

Napa Valley
Register

www.napaalleyregister.com

Year 147 • No. 66

50 cents

Friday, October 23, 2009



JAQK Cellars/c1

On Wine

JAQK

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MacLean has developed wines for Cain Vineyard and Spring Mountain Vineyards, among others.

Register wine writer L. Pierce Carson praised the JAQK Cellars 2006 High Roller Cabernet Sauvignon that he tasted during an April event at Acme Fine Wines in St. Helena.

"With more than two decades experience in Napa Valley Cellars, ranging from Cain to Ahnfeldt, Craig MacLean has blended grapes from hillside and benchlands for this new wine brand's top-drawer cabernet sauvignon. Fruit comes from Rutherford, Oakville and Coombsville (87 percent cabernet sauvignon, 9 percent merlot and 4 percent malbec) for this brawny blend. Bing cherries, Santa Rosa plums and cassis dance on the palate to the beat of the cab over a malbec bass line, and finishes with a subtle swirl of lush merlot," Carson wrote in his May 1 column in the Register.

A story behind each bottle

Bright patterns, including mosaics of the four suits - clubs, diamonds, hearts and spades - in a deck of playing cards are blended into many of the designs used by JAQK Cellars.

"The exciting concept of the packaging draws people in," Templin said. "Each bottle has a different story."

At a recent winetasting event in Carmel, Jain and Templin said people were queued up three to four

deep at times, not only to enjoy the wine but because they were drawn in by the packaging.

"People were interested in the bottles as a great gift item, they were even asking for the empty bottles because they do not want to throw them away," said Templin.

Each bottle has a design not previously seen within the wine industry. Their signature wine, the High Roller, has a poker chip - with the wine's name emblazoned on it - extending out from the bottle itself.

There are also stories on bottles

The Black Clover merlot, they say, is an homage to the club suit; on the bottle's back is an explanation of the history of the four-leaf clover in Irish lore.

Soldiers of Fortune shiraz, Templin said, references the Jacks in the deck of cards. There are four different labels for the shiraz, one for each suit.

The 22 Black cabernet sauvignon shows on its label a part of a roulette wheel with the ball having stopped on 22. "This is really meant to be about play," Templin said. "Bogie in Casablanca put his money on 22 black."

Jain said the Bone Dance merlot tells the history and evolution of the game of craps, while the Pearl Handle chardonnay - with a design to look like an old western card - has four different labels. There are four separate Pearl Handle labels, and when the bottle is turned around, a different label can be seen on each. The ace in a deck of cards is referred to as a bullet, so the labels show all four aces represented.

though us," Jain said, adding seating is arranged so there is one poker professional at each table.

World Series organizers opened up seats to watch the final table both days for JAQK Cellars customers as well inside the Penn & Teller Theatre at the Rio.

A seat for the dinner and to watch the final table of

"Over the course of a year we developed all eight wines," said Jain. "There is more we want to produce and we will start creating more."

A different approach to a tasting room

Whereas JAQK Cellars is about more than the wine itself, the team's idea of a tasting room is that it is for more than sampling the wines.

"We want to create a destination, a place to play games, have fun and enjoy some great JAQK Cellars wine," Templin said. "Imagine the JAQK tasting room down the road, a design that that creates a place to play in Napa."

He talked about a concept where there would be a lounge area to taste wine, with the ability to enjoy games of chance and the like included.

A five-year plan could include taking the idea of JAQK lounges and having them sprout up in San Francisco, Chicago, Las Vegas and other cities.

"We know design can make a huge difference," Templin said. "We are kind of all-in as far as that goes."

Are my taste buds screwed on wrong?

A couple of years ago, I started a little tasting group out here in West Marin - a gathering of interested wine lovers - we call ourselves the West Marin Wine Nose, puns intended. After we do the semi-serious part of our tasting, one of us will pull out a bottle of late harvest wine to end the evening on a sweet note. The last one we had was a very nice, light, late harvest wine from Dry Creek. It was delicate and refreshing.

Dr. Sam Spivak, one of the more outspoken of our little band, mentioned that his favorite wine and food pairing was foie gras with Chateau d'Yquem. His eyes misted over when he made that pronouncement.

I immediately jumped into the fray by saying that personally, I thought it was the worst wine and food match I had ever tasted. Thus sparked a lively discussion that lasted a very long time. The group polarized. At the end of the evening, no side



Ed Schwartz

Out of My Mind

was declared the victor.

