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Photos by Stephen Lam/The Chronicle

Jason Williams, general manager of Venge Vineyards, draws a sample of wine at the cellar in Calistoga.

## Wineries reconsider stance on discounts

Secretive strategy behind Napa's priciest bottles may be changing

By Esther Mobley

If you bought a bottle of Robert Craig Winery's 2019 Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon directly from the winery, you paid \$118. But last month, a San Francisco retailer sent out a promotional email offering the wine to its customers for \$99.95 — a tempting price for a bottle that critic Antonio Galloni awarded 97 points.

That promotional email has caused Robert Craig's CEO, Elton Slone, some "sleepless nights," he said. Soon, customers were calling him complaining that they'd overpaid. Now other retailers are asking if they can charge under \$100 for the wine. "I can't even tell you how frustrating it is," Slone said.

In the world of fine wine, few issues are as fraught — or as secretive — as discounting. Among high-end wineries in Napa Valley, discounting is all but forbidden, widely considered a brand killer. But increasingly, wineries say they've lost some ability to control how distributors, stores and restaurants price their wines. At the same time, a downturn in the U.S. wine market, coupled with increased



Venge Vineyards has a 12-acre estate in Napa Valley.

competition in the luxury tier, is making it look like the sticker price of some Napa Valley wines might simply be too high, and testing the limits of these wineries' reluctance to discount.

A complicated set of factors inform the prices of Napa Valley's most expensive class of wines — not the denizens of Safeway but the rarefied estates with exclusive mailing lists.

"There's an art and science to

pricing," said Scott Becker, owner of Realm Cellars, whose least expensive wine costs \$175. The science requires accounting for the cost of goods — extremely high for businesses that are buying multimillion-dollar vineyards, hiring famous winemakers and building designer tasting rooms. "It's not just the cost to produce that single bottle, but the overall investment into the

*Discounts continues on A8*

## Travelers Insurance raises its rates 15%

Thousands of state's customers will lose coverage over fire risk

By Megan Fan Muncie

One of California's largest home insurers will raise rates an average of 15.3% while thousands of customers are losing coverage due to wildfire risk.

Travelers Insurance — the sixth largest property and casualty insurer in California as of 2022 — was approved this month to raise rates for its Quantum Home 2.0 program by an average of 15.3% starting on June 24, filings with the California Department of Insurance show. Some of the approximately 320,000 policyholders affected will see their rates rise up to 26.7%, while others may see their rates decline as much as 8.6%, according to data in the filings.

Quantum Home 2.0 is an insurance offering by Travelers started in 2018 that provides coverage to home and condo owners, tenants and landlords, according to the company. It replaced the company's Quantum Home and Homesaver programs, the company said in filings.

Since 2022, Travelers has also not renewed thousands of policies that it stated in filings were grandfathered in before the switch to Quantum Home 2.0 and which do not meet the company's current underwriting standards.

In a filing from 2022, Travelers said it planned

*Travelers continues on A8*

## Top insurers describe status of home policies

By Megan Fan Muncie

Numerous Californians have lost their home insurance over the past few years as some of the state's largest insurers have cut back.

Some insurers have limited where they will write new policies, and others have stopped writing new policies altogether. While most of the state's 10 largest insurers say they are still offering new policies and renewing existing ones, there are key exceptions.

Together, the top 10 insurers represented just over half of the total California property and casualty insurance market in 2022, according to the latest available data from the California Department of Insurance.

Here's what to know about the top 10 home insurers in California:

*Insurers continues on A9*

## Housing crisis unites unlikely camps

By Joe Garofoli

It is the political equivalent of cats and dogs playing nice together. And something rarely seen in California.

Two groups often at odds — YIMBYs and historic preservationists — are uniting behind a measure by San Francisco Assembly Member Matt Haney that is designed to make it easier to convert office buildings to residential housing, something that could help to revive San Francisco's fading downtown and others around California.

The effects of the measure, if it passes, might not be felt for a while. But the unusual alliance behind AB3068 not only shows how the urgency of California's housing crisis is bringing together political enemies, it is a rare kumbaya moment in an era of polarization when it's easier to take cheap shots at your rivals on social media than it is to work toward a solution.

*Housing continues on A6*



Stephen Lam/The Chronicle

A bill by Assembly Member Matt Haney aims to make it easier to convert office buildings to residential housing.

## Homeless shelter operator accused of 'blatant' fraud

By Maggie Angst

An embattled San Francisco homeless shelter operator was barred Monday from seeking or receiving any new city contracts over allegations it submitted fake invoices and collected more than \$100,000 for work that was never completed.

San Francisco City Attorney David Chiu suspended the Providence Foundation of San Francisco, accusing the nonprofit and its executive director Patricia Doyle of misleading the city into covering fraudulent costs and depriving "vulnerable San Franciscans of critical services that the City earmarked for their benefit."

"There's a difference between being bad with money and intentionally defrauding the city and taxpayers," Chiu said in an interview. "This nonprofit took over \$100,000 in public monies meant to help people experiencing homelessness, and that is unconscionable."

Chiu's suspension order states that Providence

*Providence continues on A6*

