

# Edible Heritage as Musical Form: Listening to the Legacy of Global Culinary Families

Foreword by Benjamin Steiner

Concept, Curation, and Preface by Pauline Yeung

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Photograph from Boksoondoga



## About KnitKnot Global

Founded by Pauline Yeung in 2024, KnitKnot Global (KKG) is a consulting company with business lines in finance and innovation, family business and family office, and talent cultivation and development. Pauline's vision is to continue bringing people from different walks of life together for connection and community, not unlike embroidery, and to use words to weave together tapestries that tell compelling stories. In recent years, Pauline has worked with central banks, financial institutions, business schools, and prominent families, bridging diverse cultures, building resilient networks, advising innovative initiatives, engaging in Track II diplomacy, and serving as a thought leader in global soft power. For more information, please visit <https://knitknotglobal.com/>

## Authors' Biographies



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Fluent in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Japanese, and conversant in French, Pauline Yeung is the founder of KnitKnot Global (KKG), a leading consulting firm that bridges strategy, policy, and creativity to deliver impactful solutions for central banks, financial institutions, and prominent families.

As an entrepreneur, board director, and global leader in family wealth and international finance, Pauline has spearheaded initiatives with Morgan Stanley, Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and the international organization for central banks throughout her career. She serves as a Board Member of French non-profit KEY Korea Europe & You and a Council Director of the Japan Society of Hong Kong.

A graduate of Princeton University and Central Saint Martins, Pauline is also an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Hong Kong, where she teaches in the MA in Family Wealth Management and in Executive Education programs in the business school. She is a trusted biographer, researcher, and advisor for ultra-high net worth families, having featured family businesses such as Crown Worldwide, Harilela Hotels, Indorama, Jebsen Group, Luen Thai, and Nissin Foods in her publications.

Pauline has been recognized as a Fellow at Salzburg Global, Leadership Fellow at the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies, an Asia 21 Next Generation Fellow at Asia Society, and a Delegate to the Australia-China Youth Dialogue.

Her global adventures have seen her engage diverse stakeholders for French Korean gastronomy exchange, judge the Sachs Global Fellowship at Princeton University, and serve as Master of Ceremony for an event with the first Chinese astronaut in space. Back in 2003, she made history as the only Arts student to obtain 10 straight As in the Hong Kong public examinations.



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Based in Hong Kong and Beijing, Danni Li is a graduate of the Master of Family Wealth Management student at HKU, having earned her BBA in Management from HKUST with an exchange semester at KU Leuven in Brussels. Her experience spans wealth management, family offices, consulting, financial regulation, and banking, including internships at the Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission, Synpulse, the Bank of East Asia, and ICBC Asia. A trilingual communicator fluent in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, she has engaged in public dialogue as an editor of her college magazine and a former General Affairs Captain of the HKUST Mandarin Debate Team, where she competed in city-wide tournaments.



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Based in Paris with strong ties to Seoul, Emma Lombard is a graduate of Intercultural Management at ISIT (Paris Panthéon-Assas University), following a degree in International Relations from the University of Montreal and an academic exchange at Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul. Her professional experience spans institutional diplomacy, public affairs, and cultural exchange, including her recent role coordinating programs at the Fondation France-Asie, where she worked closely with ministries, embassies, and institutional partners. A multilingual writer and active member of the Franco-Korean think tank KEY Korea Europe & You, she contributes to published research on economic and cultural dialogue between South Korea and Europe.



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Elaine Wu is a Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Arts double degree candidate at the University of Hong Kong. Her academic and research interests lie at the intersection of literature and cinema across East Asia, with a particular focus on Greater China (especially Taiwan), South Korea, and Japan. Elaine previously served as a Research Assistant at the HKU Law and Technology Centre. Her practical experience further spans the legal and corporate sectors, including internships at several law firms. Based in Hong Kong and trilingual in Chinese, English, and Korean, she brings a compelling cross-cultural lens and legal-technological perspective to her academic and professional pursuits.



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Asia Zanelli is a graduate of the ESG stream of the Master of Global Management at HKU. She holds a Joint Honours degree in Political Science and International Development from McGill University and previously studied at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her international experience spans diplomacy, multilateral negotiations, luxury retail, banking, and aviation, including work with the French Ministry of the Interior and participation as a youth delegate at the United Nations Commission on Population and Development. Based in Hong Kong and fluent in French, Italian, English, Spanish, and Creole, she brings a cross-cultural perspective to questions of identity, heritage, and globalization.

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## Foreword: Craft, Continuity, and the Resonance of Heritage

**Benjamin Steiner,**  
President & CEO, Steinway & Sons

Some beginnings arrive quietly, like a single note struck in an empty room – soft, but resonant enough to suggest a larger melody waiting to unfold. My connection with Pauline Yeung began in such a way. Three years ago, she reached out with a piece of writing on Steinway & Sons, composed while she was taking an MIT course on AI. Even in that early work, she looked past the mechanics of innovation and into the deeper currents of our company – its lineage, its craft, its devotion to sound. A few mentions of technology were there, but what stayed with me was her instinct to listen for heritage.

That instinct felt familiar. Long before either of us imagined our respective paths, we both walked the same campus at Princeton – absorbing ideas, discovering disciplines, and learning to hear the world with curiosity. Of course, Steinway's own story began more than a century before those undergraduate years. In 1853, Henry Steinway and his sons built their first piano in a Manhattan loft. They were a family of immigrants guided by a simple promise: to build the best piano possible. From that promise grew a lineage of artisans – generations of craftspeople who shaped wood, steel, and felt into instruments capable of carrying human emotion. Our heritage is a living craft, performed anew with every piano built and every musician who sits down to play.

Three years after her first message, Pauline wrote again – this time with a work shaped by metaphor, memory, and cultural imagination. *Edible Heritage as Musical Form* listens to culinary families the way musicians listen to scores: for rhythm, for silence, for the emotional architecture that holds a legacy together. In the comparative essays, Pauline worked with her multicultural team of students to bring freshness and imagination to the project. By comparing eight families in food and gastronomy to symphonies, folk song, opera, chamber music, pastoral suite, and ballet suite, the essay collection listens to legacy itself – how it moves, adapts, and breathes – in a way that is lyrical, analytical, and deeply human. It reflects a conviction that is central to Steinway's identity: heritage must be played, reinterpreted, and carried forward by those who understand its deeper purpose.

Today's Steinway remains rooted in craftsmanship even as we embrace innovation. Every Steinway piano carries the imprint of the hands that built it, the musicians who play it, and the generations that have sustained its sound. Our heritage endures through continuity and renewal, and it is in this spirit that Steinway will be partnering with Pauline and her company KnitKnot Global for a series of events in major cities around the world. These gatherings will bring together music, scholarship, and cultural dialogue – inviting audiences to experience heritage not as something static, but as something alive, interpretive, and communal. It is a privilege to contribute this foreword to a work that listens so deeply to the worlds it brings together.