Every true wine and food lover knows that the foie gras and d'Yquem pairing is one of the most lauded combinations under heaven. Why do I detest it? Therein lies this column.

To my tasted buds, fresh foie gras has one of the most delicate tastes in the meat hierarchy. I must mention, as an aside, that you whisper the word foie gras in West Marin, and the food Nazis will assault our local papers with invectives not heard since I was in the United States Army, and the effigy of a goose might be burned on my lawn.

I have had foie gras with d'Yquem and also with Dolce, one of California's greatest wines ever. Same

idea; same results. I take a small bit of foie gras and it melts in my mouth. Heavenly. Then I take a sip of one or the other of these estimable wines and - wham - my taste buds are flooded with the sweet elixir. And this complex of sweet and acid tastes stays in my mouth for a very long time, and it is supposed to. Soon after tasting the wine, I put another small bite of foie gras in my mouth and ... and ... and - nothing! I can't taste the foie gras. I paid a lot for this treat, too. No taste, not for love or money.

As an aside, cholesterol being what it is, I can't have foie gras anymore, so the point may be moot.

Dr. Spivak counter-punched with a blow to my midriff. He told me that if I didn't like foie gras with a Sauternes-style wine, what wine would I like with the banned gourmet treat?

Now he had me. I had to stop and think. I thought

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THE WINES OF JAQK CELLARS

High Roller 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$67)

High Roller comes from the comes from Rutherford, Oakville and Coombsville regions. Register wine writer L. Pierce Carson described High Roller as "Bing cherries, Santa Rosa plums and cassis dance on the palate to the beat of the cab over a malbec bass line. It finishes with a subtle swirl of lush merlot."

Black Clover 2006 Merlot, Napa Valley (\$41)

A blend of merlot (77 percent) from Coombsville and Oakville, cabernet sauvignon (14 percent) from

Rutherford and Malbec (9 percent) from St. Helena, Black Clover provides hints of blueberry, lavender, black cherry and oak.

Soldiers of Fortune 2006 Shiraz, Napa Valley (\$43)

Aromas of black pepper, blueberry and star-anise are noticeable in this Carneros shiraz created by winemaker Craig MacLean. All JAQK Cellars wines are MacLean products.

Pearl Handle 2007 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$36)

Pear, apricot and melon aromas come through in Pearl Handle, with a single Sonoma Coast vineyard providing most (90

percent) of the fruit that gives the chardonnay a smooth taste with a long finish.

22 Black 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$27)

Vineyards in Paso Robles provided most (75 percent) of the fruit for this cabernet sauvignon, with the rest coming from Rutherford, Coombsville and St. Helena. A round, well-balanced wine gives off hints of blackberry, cassis and toasted nuts.

Bone Dance 2006 Merlot, California (\$25)

A blend of merlot (75 percent) and cabernet sauvignon (25 percent) from Coombsville, Rutherford and Paso Rob-

les, Bone Dance's cherry, red currant and cocoa powder aromas provide for a round, vibrant wine.

Her Majesty 2007 Chardonnay, California (\$23)

Primarily from Rutherford, with a small amount of Sonoma Coast fruit blended in to round out the palate, Her Majesty's bright fruit tastes come through.

Charmed 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, California (\$19)

Lake County fruit was used as the primary element in this sauvignon blanc that has a crisp, fruity taste and a nice grapefruit, juniper berry and green apple aroma.

Poker

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The other nominees include Barry Greenstein, Dan Harrington, Tom McEvoy, Men Nguyen, Scotty Nguyen, Daniel Negreanu, Erik Seidel and Mike Sexton. Sexton was



Harvest Report

Growers dry out remaining grapes

By DAVID STONEBERG
For the Register

Last week's storm, the remaining mugginess and rain on Monday has thrown a curve ball in this year's harvest. Grape growers are pulling leaves to open up the canopies and dry off the grapes remaining on the vines. Expect the crews to harvest the remaining grapes, mostly cabernet sauvignon, either late this week or early next week.

The reports by American Viticultural Areas (north to south) are as follows:

Calistoga (Pending)
Paul Smith, OnTheEdge Winery

Many vineyards have finished harvest while scattered blocks of cabernet sauvignon remain as well as an occasional small block of zinfandel or petite sirah. The cab blocks are still holding up well while a hard look inside clusters of some of the remaining tight-bunched varieties reveals damage brought on by last week's heavy rain and subsequent mugginess.

