



Diamond Wine Club

BLACKBIRD VINEYARDS

Napa Valley

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 12,000 cases will be released this year.

"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



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PAUL LEARY, PRESIDENT, AARON POTT,
WINEMAKER & MICHAEL POLENSKE, PRINCIPAL

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

Blackbird 2014 Paramour, Napa Valley

96 POINTS —*Purely Domestic Wine Report*

"A nose of spiced chocolate and red fruit with a subtle overlay of sticky black plum and notes of espresso. The palate entry is a beautifully sculpted blackberry and cherry accented with spicy oak. Great texture and length."

95 POINTS —*Robert Parker's The Wine Advocate*

"Another terrific example of Blackbird is the 2014 Proprietary Red Paramour, a fabulous blend of 84% Cabernet Franc, 9% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 7% Merlot...from the super-intense fragrance of white flowers and forest floor to the blueberry, black raspberry and graphite notes. The wine hits the palate with dazzling fruit intensity, loads of glycerin, a round, juicy, succulent mouthfeel, a layered personality, and a long, supple finish."

94 POINTS —*Connoisseurs' Guide*

93 POINTS —*Jeb Dunnuck (formerly with Robert Parker's The Wine Advocate)*

Winemaker's Notes - Aaron Pott

"Complex aromas of blueberry, violets, espresso, and eucalyptus encircle the nose of this elegant Cabernet Franc-blend. Layers of Bing cherry, blackberry, and savory herbs combine with fine-grained tannins on the palate, leading to a round, supple finish with persistent length."



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**This month's Diamond Plus!
Featured Wine:**

Pharaohmoans 2014 Red Wine
(Syrah/Grenache) Paso Robles

94 Points - *Robert Parker's The Wine Advocate*
385 CASES PRODUCED



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