



Santa Barbara's Fess Parker Winery Branches Out To Napa

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Late actor Fess Parker founded his Santa Barbara winery in 1989, and played a key role in building the region's reputation as a producer of upscale Burgundian varietals. The flagship Fess Parker brand currently has an annual production of around 65,000-70,000 cases, led by its Santa Barbara Chardonnay (\$18-\$19) and Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$25-\$30). But the company's second-generation—including Fess's son Eli, daughter Ashley and son-in-law Tim Snider, who is president of the winery—has also forayed into new areas lately. Those moves include a recent sparkling wine offshoot and the upcoming launch of a range of high-end Napa Cabernets.

Fess Parker's new Napa line, called Addendum, includes Stagecoach and Skellenger Lane single-vineyard Cabernets, as well as a Napa Valley Cab that is 60% Skellenger Lane and 40% Stagecoach. Those three wines, all priced at around \$95, will debut this August through direct-to-consumer and select on-premise channels, combining for about 500 cases for the inaugural 2014 vintage. Also included is a Stagecoach blend of 56% Cabernet and 44% Syrah at just under \$90. Given Stagecoach's recent sale to E.&J. Gallo, Snider says he and his team are exploring other potential vineyard sources for future vintages in case the need arises.

Meanwhile, Eli Parker—who serves as CEO of parent company Fespar—and Ashley Parker-Snider have collaborated on a recent sparkling wine project, Fesstivity, featuring methode champenoise bubbies made from Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Launched in 2015, Fesstivity is growing quickly from a small base in the \$40-\$50 price point, with current volume at around 2,000 cases.

Fess Parker's portfolio also includes Epiphany, focused on Rhône varietals from \$25-\$50 and totaling around 7,000 cases, as well as Central Coast-sourced Parker Station Pinot Noir (\$15). "Parker Station has become a nice revenue driver and by-the-glass play," says Snider, noting that the brand is now at around 25,000 cases.

Snider adds that Fess Parker has been devoting significant focus to securing new long-term grape contracts recently. "There haven't been a lot of new plantings in Santa Barbara County, so it feels like it's tightening a bit," he says. "It used to be that even if you needed additional grapes halfway through harvest you could find them—now not so much. That has led us to try to renew some of our contracts ahead of time, even if we still have a few years left."

The company has also been active on the hospitality front, opening 50-seat restaurant The Bear and Star at its Wine Country Inn in Los Olivos, California, this spring. Meanwhile, the family—which also has a third generation beginning to work in the business—is partnered with Hilton on The Fess Parker, a 360-room waterfront resort in Santa Barbara. —*Daniel Marsteller*

