

Four ice cream bars are arranged diagonally across the cover. From top-left to bottom-right: a pink and blue bar, a white bar with dark berry swirls, a solid red bar, and a yellow bar with dark chocolate chips. All bars are on wooden sticks.

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Volume 2, Issue 4

Summer 2025

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**PUBLISHER &  
MANAGING EDITOR**

Karen Elowitz

**ADVERTISING SALES  
REPRESENTATIVE**

Jim Lenhart

**DESIGNER**

Cheryl Koehler

**CONTACT US**

To reach us by mail:  
Edible Mendocino & Lake Counties  
705 N. State Street #191  
Ukiah, CA 95482

For advertising inquiries, please email  
ads@ediblemendocino.com  
or call 714-906-8801.

For editorial inquiries and  
press releases, please email:  
karen@ediblemendocino.com

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*Cover image by Karen Pavone*

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## FIRST COURSE

I'm not a fan of heat, so when Ukiah's annual two weeks of mild temperatures abruptly ended and the thermometer headed toward 100, I needed RELIEF. I made a beeline to Corazon Purepecha, Ukiah's only Mexican paletteria, and slurped down an ice-cold strawberries-and-cream agua fresca so rapidly that I got a headache (the good kind, though). It definitely hit the spot! Corazon Purepecha's colorful, delicious—and most importantly, FROZEN—treats are so irresistible that I walked out with about a half-dozen other goodies to save for later, including some paletas like the ones pictured on the cover. Read more about this amazing hidden treasure of a store, the hardworking family behind it, and how they make 2,000 popsicles every week (!) on page 12.



Now that summer is here, many folks will have dusted off their backyard barbecues and started grilling. But more often than not they often end up with burned, dry meat, or lackluster, flavorless side dishes. That's because doing barbecue well involves more than slapping a rub on a steak and throwing it on some fire. If this sounds familiar, head over to page 20 to get some pro tips from two local barbecue masters who've spent their whole careers perfecting their craft. Life is too short for bad barbecue!

In fact, our recipe roundup section features a classic barbecue side, coleslaw, but with a mouthwatering twist. It's actually corn slaw, and it was created by New York Times best-selling cookbook author Caroline Chambers. It'll take your barbecue game to the next level! We've also got a recipe that takes advantage of one of summer's sweetest, juiciest gifts: fresh peaches! This peach, prosciutto, and feta cheese salad is a summer staple in my household, and maybe it will become one in yours.

Other flavors we explore this issue include botanicals local to Lake County. Chaparral Mountain Gin, produced by Kelseyville-based Joy Merrilees, incorporates local juniper, bay laurel, orris root, elderflower, coriander, and lemon. Learn about her journey from winemaker to distiller starting on page 8, and try some of her cocktail recipes on page 11.

And last but not least, wine writer Melissa Vogt introduces us to a handful of Mendocino County winemakers who are redefining California Chardonnay. The flavors and notes of these "low-intervention" Chards echo the great white Burgundies of France, while letting the terroir of our region shine through. Read about Baxter, Lussier and Wentworth starting on page 16.

*Karen Elowitz*

Karen Elowitz  
Publisher and Managing Editor

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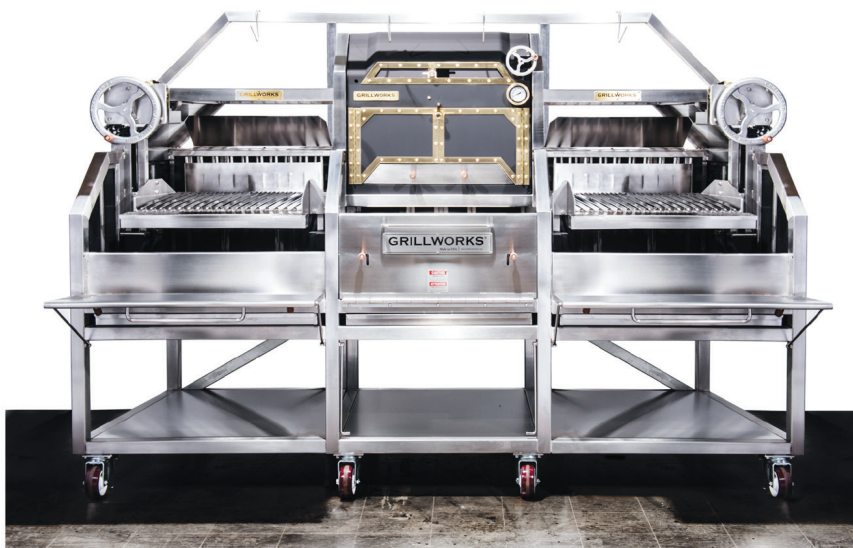
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## SMALL BITES

# Corners of the Mouth Celebrates a Half-Century

The little grocery store in the iconic building proves that idealism never goes out of style

WORDS AND IMAGES BY KAREN ELOWITT

Back in the mid-1970s, the “flower power” era was coming to an end, slowly morphing into a more cynical, disillusioned era marked by the Manson murders, Altamont, and Watergate.

But many still held on to the idealism of the 60s. And although San Francisco was the epicenter of the flower power movement, hundreds of young seekers sought refuge from the urban jungle by moving to the wilds of Mendocino County and living off the land.

Garry Sheppard was no exception. After leaving his hometown of Los Angeles and briefly flirting with San Francisco, he found his nirvana in Albion. Influenced by the back-to-the-land movement and a deep commitment to locally grown, healthy, organic food, he started a small food-buying club in Mendocino in 1975.

*The Corners of the Mouth.  
Perseverance brings good fortune.  
Pay heed to the providing of nourishment.  
And to what a man seeks.  
To fill his own mouth with.*

*—The I Ching, Hexagram 27*



*The view of the shop from the second floor “tea room.”*







The Corners crew in 1989

It originally operated out of Kellieowen Hall at the southwest corner of Lansing and Ukiah Streets, then moved to the Kelley Baptist Church building on Ukiah Street in 1976. That same year Sheppard's food club incorporated as a workers collective, and adopted the name Corners of the Mouth.

The poetic yet cryptic name derives from Hexagram 27, a passage in the I Ching, the ancient Chinese book of philosophical wisdom that became wildly popular during the 60s counterculture era.