# Preface: A Personal Journey from Concert Halls to Culinary Families

**Pauline Yeung,**  
Founder, KnitKnot Global

My love of classical music did not begin in childhood. I was not one of those students who grew up rehearsing in orchestra rooms or singing in choir lofts. My entry into that world came later, almost by serendipity, when I was an undergraduate at Princeton University. In those years, I began taking the train into New York, slipping into evening performances at Lincoln Center – nights of symphonies, ballet, and opera that felt like stepping into a different dimension of human intention.

While at Princeton, I also became close friends with musicians and music lovers – including two concertmasters of the Princeton University Orchestra – and through them I learned to listen not only with the ear, but with the mind. They taught me how structure becomes emotion, how discipline becomes beauty, and how a piece of music is held together by choices invisible to the audience. Those friendships opened a door into a world I had never imagined for myself, one I continued to explore through classical performances after returning to Hong Kong.

As I began my first job at Morgan Stanley Hong Kong, another fascination began to take shape: cuisine, gastronomy, and the cultural power they hold. I started to understand how food dissolves distance – how a shared meal can soften hierarchies, bridge cultures, and create trust and friendship.

In 2016, I entered a Japanese language speech contest and won an award for a speech on culinary diplomacy. Even then, I sensed that food was not merely nourishment or pleasure; it was a form of communication that could move gracefully across borders.

In 2025, my interest in the soft power of food returned with new urgency. Netflix's Korean cooking competition *Culinary Class Wars*, the gastronomy forums I encountered as a Board Member of KEY Korea Europe & You, and my teaching in family wealth management at the University of Hong Kong all brought the same question into focus: how do culinary families transmit identity, legacy, and legitimacy across generations?

Gradually, I began to see that classical music, gastronomy, family enterprise, and soft power were ideas that could be woven into a single conceptual thread. The culmination of that intellectual journey is the collection you now hold: *Edible Heritage as Musical Form: Listening to the Legacy of Global Culinary Families*.

When the idea for this compendium crystallized, I selected eight families whose stories carried both emotional depth and structural clarity and paired each one with a musical form, namely symphony, folk song, opera, chamber music, pastoral suite, and ballet suite. I then worked with my students and mentees to develop the comparative essays, each of which listens to two families through a distinct musical lens.

Conventional business language often describes family enterprises through governance, succession, ownership, and strategy. These categories matter, but they can miss the

emotional and sensory dimensions through which heritage survives. Music offers another language: one capable of hearing rhythm, variation, tension, harmony, crescendo, return, silence, repetition, and improvisation.

A **symphony**, as heard through **Kikkoman** and **Barilla**, reveals how global culinary families sustain coherence across generations while varying their expression across markets: Kikkoman through quiet cultural translation, Barilla through the public assertion of Italianità.

A **folk song**, embodied by **Vitasoy**, tells the story of how a simple soy drink, once a “poor man’s milk,” becomes a vessel of cultural intimacy through accessibility and shared memory, even as it navigates a recent upward movement toward premium sustainability.

An **opera**, reflected in **Urbani Tartufi**, shows how the drama of truffle hunting, table-side shaving, and centuries-old ritual shapes a form of ceremony, performance, and exclusivity that continues to exist as it moves outward to reach broader audiences.

**Chamber music**, exemplified by the **Loiseau sisters** and the **Roca brothers**, teaches us the art of mutual listening and distributed authority where heritage is performed by an ensemble negotiating tempo, interpretation, and trust. While the former seek renewal through a second generation, the latter appear to view their trio as a complete, finite performance to be honoured in its own time.

A **pastoral suite**, expressed through **Boksoondoga**, captures patience, seasonality, and attunement to place – the slow rhythms of fermentation, the humility of listening to rice, water, and microbial life, and the way terroir becomes a living, breathing collaborator.

A **ballet suite**, as seen in **the Donum Estate**, shows how choreography, design, and sensory experience become cultural power – how a vineyard becomes a stage, how sculpture and landscape move in synchrony, and how hospitality becomes an orchestrated performance of identity.

This collection does not claim that family food enterprises are literally musical compositions, and the essays are not intended as academic case studies or definitive histories. Rather, music reveals that heritage is not a static artifact but a living composition – one that must be played, interpreted, and sometimes reinvented. We invite the reader to listen differently: to hear the music of culinary families, and the cultural scores that they continue to play.

# Twin Symphonies of Heritage: Kikkoman and Barilla

## Asia Zanelli

In food enterprises built on enduring family legacies, heritage is profoundly shaped by culture across geographies and generations, influencing how continuity, legitimacy, and identity are constructed over time. Like music, food is never entirely static. It unfolds through repetition, interpretation, and intergenerational transmission. Heritage operates as a living composition; what is inherited is not only a recipe, but a rhythm – a way of working, deciding, and remembering rather than a fixed artifact.

Among musical forms, the symphony offers a particularly revealing lens. Structured yet evolving, disciplined yet adaptive, it unfolds through variation without losing coherence. Kikkoman and Barilla—two global culinary dynasties built on soy and wheat—can be understood as twin symphonies of edible heritage. Their histories are not simply preserved but are performed movement after movement, across time and markets.

Kikkoman and Barilla share scale, longevity, and cultural resonance: both began with simple ingredients and evolved into global enterprises while continuing to draw legitimacy from their origins. Yet they differ in how they articulate, transmit, and sustain their heritage.

Kikkoman's symphony is discreet, disciplined, and adaptive, built around continuity and quiet integration. Barilla's is expressive, narrative, and assertive, built around memory, family, and the public performance of Italian culinary identity. Their comparison shows that family-business heritage endures not by resisting globalization, but by translating inherited identity into forms of legitimacy that resonate across markets and generations. Listening closely to their trajectories reveals not only two companies but two philosophies of familial continuity.

## National Cultural Expression

Like symphonies rooted in different musical traditions, Kikkoman and Barilla emerge from distinct cultural worlds that shape how heritage is understood and expressed. National culture does not mechanically determine corporate strategy, but it provides a repertoire of meanings through which heritage can be made legitimate.

At Kikkoman, soy sauce is not elevated as a symbol but absorbed into daily life: an ingredient so ordinary it becomes foundational. Its heritage is carried not only through corporate memory but through the deep, fermented aroma of soy sauce itself: dark, saline, and familiar enough to disappear into the meal. Over time, repetition itself becomes meaning.

In this symphony, heritage is not loudly announced or declared. Instead, it is sustained through consistency: a quiet accumulation of trust that settles into the background of everyday practice (Sasaki et al., 2019). In Nye's terms, this is soft power exercised through everyday practice: non-coercive, non-spectacular, and effective precisely because it blends in (Nye, 2004).

By contrast, Barilla embodies a more expressive and narrative conception of heritage, shaped by Italian familism, regional pride, and an emotional connection to cuisine, with pasta functioning as a shared cultural memory and a marker of national identity. Through advertising imagery of grandmothers, children, and domestic rituals, Barilla invites consumers to associate pasta with childhood, family intimacy, and the imagined warmth of the Italian home.

Food becomes a narrative device, evoking memory, belonging, and domestic intimacy. Heritage is visible in the blue box, in the family name, and in the instructions that teach even distant consumers how pasta should be cooked.

