

The Press Democrat

2 Sonoma County winemakers team up to buy Mendocino County vineyard and start Syrah wine brand



SLIDE 1 OF 2

Baron Ziegler, CEO of Banshee Wines, Thursday March 8, 2018 in Healdsburg. The 'El Pino Club' sign was picked up at a flea market in Alameda County and adds to the hipster feel of the winery. (Kent Porter / Press Democrat) 2018

BILL SWINDELL

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

October 18, 2021, 5:39PM

Two local winemakers have bought a highly regarded Mendocino County vineyard from which they will launch their label focused on syrah grapes with hopes to boost the varietal to rival pinot noir.

Pax Mahle of Pax Wines of Sebastopol and Baron Ziegler, who created Banshee Wines of Healdsburg, have teamed up to buy Halcon Vineyard in Mendocino County. They will use it to create a small new label named after the vineyard.

The two bought the 162-acre vineyard from Paul and Jackie Gordon, who first planted grapes in the high-elevation area in 2005 in the Yorkville Highlands between Cloverdale and the Anderson Valley. The purchase price was not disclosed on the transaction that closed just before harvest.

“From the best syrah site in California, we are going to try create the best syrah we have seen around here,” said Ziegler, who made his mark in the local wine industry with Banhsee, which specialized in affordable pinot noirs.

He later sold the brand to Foley Family Wines and has created six other wine brands, including Marine Layer Wines, which just opened up a tasting room off the Healdsburg Plaza.

Mahle, meanwhile, has built up his label with syrah, as well as such lesser-known varietals as grenache, mouvedre and chenin blanc that are served at his popular tasting room in The Barlow. That’s where he also has a winemaking facility.

In the new venture, the two friends decided it was easier to create the Halcon label to stand on its own with about 700 cases to start and selling mostly direct to consumer. It will be priced around \$80 a bottle, Ziegler said.

"It's not going to be like a reserve cuvée with three different tiers. It's one wine, one parcel and a blend of three different blocks of syrah," he said.

The 15-acre vineyard has 11 acres dedicated to syrah, said Paul Gordon, who noted the temperatures there track with those of the northern Rhone wine region in France that produces the best regarded syrah in the world.

The varietal has a reputation of being "a bit of a geek's wine," but Gordon said he believes there is tremendous potential upside to grow in the marketplace.

Mahle agreed and noted this year's vintage is spectacular as he was pressing some of the fruit on Monday.

"It looks more like Rhone Valley than it does California," he said of the vineyard. "Our plan is to celebrate what Paul and Jackie have done so far and bottle this one great wine from this one great vineyard."