Titled "Nourishment," the passage emphasizes the importance of both physical and spiritual sustenance. It represents not only eating properly, but also caring for oneself and others, cultivating moral values and intellect, and achieving balance by controlling one's appetites.

Corners is closely identified with the striking and beloved building that it has occupied for almost five decades. Originally built in 1893 by early settler William Kelley for his wife, Eliza, it had an active church congregation from 1894 until about 1936, then housed various businesses until Corners moved in. The store has now become part of the historical legacy of the building, and of the town of Mendocino.

If you've never been inside, you're in for a treat. It's not quite a religious experience, but the 30-foot ceilings, lancet windows, and stained glass definitely make for a unique shopping experience. Don't miss the tea room, a second-story alcove above the checkout area that looks over the main shopping floor.

Although Sheppard left the Corners collective not long after it incorporated, it continued to operate according to its founding principles, and still does to this day.

In the 50th year of Corners of the Mouth we celebrate its ongoing commitment to collective ownership, healthy food, and local producers.

In an era of industrial food, capitalism run amok, and corporate greed, the persistence of Corners reminds us that although the 60s and 70s are long gone—their idealism still lives on.

*Corners of the Mouth is located at 45015 Ukiah Street in Mendocino. It is open from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm every day. For more information call (717) 937-5345 or visit [Facebook.com/CornersoftheMouth](https://facebook.com/CornersoftheMouth).*

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# Good, Clean, and Fair: Slow Wine for the Win!

The newly revised edition of the *Slow Wine Guide USA* features an expanded and updated Mendocino County chapter

BY KAREN ELOWITT

If you're familiar with the concept of "slow food," then the concept of "slow wine" should be a no-brainer. After all, grapes are an agricultural product like any other.

As with slow food, slow wine is all about vino that is made and grown with environmental sustainability and social responsibility in mind.

Slow Wine USA, which is part of the Slow Food USA organization, supports and promotes winemakers who work with respect for the environment, terroir and workforce. To help consumers make educated choices, they produce an annual guide called Slow Wine Guide USA.

With a guiding mission of "good, clean, and fair," inclusion in the Slow Wine Guide USA requires wineries to grow the majority of their own grapes, to avoid use of synthetic fertilizers and herbicides, and to have a conscious and sustainable approach to the use of environmental resources. The 380 wineries in the book also meet other criteria, such as practicing biodiversity in the vineyard, demonstrating terroir-related values such as history and identity, and treating winery employees and surrounding communities fairly and cooperatively.

The Slow Wine Guide USA was first published in 2018 and has been through several editions since then. It is organized by state and region, and has always included a handful of wineries from Mendocino and Lake Counties. However, the most recent edition, which was released in 2025, features a greatly expanded "Mendocino & Other" section (which includes Lake County), acknowledging this region as a leader in sustainable wine production.

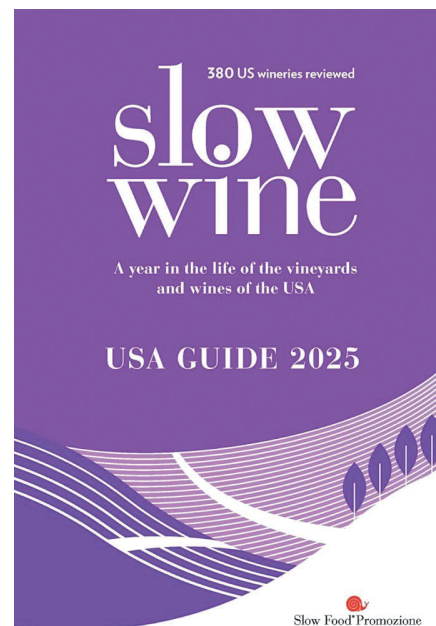
Redwood Valley-based wine writer Heidi Dickerson, editor of the local chapter of the book, was instrumental in ensuring that 25 wineries from the area were included—compared to only five in the previous edition.

"Mendocino County is one of the slowest – and most sustainably farmed—wine regions in the country," Dickerson said. "I had a blast writing about as many as I could."

To learn more about *Slow Wine Guide USA 2025*, including where to buy a copy, visit [slowwineusa.com](http://slowwineusa.com).



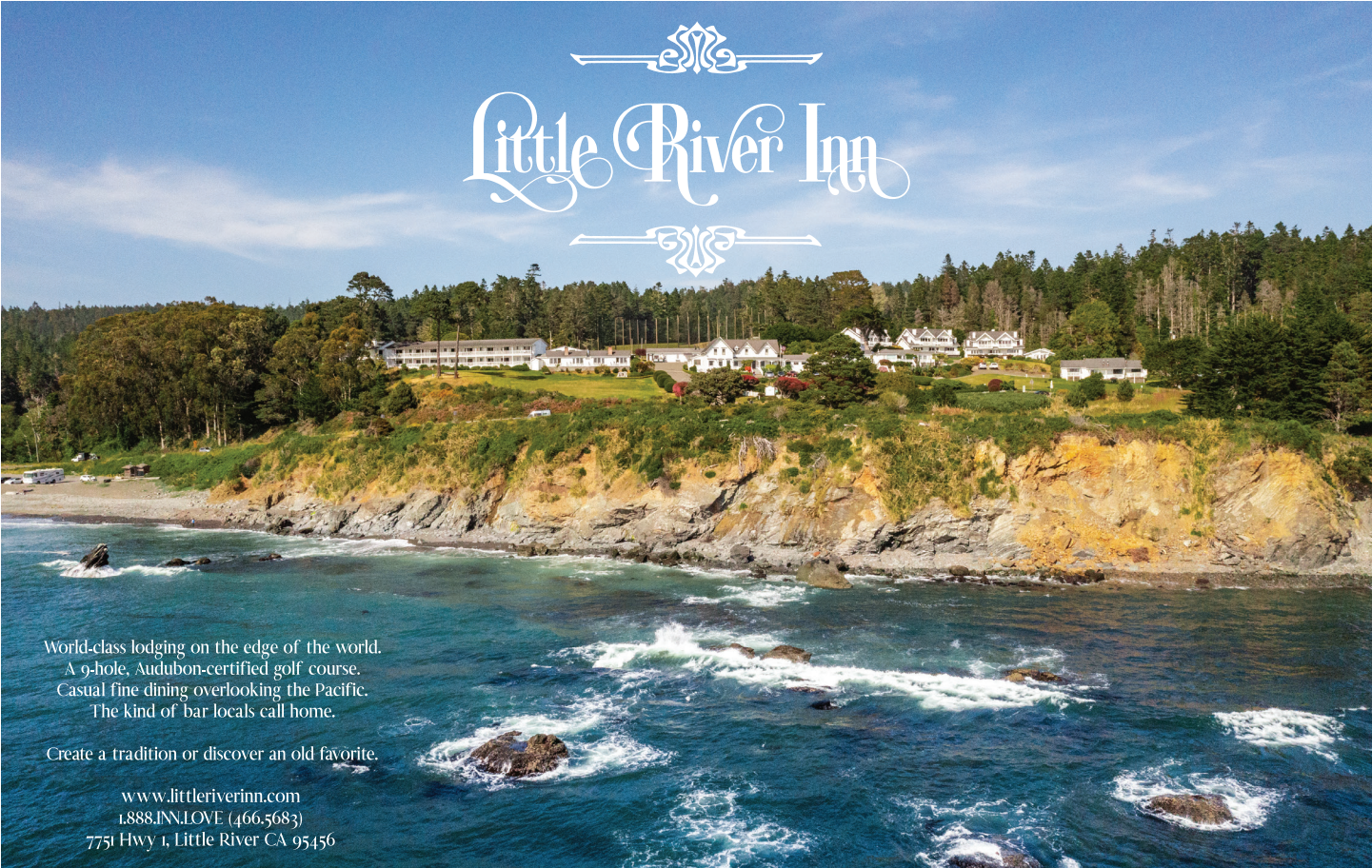
Heidi Dickerson (left), local editor, and Deborah Parker Wong (right), national editor, at the *Slow Wine Guide USA 2025* reception at the Ukiah Valley Conference Center in April.



