

A Brand For John McClelland

by Dan Berger

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If you've been paying attention to wine for the last 60 or so years, a new brand now appearing on many store shelves might catch your eye, and raise at least one brow. And if you had the least doubt, yes, J. McClelland Cellars is a recent development that pays homage to a man whose career in the wine industry spans six decades, going back to the 1950s(!), and who remains actively involved in this new venture bearing his name, one many older wine lovers may know.

John McClelland was vice president of sales for Almaden Vineyards more than four decades ago (he was at Almaden for 25 years), when that iconic brand was making 13 million cases of wine per year and was one of the largest wineries in the world. He subsequently joined Geyser Peak Winery in Geyserville, when its then-new wine maker Daryl Groom created such excitement for that brand that production in the early 1990s exploded.

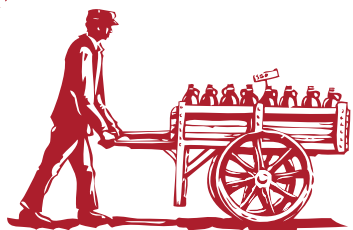
John also has been chairman of the Wine Institute in San Francisco, and as gregarious as he is, to this day, he became one of the best-known California wine executives for decades; hardly a public event existed without his presence.

"John is simply one of the great historians of our industry, and I just love listening to him hour after hour," said Anthony Scotto, who John mentored and who is the creator of the new J. McClelland brand.

"I just love history, especially the history of our industry," said McClelland, 83, over lunch the other day. And it's no wonder that Scotto appreciates John, since his own family started in the wine business in 1883 in Italy, and is himself the head of the fifth-generation to make wine.



FAMILY WINEMAKERS SINCE 1883



SCOTTO CELLARS

To create a new brand dedicated to an iconic figure in the wine industry requires a higher quality image, Scotto knew, so he decided to call upon John's connections with Napa growers, as well as longtime brilliant wine maker Mitch Cosentino, who was hired to be the wine maker for this project five years ago.

To be sure the grapes would not have to be trucked far, Scotto leased a facility in Napa Valley and in 2012 began making high caliber wines under the J. McClelland label.

Most of the wines for this project come from high-quality growers in the prestigious Oak Knoll District, which has produced some of the Napa Valley's finest red wines.

Since John has always been sensitive to pricing that puts wine out of the reach of ordinary folks, price was a major factor. As a result, the McClelland wines are priced significantly lower than most other Napa Valley wines.



Anthony is sole owner of Scotto Cellars, based in Lodi but which uses fruit from all over the state. It produces some of the best value wines in California, and uses some 40 different labels. A good friend says of the main brand, "Scotto is the largest winery no one ever heard of," and he noted that its primary calling card is value wine.

One popular Scotto wine is called Rare Red, produced in large quantities and which carries a suggested retail of \$8, but almost never is that expensive!



An example is the recent release of an excellent 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon priced at \$45. It is one of the least expensive Napa Cabernets on the shelf, and is extremely well-made with wonderful structure, and has the opportunity to age for several more years in the cellar.

I also liked a 2013 Merlot (\$35), also from Oak Knoll, both wines exhibiting splendid character and balance.

The new J. McClelland brand is still relatively new, so distribution isn't as broad as Scotto would prefer, but the company has recently opened a joint tasting and sales room with Cosentino's Pure Cru wines and Jean Edwards Wines on First Street in Napa."

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