, she hopes, will be in 2021: The team will offer high-value staff members ownership percentages in a soon-to-be-revealed new restaurant concept.

Offering ownership will mean venturing into "uncharted waters," King says, but it's important. "There's no better symbol of gratitude toward staff than equity in the business."

**NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION:
CREATE A RESTAURANT
EQUITY SHARING
PROGRAM FOR STAFF**



**TAG GALYEAN, COFOUNDER OF WEST VIRGINIA GREAT
BARREL COMPANY, CALDWELL, WV**

"I have always thought of consistency and flexibility as being at odds with each other," says Tag Galyean, the cofounder and brand ambassador for new cooperage West Virginia Great Barrel Company, which opened in late February 2020. Top-notch quality, he thought, meant never wavering in your business methods. Staying true to the plan, no matter what. "What 2020 has taught us is that we have to figure out how to be flexible in order to maintain consistency."

Demand for the cooperage's barrels has been uneven and unpredictable. Next year, Galyean says, will be about adjusting for such uncertainty without sacrificing quality.

For one, the company plans to be aggressive in acquiring wood to make its barrel staves. "If we have more wood than we're going to use because of a temporary decline in demand, then basically our staves will just be older," Galyean explains. There may even be an upside to holding onto wood for longer than anticipated. "Some distillers prefer and will pay a premium for a barrel made out of older staves aged 18 months instead of six months."

Galyean built the West Virginia Great Barrel Company's state-of-the-art plant to be used as a showroom—it "looks more like a BMW factory than a cooperage." But few buyers want to visit mid-pandemic, so he is shipping barrels to distilleries around the country.

The shifts, Galyean says, have helped to keep the quality of his barrels high while adjusting to new realities. Most importantly, the shifts have helped to keep the company's roughly 100 staff members employed. "We want to be consistent about hiring people for basically a lifetime of work and making sure they can support their families and grow into the business," Galyean says. ■

**NEW YEAR'S
RESOLUTION: FIND
MORE WAYS TO BE
FLEXIBLE WITHOUT
SACRIFICING
QUALITY**