## WHO'S INCLUDED?

Alta Orsa, Hopland | Artevino, Yorkville | Barra of Mendocino, Redwood Valley | Bee Hunter, Boonville | Blue Quail/McFadden, Potter Valley | Bonterra, Hopland | Brashley, Philo | Campovida, Hopland | Cesar Toxqui, Redwood Valley | Chance Creek, Redwood Valley | Domaine Anderson, Philo | Drew Family Wines, Elk | Duncan Peak, Hopland | Terra Savia/Ettore, Hopland | Frey Vineyards, Redwood Valley | Handley Cellars, Philo | Lichen Estate, Boonville | Mariah Vineyards, Manchester | Mia Bea Wines, Redwood Valley | Navarro Vineyards, Philo | Pennyroyal, Boonville | Powicana, Redwood Valley | Shannon Family of Wines, Clearlake Oaks | Testa Vineyards, Redwood Valley | Trinafour, Ukiah





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MEET THE MAKER

# *Finding Her Spirit*

Winemaker Joy Merrilees pivots to spirits with a gin  
that captures the essence of Lake County

WORDS AND IMAGES BY KAREN ELOWITT







Photo courtesy of Muse Photography



When I first met Joy Merrilees she was on top of a ladder, plucking elderflower blooms from the top of a tree on her property.

“Plants have always been my passion,” she said. “Not just for their medicinal properties, but for their mental health benefits, and the happiness that people get from being outside and gardening...all of those things!”

Having grown up among the plants, flowers and trees of Upper Lake, it should not come as a surprise that Merrilees developed a passion for all things botanical. And that she’s turned that passion into not one, but two plant-related careers.

You may know Merrilees’ name already—she is an experienced winemaker, having worked for the last 20 years at some of the most well-known wineries in Lake County, capturing the essence of Lake County’s volcanic terroir into bottles of award-winning wine.

But in her spare time she tinkered with spirits, experimenting with different ways of coaxing the essence of local plants into bottles of gin. Considering her primary job as a winemaker, and her knowledge of the local flora, it was a natural progression.

“I really wanted to share with the world the sense of place of the chaparral biome here, because it’s very unique,” she said. “I’ve been immersed in it for the majority of my life, hiking, camping and exploring the hills.”

Becoming a distiller didn’t happen overnight, though. It was basically a culmination of a lifetime of study, work and observation. Armed with a degree in botany and horticulture, Merrilees leaned on transferable skills from the wine industry, self-taught knowledge, and wisdom from friends who were distillers. She also did some formal coursework on the art and science of distilling.

Somewhat serendipitously, it was actually wine—or more accurately, wine grapes—that finally turned her passion for spirits into her new career as Lake County’s first craft distiller.

Merrilees and her husband grow Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc grapes at their 60-acre property in Kelseyville, and typically sell it to local winemakers. However, in 2023 they found themselves with 10 tons of unsold Cabernet Sauvignon grapes.

“I thought, ‘okay, I’m going to turn some excess into an opportunity,’” Merrilees said. “How can I turn a perishable commodity into something that adds value? So we decided not to feed it to the chickens, but make gin out of it.” Two years later, High Chaparral Mountain Gin was born.

While most gins are primarily corn- or potato-based, they can also be made with wine as the predominant ingredient. High Chaparral gin does use a small amount of corn to add sweetness, but the stars of the show are the wine—and of course, the botanicals.

First and foremost there’s juniper, which is what distinguishes gin from other spirits. Merrilees forages as much as she can from the higher elevations of the Mendocino National Forest, and buys the rest from local producers. Then there’s California bay laurel, elderflower, orris root, and coriander, all of which grows on her property. And lastly there’s lemon peel, which comes from neighbors and friends.

*Top: A photo of a native manzanita tree from the property where distiller Joy Merrilees lives adorns the High Chaparral gin bottle. Bottom: Merrilees harvests elderflower blooms from trees on her property to use in her gin.*





Photo by Caitlin Custer/Adobe Stock



*Clockwise from top left:*

*The chaparral biome is found in only five places in the world: California (including Baja California); coastal areas of the Mediterranean; central Chile; the Cape region of South Africa; and southwestern Australia. It is characterized by hot, dry weather, and shrubby, drought-resistant vegetation.*

*The six botanicals in High Chaparral gin infuse it with the essence of Lake County. From left to right: Lemon peel, orris root, coriander seed, elderflower, California bay laurel, and juniper.*

*Elderflower drying on racks in Merrilees' shed.*

*Merrilees grows agave on her 60-acre property. She plans to add agave to the gin recipe when the plants mature.*



## CHAPARRAL PAPER AIRPLANE

¾ ounce High Chaparral gin  
¾ ounce Aperol  
¾ ounce Brucato Chaparral Amaro  
¾ ounce lemon juice

Shake all ingredients with ice, then strain into a coupe glass. Garnish with a dried Meyer lemon wheel.