Kikkoman's heritage might be felt most powerfully not in a slogan, but in the quiet continuity of brewing: soybeans, wheat, salt, water, microorganisms, time. Barilla's, by contrast, enters the home through the ritual of boiling water, salting it, waiting for pasta to soften, and serving a dish whose simplicity promises memories even far from Italy.

If Kikkoman's symphony is a restrained and continuous motif, Barilla's is a melodic theme brought to the foreground, inviting recognition and emotional participation. The former allows heritage to remain implicit, while the latter is actively articulated through storytelling and public discourse (Sargiacomo et al., 2023). One heritage disappears into flavour; the other announces itself as a way of life.

### **Governance Across Generations**

To sustain this cultural expression across centuries, however, requires more than just passive repetition; it requires a structural hand to guide the tempo. In family enterprises, this conducting role is performed by governance. The family business needs a conductor: not necessarily a single charismatic figure, but some principle of coordination that decides tempo, balances competing voices, and prevents variation from becoming noise.

At Kikkoman, the conductor is deliberately understated. Authority does not appear as a dramatic figure standing before the orchestra, but as a quiet rhythm embedded in institutional practice. Several founding families, including branches of the Mogi family, have historically shaped the enterprise, yet the brand itself remains more visible than any individual family member.

Instead of standing apart from the enterprise, the family is absorbed into it. The conducting hand is present, but almost hidden: it keeps time through continuity, discipline, quality, and trust. The most historically significant challenge in Kikkoman's governance was perhaps the Great Noda Soy Sauce Strike of 1927–1928. The dispute lasted 218 days and mobilized thousands of workers around wages, union recognition, and working conditions. Its aftermath contributed to a stronger emphasis on employee welfare and industrial paternalism, as well as to the presentation of the family enterprise as serving a wider social purpose (Large, 1981).

Barilla's conductor, by contrast, is more visible. The family name stands at the podium, functioning simultaneously as ownership identity, corporate brand, and cultural promise. A pivotal moment for Barilla in the late 1960s reveals how fragile a family symphony can become when external turbulence collides with internal divergence. During the social and labour unrest of 1969, Barilla's sales were severely disrupted and the strain exposed deep

differences between Gianni and Pietro Barilla, whose contrasting temperaments made unified crisis management difficult.

In 1971, the family sold a controlling interest in the business to the American corporation W. R. Grace, a moment that nearly silenced the family's melodic line. Yet the recovery that followed – driven by Pietro's determination to reclaim the company, which he repurchased in 1979 – became a defining act of governance, demonstrating that conducting a family enterprise requires not only continuity but the capacity to reassert legitimacy after crisis (Sargiacomo et al., 2023). Barilla's governance survived because the family learned to re-enter the score after a dissonant passage, restoring coherence through renewed discipline and professionalization.

In musical terms, Kikkoman conducts through restraint, while Barilla conducts through narration. One keeps the rhythm almost invisibly; the other gives the audience a story through which to hear the music.

### **An Orchestral Performance**

Just as a symphony depends on coordination across strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion, family heritage depends on alignment among multiple stakeholders: family members, employees, suppliers, communities, consumers, and public institutions. At Kikkoman and Barilla, heritage is not a solo performance by the founding family. It becomes credible only when the wider organization plays in tune, translating inherited values into public accountability.

For Kikkoman, its three-hundred-and-fifty-year history of naturally brewed soy sauce is expressed through reliability, quality consistency, and long-term stewardship – values that resonate with Japanese traditions of collective trust through stable employment and local community engagement (Bhappu, 2000; Sasaki et al., 2019).

For example, the Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum in Noda reveals the company's production heritage to visitors through tours, exhibits, and displays on the history of soy sauce. Rather than presenting heritage only as corporate branding, the museum embeds Kikkoman's identity within the local history of its historic home, Noda, and educates the public about the craft and cultural significance of soy sauce (Kikkoman Corporation, n.d.).

In contrast, Barilla's family melody is joined by the instruments of clear communication and contemporary legitimacy in a European corporate environment, namely in the form of nutrition metrics, sustainability commitments, and public reporting. Its strategy is highly visible, featuring explicit targets and engagement with international frameworks, including the principles of the UN Global Compact (Barilla Group, 2025).

In particular, Barilla's stakeholder strategy is reflected in its 2030 product-improvement agenda, which includes measurable objectives concerning sugar, salt, and fibre across its portfolio. These targets demonstrate how Barilla translates its heritage of Mediterranean food culture into publicly accountable obligations around responsible consumption (Barilla Group, 2025).

## Globalization as Musical Variation

When these symphonies travel beyond their native borders, heritage becomes a tool for global influence. Yet Kikkoman and Barilla exemplify two contrasting approaches to globalization: cultural translation and cultural assertion. Kikkoman's symphony is transposed into different keys for different halls; Barilla, by contrast, preserves the original key and teaches the audience how to listen.

Kikkoman adapts its composition as it moves. Rather than exporting Japanese culinary norms wholesale, the company translates itself into new contexts, enhancing flavours, uses, and meanings while preserving its underlying structure. Soy sauce thus enters other cuisines not as an imposition, but as a complementary ingredient that can be integrated into Western cooking practices without making "Japaneseness" a prescriptive model (Kikkoman Corporation, 2021).

In musical terms, the melody of Kikkoman is transposed into different cultural keys but remains recognizable (Meyer, 2014). The use of soy sauce shifts from sushi and rice dishes to marinades, soups, vegetables, and Western home cooking. The heritage survives because it is translated, not diluted.

Barilla's globalization, by contrast, is a form of cultural assertion. Rather than primarily presenting pasta as a neutral ingredient to be absorbed into local cuisines, Barilla often emphasizes Italian culinary codes by educating consumers about proper pasta preparation, Mediterranean dietary principles, and the cultural significance of Italian food. Even the cooking time printed on each pasta box participates in this pedagogical performance, framing pasta preparation as a matter of cultural competence rather than mere convenience.

As Barilla actively converts heritage into communicative power, Italian cuisine is portrayed as an emotional, relational, and even ethical project, associating pasta with family life, well-being, and the Mediterranean diet (Sargiacomo et al., 2023).

Barilla thus positions itself as a custodian and global ambassador of Italianità, teaching the audience how to listen to its symphony and positioning Italy as a global culinary reference point rather than merely a country of origin (Barilla Group, 2023).

Both strategies resist a common assumption: that global success requires uniformity. What emerges instead is a form of cultural intelligence – the ability to discern when to adapt and when to remain unchanged.

## Conclusion: the Endurance of the Score

Kikkoman and Barilla reveal that there is no single way to sustain a culinary legacy. One composes through continuity, allowing heritage to settle into the fabric of everyday life. The other composes through expression, shaping heritage into a narrative that can be shared and recognized across cultures. These distinctions should not be read as absolute oppositions: Kikkoman also narrates its heritage, and Barilla also adapts to local markets. The difference lies in emphasis, not essence.

Kikkoman's symphony is subtle, adaptive, and continuous, sustained by an undertone of stewardship that rarely seeks the spotlight. Barilla's is expressive, narrative, and assertive,

carried by a clear melodic line of family memory and Italian culinary identity. These contrasting orchestrations show that heritage endures when governance resonates with culturally embedded expectations while adapting to global markets.

