

Kendall Jackson takes to the hills

21 Jul 2005 by JR

Like most writers on any consumer subject, I am bombarded with material selling products to me and thence, the senders hope, to the really important people, consumers. Most of this goes straight into the bin or the Deleted Items folder but I received the following from Jess Jackson, hugely canny founder of Kendall Jackson a couple of weeks ago and find it too revealing not to share. I have never met Jess Jackson but am impressed by the way he has successfully ridden the California wine rollercoaster of recent times. I therefore thought you might be interested, while keeping your tongue firmly in your cheek re any self-congratulation, in the evolution charted, possibly forecast, in this recent overview from him:

Letter from Jess Jackson

The wine landscape continues to change. A little more than a year ago I commented in a similar letter about how Kendall- Jackson's Vintner's Reserve Chardonnay had changed over the years, holding its own against an oversupply of wine and a raft of aggressively priced domestic and international competitors. I'm proud to say that our family has withstood the challenging business environment of the past few years and secured a foundation for Kendall- Jackson that keeps us ahead of the competition for years to come.

Today, Kendall- Jackson announces an entirely new direction with our Vintner's Reserve wines. In keeping with our commitment to family farming and holding firm on our notion that Kendall- Jackson is the premier "affordable luxury wine," the 2004 Kendall- Jackson Vintner's Reserve Chardonnay now proudly features the words "Jackson Estates Grown" on the label. What this means is that all the Chardonnay grapes used to make this wine were grown on vineyards we own or control. And for those who know anything about farming, controlling one's own vineyards means that you control grape quality.

Every change in grape sourcing, every tweak of the label, is designed to deliver to the consumer more information and a higher quality bottle of America's favourite premium Chardonnay. For this boost in quality, we are priced a little higher than other competitors, but delivering far greater value.

There are major changes in grape sourcing for our Vintner's Reserve Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon as well. With the next vintages, the 2003 Vintner's Reserve Merlot and 2002 Vintner's Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon move to a tri-appellation identification on the label, specifically featuring the three important North Coast viticultural regions of Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino. The extremely concentrated and complex grapes in the '03 Merlot and '02 Cabernet Sauvignon wines are from our mountain estate vineyards, grown high above the Napa, Alexander, and Anderson Valleys.

As I've said for two decades, growing grapes on the sides of California's cool coastal mountains and ridges builds character - not only in the character of the wine, but also the character of the people growing the grapes. It's not easy growing grapes on mountains. Nor is it inexpensive. It's a real test of patience and determination. A key ingredient in producing these exceptional wines is the institution of sustainable farming practices, combined with hard work by our vineyard crews and winemakers.

Understanding these truths about wine quality, we've planted our Kendall- Jackson estate vineyards in some of the highest elevations and top micro-climates of Napa, Sonoma, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and Mendocino counties. We're proud of our new Vintner's Reserve wines, and equally proud of our upper-tier wines - Grand Reserve, Highland Estates and Stature. My family and I are dedicated to delivering wines of consistent quality and richly intense flavours, and we hope you enjoy the ever-evolving wines of Kendall- Jackson for years to come.

Signed, Jess Jackson, Owner & Proprietor [got that?]

Interesting, eh, that he has taken such trouble to follow more of a European model for grape supply and even vineyard location. What JJ does today...