## CHAPARRAL GIN & GINGER

1 ounce High Chaparral gin  
½ ounce lemon juice  
3 ounces ginger ale

Add ice, gin and lemon juice to a highball glass. Top with ginger ale, and garnish with fresh lemon and elderflowers.





"You really just have to find that sweet spot where all of those botanicals are coming out in the proportions that you're looking for," she said.

For example, bay laurel adds a spicy note, elderflower offers floral notes, and the lemon peel adds finish and weight. The orris root (from irises) not only adds earthiness and notes of lavender, but also helps to bind and enhance the flavors of the other botanicals.

The elegant bottle even reflects the chaparral mountain landscape—the tree pictured is a native Manzanita from Merrilees property.

"I think that sense of place really comes through in the gin's aromatics, its flavors, and even the visuals—it's an all-encompassing sensory experience."

Merrilees is thrilled to be able to flex her creative muscles as a spirit maker, and turn her love of plants into an ingestible form of art.

"I've been using plants to make art at every point of my career," Merrilees said. "I was a landscape designer at one point, using plants to make landscape art. Then I became a winemaker, using plants to make wine art. So this is just the next iteration of that. Now I have a bigger paint brush, if you will, of plants, to make art from."

The first batch of High Chaparral gin produced 2000 bottles, which can be bought at various retailers online and in Lake County. Merrilees is excitedly planning the next batch, thinking about ingredients to add and ways to adjust the recipe to make it even better.

"I do think the base of it is really good, but I want to change up the aromatics a little," she said. "I'll probably kick up the elderflower a bit and dial down the corn, because the botanicals will add a little bit more of that sweetness naturally. In the future I also want to add agave from my farm, but it's still too young now."

Merrilees is proud to have created a product that's new to the county, but was born of its land and heritage.

"As a farmer, it's important to stay on top of what is popular and what is going to keep Lake County an agricultural community," she said. "We're always looking for innovation and looking to the future."

To learn more about High Chaparral Native Botanical Mountain Gin, visit [highchaparralspirits.com](http://highchaparralspirits.com)

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# FROZEN FLAVORS TO SAVOR

*Move over 31 Flavors—Corazón Purépecha takes the edge off the summer heat with unique hand-made popsicles, agua frescas, ice cream, and much more*

WORDS BY KAREN ELOWITT | PHOTOS BY KAREN PAVONE







*Above: Corazón Purépecha's icy agua frescas are the perfect antidote to a sweltering summer day. Opposite: Elizabeth Echevarría serves Corazón Purépecha's paletas to a hungry customer.*

In Mexico and much of South America, paleterías are ubiquitous. Even the smallest villages have a paletería (or three), and you can also find them at pop-up streetside stalls and mobile pushcarts in plazas and parks. They are a time-honored summer tradition, with multiple generations of families making weekly trips to the local paletería on hot days to indulge in cool, colorful treats such as paletas (popsicles), helados (ice cream), agua frescas (cold, fruity drinks) and other frozen goodies.

Paleterías are a little harder to find in Mendocino and Lake counties, however, but not impossible. Tucked into a couple of hidden corners of Ukiah are the two branches of paletería Corazón Purépecha, neither of which look remarkable from the outside. But once you enter, it's like walking into the center of a delicious rainbow.

The star of the show is the paletas themselves. Vividly colored, beautifully textured, and literally melt-in-your-mouth delicious, they are like miniature works of art.

"A paleta is basically ice cream on a stick," said owner Elizabeth Echevarría. "There's dairy and non-dairy versions. In the non-dairy paletas, it's basically just fruit, sugar, and water, and for the dairy ones, of course, there's also heavy cream in it. So it's pretty simple and sort of healthy."

Paletas are generally considered to have originated in the Michoacán region of Mexico, where Echevarría and her family are from. (In case you were wondering, the word "Purepécha" in the name of the store refers to an indigenous ethnic group from Michoacán.)

What primarily distinguishes paletas from American popsicles is the tradition of making them—typically by hand—with only the freshest ingredients, and nothing else. No fruit juice, no high fructose corn syrup, no additives. Echevarría proudly boasts that they don't use any preservatives or artificial flavors, and that they buy their fruit from a produce company in Sonoma County.

"We always use fresh ingredients," Echevarría noted. "We make them every week, and we only make what we need. So people are getting a fresh product that's not stored for months in the freezer."

Every Wednesday Echevarría, along with her husband Luciano and son Leonardo (who share the surname Mendoza), make 1,500 to 2,000 paletas in about 65 different flavors. It's a very impressive, well-oiled operation.

The process involves first cutting up the fruit and other ingredients, blending them together, then pouring the mixture into popsicle-shaped molds. The sticks are added, then the molds are put into a flash-freezing tank. After 10-15 minutes they are removed, bagged, labeled, and sent to the fronts of the two stores.

The most popular paleta flavor is fresas con crema (strawberries and cream). Other flavors include bubblegum, cotija cheese and blackberry, eggnog and raisin, vanilla, pistachio, Oreo, tamarind, tequila, and pumpkin spice (in fall and winter).

There are also 20 ice cream flavors—Echevarría and her team make that on Mondays—as well as thirst-quenching agua frescas and



raspados in flavors such as hibiscus, pineapple and cucumber, watermelon, and of course, strawberries and cream. You can also get assorted other mouthwatering sweet treats such as chocolate-covered bananas, fruit bowls, arroz con leche (rice with milk), smoothies, and yogurt parfait.

If you've got a hankering for something savory and spicy, there's an entire menu of items to satisfy that craving. Highlights include the puercada ("dirty corn" that comes in a bag with mayonnaise and cotija cheese, topped with hot sauce and chili powder) and the Marucha-esquite, which combines Maruchan ramen, corn, salsa-flavored Tostitos, nacho cheese, mayonnaise, cotija cheese, and hot sauce.