What unites Kikkoman and Barilla is not method, but discipline. In both cases, heritage is not preserved by being frozen in time, but by being enacted repeatedly, through products, decisions, and relationships. It is this repetition, sustained over decades, that gives it weight. Like a symphony, a family enterprise does not endure because its original recipe is locked in a glass case for passive appreciation. Rather, it endures because each generation learns how to play it, faithfully enough to be recognized, and freely enough to remain alive.

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# Kikkoman



The iconic 150ml dispenser bottle of Kikkoman soy sauce designed by Kenji Ekuan.



An educational display at the Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum illustrating the 4–6 month fermentation process.



The Kikkoman Soy Sauce Museum in Noda, Japan, open for visitors to experience the color, taste, and aroma of soy sauce during a factory tour.

# Barilla



Various Barilla products displayed as popular choices on supermarket shelves



Barilla Spaghettoni No. 7, a classic, slightly thicker version of traditional spaghetti



Pasta Barilla Capellini in a chef's hands. Kharkiv, Ukraine. 15 January, 2021.

# Folk Song and Opera in Transition: Vitasoy and Urbani Tartufi

## Danni Li

At first glance, Vitasoy of Hong Kong and Urbani Tartufi of Italy seem to have nothing in common. One is like a folk song – rooted in everyday nourishment and offered freely to the masses; the other is like an opera – crafted into a refined and exclusive pleasure for the few. In recent years, however, both family food enterprises have sought to innovate, to transform, and to reinvent themselves in step with the market, considering the shifting tastes of the discerning consumer.

As Vitasoy moves toward finer products and Urbani toward broader accessibility, their once-divergent trajectories have begun to converge. Vitasoy, the soy-based staple that once brought affordable nourishment to so many, has lately gained a new orchestration through premium product lines and a commitment to sustainability; Urbani, the centuries-old custodian of Italian truffle culture, has slowly opened the doors of fine dining to ordinary households.

Unsurprisingly, their kinship also lies in the fact that both are family enterprises in the deepest sense. Vitasoy was born from Dr. Lo Kwee Seong's almost paternal concern for public nourishment, and across generations it has retained the character of a family mission: to make simple, healthy food available to the many. Similarly, Urbani has carried within one family the secrets, networks, and prestige of the truffle trade, passing down not only a business but also a cultural vocation. In both firms, inheritance is more than a matter of shares or surnames. It is also a transmission of memory, craft, obligation, and trust.

Together, Vitasoy and Urbani reveal how family enterprises preserve inherited identity by transforming it: Vitasoy elevates a democratic staple through premium sustainability, while Urbani democratizes an elite delicacy through masstige accessibility. Their opposite movements show that heritage survives not by remaining fixed, but by adapting its original emotional and cultural promise to new consumers.

### Soybean and the Register of a Folk Song

Vitasoy was founded in Hong Kong in 1940 by Dr. Lo Kwee Seong, who saw in the soybean an affordable source of plant protein for a city struggling under wartime scarcity (Wong, 2021). Conceived quite openly as a “poor man’s milk,” a nourishing substitute for the cow’s milk most families could not afford, in its earliest years the drink was bottled in wide-mouthed glass and consumed the same day it was produced – delivered to school canteens, factory floors, and street stalls, at first for only a few cents a bottle, as a daily ration of nourishment for working families and their children (Fu, 2018; Wong, 2021).

This was precisely the register of a folk song. Like Vitasoy itself, folk songs have always been born from the rhythms of ordinary people. For countless children, Vitasoy was the nourishment they quite literally grew up on, and its presence ran quietly through the small moments of daily life. Yet it offered more than nutrition; it offered joy. It was the bottle shared with a classmate at recess, the quiet comfort passed around during a break on the factory floor, the familiar cry of a vendor calling it out at a roadside stall.

In each of these settings the drink carried a simple, everyday happiness. Decades of advertising only deepened the attachment, casting Vitasoy as a companion that grew up alongside Hong Kong and folding private memory into the city's shared biography (Yu & Kwan, 2015).

Like universally singable songs of home, Vitasoy worked through accessibility, repetition, and emotional return. Neither the song nor the drink needed ornate language or any explanation to be understood: to taste the drink was to recall a time without cares, a time in which Vitasoy was always there.

If the opera commands awe from the few, the folk song commands love from the many: one whose authority lies not in exclusivity but in ubiquity, not in spectacle but in the deep familiarity that turns a daily drink into a shared inheritance.

### **Truffles and the Art of Opera**

In contrast to Vitasoy, Italian truffle giant Urbani Tartufi could perhaps be seen as embracing the elements of opera. Founded around 1852 in Scheggino, a village in the Umbrian hills of central Italy, it remains a family enterprise – now led by Olga Urbani, of the family's senior living generation, with the next already coming up (Chirieleison et al., 2024).

For the better part of two centuries its fortunes have been bound to the *cavatori*, the truffle hunters whose trained dogs lead them through the forests after a fungus that resists cultivation and can be gathered no other way (Rittersma, 2012). Their rare harvests long travelled primarily to elite restaurants, luxury food markets, and aristocratic tables, where the ingredient was not merely served but revealed like a dramatic act in motion: a wooden box opened at the table, a blade shaving the truffle so that its aroma met the heat of the dish at exactly the right instant.

Indeed, the analogy to opera is no accident, for opera too is closely associated with Italian cultural prestige: intense, ceremonial, and historically tied to elite spaces of performance. The black truffle and the operatic aria belonged to the same rarefied world: a refined pleasure long reserved to the few who could reach it.

So completely had the Urbani family come to command the trade of truffles that, by the second half of the twentieth century, the firm was handling between 80-85% of all the truffles sold in the world. Carlo Urbani had been crowned the "King of Truffles," and the firm's preserved truffles had carried off prizes at the great international expositions of the early twentieth century (Rittersma, 2012). The recognition of Paolo Urbani as a *Cavaliere del Lavoro*, one of Italy's highest civic honours, confirmed the family as custodians of an art form.

### **A Folk Song Gathering New Elements**

The folk melody of Vitasoy began to gather new harmonies in 1975, when Vitasoy became the first company in Hong Kong to adopt Tetra Pak's aseptic carton and ultra-high-temperature processing, extending shelf life to a full year and freeing the drink from refrigeration (Yu & Kwan, 2015; Wong, 2021).

In the decades since, the family enterprise has layered fresh sophistication onto the original score: its soybeans and oats are now non-GMO certified, avoiding genetically

modified organisms, its cartons carry Forest Stewardship Council certification, and it has reformulated its drinks to cut fat and sugar while keeping the range overwhelmingly plant-based – by the company’s own account, some 90% of it.

What began as wartime relief has ridden a “progressive premiumization of the category,” its revenues roughly doubling over a decade to near a billion U.S. dollars as the company pursued B Corp certification and brought its reporting into line with international climate standards (Marquis, 2023).

In many ways, Vitasoy’s evolution from a grassroots staple into a premium, health-focused, sustainable lifestyle brand is not simply a commercial shift but a deliberate reinterpretation of its founding mission. As CEO Roberto Guidetti explains, the company’s purpose has always been “to provide tasty, sustainable plant-based nutrition,” and its modern ESG framework now formalizes this heritage into two pillars: making the right products and making products the right way (Marquis, 2023).

