

PEOPLE

John Legend's 'Perfect Mix' in Wine

The superstar has built a thriving wine brand while pairing steaks—and pancakes—at home

BY BRIANNE GARRETT

John Legend, beloved R&B mainstay since the early 2000s, has become a massively successful entertainer across media and genres: Last year, the current star of NBC's *The Voice* became a rare EGOT winner—someone who has captured Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony awards. Now Legend, 40, has set his sights on yet another creative field.

Wine first made its debut on Legend's professional résumé in 2015, when he launched his LVE (Legend Vineyard Exclusive) wine label in collaboration with Napa's Raymond Vineyards and winemaker Jean-Charles Boisset. It has grown to a lineup of five wines, including a Napa Cabernet, a Cameros Chardonnay and, new in 2019, a French sparkling rosé.

"The wines we decide to develop are really based on the things I like to drink," says Legend. Wine also plays a big role in his kitchen, where it's paired with recipes crafted by his wife, cookbook author Chrissy Teigen. "It's a very huge part of who we are—how we entertain, how we interact with each other and how we interact with our friends and our family," he says.

Legend spoke to writer Brianne Garrett about how blending wine is like seeking the "perfect mix and perfect mastering process" in the studio, how he and Teigen concoct pairings of his wine with her dishes, and what has most surprised him about the wine business.

Wine Spectator: How did your love of wine begin?

John Legend: I think when I started traveling a lot more and started visiting vineyards and really beautiful restaurants around the world in Italy and France and Napa Valley and all over, I just started to fall in love with wine and the experiences that I had had around it. We love Burgundy, we love the south of France, we love Tuscany. We're going to go back [to Tuscany] in a couple of weeks for a little family vacation. And when we go, the whole reason we go there is to eat and drink.

WS: How is making wine like making music?

JL: Being in music for this long has taught me the benefits of working with really talented people who know what they're doing. People who, when you come together, make you better, and you hopefully can make them better too. We definitely found a partner like that in Jean-Charles Boisset.

I also think even the iterative process of working on a song until you feel like it's right and then working on a wine, tasting and blending—it's all based on your own personal taste, it's all based on your own opinion, it's all subjective. But that iterative process of continuing to blend until you get it exactly where you think it's perfect, and you feel like it's opened up and all your senses are thrilled by it, I think it's a similar process to when the music comes together and you're waiting for that perfect mix and perfect mastering process. In that way, I think they're very comparable. When we were blending the wine, we also listened to music and tried to get into certain moods so that the whole sensory experience would be connected.

WS: Your wife, Chrissy Teigen, has published two cookbooks. How does wine play a role at the table at home?



John Legend at Raymond Vineyards in Napa

JL: You know, [Chrissy and I] truly love entertaining. We love cooking for each other, we love cooking for our friends, and so much of it revolves around recipes that she's made or is developing for her book, and then around us drinking our LVE wine. We're not just putting our names and faces on these products, we actually enjoy them.

We pair the [Provence] rosé with my fried chicken; we have the [Napa] sparkling when I make breakfast in the morning on Saturdays or Sundays, like a nice pancake brunch. Some of our heartier dishes we'll have with the Cabernet. We serve the Cabernet a lot; sometimes it's with pastas, with steaks, with Chrissy's lasagna. I think it's a good combination. And it goes over really well.

I tend to like Cabernets a lot, and I tend to like Bordeaux a lot. I like a lot of stuff from Tuscany, like Brunello di Montalcino. I do love a good rosé, and I love a good sparkler.

WS: What has surprised you about the wine business?

JL: I think it's important to know, especially for celebrities getting involved, that there aren't any shortcuts to doing something that's really high quality. If you want to do it right, you have to work with great people, you have to put your own time and attention into it, you have to spend time on the blending side but also on the sales side and meeting with buyers.

I think the most complex side is the sales and distribution side, because there's a lot that goes into it, and I'm still learning from our friends at Boisset, but it's been fun to learn with them and meet with our buyers, meet with retailers and distributors. It has given me a lot of respect for people that do this business.

WS: What's next in your journey with wine?

JL: [Chrissy and I] have definitely been looking at possibly getting some property up in Napa Valley, since we love visiting there so much. So that's definitely something we're looking at.

We're looking into the canned wine world, and we'll probably do some experimentation in that pretty soon. We're going to keep growing and keep learning. We wanted it to last, and hopefully it will. □

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