The first Corazón Purépecha store opened on Airport Park Boulevard in Ukiah in 2015, powered by sweat equity and money the family had saved up. Echevarría had help from relatives in Santa Maria who ran their own successful paletteria and shared recipes that had been passed down through the family for generations.

The business was so successful that the family opened a second store next to the Raley's on North State Street in 2017. Now they are set to expand again, with a third store opening later this year in Lakeport. Keep your ears and eyes open for more details on the grand opening date.

Corazón Purépecha has two locations in Ukiah: 1252 Airport Park Blvd. Unit B6, and 1311 North State Street. For more information, visit [Instagram.com/paletteria\\_corazon\\_purepecha](https://www.instagram.com/paletteria_corazon_purepecha)



Above: Hand made ice cream is one of the highlights at Corazón Purépecha. Below: Elizabeth Echevarria (center), her husband Luciano Mendoza (left) and son Leonardo Mendoza (right) are the powerhouse trio behind Corazón Purépecha, the popular Ukiah paletteria that will open its third store soon in Lakeport





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# In the Balance

## Low-Intervention Chardonnay Finds Its Voice in Mendocino County

BY MELISSA VOGT

Chardonnay in California has long been painted in broad strokes: either sharp and citrusy or thick with butter and oak. But a quieter revolution is underway on the rugged ridgelines and cool valleys of Mendocino County. Here, thoughtful winemakers are redefining what California Chardonnay can be—crafting wines of balance and nuance that echo the great White Burgundies of France while staying rooted in the region's wild, coastal terroir.

These Chardonnays are not the butter bombs of yesteryear, nor the stainless-steel styles that became the response to them. Instead, Mendocino County's low-intervention Chardonnays are restrained, textured, and mineral-driven, shaped gently by mostly native fermentation, neutral or low amounts of new oak, and a deep respect for the land—many of the vineyards are farmed sustainably, organically, regeneratively, or all of the above. With naturally low-alcohol levels and crisp acidity, these wines tell a story of place, patience, and winemaking that gets out of the way.

Mendocino County is carving out a space for Chardonnay that feels refreshingly modern yet deeply grounded in Old-World traditions. These winemakers aren't chasing trends—they're letting nature lead, crafting wines that are thoughtful, restrained, and expressive. Whether grown along the foggy ridgelines of Mendocino Ridge or tucked into the quiet corners of Anderson Valley, these Chardonnays share a common thread: a reverence for the land, for balance, and for the quiet beauty that lies between brightness and richness.

*Vineyards in the Anderson Valley*







Phillip Baxter of Baxter Winery at his high-elevation Oppenlander vineyard near Comptche

## AGING & LEES: The Quiet Architects of Chardonnay

Two of the most influential forces behind Chardonnay's flavor and structure are aging and lees contact. Aging in oak—particularly neutral French oak or a low percentage of new French oak—allows wines to breathe and evolve slowly, adding gentle textures and depth without overwhelming the grape's natural characteristics. Lees are the spent yeast cells left behind after fermentation. When winemakers age their Chardonnay on the lees, the wine gains richness and complexity, often contributing a creamy mouthfeel and layered aromatics. With a light touch of malolactic fermentation—the conversion of malic acid into lactic acid—the process adds richness and gentle, buttery undertones that do not overpower the entire palate.

The winemakers of Mendocino County are using these tools with a light touch, letting the environment lead and the grape express its most honest form. The result is a compelling collection of Chardonnay that is elegant yet expressive and distinctly Mendocino.

## BAXTER WINERY: Mineral Elegance from Oppenlander Vineyard

Winemaker Phillip Baxter brings a Burgundian sensibility to the rugged Mendocino coast, crafting small-lot, naturally fermented wines that let vineyard character shine. His 2022 Oppenlander Vineyard Chardonnay—sourced from own-rooted vines just nine miles from the Pacific near Comptche—is a study in quiet precision and old-world technique. Hand-harvested fruit is whole-cluster pressed, then gravity-settled and racked to neutral French oak, where native yeasts guide a long, slow fermentation.

Baxter allows the wine to rest on its lees for eight months, developing texture without distraction. Only 30% of the wine undergoes malolactic fermentation, preserving natural acidity and freshness. The final six months of aging took place in stainless steel to refine the wine's crystalline edge. There is no new oak, no added yeast, and no filtration—just an elegant translation of site and season.

The resulting Chardonnay is ethereal yet structured. The 2022 Oppenlander Vineyard Chardonnay boasts notes of orange blossom, lemon zest, and beeswax, giving way to flavors of Meyer lemon and stony minerality on the creamy textured palate. Reminiscent of Chablis and with just 12.8% alcohol, Baxter's mineral-driven Oppenlander Chardonnay offers the kind of quiet clarity only possible through respectful farming and restrained winemaking.

*The Baxter Winery tasting room is located at 8660 Hwy. 128 in Philo. For more information, call 707-895-3173 or visit [baxterwinery.com](http://baxterwinery.com).*



## WENTWORTH VINEYARDS: Technique in the Hills

Mark Wentworth approaches Chardonnay with the precision of a craftsman and the sensitivity of a naturalist, drawing from two different vineyard sites to create wines of depth and finesse. At his high-elevation estate on Mendocino Ridge—just a few miles from the Pacific—his 2023 Wentworth Vineyard Chardonnay begins with regeneratively farmed, hand-harvested grapes from a site perched above the fogline. The vines, planted in 2015 to a mix of Dijon 95, 548, and Hyde selections, root deeply into ancient seabed soils and fractured shale.

The fruit is whole-cluster pressed and fermented in barrel, with two-thirds new French oak lending structure and spice. A complete malolactic fermentation in the barrel follows, encouraged by biweekly stirring of the lees, which adds texture and mid-palate weight. Though rich in process, the wine remains nimble: lifted by brisk acidity and layered with salinity. It's a Chardonnay that speaks fluently of cool air, forest light, and mineral tension.