Like a kind of musical refinement, Vitasoy is an everyday folk melody gaining new orchestration through sustainability, nutrition, and climate readiness, resonating as a contemporary, globally conscious refrain. With refinement over time, heritage deepens rather than fades when incorporating modern standards.

### **Opera Opens its Doors to the Public**

Similarly, Urbani’s recent path has been one of movement. Just as opera learned to open its doors – lowering its ticket prices, moving into open-air arenas, carrying a single staging by broadcast to audiences across the world, all without surrendering its art, Urbani has become more accessible to the public.

Here, too, the decisive move was technological. From the late nineteenth century, the family refined the preserving and packing of truffles – sealing, sterilising, and standardising a famously fragile delicacy so that it could travel, keep, and reach tables far from Umbria – turning what had been a proto-industrial workshop into an advanced food company (Rittersma, 2012).

On that foundation Urbani has lately pursued what scholars term a “masstige” strategy: combining “mass” and “prestige” through accessible, truffle-based products sold at prices ordinary households can meet yet still be read as premium by trade and diner alike. This was not merely commercial expansion but a deliberate adoption of “a balance between exclusivity and accessibility, premium price and widespread distribution” that allows small and medium enterprises to democratize luxury (Chirieleison, Turzo & Nardi, 2024).

Operating today across some seventy countries, with five brands and a portfolio of hundreds of items, the company was among the first to carry the truffle into mass-market retail (Chirieleison et al., 2024). The company now produces black and white truffle pastes, truffle-infused oil, salt, and butter, mushroom condiments, and even truffle-flavoured burgers – sold through supermarkets, e-commerce platforms, global Italian food marketplace Eataly, as well as through its American subsidiary, Urbani Truffles USA, and its other international branches, placing the same ingredient within reach of households far from Umbria.

Urbani's ability to place truffle-based products simultaneously in flagship stores and large-scale retail channels reflects the dual logic of "masstige": the brand preserves its aura of refinement while meeting the desires of a new middle-class consumer who seeks sensorial pleasure, emotional connection, and identity expression at attainable price points.

In this sense, Urbani's movement outward mirrors Vitasoy's movement upward: both reinterpret inherited heritage through strategies that blend quality, cultural symbolism, and broader reach, aligning tradition with contemporary expectations of accessibility and aspiration.

### **Variations on a Familiar Theme**

Yet the movements of both enterprises also reveal the tensions inherent in translating heritage into contemporary relevance. Vitasoy's move into plant-based wellness and sustainability raises a subtle but consequential question: how does a folk song find new audiences while preserving the warmth of home? As its identity becomes increasingly shaped not only by everyday intimacy in Hong Kong's collective memory, but also by global ethical standards, the brand carries the delicate responsibility of remaining both a shared, democratic comfort and a refined choice for new generations of conscientious consumers.

Meanwhile, Urbani's masstige turn democratizes truffle culture in a shift that may subtly erode the artisanal foundations that once made the ingredient rare. The cavatori's craft – rooted in secrecy, seasonality, and embodied knowledge – becomes part of a broader lifestyle narrative that needs to be carefully managed so that it does not dilute the very aura of exclusivity that gave the truffle its operatic power. In opening the doors of the opera house, Urbani must undertake the artful work of ensuring that the performance remains true to its essence.

In both cases, innovation does not simply expand the original emotional key; it enriches, alters, and modifies. The folk song gains new harmonies that allow it to be heard in new places; the opera broadens its audience beyond elite circles. These enterprises evolve because they must, with a family mission that seeks to ensure that the music, while transformed, remains recognizable to the original composer and the communities that first gave it meaning.

### **Moving Closer to Each Other from Opposite Directions**

Overall, Vitasoy and Urbani can be seen to have travelled two paths that are moving closer to each other from opposite directions. Vitasoy moves upmarket, from grassroots nourishment toward the aspirational language of health and sustainability, while Urbani moves outward, from elite gastronomy toward the everyday table. The former is like a folk song, passing from street-corner humming to refined arrangement; the latter is like an opera, moving from the elegance of the court hall to shared enjoyment by all.

Both brands hold fast to their family heritage amid innovation and stay close to the rhythm of the times amid change. They continually break the boundaries between social circles, using their products to connect emotion and transmit culture – with attempts to guard memory while embracing change.

Perhaps this is the most moving thing that edible heritage shares with the art of music: what truly endures is never rigid adherence to the unchanging, nor blind radical innovation, but the balance found between tradition and modernity, which lets emotion and culture remain the core force linking one generation to the next.

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# Vitasoy



The lineup of Vitasoy drink cartons showcasing various flavor varieties.



A family enjoying Vitasoy drinks during an outdoor picnic.

# Urbani Tartufi



Logo of Urbani Tartufi, the world's largest truffle company. Rome, Italy. December 22, 2017



Lights are enlightening Rice with truffles at FICO EATALY WORLD, the largest agri-food park in the world. Bologna, Italy. October 2, 2018.

# Chamber Music of Family Restaurants: The Loiseau Sisters and the Roca Brothers

## Emma Lombard

Chamber music asks something paradoxical of its performers: it demands that each musician listen as much as they play. Without a conductor, there is no single authority to arbitrate tempo, dynamics, or interpretation. The ensemble must negotiate these in real time, through glances, breath, and the accumulated trust of years of playing together. The result, when it works, is a form of collective art: precise, intimate, and alive to the moment.

Some family restaurants operate in exactly this way. They are not orchestras, directed from above by a singular genius. They are chamber ensembles: small, interlocking, and running on mutual knowledge rather than hierarchy.

The Loiseau Sisters at Groupe Bernard Loiseau in France, and the Roca Brothers at El Celler de Can Roca in Spain, offer two of the most instructive examples of this model. Together, they illuminate what it means for a family to transmit a culinary heritage not as a fixed score, but as a living practice of shared performance.

### Coordinating Multiple Voices in an Ensemble

After Bernard Loiseau's death in February 2003, Groupe Bernard Loiseau faced not only a managerial transition but the painful question of how to continue a house so closely identified with one creative presence. The founder had built La Côte d'Or around a highly centralised, entrepreneurial model in which he was at once chef, spokesman, creative director, and host (Paris and Leroy, 2013).

Bernard Loiseau's cuisine, marked by the "nouvelle cuisine" principles of lightness, simplicity, and the supremacy of taste, bore his signature so completely that when he passed away, staff and customers alike struggled to imagine what the house would sound like without him.

What followed was, in musical terms, the question every chamber ensemble faces when it loses its founding member: can the music continue, and if so, who carries the melody? The answer, at Groupe Bernard Loiseau, came not from a single successor but from a distribution of responsibilities across the family.

Dominique Loiseau, Bernard's widow, assumed strategic leadership not as a replacement chef, but as the guarantor of the house's identity and long-term direction. She hired a general manager to formalise operational processes, took personal charge of public relations and guest reception, and made the crucial decision to support Patrick Bertron, the longtime sous-chef, as head of the kitchen. In doing so, she enacted the core principle of chamber music: no single voice was asked to carry everything. Each role was distinct, defined, and accountable to the whole (Paris and Leroy, 2013).

