

## Celebrity pairing: Aykroyd, De Loach

Multitalented comedian's European palate may blend well with Sonoma County wines

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Dan Aykroyd takes his sunglasses off during a news conference in Toronto Wednesday, June 13, 2007, where he unveiled plans for the Dan Aykroyd Winery.



Personalities often get roped into “making” wine.

Jerry Garcia, Olivia Newton-John, even Elvis had wine labels created for them. So did Greg Norman, the Australian-born golfer turned mega-company with his own line of sportswear.

It’s hard to know how many of these wines were legitimately created by the personalities themselves, but it’s a fair guess that the impetus came from someone else, and that the actual direction the winery took came from a marketing manager.

Decades ago, when Always Elvis was debuted, the King had already died. As a good reporter would, I asked the (Detroit-based) company that created the line of wines, “Did Elvis drink wine?”

“No,” said the marketing director of the company, “but Always Elvis is the sort of wine that Elvis would have drunk if he drank wine.”

Oh.

So I was marginally skeptical when it was announced, rather privately, that comedian/actor/Blues Brother Dan Aykroyd of “Saturday Night Live” fame was to release the first wine under his California wine project.

But a quick search of the Internet showed that Aykroyd is no newcomer to wine. Indeed, the Canadian-born multitalented man of the world already had founded a winery in Canada’s Niagara Peninsula and was making superb chardonnays, sauvignon blancs and rieslings.

Aykroyd says that it was musician Steve Cropper “who really introduced me to great wine. He had a fantastic cellar, and after shooting (the “Blues Brothers”), John (Belushi) and I would go back Steve’s place and he’d pull out a lot of great premier crus and bordeaux and other fine wines.”

Speaking casually at De Loach Vineyards in the Russian River Valley, Aykroyd said that experience “ruined me forever. I can’t drink bad wine anymore.”

That led to his opening the Canadian winery, and why he joined forces with De Loach to make a chardonnay and a cabernet sauvignon from Sonoma County fruit.

“He could have gone to Napa,” said John-Charles Boisset, owner of De Loach, but noted that the style of wine he wanted to make suited the soils and climate of Sonoma a lot better.

That style means with great fruit and balance and lower-than-popular alcohols.

The two met at a cafe in Canada where they were dining.

Boisset walked over, handed Aykroyd a business card and suggested that he try De Loach wines.

Aykroyd and his wife, actress Donna Dixon, live in Los Angeles, so a visit to Sonoma County was an easy trek, and within weeks the two men were chatting about a joint venture. It occurred just before the 2007 harvest, so Boisset had his team set aside special lots of wine for blending, and by this December, a line of Dan Aykroyd wines will be on the market.

I tasted samples of the two wines recently, and can state they are exceptional. But formal reviews will have to wait until the wines are bottled.

I asked Aykroyd how good a wine taster he is. “I don’t know how good my palate is, after riding a Harley for years. I will say that if you drive a Harley, you don’t need a psychiatrist.

“But I can also say I know what style of wine I like, and it is more like European wines — and that’s what we will be making here.”

And the good news is that the wines will sell for about \$20 a bottle, no more.

“We want to make great wine at an affordable price,” he said.

“And this will help put a real face on Sonoma County wines,” said Boisset.

More details on the Aykroyd wine project when the wines are released.

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