From Anderson Valley's deeply shaded Deep End comes the 2023 Nash Mill Chardonnay—a study in elegance from a vineyard just 12 miles inland but markedly cooler. Planted to Wente and Dijon 95 clones, the block sits between 400 and 500 feet in elevation and has been dry-farmed organically since the Wentworths acquired it in 2017. Whole-cluster pressed and fermented in a mix of stainless steel, new French oak, and neutral barrels, this wine balances aromatic lift with structural grace. Full malolactic fermentation and careful stirring of the lees coax out notes of white flowers, lemon zest, and crushed oyster shells. Both wines are bottled unfiltered, allowing the clarity of place to shine through the winemaking craft.

*The Wentworth Vineyards tasting room is located at The Madrones, 9000 Hwy. 128 in Philo. For more information, call 707-813-1339 or visit [wentworthvineyard.com](http://wentworthvineyard.com).*

*Mark Wentworth at work in his high-elevation estate on Mendocino Ridge*





Photo courtesy of G.W. Lussier

## LUSSIER WINE CO.: Regeneration in a Glass

No conversation about Chardonnay in Mendocino is complete without Lussier Wine Co., where winemaker G.W. Lussier channels the energy of the land into every bottle. Lussier sources Chardonnay from the high-elevation Mariah Vineyards, perched at 2,400 feet in the Mendocino Ridge AVA. Planted by Dan Duling and now farmed by his son, “Swiss Mike,” the site overlooks the Pacific Ocean and is sculpted by coastal winds and timber-laced soils—ideal conditions for a long, cool growing season. The vineyards are Land to Market–certified and completely regeneratively farmed.

For the 2023 vintage, Lussier picked his Chardonnay at just 20.5 brix, preserving a taut line of acidity and a naturally low alcohol of 12.3%. The fruit—clones 76 and 96—was hand-harvested and co-inoculated with a low-foaming yeast, followed by malolactic fermentation. The wine fermented slowly in barrel, spending just over a month in fermentation before aging on its lees for 16 months. Half of that aging occurred in new French oak barrels from Atlantique, a family-run cooperage where master cooper Eric Millard makes just three barrels a day by hand. Each stave is air-dried for three years and submerged in the Atlantic before being fire-bent over a slow, neutral flame, yielding a barrel with energy, nuance, and textural finesse.

Yet the oak never overpowers. This is not a Chardonnay of butter and toast, but one of salinity, sleek acidity, and pure site expression. Lussier’s use of Simonit & Sirch pruning, which preserves sap flow throughout the vine, further underscores his commitment to vine health and longevity, practices that allow fruit to ripen with both power and poise. The result is a wine that vibrates with coastal vitality, layered citrus, and mineral tension. It doesn’t just reflect Mendocino—it sustains it.

For more information about Lussier Wine Co., visit [lussierwineco.com](http://lussierwineco.com).



Photo courtesy of G.W. Lussier

*Top: Chardonnay grapes growing at the 2,500-foot Mariah Vineyards in the Mendocino Ridge*

*Bottom: Lussier’s 2023 Mendocino Ridge Chardonnay*



# HOW TO BARBECUE Like A PRO

**TECHNIQUES  
AND TIPS  
FROM TWO  
LOCAL  
BARBECUE  
MASTERS**

Let's face it, life is too short for bad barbecue. It's easy to throw some meat on a grill, but it can be difficult to make it truly delicious. It can also be polarizing; the U.S. has dozens of regional variations of barbecue, and each one claims to be the best. Furthermore, everyone has their own opinion on the "best" sauce, the "right" way to smoke brisket, or the most "appropriate" side dishes to serve with your main course.

They are all correct, actually. The beauty of barbecue is that you get to experiment and decide what pleases your own palate. Is it a tangy sauce, or a smoky one? A fat burger, or a flat one? A well-done steak, or a rare one? Griddle, grill, or smoker? The choices are endless.

However you do it, do it well. For inspiration, we talked to two local barbecue masters: Gane Jackson from Smokey's BBQ in Willits, and Carl White from Danny's Roadside Kitchen in Lower Lake. Their styles couldn't be more different, but they both offer valuable tips and techniques to get the most out of your summer barbecue adventures.

BY KAREN ELOWITT







*Gane Jackson of Smokey's BBQ in Willits at work smoking some brisket. Right: Juicy pork ribs straight off the grill at Smokey's BBQ*

## CHICKEN

Prep is important with chicken (and other meats) to lock in flavors and moisture, according to Jackson. "One thing that people mess up on a lot is they don't sear it first," Jackson said. "They don't sear on their juices and sear on the flavor."

"My trick is always I use the skin side up first and then let the fat render out of the skin, and then I'll flip it over, and that will prevent the chicken from sticking to the grill and falling apart," he added. "Also, most people pull their chicken too early from the grill. And that'll lead to shredding. When it's done on the bottom, it will just come right apart. It'll come right off, and you won't have to worry about a thing."

White recommends using the chicken thigh, rather than the breast or wing, to dramatically decrease your chances of ending up with bland, dried-out meat. "People tend to overcook chicken, and that's the reason it's dry," White said. "But chicken thighs don't dry out. You can take a chicken breast and cook it the same way you cook a chicken thigh, and the chicken thigh is going to have a lot more moisture and flavor than chicken breast."

## STEAK

"Steaks are more forgiving than chicken," Jackson said. "A lot of people like them on the medium to medium-rare side, so you don't really have to worry about internals too much on that. But you don't want to constantly flip your steaks. You want to flip them two times, but rotate 45 degrees in the middle, to get those beautiful grill marks."



Photo by Karen Elowitz

Jackson also has a trick to test "done-ness." "I open my palm, and start with the flesh under my thumb," he said. "I work my way to the center of my hand. The flesh under my thumb is the same color as rare meat, and the flesh in the center of my hand is the same as well-done meat. You can find your happy medium somewhere in the middle."

White concurs that it's important to get steak right. "My wife married me because of the way I cook the steak," he confessed. "I won her over by the way I cook. But I understand that people have a hard time with steak."



## BURGERS

"The trick with burgers is to never, ever smash them," Jackson said. "I put a dimple in the center of the burger with my thumb. That way it expands, stops it from shrinking up, and it won't puff up. Also, you should only flip a burger once. After about seven or eight minutes, flip it over, and then let it finish on the other side."

Jackson uses the rule of thumb, literally, to get the optimal thickness for his patties, and another simple hack to ensure they are perfectly round. "I use my thumb to measure the height," he confesses. "That always works out great."

