



Diamond Series



Blackbird Vineyards

At an early age, Michael Polenske realized his future would one day involve wine or the wine business. The owner of one of the newest stars of Napa Valley's jeweled crown called Blackbird Vineyards says he started being interested in wines during his college days at the University of California, Chico.

"In fact," Polenske recently recalled, "I took about the same number of finance and wine courses while in school. Something about wine intrigued me and I needed to know more about it."

Polenske's business career involved a number of varied businesses centering on his financial expertise. He has owned a variety of restaurants, art galleries and private clubs among others. Polenske had thrived on the concept that he brought a flair for combining individual talents into a successful team to many of these investments.

Fast forward to 2003, and Michael Polenske is searching throughout Napa Valley for a house with a pool that is located on a hill.

"What I eventually found was a house without a hill surrounded by an incredible vineyard planted in Merlot," Polenske continued. "Yes, it did have a pool, but the vineyard was already producing fruit that was being used in world class wines. I did some real due diligence on the vineyard and felt it could become even better with the right kind of resources at its disposal. It's not often that you come upon a piece of land that has such a great pedigree."

The rest, it is easy to say, is history. Blackbird Vineyards (Merlot actually means *little blackbird* in French patois) became a reality and its first release of only 100 cases (using grapes that weren't already sold to existing wineries) was awarded a 98 score by a top industry periodical. That was in 2005, and the accolades haven't stopped for the rocket-propelled winery.

Michael Polenske modestly credits his "team" for the winery's success. His winemaker, Aaron Pott brings a world-class resume to the proverbial table. Pott began his career in Napa Valley with Newton Vineyard and later moved

his winemaking talents abroad. In France, Pott settled in Bordeaux as a veteran of the Bordeaux winemaking scene and holds the distinction of being the only American winemaker to hold the winemaker title at a premiere grand cru level Bordeaux property. Among Pott's duty stations were Chateau Troplong Mondot and Chateau Las Tour Figeac, both highly respected entities in the St. Emilion sector of Bordeaux. More recently, Aaron Pott has been named the top honor of **2012 Winemaker of the Year** by *Food & Wine* magazine.

Production levels at Blackbird Vineyards have grown significantly and around 5,500 cases will be released this year. It is significant to note that Napa Valley's current relatively soft business climate hasn't affected its newest star.

"We have been fortunate to always be behind the demand curve," Polenske added. "Even though we have expanded rapidly, there has always been more of a demand. My planning is that we will continue to grow as long as the consumer demand is there."



Polenske also admits that the style of Blackbird Vineyards' wines hasn't hurt their chances. He said it was always his intention to produce wines that mirrored the "right bank style of Bordeaux" that features mostly Merlot and Cabernet Franc as its main varietals. These wines are unusually rich in flavor with acidic balance and are perfectly attuned to the whims of an international palate. Michael Polenske considered all these aspects when designing his first Blackbird Vineyards release.

An inspiring wine label was another factor in the winery's instant success.

"I interviewed a number of creative designers for the project," Polenske again recalled. "I stopped when I found David Hughes. He was a local and that was one of my requirements. I wanted someone who understood wine culture and really cared. He had already designed Thomas Keller's French Laundry logo and Bouchon Bakery menus and was also the creator of Robert Redford's logo for the Sundance Film Festival. His work jumped



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Michael Polenske
- Proprietor



out at me and what he did for Blackbird Vineyards speaks for itself.”

Michael Polenske has two additional Napa Valley projects that work hand in hand with Blackbird

Vineyards. He owns the newly created Ma(i)sonry Napa Valley (Yountville) and the I. Wolk Gallery (St. Helena) that offer upper scale art, antiques and design to visitors and locals alike, all in the company of great local wines such as Blackbird Vineyards.

Although just a decade old, Blackbird Vineyards must be regarded as a celebrity winery due to its immediate success.

Accolades and Tasting Notes

Blackbird 2012 10th Anniversary ‘Paramour’ Proprietary Red Wine

94 Points, Robert Parker’s *The Wine Advocate* — “A blend of equal parts Merlot and Cabernet Franc (a la a St.-Emilion), the gorgeous 2012 Proprietary Red Palamour offers up notes of Christmas fruitcake, forest floor, mulberries, black cherries and currants. Full-bodied and beautifully fruity without a lot of weight, this is a beautiful example of a complex wine to drink over the next 10-12 years.”

93+ Points, Antonio Galloni — “The Cabernet Franc-based 2012 Paramour is laced with espresso, tobacco, smoke, licorice, incense, and sweet herbs. Dense, compact yet also endowed with serious implosive energy, the Paramour is one of the most reticent wines of this generally much more open vintage. Even with quite a bit of Merlot in the blend, the 2012 boasts considerable structure.”

93 Points, Doug Wilder, *Purely Domestic Wine Report* — “2012 Paramour shows tremendous concentration in the nose of blueberry, plum, carbon, petrichor, licorice and espresso. The palate entry is beautifully balanced and sculpted blackberry with deeply layered stone fruit. Excellent length and texture. Very nice.”

Winery Notes — The 2012 Paramour offers exquisite aromas of blackberry, plum, and tobacco. This authentic expression of Cabernet Franc showcases textured layers of chocolate and nutmeg, combined with fine-grained tannin and deeply layered flavors of stone fruit. The supple finish is round and balanced, providing persistent length of flavor. Paramour will continue to develop with time in the bottle for the next decade or more. 53% Cabernet Franc, 44% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Sauvignon.

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