

# MEININGER'S

WINE BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL

## The Brand Builder: An Interview With Dennis Carroll

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What Dennis Carroll doesn't know about wine brands probably isn't worth knowing. In a career spanning just over two decades, Carroll has not only created, sold and built major wine brands, but he's taken existing brands and revitalized them.

After graduating as an accountant, he became a founding member of a new San Francisco wine and spirits store called Beverages and More in 1994. That venture has since become BevMo!, a West Coast powerhouse with more than 145 stores. Carroll parlayed this experience into his own wine consultancy, whose projects included facilitating the sale of Blackstone to Constellation.

In 2001, Carroll co-founded the Sonoma-based Purple Wine Company, which produces both branded wines and private label wines for retailers and restaurants. During his tenure, the company built a number of popular brands, such as Mark West, which was sold to Constellation in 2012. After leaving the Purple Wine Company, Carroll founded Wine Hooligans, which now has five wine brands, four winemakers and himself as Head Hooligan.



Dennis Carroll (front) with winemakers

One of Wine Hooligan's most successful projects has been the revitalization of the Cycles Gladiator brand, which had suffered from a volume-driven corporate strategy. Another notable success has been Broadside Wines, which partnered with Wine Hooligans in 2014 with a view to extending distribution and developing an affordable Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon. In 2015, the new wine was named as one of Eric Asimov's Fall Wines: 20 under \$20.00, and found a home in more than 30 new markets.

In short, Dennis Carroll is very good at wine brands. The below interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

### **After you sold Mark West, why did you get back into the wine business rather than, say, heading for the beach?**

You know, I'm not young but I'm not old quite yet and I still wanted to do some things in the wine business. It was a great brand, but there wasn't necessarily a Mark West behind it. I wanted to take a different approach, with authenticity behind it – real brands, real places, real people.

### **When did you found Wine Hooligans?**

It was founded in 2013 and we started shipping in 2014. It was based on the relationships I built at Purple Wine Company – we had those distribution networks.