To make the patties uniform, he turns a can upside down and uses the rim like a cookie cutter. "You want to cut it so it's just a little bit bigger than the bun, so when it shrinks up on the grill, you get a rim-to-rim burger. There's nothing worse than a burger that's hiding in the middle of the bun, and all you get in the first three bites is mouthfuls of lettuce and tomato."

## RIBS

Boiling ribs for about 45 minutes before barbecuing is considered sacrilege by some experts, who feel that it ruins the texture and causes the flavors to leach out of the meat. We think the trade-off is worth it for the increased tenderness that boiling creates, and you can always add more flavor in your sauces and rubs. We'll leave it up to you to decide which method you prefer, but whatever you do, make sure to let your ribs get to room temperature before doing anything with them.

"A lot of people make the mistake of taking the ribs right out of the ice box and putting them straight on the grill," White said. "I put mine in the sink and add some salt, a little bit of sugar and some bay leaves, and let them set for maybe 10 or 15 minutes. That helps open up the pores so that when you put your rub on, the meat absorbs it better."

## RUBS & SEASONINGS

"Your rub should complement your barbecue sauce, because you don't want them to mismatch," White said. "For example, at the restaurant I use an apple-based barbecue sauce, which is a little sweet. So I make my rub a little bit more spicy. That way one plays off the other. But if you have a spicy barbecue sauce, then you don't want a real spicy rub, because that would be going overboard." White is a fan of ingredients like Scotch bonnet and habanero peppers, apple cider vinegar, and fruits like mangoes and pears.

Rubs should also match the meat they are applied to, White added. He prefers more pepper in a rub for steak or other red meats, and less for chicken and pork. But most importantly, don't be afraid to go big on flavor. "I feel like people under-season food all the time," he said. "You should build layers with seasoning as you're cooking. Everything you do should be about building layers with seasonings so when it finishes, it doesn't need anything else."



Photo by Karen Elowitz

Carl White, owner of Danny's Roadside Kitchen, with his dog, Athena

Below: A rub recipe created by Gane Jackson's 9-year-old daughter, Kaya

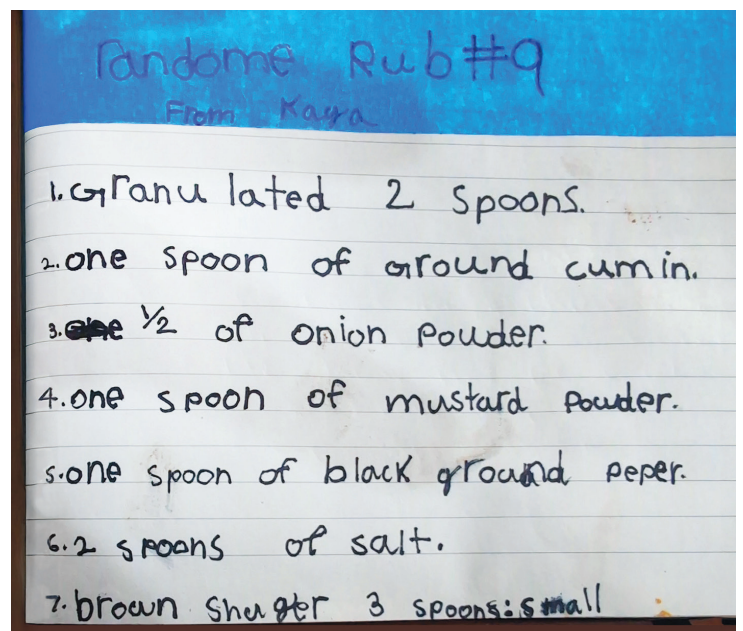


Photo courtesy of Gane Jackson





The side entrance to Danny's Roadside Kitchen in Lower Lake. The smoker can be seen in the middle-right of the image.

## BARBECUE SAUCE: BUILD OR BUY?

White is a proponent of cooking—rather than “assembling”—barbeque sauce, because it provides a much richer, textured flavor.

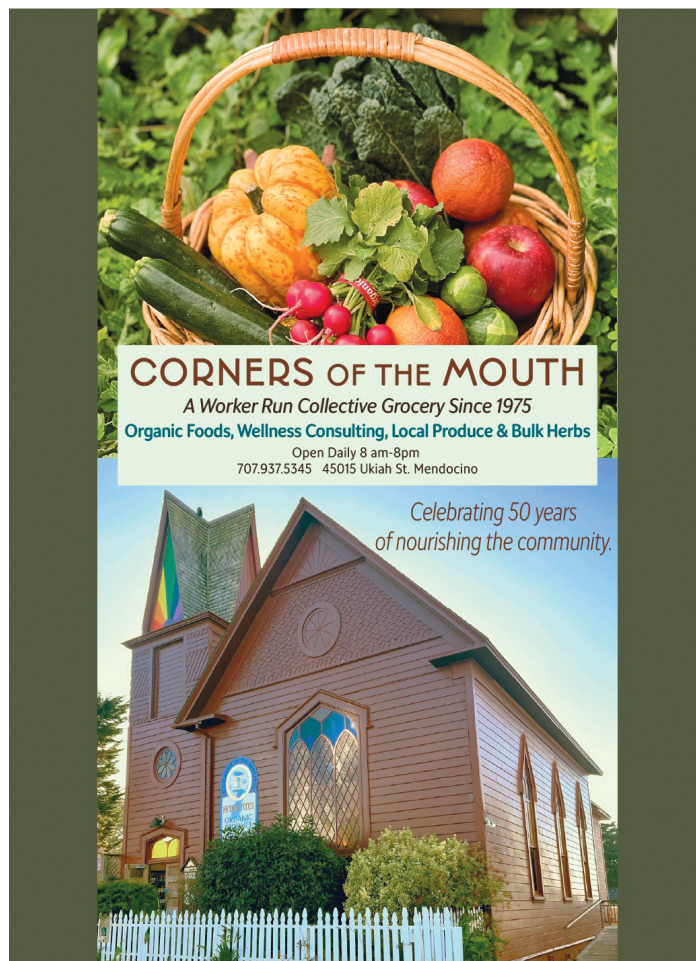
“Sure, you could take a bunch of ingredients from the store, like ketchup and seasonings, and mix them together for five minutes and call it barbecue sauce,” he said. “But it’s much more satisfying to make your own at home. You just need to combine all ingredients in a pot and boil them like you were making a pot of beans.”

