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The Power Of Rebranding: From Hidden Ridge Vineyard to Immortal Estate

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They say a good quality product can sell itself. Hogwash! In an era marked by crowded marketplaces, big data, and hyper-dynamic marketing practices, selling a product requires deft strategy. In many cases, the fine line that separates success and failure lies upon a brand's ability to consistently deliver on message for ever changing marketplace. For Tim Martin, co-founder of Gauge Branding and owner of Immortal Estate – previously Hidden Ridge Vineyard – his latest passion project is a testament to the power of rebranding: reviving a stagnant vineyard into a luxury wine brand.



As a child, Martin worked as a prep cook for his Italian grandfather. His penchant for all things culinary led him to two accomplished decades in restaurant and hospitality management. After working in Napa Valley for a decade with legendary Robin Lail and her wine project, Lail Vineyards, in addition to launching his own project, Tusk Estates, Martin launched Gauge Branding with partner Mark Wiegard. At Gauge, Martin focuses on cultivating brand DNA and crafting marketing strategies for emerging winemakers, cold-brew coffee makers, and bourbon distillers. In 2017, he fulfilled his lifelong dream to own a vineyard and thus became the new owner of Hidden Ridge Vineyard, now known as Immortal Estate.

In its original incarnation, Hidden Ridge Vineyard was a small vineyard with a cult-like following. Its 2013 Impassable Mountain Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon received a coveted 100-point score from venerated wine critic Robert Parker, who described it as a “quintessential example of what perfection is.” The brand’s only other wine, the 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon 55% Slope, also received a laudable 97+ score. Yet despite such critical accolades and high remarks, the vineyard and its compelling wines went largely unrecognized. The problem wasn’t the wine, but rather the branding or lack thereof.



Hidden Ridge Vineyard

To say the vineyard’s unique location is off the beaten path would be an understatement. Located on 150 acres of land on the Sonoma side of Spring Mountain in the Mayacamas Mountains, the secluded vineyard runs the ridge between the Napa and Sonoma valleys. West of

St. Helena, the estate's 50 planted acres span the slope of Spring Mountain. What makes the vineyard unique is its 55-degree slope, a deviation from the county's set 15-degree maximum. Since the area was originally developed by Lynn Hofacker and Timothy Milos in 1990, the estate is grandfathered in.

With its extreme slope and mountainous terrain, the area is an anomaly compared to typical auspicious properties. After initially purchasing the land, Hofacker spent years learning the land and developing the vineyard. This distinctive terroir provides unique soil and light conditions for the mountain fruit used to produce the vineyard's acclaimed cabernets. The property's exposure to the early afternoon breezes from the Russian River compounded with the area's climate keeps the wines natural acidity and nuanced flavors. Rich, dark, and full-bodied, the wines boast a complex range of palette notes like cassis, dense cocoa, sweet spice, and truffles. "These mountain fruit are incredibly delicate," said Martin. "The wines produced here are unlike anything else you can find. It really speaks to just how special this location is."

While Hofacker proved to be accomplished in producing remarkable cabernets, his tenuous efforts in establishing his brand and marketing his creations kept the Hidden Ridge name a little-known secret. Today, Martin has made it his mission to change that.



Mark Wiegard, Co Owner / Creative Director, with Tim Martin, Co Owner / Brand Director, both of Gauge Branding.

When reimagining Immortal Estate, Martin had one goal in mind: to create a world class cabernet from Sonoma, which no one has ever seen. "I was intrigued by this idea that we have drawn lines and said, 'Napa does this well, Sonoma does this well,' but these are arbitrary lines we drew on a map. Mother Earth didn't do that," said Martin in an interview with Napa Valley

Register. “So when I tried this wine for the first time it opened up my brain, I felt like I learned something, because this is a Sonoma cabernet that you don’t expect to have these kinds of profiles. I was blown away and sort of accepted this challenge of communicating to the world that Sonoma can make amazing cabs.”

For Martin, the new Immortal Estate was launched as an evolution of Hidden Ridge Vineyard. Rather than disregarding the past, Martin aims to honor the original vineyard by building upon its legacy of winemaking and transforming the brand into a prestigious name that will stand the test of time. “I love the fact that every day I get to work on something that I hope will outlive me,” said Martin. “Lynn, the founder of the vineyard, he’s part of that spirit. Here’s a man who crafted this amazing property. He passed away, and yet, this vineyard lives on; it’s like the spirit of his is there.”



Immortal Impassable

If ever there was a symbol to represent endurance and eternal life, the immortal jellyfish would be it. As the only immortal creature on the planet, the jellyfish is able to reset itself and transform back into an adolescent state to essentially start over. With this in mind, Martin made the mysterious creature the focal point of the vineyard's new branding. "Like the immortal jellyfish on our labels, we want clients' memories with Immortal Estate wines to live forever," said Martin in a press release. "We believe the way to do that is to deliver a truly luxurious wine experience through incomparable wines. We believe something special happens when people come together around good wine. Our goal in everything we're doing is to create these immortal moments for people."