Diamond Mountain District

Dawnine Dyer, Dyer Vineyards
Last Tuesday delivered 4 inches of rain and was followed by four humid and muggy days — perfect conditions for botrytis and molds. Lots of leaf pulling has been done to open up canopies and help dry out the fruit in vineyards still waiting to pick ... and so far so good. With a second round of rain this past Monday, every decision becomes increasingly critical.

Howell Mountain

Pat Stotesbery, Ladera Vineyards
We have certainly had enough rain. While a lot was picked before the rain, most folks are picking between the rains. Those who are not yet done, including ourselves, are picking whenever we can get in the vineyards without getting stuck. Tough work for the crews. If this week is sunny and warm, most of the fruit should be off by Oct. 23 and



Katie Jain and Joel Templin of Hatch Designs are the creators of JAQK Cellars, with the help of master winemaker Craig MacLean. Submitted photos

High rollers Ace, jack, king, queen — it's the play of wine in JAQK Cellars

By DAN ROSS
Register Online Editor

How do two people who run a San Francisco-based graphic design firm come to develop their own wine brand?

This is about more than just wine, it is about an entire concept, an entire experience, a new way to look at blending wine and play through the wines and the people of JAQK Cellars.

Katie Jain and Joel Templin of Hatch Designs are the creators of JAQK Cellars, with the help of master winemaker Craig MacLean.

"We wanted to start hatching our own brands, for purely selfish reasons — we wanted our own total control," Templin said.

Jain called it "an incubator for our own products."

The pair said they were looking for a way to develop a brand that went beyond the wine itself.

"What if you developed one with a bigger concept?" Templin said.

Combining some of their interests, including Jain's enthusiasm for poker and Templin's competitive nature, they worked up an idea to build their brand around what you would come across inside a casino.

With the World Series of Poker being the third largest event on cable television and poker chips among the top three sellers on Ama-

zon.com for the last three years, the duo set out to combine their branding of wine with a fun concept of poker and the gaming industry.

Now you understand the spelling. JAQK for the top four cards in a deck of cards, the Ace, King, Queen and Jack.

The concept was set, now where to go with it? Templin and Jain worked with people in the wine industry through companies such as Fosters and Constellation Brands and MacLean Wines. They contacted well-known winemaker Craig MacLean to ask him about the idea.

"We wanted to have some more fun with it, that's where it started," Templin said.

They scheduled lunch with MacLean at Rutherford Grill, Templin and Jain said, thinking he could be a sounding board for their idea.

When they asked him if thought they were crazy to try such a concept, Templin said, MacLean felt the idea was so good that he wanted to be a partner and their winemaker. So from searching for wine to label as their own, they now had a person with more than 20 years in the industry developing their own label.

"Our most incredible asset is Craig MacLean," Jain said. "We had close to 500 cases from our first vintage and we sold out the first year."

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The founders of JAQK combined their interests — including Katie Jain's enthusiasm for poker and Joel Templin's competitive nature — to build their wine brand around items you would come across inside a casino.

The play's the thing...

By DAN ROSS
Register Online Editor

Working with one of their Hatch Design clients, Joel Templin and Katie Jain and their JAQK Cellars wines ended up as part of the biggest poker tournament in the world.

The team at Hatch developed designs for Harrah's casinos. One of the people they worked with on the concepts insisted they meet with Jeffrey Pollack, commissioner of the World Series of Poker, and show him the line of JAQK Cellars wines.

"We showed him wine, he loved it and invited us to be part of the World Series," said Jain.

The wine is being featured, with JAQK Cellars as the presenting

sponsor, Nov. 7 at the Poker Hall of Fame Dinner near the end of the World Series of Poker's Main Event. The final nine of nearly 6,500 players in the Main Event are vying for a first-place prize of some \$8.5 million.

Players at the final table include Phil Ivey, widely regarded as the best poker player in the world today. Ivey has won seven World Series bracelets. He is also a Hall of Fame nominee.

Ivey and the other eight final players will be joined at the dinner at the Rio in Las Vegas by all living Hall of Fame members and their guests, as well as the other eight finalists who have been nominated for induction into the Hall.

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