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Do Celebrity Wines Sell?

Industry professionals discuss how fame affects the retail sales of wines associated with actors, musicians, and sports stars



A growing number of celebrities are getting into the wine business: Drew Barrymore has collaborated with [Carmel Road](#) in Soledad, California; Maynard James Keenan, the vocalist for the band Tool, is the proprietor of [Caduceus Cellars](#) in Jerome, Arizona; Sting bought the [Il Palagio](#) estate in Tuscany. Even sports stars like former NFL quarterback Drew Bledsoe have joined in. The question is, do celebrity wines sell—and if they do, who is buying them?

Where to Find Celebrity Wines

Mass-produced celebrity wines are commonly sold at big-box stores and grocery chains. For example, wines from [Carmel Road](#) and [Dreaming Tree](#) (a collaboration between Dave Matthews and winemaker Sean McKenzie, based in Geyserville, California) are regularly found on the shelves of retail outfits like [Total Wine](#), [BevMo!](#), and [ABC Fine Wine and Spirits](#). Total Wine also carries wines from [Caduceus Cellars](#) and [Pursued by Bear](#), the actor Kyle MacLachlan's winery in Walla Walla, Washington. [Esquin Wine and Spirits](#) in Seattle carries wines from both [Pursued by Bear](#) and [Doubleback](#), Bledsoe's winery, also in Walla Walla, as well as other Washington celebrity wines. [The Wine House](#) in Los Angeles carries [Dreaming Tree](#), [Carmel Road](#), and [Doubleback](#).

Devon Broglie, MS, the global beverage buyer for [Whole Foods Market](#), says that Whole Foods carries several celebrity wine options that are popular with its customers, including Dreaming Tree and Carmel Road. “The popularity of several of these wines is evident in the number of bottles we sell,” he says, “but it’s difficult to determine if customers are drawn to these specific wines due to celebrity ties or simply because of the high quality of the product.” Of the celebrity wines the grocery offers, [Miraval](#) from Côte de Provence is the most popular. Broglie says he doesn’t really consider it a celebrity wine, however, because although the estate is owned by Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, the wine is produced by the Perrin family of Château de Beaucastel.

Fame as a Sales Strategy

Some wine producers play up their celebrity association. At Carmel Road, the Barrymore wines’ labels feature the actress’s name. Chad Lapp, the vice president for [Opici Family Distributing](#), which represents the musician John Legend’s [LVE Collection Wines](#), explains that retailers and distributors actively promote LVE with point-of-sales and shelf talkers that indicate the wine is a collaboration between Legend and Jean-Charles Boisset, proprietor of [Raymond Vineyards](#) in Napa Valley, California. For them, combining the celebrity of John Legend with the expertise of an established wine personality makes a promising sales strategy.

Other retailers and distributors, however, don’t count on fame to sell wine. Since the beginning, Miraval has avoided its celebrity connection wherever possible. “It was very important for us *not* to mention their names to introduce the wine, because that’s not what it’s about. It’s about the quality of the wine, not Brad and Angelina,” says Hubert Fabre, the executive vice president and national sales manager for [Vineyard Brands](#), which represents Miraval. In fact, if retailers post a picture of Pitt and Jolie from, say, [People magazine](#) alongside their stores of Miraval, Vineyard Brands asks them to remove the clipping.

Despite attempts to downplay it, consumers and retailers quickly caught on to the Pitt-Jolie connection, and while it may have helped the brand overall, there were instances when the celebrity ownership also had the potential to hurt it. Fabre says that the fine-wine community seemed predisposed against Miraval because of its celebrity association. He recalled a blind tasting at which sommeliers, after the reveal, “were saying they wanted to not like the wine because it was owned by some celebrities,” but “the wine was nice—and they liked it.”

Sting’s association with the winery on the Tuscan estate he owns also tends to be downplayed in marketing efforts. For example, when Il Palagio’s Message in a Bottle, a blend of Sangiovese, Syrah, and Merlot, was featured in Esquin’s October 2017 Hot Sheet newsletter, it was the wine’s 91-point James Suckling rating that got the callout, not Sting.