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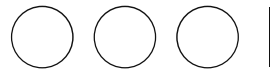
Famed Cabernet winemaker just sold his second Napa winery — but this time it's different



Jess Lander

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Mark Herold made headlines when he sold his [Napa Valley garage winery Merus](#), coveted for its big and bold Cabernets, to [billionaire Bill Foley](#) and his rapidly expanding empire Foley Family Wines in 2007. But when it came time to sell his namesake winery, he took a different route — joining a small countermovement of vintners attempting to disrupt Napa Valley's corporatization trend.

- **Related:** [Brion Wise buys Cabernet vineyard in Napa's Pritchard Hill](#)

This month, Herold sold the Cabernet Sauvignon-focused Mark Herold Wines to a client of 13 years, Brion Wise. Wise owns two eponymous wine brands, B. Wise Vineyards in Sonoma and Brion, a premium, single-vineyard Cabernet label in Napa; Herold, a sought-after winemaking consultant in the Bay Area, works with both. A prolific investor across several industries, Wise also has an ownership



Noted Napa Valley winemaker Mark Herold, left, has sold his namesake wine brand Mark Herold Wines to local vintner and investor Brion Wise, right.

Larry Anderson

stake in 400 acres of premium Napa Valley vineyard land in top subregions like Oakville and Coombsville.

The purchase price was not disclosed. The Mark Herold Wines tasting room, located steps from Napa's Oxbow Public Market, will remain in operation.

The acquisitions of big-name wineries — like Joseph Phelps and Shafer — by conglomerates for hundreds of millions of dollars have become the controversial new normal in Napa Valley. Many in the local wine industry are concerned that the region will lose its roots as a multi-generational farming community, and that sustainable farming and wine quality will falter as a result of hands-off ownership by absentee parties. But recently, more winery and vineyard owners, like Herold, are selling to a familiar face or a small, family operation instead of a corporation.

Herold called the deal “a perfect marriage” that allows him to stay on as winemaker and the face of the brand.

His continued involvement was “critical” in Wise’s decision to purchase. “If it were just a brand, I probably wouldn’t do it,” said Wise. “I know it’s going to be handled properly and done right because he’s the guy behind it.”

It’s an opportunity for Herold to focus on artistry and transition away from the administration side of the business. But he said his alliance with Wise will also help improve the quality of his wines, which include Mastodon, a \$750 large format bottling of Oakville Cabernet.

“Brion has things I don’t — vineyards, a winery — and in order for Mark Herold Wines to grow further, these things are indispensable,” said Herold. “Some vineyards he has access to, I could never access. They’re very high quality and very expensive.”

The sale is reminiscent of a handful of recent Bay Area transactions, like cult Cabernet brand Realm’s 2022 [purchase of the Houyi Vineyard and winery in Napa’s ultra-exclusive Pritchard Hill region](#). Realm had a decade-long relationship with the previous owners and agreed to keep the name as an homage. Similarly, Berkeley natural wine phenom [Broc Cellars bought Fox Hill](#), a popular Mendocino County vineyard, earlier this month; the winery had purchased grapes from the property since 2013.

Perhaps most notably, renowned vintners Steve Lagier and Carole Meredith decided not to cash out as they eye retirement. Instead, they agreed to [transition ownership of their lucrative Napa hillside vineyard](#), Lagier Meredith, to their friend and fellow winemaker Aaron Pott — for \$0.



Mark Herold Wines is known for its big, bold and brawny Cabernet Sauvignons. Mark Herold will continue on as the winemaker and face of the brand.

Mark Herold Wines

These intentional moves appear to prioritize legacy over money. “What’s happening in the wine world with big companies buying our brands is that control is locked and your vision gets swallowed up,” said Herold.

He’s speaking from experience. After the sale of Merus, Herold was quickly replaced by famed winemaker Paul Hobbs. He went on to start Mark Herold Wines, but was prohibited from making his signature Cabernet Sauvignon for several years due to a non-compete clause in the sale agreement.

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But there is no such paperwork this time around, and Herold is confident that the partnership will stick — he and Wise share a history and wine preferences. “It’s funny because 25 years ago, I was buying (vineyard) rows and there’s this guy Wise with some of the rows that I wanted,” he said. “We’ve been attracted to similar fruit for a while.”

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