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How Napa Valley's Newton Doubled Down On Quality Cabernet



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I explore the world of intoxicating elixirs and the business that makes them tick. [FULL BIO](#) ▾

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Newton's upgraded Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

Newton Vineyards celebrated its 40th Anniversary this year, capping an unlikely collaboration between Moët Hennessy Estates & Wines CEO Jean-Guillaume Prats and Rob Mann, the young Aussie winemaker Prats tapped to oversee the portfolio. Newton is best known for its unfiltered Chardonnay, but this duo's mission was to elevate Newton's Cabernet Sauvignon program, and invested millions to ensure the winery and its wines are optimized to produce a Napa-Cab that competes with the regions finest.

Few people in Napa Valley had heard of Robert Mann when he arrived in 2012, but his family's winemaking dynasty is a big-deal Down Under. Mann's grandfather's granddad was among the first pioneers to plant grape vines near Perth in the mid 19th century, where Rob grew up. Mann learned winemaking as a boy from his grandfather, Jack Mann, a local legend who created a mega-brand called Houghton's White Burgundy in the 1930s. His achievements inspired the Hardy Wine Company to name their top bottling after him. Hardy was also where Rob would score his first job.

"I went from university straight into it," Mann says. "This was the 90's when hearty Australian reds were being exported to the US in big volumes; production was booming. I think all of us graduates scored positions right out of school."



Winemaker Rob Mann in the vines on Mt. Veeder

At 21-years-old Mann became assistant winemaker at Hardy, a 10,000-ton winery in southern Australia, where he found himself thrust into overseeing the winery's red wine program. It was a sink or swim moment for the young winemaker, and sinking was not an option. Mann had no choice but to learn the ropes of commercial production on the fly.

“It was a big evolution in the Australian wine industry,” Mann remembers.

“Overnight we went from making classically styled wine to these big, oaky, alcoholic things which were highly rated and in demand. That had a big impact on how people made wines, and I was lucky to be on the curve. I learned quite a bit having to do that.”

After two years Mann was promoted to Operations Wine Maker at Hardy’s historic Tintara Winery in southern Australia’s McLaren Vale. He spent the next five seasons making wines from the Hunter Valley, Canberra, and other emerging regions, broadening his repertoire for finessing different grapes and blending styles. It was also here that Mann met his future wife. Things were going well, but fate had other plans.