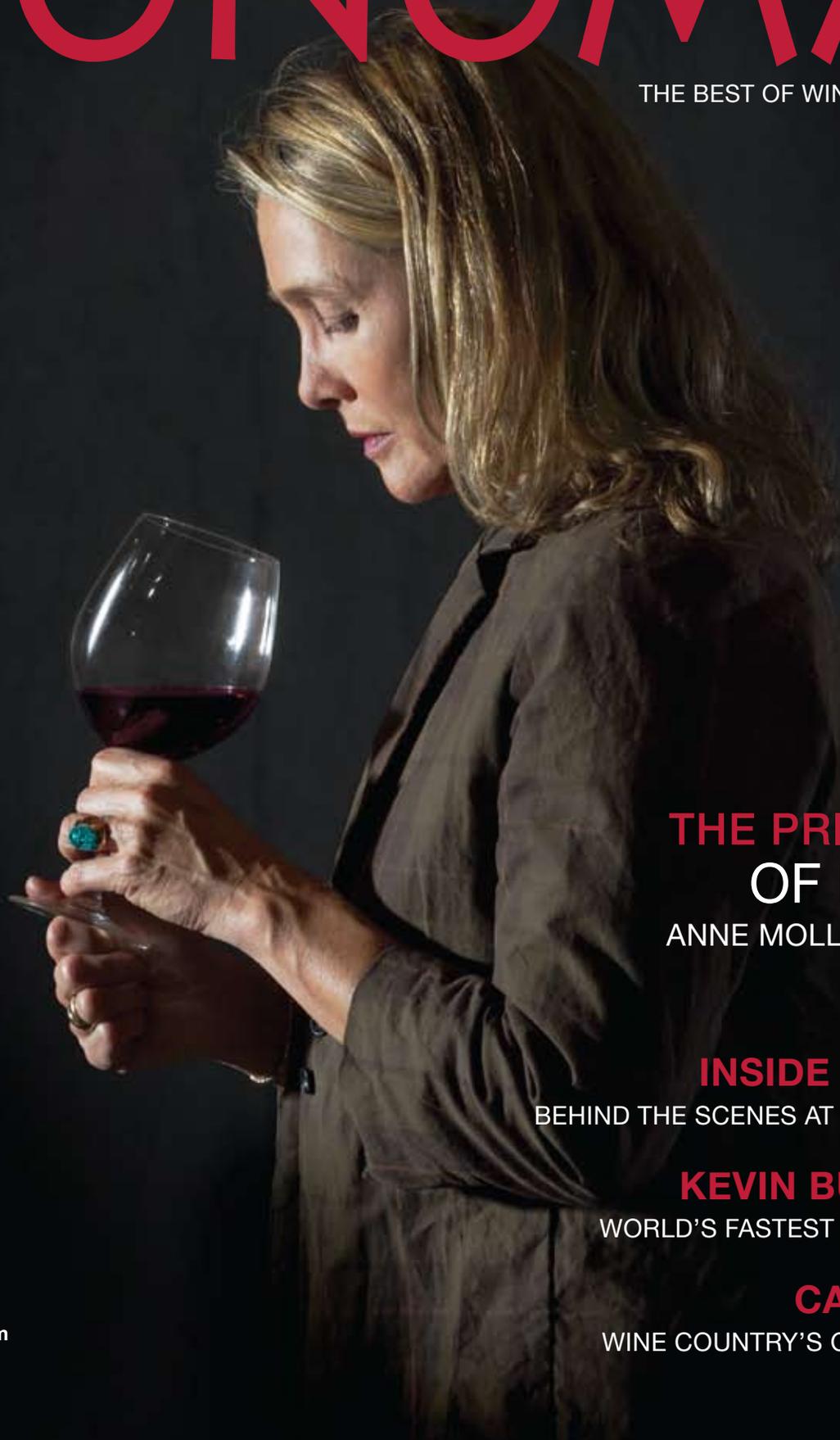


THE WINE ISSUE

SONOMA

THE BEST OF WINE COUNTRY



THE PRINCESS OF PINOT

ANNE MOLLER-RACKE

INSIDE THE CIA

BEHIND THE SCENES AT GREYSTONE

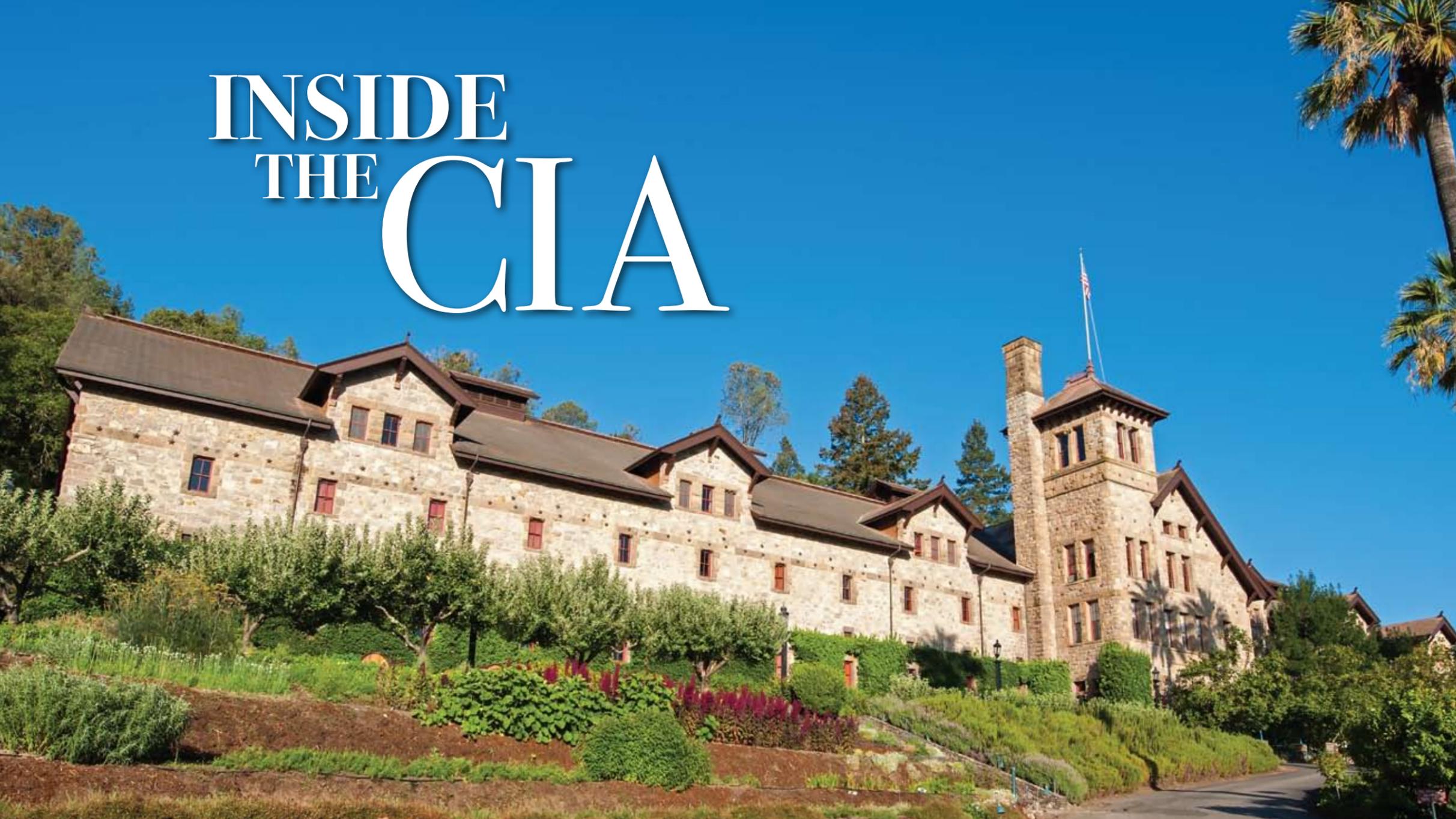
KEVIN BUCKLER

WORLD'S FASTEST WINEMAKER

CANNABIS

WINE COUNTRY'S OTHER CROP

INSIDE THE CIA



*A unique
window into the
world of food*

STORY COURTNEY HUMISTON
PHOTOS REBECCA GOSSELIN

As the sun rises over the vineyards of Charles Krug, at the northern end of Napa Valley, the light dramatically illuminates the stone surface of the three-story castle-like Greystone building. Home now to the West Coast outpost of the Culinary Institute of America, it rises like a fortress from the eastern slopes of the Mayacamas mountain range—a remnant of Napa Valley's first boom time when Catholic missionaries, European entrepreneurs and ambitious frontiersmen flocked to the fertile valley to farm and build and, of course, make wine. Up the same stairs that winemakers at the turn of the century once climbed to check on fermentations and perform punchdowns, students in freshly pressed and spotlessly white chef coats now trudge through an early morning fog, lugging their “chef roll” of knives and meat thermometers and pastry-making paraphernalia.

