



Anne Schamberg | On Wine

Winery co-founder bets with his

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Joel Templin of JAQK Cellars

"Everyone grew up playing games," says Joel Templin, one of the founders of JAQK Cellars, a high-end California brand that's getting a push in Wisconsin.

That's JAQK as in jack, ace, queen and king.

Wisconsin is near to his heart because Templin, 42, is from Fond du Lac, where he learned to play card games from Go Fish on up to poker. He also earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in graphic design from the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

He and his partners are betting that card sharks and wine hounds alike will go for their poker-themed bottles.

So far, it seems to be working. The wines, first released in 2008, are available in about 26 states and nine countries. Production is at about 11,000 cases for their eight-wine lineup.

Templin notes that much of the initial investment money for JAQK came from "friends of friends" in Wisconsin.

And no wonder people were ready to play along.

In 2007, Templin and his colleague, Katie Jain, founded Hatch Design, an award-winning San Francisco firm. Theirs is an impressive client list that includes Apple, GE, Starbucks and Pottery Barn.

The design duo also had gained experience developing wine brands for "players large and small," and it was by way of this work that they "saw an opening to create something new and different," he said.

JAQK seemed like a winning choice as a name that brought to mind poker and other games of chance.

According to Templin, World Poker "is the No. 3 watched sport" on television. Their marketing research also showed that poker chips are a top gift item.

"We wanted a wine brand that would resonate with people," he said.

And, yes, they've dealt themselves some catchy packaging. On the High Roller Cabernet, for example, a poker chip is embedded in each bottle. (You'll have to chip in over \$65 for this Napa Valley Cab.)

But who's in charge of what's inside these playful bottles?

Craig MacLean is JAQK's winemaker as well as one of the founders. He has a master's degree in oenology from the University of California-Davis and 25 years of experience making wines in the Napa Valley. Along the way he's racked up quite a few 90-plus reviews.