The transition was not painless. Some long-serving dining-room staff, deeply attached to Bernard Loiseau's style, found Bertron's gradual innovations difficult to accept. They felt that he was departing from what had made the house great, introducing complexity and

variety into a cuisine that had been defined by its austere focus on a single main product and two complementary ones. Despite these challenges, the restaurant thrived. By 2013, Bertron's cuisine had found its voice within the house's tradition, and the restaurant had maintained its place among France's leading gastronomic institutions (Paris and Leroy, 2013). In September 2023, Bertron passed the kitchen to his longtime second, Louis-Philippe Vigilant, while remaining involved with the house as an ambassador (Gault & Millau, 2023).

### **Bérangère and Blanche: A Sister-Led Succession**

Importantly, these succession plans were accompanied by a generational transmission under the leadership of Bernard Loiseau's two daughters. Bérangère Loiseau joined the group in 2013 to create its marketing department, became Vice-President in 2021, and assumed the presidency in 2023, translating the Loiseau inheritance into institutional strategy, brand coherence, and long-term development. Her sister Blanche, trained as a chef, now leads the kitchen of "Loiseau du Temps," the group's bistrot in Besançon (L'Hôtellerie Restauration, 2025).

With Blanche's return to the family business in 2021 after training and travelling abroad, including formative experiences in Japan, a Loiseau family member was once again behind the stove at Groupe Bernard Loiseau.

For Bertron, who had carried the kitchen after Bernard's death, training Blanche was not simply the education of a young chef; it was a symbolic return of culinary knowledge to the family line. Blanche herself described it as the "passage de flambeau" she could not receive directly from her father (GE RH Expert, 2022).

Yet Blanche's legitimacy is not only genealogical. In Japan, she had worked in traditional kaiseki kitchens, initially washing dishes and observing before gradually earning a place in a highly codified environment. She returned to the family business with a broadened understanding of discipline, seasonality, humility, and cross-cultural management. In 2024, there was a chance to open a restaurant in Tokyo, and she came to divide her time between France and Japan (CCI France Japon, 2026).

The two sisters' respective roles, strategic and entrepreneurial for Bérangère, culinary and creative for Blanche, reproduce within the family the same logic of complementary differentiation that characterises any chamber ensemble.

"Trouver l'équilibre entre l'héritage et l'innovation est un défi quotidien ("finding the balance between heritage and innovation is a daily challenge"), Bérangère explained in a 2025 interview, invoking her father's formula of the "figuratif moderne": the revisiting of terroir classics at the highest level of refinement (L'Hôtellerie Restauration, 2025).

### **Three Parts, One Composition**

At El Cellar de Can Roca, the chamber music structure was not inherited under crisis but deliberately constructed from the outset. The restaurant grew from a family deeply rooted in hospitality: the brothers' parents, Josep Roca and Montserrat Fontané, ran Can Roca, a popular neighbourhood restaurant in Girona, and it was in that working-class dining room that Joan, Josep and Jordi first absorbed the rhythms and values of cooking for others (Meneguel, Mundet and Aulet, 2019; Groysberg, Hecht and Baden, 2021).

When Joan and Josep opened El Celler in 1986 in a building adjacent to Can Roca, they were already performing as a duo: Joan in the kitchen, Josep managing the dining room and wines. When Jordi joined the team definitively in the late 1990s as pastry chef, the trio was complete and with it, the full range of the ensemble.

The distribution of roles at El Celler is very precise, and it maps directly onto the logic of chamber music. Joan Roca, the head chef, is what his collaborators describe as the architect: methodical, serene, a craftsman who translates the wildest ideas into executable dishes without losing their emotional force.

Josep, the sommelier, is the house's communicative intelligence with an unusual capacity to move between the worlds of wine, food, and feeling, and to articulate for guests what the cooking is trying to say.

Jordi, the youngest by fourteen years, is the ensemble's transgressive voice, the one whose imagination consistently pushes the others past their comfort zones. In musical terms, Joan provides the harmonic foundation, Josep the melodic line, and Jordi the unexpected variation that keeps the composition alive.

### **A Distinctive Philosophy of Heritage**

What makes this model genuinely chamber-like is not merely the division of labour, but the quality of communication it enables. Decisions at El Celler are not made through formal hierarchy. They emerge from a continuous dialogue in the kitchen, at the research and development centre La Masia, and at the lunch table at Can Roca which the whole team shares every day.

Accompanying good food is a distinctive philosophy of heritage. Wine inspires dishes; dishes suggest wine pairings; desserts reinterpret perfumes; perfumes become the starting point for a new menu sequence. This creative conversation moves between the brothers laterally, not vertically. Each brother hears the same melody differently, and it is precisely the difference that generates the richness.

Heritage, for the Rocas, is not a fixed repertoire to be preserved intact but a living score to be continuously reinterpreted (Meneguel, Mundet and Aulet, 2019). The Roca brothers were born a hundred metres from the restaurant. They eat lunch every day at their parents' table. Their menu items carry titles like "Growing up in a Bar," a miniature cardboard model of Can Roca surrounded by snacks representing their childhood memories, or "The World," a globe loaded with the culinary traces of their international travels (Groysberg, Hecht and Baden, 2021).

Each new dish is both a variation on a theme and a statement of where the ensemble stands today. Through their menu, the brothers translate the surrounding landscape, local traditions and their own family memories into a cuisine that stays rooted in place even as it continually reinvents itself (Meneguel, Mundet and Aulet, 2019).

### **Ensemble Discipline in a Family Restaurant**

To maintain the precision of a chamber ensemble over decades is not merely an artistic challenge; it is a gruelling physical and emotional discipline. In traditional, conductor-led

kitchens, the stress of the performance is often absorbed through rigid hierarchy and fear. But in a collaborative, family-led ensemble, the sustainability of the human instrument becomes paramount.

At Groupe Bernard Loiseau, the transition from Bernard's highly centralized, paternalistic leadership to a distributed family model required a form of discipline among various players that continued as the Loiseau sisters eventually took over. By defining clear, accountable roles for the family and the kitchen, Dominique Loiseau proved that the intimate, hospitable atmosphere of a family home could be sustained through structured collaboration rather than singular leadership. As the Loiseau sisters joined the ensemble, the performance did not falter; it was simply re-arranged so the players could survive it.

At El Celler de Can Roca, this discipline was built directly into the restaurant's infrastructure. Since 2016, the brothers have run a double-shift system, replacing the entire lunch crew with a fresh team for dinner to combat the industry's notorious burnout rates. They also brought an in-house psychologist into the fold to manage the interpersonal friction between the highly transient kitchen interns and the more permanent dining room staff (Cabrera and Hugas, 2020).

This was not done out of soft sentimentality, but out of a practical understanding of what Ulloa, Roca, and Vilaseca (2017) call "sensible skills." Culinary excellence does not reside in the isolated sensory talents of a single genius, but in a shared, communal vocabulary cultivated across the entire team. By closing the restaurant every Tuesday lunchtime for collective training sessions, covering everything from sensory physiology to the history and literature of the regions they visit, the Rocas treat their staff not as interchangeable gears in a machine, but as musicians who must rehearse together to stay in tune (Groysberg, Hecht and Baden, 2021).