At 7 a.m. sharp, with eyes bleary from either working a seemingly interminable dinner shift in one of Napa's demanding kitchens or from a late night of PBR and karaoke at Anna's (depending on who is funding their expensive





education), students settle into desks and turn to one of the 1,200 pages of *The Professional Chef*—the school’s comprehensive guide to cooking techniques, vegetable identification and meat fabrication (with recipes)—depending on that block’s curriculum: *garde-manger* one week, cuisines of Asia the next.

For those aspiring to be the foul-mouthed, tattooed, speed-snorting type of chef, the CIA is not the place. For starters, none of those things are tolerated. Neither is facial hair (not even a 5 o’clock shadow—one student reported that he had to shave during lunch in order to comply with the strict standards), tardiness, sluggishness or complaining. “It’s difficult for some students,” acknowledges Chef Instructor Patrick Clark. “We have a hard line for that stuff here. But it is the demands of this industry ... I try not to make it unpleasant, but students need to understand it’s not an easy industry. Working in a professional kitchen isn’t for everyone,” says Clark.

After a 45-minute lecture, it’s time to get to work. Students, identically clad in buttoned-up chef coats, elastic-waisted black-and-white-checked pants and tall paper hats, hustle into the huge open Test Kitchen or “TK” as it is referred. Boasting seven kitchen “suites,” each with eight gas burners, four induction burners, eight glass-top electric burners, two French tops and four ovens (some have fryers and broilers as well) the TK is an intimidating place—especially when 200-plus students are frantically preparing their *mise en place* (students are graded each day based on the accuracy and consistency of their knife skills when it comes to chopping, mincing and dicing) that will serve as the foundation for the meal they are to prepare.

Among the list of expectations Chef Clark gives for his students, at the top is “a

SEVEN KITCHEN SUITES, each with eight gas burners, and 200 students, all chopping, mincing, dicing and starting the occasional fire.



sense of urgency.” “Timing is critical ... It’s critical in this industry,” he says. Over the next four hours, the entire student body is engaged in a single effort: the making of lunch. Students frantically, urgently sauté, roast, blanch, braise and grill their way to the day’s goals. Except for the clatter of pans, the tick and hiss of gas stoves and the occasional “Yes, chef!” and “hot behind” as students barely miss running into each other with pans of gravy and pots of chicken stock, the Test Kitchen is surprisingly quiet. Chef instructors roam the kitchen offering guidance and criticisms; troubleshooting and putting out fires (yes, sometimes literally).

“One year there were 27 Michelin stars in this building.”

The Culinary Institute of America is the country’s largest and arguably best cooking school (it boasts the highest retention rate and is the only one that is not-for-profit). The CIA’s mother ship is in Hyde Park, New York, and, according to Clark, “they dictate what happens here.” But the Greystone campus is unique in that it serves not just as a hub for eager would-be Thomas

Keller and Michael Chiarello, but also for the masters themselves. Each October, the three-story building fills with Michelin-star-carrying chefs (“one year there were 27 Michelin stars in this building,” says Clark) and their obedient, quick-moving kitchen crews for Worlds of Flavor, which is just one of 12 conferences exploring the cutting edge of international cuisine and culinary development. For instructors, “It opens our eyes to what is going on in the rest of the world, not just in Napa Valley,” says Clark. Nestled in the heart of a fine wine region, Greystone’s inextricable link to the wine industry is another thing that sets it apart from the other three campuses (CIA recently expanded to Austin, Texas, and Singapore).

Designed by the same architect responsible for Chateau Montelena and Inglenook, the original stone structure was built as a cooperative winery in 1889—with capacity to store two million gallons of wine, Greystone was instrumental in the early success and expansion of Napa’s wine industry—it made it possible for the many small producers to free up space in their own cellars at harvest, meaning they could age wine longer and demand higher prices from greedy San Francisco merchants.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Greystone, like nearly all other wineries in California, was abandoned. Phyloxera, a vine pest that eats the roots of vines, systematically destroyed whole vineyards and any effort to replant was discouraged by the passing of the 18th Amendment and the 13 dark years of prohibition that followed.

In 1950 the Christian Brothers purchased Greystone and, for the next 40 years, it once again became a fully operational winery. When the Christian Brothers sold its wine brand to the international beverage distributor Heublein Inc. in 1990, the CIA renovated the building and moved into what is now a nationally registered historic place.

