



Sogno Uno de Savanna Samson - great nose

by - Abram Sauer
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A porn star recently released a self-branded wine. A renowned wine snob gave it a 90 to 91 out of 100. Due to this, the name Savanna Samson became known to many, and to many others it became publicly OK to know.

When the *New York Times* chose the title "Naked Came the Vintner" for a February 2006 article about porn star Savanna Samson's self-labeled wine (full name: the classy-sounding Sogno Uno de Savanna Samson), it's unclear whether the title was intentional homage or stupid luck. Either way, the hoax novel published in 1969 that became a bestseller—*Naked Came the Stranger*—could not better characterize the reality of what motivates the celebrity-named wine market.

From the near-dead (Rolling Stones), to the Grateful Dead (Jerry Garcia) to the just plain dead (Elvis), celebrity-branded and -named wines are increasingly on the shelves. And increasingly getting bought. Though it's difficult to establish just how many celebrities are in the self-branded wine business, a cursory search produces results for, among others, Olivia Newton-John, Jeff Gordon, Jackie Chan, Ernie Els, Joe Montana, Mike Ditka, Mick Fleetwood, Madonna, Gerard Depardieu, Greg Norman, Cliff Richard, Francis Ford Coppola, Sam Neill, Emeril, and Vince Neil (the once-and-current lead singer for Mötley Crüe). Ten years ago one would have been hard pressed to come up with half as many names. So, why have so many celebs hit the bottle?

There are two types of celeb wines: those with celebrity names and others made by celebrities. Of the latter there are many and yet, like Brad Pitt owning stock in Coca-Cola, one publicly has little to do with the other. For example, the wine brand [Koala Blue](#) is a product by Olivia Newton-John. But neither her name nor image appears on the label. While these celeb-behind-the-scenes wines certainly benefit from their named benefactors, it's the directly celeb-identified wines that are of most interest from a branding perspective. These include Mario Andretti's [Andretti Winery](#) label, [Greg Norman's bottles](#), and the very popular [Marilyn Wines](#).

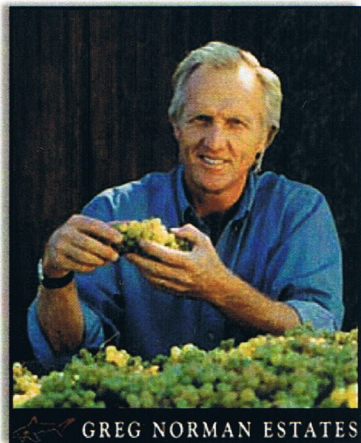


A gambling man's money would be on the fact that many wine drinkers can't tell a 95 from a 75. So when it comes to celeb wines, consumers are buying for the label—or the name. And there are two reasons they might want that label.

Celebrity wine can be one of two things to the consumers who purchase it. First, it can be a team jersey for people who scoff at those who wear team jerseys. That is to say, one would expect that the type of celebrity-follower who would be interested in a **boldface**-named wine would have a set of expectations respective to that celebrity's characteristics. Liberally stereotyping here, the sort of consumer who would be interested (genuinely) in a Vince Neil-labeled wine is probably the same type of consumer who is not going to worry much about its "nose." But the kind of person who appreciates (genuinely) Francis Ford Coppola's work (minus 1996's *Jack*) would also appreciate a wine that rewarded knowledge and deeper understanding. This group includes collectors who buy the bottles with no intention of them ever leaving a shelf.

The other, and probably more common, kind of celeb-wine consumer is motivated by humor and treats the wine largely as a conversation piece. To illustrate this group, a personal anecdote: this author has twice steamed off a few wine labels and substituted personalized, Photoshopped creations in place of the originals. This has been, without fail, a hit. And nobody ever asks what brand or vintage the wine was before I went Dr. Frankenwine on it. The obvious point of this anecdote is that it is often the wine label itself that is important, with the contents being an added bonus. (Trump Vodka fits into

this category even if The Donald insists it doesn't.)



Nothing is a better example of this kitsch wine consumerism than the line from [Celebrity Cellars](#). Carrying wines branded for Madonna, the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, and KISS, the distributor makes few attempts to hide the fact that its products exist for about the same reasons as a concert t-shirt. The bottles, exploiting each brand's iconic imagery, are marketed not for their content but for their simple existence as band-approved collectibles: e.g., from Cellar's marketing copy, "The undeniable rock & roll attitude of KISS in a bottle," and "Capture the excitement of Madonna's Confessions in these collectible bottles."

Ultimately it's *because* Samson's wine fits into both celeb wine markets that it is so remarkable. (Plus, it serves as a "legitimate" excuse for sober publications to run pictures of a porn star.) It is a brand with two completely opposite brand

advantages and brand characteristics. Bought only for the label it's a great gag; bought only for the contents it's a great drink.

The truth is that there is almost zero downside whatsoever for a celebrity to release a self-named wine. If it sucks—well, most people expected it to suck anyway so no damage done. And if it scores a 91, well, then for once you've blown something else: expectations.

[Abram Sauer](#) wrote this article while consuming Coppola Cabernet Franc 2002.

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