### **Conclusion: Imagining the Future as a Chamber Ensemble**

What the Loiseau Sisters and the Roca Brothers ultimately share is how the family recipe is not complete until it is played, until the team gathers around the pass, until the dining room fills, and until the evening begins its unfolding sequence of courses, wines, conversations, and silences.

This understanding has consequences for how the current generation of these family enterprises imagine their future. At Groupe Bernard Loiseau, the two sisters are now writing the next chapter: Bérangère leads the group's strategic development while Blanche embodies its culinary continuity, together ensuring that the transmission does not stop at the first succession but extends into the family's second generation (L'Hôtellerie Restauration, 2025).

In contrast, at El Celler de Can Roca, the three brothers have long described the restaurant as a project imagined and built by the three of them together, rather than a dynasty designed from the outset to pass automatically to the next generation. The chamber ensemble, in this reading, is complete in itself, not necessarily a legacy to be perpetuated, but a performance to be honoured in its own time (Groysberg, Hecht and Baden, 2021).

The Loiseau and Roca cases show two forms of chamber heritage: one ensemble rebuilt after the loss of its founding soloist, the other composed from the beginning around three sibling voices. One seeks renewal through the next generation; the other may remain inseparable from the original trio. Family heritage does not always mean indefinite

dynastic continuation. It can still be powerful through the integrity of a completed performance. In both cases, the value of the family restaurant lies not simply in preserving the score, but in knowing when, and with whom, it can still be played.

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# Groupe Bernard Loiseau



Portrait of the Loiseau family taken in February 2025.



Plated signature dish served at Le Relais Bernard Loiseau.



Main dining hall at Bernard Loiseau.

# El Celler de Can Roca



Entry sign of the world famous 3 michelin stars restaurant and best of the world El Celler de Can Roca in Girona. Girona, Spain. January 19 2019.



Spanish chef Joan Roca during the 30th edition of the MadridFusion 2025 international gastronomic congress. Madrid, Spain. January 27, 2025



El Celler de Can Roca, restaurant founded in 1986 by brothers Roca , Joan, Josep and Jordi. Girona. Catalonia. Spain.

# Pastoral and Ballet Suites: Boksoondoga and the Donum Estate

## Elaine Wu

Fermentation is one of the few human arts that asks for patience rather than control. It unfolds in silence, across seasons and vessels, through the subtle dialogue between human intention and the life of the material itself. For Boksoondoga, this living process is brought to the surface: audible in the bottle's natural carbonation and visible in the brand's devotion to traditional rice-wine making. At the Donum Estate, fermentation remains more backstage, supporting a broader choreography of vineyard, sculpture, architecture, and hospitality. Read through musical form, the two enterprises reveal different aesthetics of family heritage: Boksoondoga as pastoral suite, attuned to rural rhythm and natural variation; Donum as ballet suite, shaped by design, spectacle, and deliberate movement.

Boksoondoga began with Park Bok-soon's home-brewed makgeolli, or Korean rice wine, and was later developed by her son Kim Min-gyu into a premium brand that remains rooted in traditional fermentation and family memory (Boksoondoga, 2023a; The Korea Herald, 2014). Donum, shaped by Allan and Mei Warburg, developed as a Sonoma estate where fine wine is inseparable from land stewardship, contemporary sculpture, and a carefully designed visitor experience (The Donum Estate, 2023, 2024). Although both businesses are anchored in family vision, they express it through different aesthetic forms.

Elevating a rustic heirloom through the patient rhythms of environmental attunement, Boksoondoga's logic is captured by the pastoral suite's emphasis on continuity, rural rhythm, and responsiveness to place. In contrast, Donum preserves viticultural prestige through a carefully staged, cross-disciplinary aesthetic, much like the ballet suite's emphasis on orchestration, theatricality, and curated sensory experience. Together, they show how families in wine and spirits express contemporary luxury through distinct but equally compelling frameworks.

### **Boksoondoga: Melodies of Pastoral Attunement**

Boksoondoga's identity begins in Ulsan, a metropolitan city in southeastern South Korea known for its industrial prominence and coastal setting, with the transmission of domestic brewing knowledge across generations (Ulsan Metropolitan City, n.d.; Kim, 2023). This lineage frames the brand not merely as a commercial producer of rice wine, but as a custodian of maternal heritage. In this sense, the brand's ethos is deeply pastoral, rooted in a lived relationship between family, season, and place.

Using 100% Korean-grown rice and natural fermentation in traditional hangari vessels, Boksoondoga is committed to traditional materials and methods (Boksoondoga, 2023b). By deliberately tying its business model to agricultural stewardship and local sourcing, the brewery roots its commercial viability in the health of its local ecosystem (The Korea Herald, 2021). Working in deep attunement with this environment, the brewer listens, observes, and adjusts to shifts in temperature, humidity, and microbial activity, allowing the fermentation to unfold as a pastoral suite reflecting natural forces.

## **The Acoustic Crescendo: Champagne Makgeolli and Modern Variations**

The brand's signature natural carbonation gives this process its most vivid expression. Boksoondoga is often described as "Champagne Makgeolli," which points to the sensory drama of fermentation itself (The Korea Herald, 2021). The carbonation is not artificially imposed but produced through long-term natural fermentation in earthenware jars, which gives the drink both its lively texture and its sense of vitality. The act of opening the bottle itself is a small acoustic event, a spontaneous release of fermentation pressure that acts as the pastoral suite's sudden crescendo that makes Boksoondoga's living carbonation audible to its audience (The Soul of Seoul, 2026).

Rather than smoothing out this intense, volatile extra carbonation for mass-market uniformity, founder Kim Min-gyu deliberately preserved it (The Korea Herald, 2021; Kim, 2019). He redesigned the bottle and presentation to appeal to contemporary aesthetics, introducing a unique variation to the rustic melody and converting a biological quirk into a signature feature (Arirang TV, 2019). The Korea Herald notes that Kim preserved this extra carbonation while presenting the drink in a more contemporary form, showing how tradition and modernity are held together rather than set in opposition. In this way, Boksoondoga turns fermentation into a recurring reminder that the life of the product is inseparable from the forces that made it.

## **The Pastoral Suite on the Global Stage**

With its cultural distinction and narrative depth, Boksoondoga is not simply a local craft but an instrument of South Korean cultural diplomacy. Domestically, the brand achieved elite validation as the official toast for the 2012 Seoul Nuclear Security Summit and a 2013 Blue House presidential dinner, establishing its recurring role at state events (Boksoondoga, 2024). This public staging extended globally when it served as the official toast for the Korean Pavilion both at the 2015 Milan World Expo and the 2025 Osaka World Expo (Boksoondoga, 2024; Kim, 2025).

The diplomatic visibility is reinforced by institutional milestones: it was designated a national excellent cultural product in 2016, won Japan's GOOD DESIGN Award in 2017 to anchor its Japanese export growth, and secured global liquid credentials through critical acclaim in Los Angeles, the United Kingdom, and a gold medal at the San Francisco International Wine Competition (Boksoondoga, 2024).