While the fermentation tanks have long been empty and the 120-year-old redwood casks serve only an aesthetic function, Greystone’s significance to the wine world is far from past. In 2010, under the guidance of Karen MacNeil, author of *The Wine Bible* and Chairman of professional wine studies, the CIA launched a first-of-its-kind wine education program headquartered in the former Christian Brothers distillery adjacent to the main Greystone building. Where the infamous brandy once bubbled away, a laboratory-like tasting facility complete with light boxes and individual sinks, creates an almost ridiculously academic setting for studying wine.

On the first seven-hour day of the Accelerated Wine and Beverage Program (AWBP), students are given 12 crystal Riedel glasses, which they will be responsible for maintaining and bringing to class every day for the next nine months. They are also issued a corkscrew (which they are



MASTER SOMMELIER ROBERT BATH: “AWBP is the way I wish I had learned about wine.”



CHRISTIE DUFAULT, a full-time instructor in the Accelerated Wine and Beverage Program, has real-world experience at two, top San Francisco restaurants.

instructed to never be without—not just for class but for life—a magnum-sized decanter, a complete bar set, terry cloth buffing rags and 14 textbooks—covering everything from malolactic fermentation and canopy management to the soil types in Rioja, the history of Champagne and instructions for serving a 40-year-old bottle of wine.

Master Sommelier and full-time instructor Robert Bath calls AWBP “The way I wish I could have learned about wine ... it’s a groundbreaking approach at providing a systematic and intensive look at the world of wine and beverages.”

Each morning, students unpack their glasses—making sure they are spotless—and settle in for three hours of lecture and discussion. One week, the trellising systems in Friuli, the next AOC laws in France, the following, the sub-appellations of Australia. Notes are taken, flash cards made: everything—every minutia of labeling laws and grape ripeness—will be on the test.

If tasting 8 to 16 wines sounds like a

relaxing way to spend the afternoon, you have to think again. Each day, between 8 and 16 wines are poured from bottles wrapped securely in paper bags—making the tasting blind. The room is silent as students quietly swirl, sniff and sip, writing down aromas—burnt popcorn, white flowers, unripe peach skin—and determining whether the acidity level is medium plus or medium plus *plus*. One student is then called upon to tell the class everything he or she can about the wine—and make an educated guess as to its origin and level of quality. This exercise, referred to as “systematic tasting analysis” will prepare the students for both the final comprehensive exam in the spring and the rigorous Court of Master Sommeliers exam, should they choose to subject themselves to an exhausting and, at times, humiliating daylong test, during which they must decant wine, make pairing recommendations and serve a table of imaginary guests.

“The CIA helped me develop a healthy sense of urgency.”

As of the spring of 2013, 58 students have graduated from AWBP (the writer of this story is a graduate of the 2011 class) and gone on to work as sommeliers, restaurant managers, distributors, importers and even winemakers. “The wine education is unparalleled in the world,” says Christie Dufault, one of the program’s two full-time instructors. “What sets the CIA apart is a combination of the location, the facilities, and the quality of the students,” says Dufault. One could also argue it is the caliber of the instruction: Before joining the CIA, Dufault ran two of the most prestigious wine programs in San Francisco—at Restaurant Gary Danko and Quince. When she isn’t teaching, she travels around the world keeping up on new vintages, producers and up-and-coming regions.

If the CIA had a spokesperson for the diversity of their programs, it would be Amy Racine, who completed the four-year

culinary program in Hyde Park, graduated at the top of the inaugural AWBP class at Greystone and is now, at the age of 25, running the wine program at a high-end restaurant in San Francisco. Racine speaks highly of her time in the hallowed halls (as any spokesperson, official or not, would): “The CIA helped me to develop a healthy sense of urgency,” says Racine, whose first job out of AWBP was as a sommelier at one of the high-end Amangiri resorts.

Racine attributes a strong knowledge of both food and wine as well as hospitality and professionalism to her success at such a young age. It is, perhaps, the diversity of the curriculum that makes the CIA experience unique. All culinary students take wine classes and work both in the front- and back-of-house positions at the CIA’s restaurant, and all wine students spend a month in the “TK” learning how to hold a knife and make a perfectly clear consommé.

By 2 p.m. the Test Kitchen is spotless once again—stretches of stainless steel countertops have been scrubbed and polished. Students have shed their hats and spent a few minutes reflecting on what went wrong before hitting the books: creating menus, restaurant concepts and budgets. Many students are back in their whites again by 4 p.m., chugging Red Bull and preparing *mise en place* once again—this time in a real restaurant. It makes for a long day, but as Chef Clark points out, 14-hour days are a part of the industry. **S**

