

Jess Jackson adds Arrowood, Byron and Freemark Abbey

21 Aug 2006 by Linda Murphy

California billionaire vintner Jess Jackson has expanded his legacy by buying another.

Jackson and his wife, Barbara Banke, confirmed that their reported \$97 million (£51,506,977) bid to purchase the three wineries run by Legacy Estate Group - Freemark Abbey in Napa Valley, Arrowood in Sonoma County and Byron in Santa Barbara County - had been finalized.

It was a short run for Legacy, founded in 2000 by brothers Calvin and Dev Sidhu. Their acquisition of the historic Cabernet Sauvignon/Chardonnay producer Freemark Abbey in 2001, followed by purchases of Arrowood and Byron from Constellation Brands, turned into an estimated \$90 million loss for investors. By November 2005, Legacy was history.

Last Friday a Sonoma County bankruptcy court approved Jackson's buyout bid, hiking Jackson Family Wines' brand total to 40, including the value-priced, ubiquitous Kendall-Jackson Vintner's Reserve.

This is the third 2006 purchase for Jackson, who also grabbed Murphy-Goode Winery in Sonoma County and Robert Pecota Winery in Napa Valley. Uncharacteristically quiet on the wine front since 2003 - he was focused on his Stonestreet Farm racehorse business in Kentucky, but now has a fraud lawsuit pending against several horse agents -- Jackson and Banke are playing the wineries again instead of the ponies.

Coincidentally, Jackson produces a wine called Legacy, a Cabernet Sauvignon made at his Stonestreet Winery in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley. One has to wonder what Jackson will do with that wine, now that Legacy Estate Group is part of his estate.

[Jackson is nothing if not hands on. I drove past his Australian enterprise Yangarra in McLaren Vale this morning. Signs were that a substantial vineyard he had planted there but a few years ago had already been ripped up, ready for something more marketable presumably - JR]