White suggests starting with vinegar, apple sauce, tomatoes, onions, peppers, brown sugar and even a fruit like mango or pear, and reducing it down until all the ingredients meld together and you are left with a silky, velvety mixture. Google “barbecue sauce,” find a recipe that resonates with you, and use it as a starting point. Tweak it a little bit this way or that way, and call it your own.

If you don’t have the time or inclination to make your own sauce, Jackson suggests buying a quality off-the-shelf brand and “brightening it up” to your liking. Adding a little beer or lemon, for example, can jazz up the flavor nicely.

Smokey's BBQ is located at 42 S. Main Street in Willits.  
For more information call 707-409-4331 or visit  
[Facebook.com/707MendoBBq](https://www.facebook.com/707MendoBBq).

Danny's Roadside Kitchen is located at 9800 Hwy 53 in Lower Lake. For more information call 707-701-6025 or visit [Facebook.com/DannysRoadsideKitchen](https://www.facebook.com/DannysRoadsideKitchen).



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## ELEVATE YOUR SIDES

**Potato salad:** If you like your potato salad on the softer side, use Yukon Gold potatoes. They make really good creamy potato salad because they break down in the middle a little bit. But if you prefer the classic chunky potato salad, use russet potatoes. Other types of red potatoes hold too much water, Jackson says. And don't forget to season it well—paprika is always a winner. **TIP:** If you're making a TON of potato salad, save time by boiling the potatoes whole, letting them cool, then cutting them. It cuts out one step in the process.

**Macaroni & cheese:** If you want to elevate your mac & cheese game beyond boxed Kraft, Jackson suggests experimenting with different cheeses and sauces. He prefers a bechamel sauce (flour, water, butter and milk) with cheddar and Monterey Jack, but any cheese you like is the best choice. Jackson also advises using a lot more salt and pepper than you're used to, unless you're using a salty cheese like Gruyere and pecorino.

**Cole slaw:** There are two things to be careful of when making cole slaw: not to make it too soft and mushy, nor too crisp and crunchy. There is a happy medium. To ensure your cole slaw is not too watery, degorge or "rest" your vegetables first by mixing them with the salt from the recipe, then draining them in a colander for 15–30 minutes before proceeding. To make sure it's not too crispy, dial back the mayonnaise, and consider using a cooked vinaigrette instead of straight vinegar. It will soften up the cabbage while still providing that satisfying tanginess.

*Sides from Smokey's BBQ: Macaroni and cheese, collard greens, and baked beans*



## PEACH, PROSCIUTTO AND FETA SUMMER SALAD

*Recipe and image by Karen Elowitt*

*This is one of my favorite summer salads because it's a little sweet, a little salty, and healthy but filling. The sweetness of the peaches and honey is beautifully offset by the saltiness of the prosciutto and feta. It all sits on a bed of creamy, smooth butter lettuce—my favorite variety—which I pick up at the farmers market. (One decent-sized head can easily make three small-ish salads.) The lemon-infused olive oil adds a little tangy zing that perfectly completes the salad. Note: I prefer to put the olive oil and honey on before the solid toppings (to allow it to trickle into the lettuce), but you can drizzle it on as the last step, if you prefer.*

*Makes about 3 servings*

- 1 large head of butter lettuce
- 2 large, ripe peaches (canned can be substituted in the off-season)
- 1 ounce prosciutto
- ¼ cup crumbled feta cheese
- Honey
- Lemon olive oil

Wash and cut the lettuce into medium-size chunks. Place equal amounts into three bowls.

Drizzle a generous amount of honey and olive oil onto the lettuce.

Cut the peaches in half, then pull out the pits. Cut them further into ½ inch wide wedges.

Cut the prosciutto into small strips, about ½ inch wide by 3 inches long.

Put 3–4 peach wedges, 3–4 prosciutto strips, and some crumbled feta onto each salad.

Photo by Karen Elowitt



# CHARRED CORN SLAW

Recipe and image by Caroline Chambers

Coleslaw is too often a thick, mayo-heavy side dish with cabbage, carrots and nothing else. Mayonnaise is good for binding the cabbage together, but in this version a lot of acid is added so it becomes a lighter dressing. Lime juice and apple cider vinegar are used for a wonderfully tangy, but still creamy coleslaw that is packed with flavor thanks to crumbly Cotija cheese, cilantro, green onions and the real kicker: charred summer corn. Top it off with roasted peanuts for crunch and you have a summer slaw your guests will love.

Serves 4–6.

- 3 ears of corn, shucked
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- Juice of 2 limes (about ¼ cup)
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons granulated white sugar
- ¼ teaspoon ground cumin
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ small head green cabbage, thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
- ½ small head purple cabbage, thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and minced
- 1 bunch cilantro, finely chopped
- 3 green onions, thinly sliced
- 4 ounces Cotija cheese, crumbled
- ¼ cup roasted peanuts, chopped

Preheat an outdoor grill to high (500° F) heat.

Place the corn on the grill for 2–3 minutes per side, until charred all over. Set aside to cool. In a medium bowl, combine mayonnaise, mustard, lime juice, vinegar, sugar, cumin, cayenne and black pepper. Whisk well to combine.

In a separate large bowl, place the cabbages, jalapeño, cilantro and green onions. Cut the corn off the cob and add it to the bowl. Pour ¼ cup of the dressing over the cabbage mixture. Toss to combine. Add more dressing until desired level of creaminess is achieved. Toss in the Cotija cheese.

Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour to allow flavors to incorporate.

Sprinkle peanuts over top when ready to serve.



Caroline Chambers grew up in North Carolina, where she was raised on the robust flavors of the South. She has owned and operated a farm-to-table catering company in San Diego and has worked as a recipe developer and stylist for publications and brands including The New York Times, Robert Mondavi Wine, Food Network and Magic Chef. She currently lives in Carmel Valley with her husband George, two sons, a dog and ten chickens. Her new book, *What to Cook When You Don't Feel Like Cooking*, is available at [carolinechambers.com/cookbooks](http://carolinechambers.com/cookbooks).





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