What results is a rare form of commercial poise that reinterprets volatility as authenticity. This philosophy has allowed Boksoondoga to extend its business practice into a broader fermentation culture beyond the bottle. The company leverages fermentation as an entire aesthetic and lifestyle system, developing related content that spans cosmetics, restaurants, pubs, and even "fermentation architecture" (Boksoondoga, 2023). Ultimately, Boksoondoga succeeds because it does not eliminate tradition to scale up; instead, it elegantly packages patience and seasonality as a modern, premium experience.

## **Donum: The Ballet Choreography of Experience**

At the Donum Estate, viticulture undergoes a profound transition, becoming an aesthetic performance through spatial experience, a kind of ballet choreography that guides the visitor through wine, landscape, and art. By integrating a winemaking facility, an organic

farm, and one of the largest accessible private sculpture collections in the world, the estate positions itself “at the intersection of fine wine, sustainable farming, and world-class art” (The Donum Estate, 2023). As NorthBay biz and Visit California note, the estate leads guests from an initial tasting through sculpture gardens and sensory pathways to the Vertical Panorama Pavilion, making the movement itself part of the design (NorthBay biz, 2024; Visit California, n.d.).

The sculpture park acts as the principal ensemble of this visual ballet, featuring internationally recognized artists such as Yayoi Kusama, Ai Weiwei, Keith Haring, Louise Bourgeois, Tracey Emin, Jaume Plensa, and Zhan Wang, whose monumental works are woven directly into the vineyard landscape (My Modern Met, 2018; Artful Living, 2023; IGNANT, 2019; The Art Newspaper, 2022). Pieces such as Kusama’s Pumpkin, Ai Weiwei’s Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads, and Bourgeois’s Crouching Spider are especially striking because they anchor the estate’s visual identity and transform the vineyard into a choreographed cultural landscape rather than a conventional winery. In this setting, tasting wine becomes an immersive dance, and Donum feels less like a tasting room than an open-air theatre (The Art Newspaper, 2022).

### **Behind the Ballet: The Discipline of Land Stewardship**

Behind this seamless performance lies a complex web of operational realities, akin to the rigorous backstage coordination required for a major ballet production. Managing a premium aesthetic estate requires balancing the intensive demands of art preservation, such as weatherproofing, curation, and maintaining the tourism infrastructure required for monumental sculptures, with the strict biological timelines of biodynamic viticulture (Observer, 2026). Donum navigates this tension by operating as an ecosystem where land management, art, and hospitality are fused into a long-term brand framework. This model functions by funding the high operational costs of its cultural features directly through the premium revenue generated by its agricultural production (The Donum Estate, 2024, 2025).

This financial balance relies heavily on asset preservation rather than production volume. Economically, Donum is not a high-volume commercial enterprise; its business model depends fundamentally on scarcity, provenance, and the prestige of terroir. It produces small-lot, estate-specific wines from its properties in Carneros, the Russian River Valley, and Anderson Valley (The Donum Estate, 2024). Because value is derived entirely from the unique identity of the land, ecological care becomes central to the brand's financial proposition. This is evidenced by the estate’s Regenerative Organic Certified status across all its vineyards (The Donum Estate, 2024). By positioning regenerative organic farming as a core business practice, Donum treats the vineyard as both an ecological and a cultural asset that must be maintained over generations. Ultimately, Donum’s commercial viability leverages the slow, permanent, and unpredictable cycles of long-term land stewardship to fuel a precisely engineered consumer experience.

### **Two Aesthetic Economies: Conducting Legacy with Family Patience**

What distinguishes Boksoondoga and Donum is not simply the products they sell, but the way each turns production into a cultural event. In both cases, value is created less

through industrial efficiency than through a deliberate alignment of family structure, place, story, and the way guests experience the product. Boksoondoga and Donum therefore reveal that wine and spirits can become cultural experiences when they are supported by design, narrative, and sensory depth rather than by scale alone.

The family is central to this process because it protects forms of patience that the market might otherwise rush. In Boksoondoga's case, the family sustains a fermentation process that cannot be fully standardized because its character depends on the uncertain rhythms of natural elements, including temperature, humidity, and microbial life (Boksoondoga, 2023b). In this pastoral suite, the brewer must tolerate variation and respond to it, much as a conductor allows different tempos and pauses to shape a performance.

Donum, though operating in a very different register that resembles a ballet suite, depends on the same kind of patience; the family's long-term commitment to land stewardship, art collection, and visitor experience gives the estate a permanence that transcends short-term market considerations. In both cases, the family business survives by protecting what might otherwise be optimized away — slowness, variability, and embodied attention.

### **Tonal Keys and Written Scores: The Shared Dynamics of Experience**

Boksoondoga and Donum ultimately demonstrate that the preservation of agricultural heritage relies on the deliberate cultivation of aesthetic value. Embodying the spirit of the pastoral suite, Boksoondoga elevates local traditions by embracing the organic and unpredictable rhythms of living fermentation. Mirroring the design of the ballet suite, Donum reinterprets the vineyard as a highly choreographed stage where contemporary art and sustainable viticulture merge into a seamless sensory spectacle. Although their methods diverge, both family enterprises successfully resist the pressures of modern industrial efficiency by treating time, place, and tradition as premium assets.

Terroir functions as the tonal key that gives each enterprise its distinct resonance. Boksoondoga's identity is inseparable from Ulsan, from traditional vessels, and from the local conditions that shape natural fermentation. Donum, meanwhile, translates the geography of Carneros into a designed sensory landscape, where the vineyard, sculpture, and pavilion are anchored into the soil as part of a single aesthetic whole. Terroir in both cases becomes more than origin; it becomes a barrier to replication. The very qualities that make these products distinctive cannot be outsourced without losing the meaning that gives them value. The local specificity, which appears at first to be a limitation, becomes the source of commercial power in practice.

This is also why performative experience matters so much in both businesses. Boksoondoga asks the consumer to pause, open the bottle carefully, and encounter carbonation as part of the product's living identity (The Soul of Seoul, 2026). Donum invites the visitor to move through a choreographed environment in which architecture, art, and tasting are synchronized into one continuous experience. In both cases, design writes the score for consumption. Yet this elegance depends on hiding the friction beneath it: the volatility of fermentation, the labour of agriculture, the maintenance of sculpture, and the logistical burden of hospitality. The consumer encounters coherence, but that coherence is produced through careful management of instability.

In conclusion, Boksoondoga converts the unpredictability of living fermentation into a premium expression of pastoral attunement, while Donum converts the vineyard into a

theatrical stage for ballet performance. One lets the audience hear fermentation breathe; the other teaches the estate to dance. Both remind us that heritage endures when families know how to give patience a form.

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# Boksoondoga



Boksoondoga as a makgeolli drink for all seasons



Boksoondoga's brewery in Ulsan, surrounded by open fields.

# The Donum Estate



Fernando Botero at the Donum Estate



Ugo Rondinone at the Donum Estate



Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's bronze sculpture Pumpkin (2014) installed beside the contemporary visitor pavilion at The Donum Estate.



