

SONOMA COUNTY

# The Evolution OF AN ICON

**HOW JOHN JORDAN  
HAS KEPT JORDAN  
WINERY IN THE  
FAMILY—AND IN  
THE SPOTLIGHT**

story by Kim Beto  
photos by Marcus Cano

Southern Glazer's  
Wine & Spirits VP  
of Key Accounts  
Kim Beto goes  
for a spin through  
the vineyards with  
Jordan Winery  
CEO John Jordan.

As VP of Key Accounts for Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits and as someone who had visited the Jordan estate for many years under Tom Jordan's leadership, I was certainly curious about what would unfold when his son John took the reins of the Alexander Valley winery in 2005.

The passion one generation has for a family business is not always passed on to the next; although John knew that the winery would be a part of his future, he'd planned a different career path and was practicing law full time when his father asked him to take over the company. However, over the past decade, I have watched how the winery has actually been revitalized by his tenure and its reputation elevated.

There is now a hipness to the brand that shows in its vibrant social-media presence, thanks largely to the creative efforts of Marketing Director Lisa Mattson, and in the success of its epic, invitation-only Halloween bashes. But the winery's receiving renewed attention from the trade as well as consumers: I have been witness to several tastings with sommeliers who found that, tasted blind against top Bordeaux and white Burgundies, Jordan showed amazingly well, warranting its place on the world wine stage.

Recently, I was shuttled to the Healdsburg property in a super-cool bus that played promotional videos produced by John and his team for a dinner and an interview the following day. I woke to a morning that showed off the chateau-style grounds in a mag-



**John Jordan (right) tours his family's Healdsburg estate with author Kim Beto.**



**Signs of the times: Jordan Winery points the way toward its sustainability initiatives.**

nificent light; against the breathtakingly serene backdrop, the only sound I heard were crows, donkeys, and goats in the distance. John has created a refuge for these animals on his 1,200-acre sustainable estate, situating their abodes down by a vegetable garden, in keeping with his philosophy that Jordan must be a steward of the land. (It also has a spectacular culinary and hospitality program run by Executive Chef Todd Knoll and his wife, Director of Hospitality & Events Nitsa Knoll. Note to the trade: Book your visit well in advance.)

Having known John for decades, it came as no surprise to me that he has a tremendous amount of energy. In addition to his economics degree, he's earned a law degree and an MBA; he is a linguist, a TV commentator, and a pilot as well as an attorney and the winery's CEO and day-to-day general manager. What I didn't know until our interview, however, is that he also oversees The John Jordan Foundation for kids in need, which he funds with a large portion of the proceeds from Jordan Winery.

Yet, for all his achievements, John is a humble man. For that reason, he's quick to pivot conversations to key members of the Jordan staff. Take winegrower Rob Davis, who has been with Jordan since 1976, making him the longest-tenured winemaker in Sonoma County and probably the second-longest-tenured in California (see page 14 for more

on his career). "Jordan would not be the winery it is today without Rob," John said. "His attention to detail and his commitment to our house style of winemaking balance helped my parents build a strong and trusted brand."

But looking to the future as well as honoring the past is part of John's DNA as a small business owner, and in that regard he considers Rob a true artist: "Rob is naturally curious about how he can continue to improve on the wines. When he wanted to get better fruit sources from the Alexander Valley and change our regimen to all-French oak, I supported him 100 percent. We all see that the wines are better than ever." What's more, John added, "It has been exciting to watch him mentor younger winemakers in recent years, who are going to lead our winemaking into its next chapter. I always believe our best vintages lie ahead, because if you're not trying to get better, you're getting worse." (Though I, for one, wouldn't turn down a 1977 Jordan Cabernet in magnum—among my all-time favorites to this day—the new Jordan vintages are indeed exciting.)

John's mission is to produce wonderful Russian River Valley Chardonnay and Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and to offer a memorable hospitality program—the Estate Tour is truly remarkable—all while preserving the natural resources that have made Jordan Winery the landmark it is. I'm excited to see what he'll do next. ■■