

MARKET INTELLIGENCE ON SPIRITS, WINE AND BEER

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# MARKET WATCH

## VINTUS

20 YEARS OF BUILDING  
A PORTFOLIO OF JEWELS



### PLUS

ARGENTINA'S CHALLENGES  
CANADIAN WHISKY UPDATE  
HOLIDAY PRODUCT ROUNDUP  
MIXOLOGY: THE MARTINI



## Building A Company

In 2004, Michael Quinttus left the comfort and prestige of his senior vice president job at Kobrand Corp., setting out on his own to form a new wine importer and marketer called Vintus. With so many start-up importers out there and a market awash in wine, it sure looked like a tough climb. But right from the start, it became clear that Vintus was choosing its clients

well, carefully building a portfolio of top-flight wines. Its earliest labels included Château Margaux, La Fleur-Pétrus, and Guigal, and it continued from there, with the addition of some prestige California labels along the way. It's now been 20 years, and Vintus has made its mark on the world of fine wine. Read all about how they did it in our cover profile, which starts on page 24.



We also interview Cristina Mariani-May of Banfi to get her take on that family company's progress and the Italian wine scene overall. We look at the U.S. market for sparkling wine, where there's lots of innovation happening and, despite some tepid growth numbers lately, a fair amount of optimism to go with it. We also look at Argentina, where the challenges continue to be fairly steep, with too much of the category well below that \$12 threshold.

Canadian whisky is another category that continues to battle, as the same premiumization issue impacts that segment, as we explore in our annual category report. Even Canadian whisky leader Crown Royal, which always seems to have some sort of growth story to tell (this year it's Crown Royal Blackberry), showed an overall slump last year. As with Argentina, there's not enough storytelling and identity to Canadian whisky, even though there could be. But flavors aside, it continues to seek its sweet spot in the marketplace.

Elsewhere, we look at that timeless classic, the Martini, to see what mixologists are doing to maintain its relevance with artisanal ingredients and other innovative twists. Finally, we cap off the features list with our annual roundup story on holiday products—and wish you all a prosperous selling season.

Enjoy the issue,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marvin R. Shanken'.

Marvin R. Shanken

# OBSSESSED

## WITH EXCELLENCE

Vintus founder and CEO Michael Quinttus had an ambitious goal when he launched his wine import company 20 years ago: Develop an international portfolio of exceptional wine producers who are quality leaders in their regions. That was the plan in 2004 when Vintus started, and it remains the focus today. Over the course of two decades, Quinttus has attained and exceeded his initial vision. Vintus now boasts a portfolio of roughly 45 top-notch labels from 30 wine producers and estates, spanning from Champagne Bollinger and Château

*Vintus has an intense passion for fine wine, highlighting benchmark producers from key regions around the globe*

BY LAURA PELNER

Margaux in France to Ornellaia in Italy and Far Mountain in California.

Quinttus built the company slowly and purposefully, weathering changing consumer habits and shifting wine trends to create a comprehensive collection of Old and New World wines. Growth has come steadily.

Since 2019, Vintus has added 11 new wine brands, including five this year. In addition, the company branched out into spirits in 2018 and now counts Ginraw gin and Bonanto aperitivo as key parts of its expanding business. Beyond brand growth, Vintus has developed its operations to also include a



New York-based wine importer Vintus has a varied portfolio (pictured) with a focus on France, Italy, and the United States, though the company also represents labels from Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Australia, and New Zealand.

PHOTO BY (OPPOSITE) MARCO BACIANI



*Michael Quinttus (pictured) launched his wine import company Vintus in 2004 after an 18-year career managing the wine portfolio at Kobrand. Over the last two decades, Vintus has grown tremendously.*







*Vintus acquired five new import brands this year, including the historic estate Château de La Chaize (pictured). Vintus now represents wines from eight French regions: Champagne, Beaujolais, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rhône Valley, Loire Valley, Languedoc, and Provence.*

wholesaler in New York and a direct-to-consumer membership platform, in addition to its primary import functions.

“Having started from scratch in 2004, the portfolio in the early years primarily comprised niche producers that were of high quality but lesser known in the market,” Quinttus says. “Over time, as we built our organization and distributor network, we were able to increasingly attract producers with strong brand recognition. This created a synergy in the portfolio that allowed us to gain more attention from our critical distribution partners and invest more deeply in our sales organization.”

A concentration on representing the best producers in each region has certainly boosted success. “We recognized over time that building a successful business requires focus,” Quinttus explains. “Rather than trying to represent a wide diversity of viticultural areas around the world, we see a benefit to concentrating on the classic Old World regions of Europe—France, Italy, and Spain—which dominate imports to the U.S., as well as domestic producers from California and Oregon, which represent about two-thirds of U.S. wine consumption.”

## Committed To Quality

Quinttus wasn’t new to the wine world when he launched Vintus in 2004, as he’d worked for 18 years prior managing the wine portfolio at Kobrand. The relationships he made with wine producers while there spurred the success of his solo venture. Staying committed to niche producers has also helped. “The opportunity to represent so many remarkable estates and personalities has been essential to our development,” Quinttus says. “Some are boutique in size, while others offer the opportunity to establish wide distribution. But taken together, they comprise a unique portfolio that’s complementary, harmonious, and synergistic.”

Vintus seeks out family-owned wineries and Quinttus says their values and commitment to quality align well with the company’s mission. He notes that wine, with all its nuances, is a product born of emotion, and he believes family-owned estates are more invested in the agriculture and cellar practices that lead to quality wines. “The size of production is less the issue,” Quinttus explains. “Most important to us is the passion our family partners bring to their production and the maintenance of quality as they grow.”

Family-run businesses are often able to pivot faster than their larger corporate counterparts, which has been crucial in recent years. Quinttus says the current market for wine is among the most challenging he’s seen since he began working in the industry in the 1980s. He points to the shifts in consumption patterns—led by a rise in cocktails and RTDs, low- and no-alcohol drinks, and cannabis—as barriers that he’s navigating with his winery partners.

Of course, Vintus has also learned to pivot. The company established its own distributorship, called Vintus New York, in the Empire State in 2019 and moved its corporate headquarters to Manhattan in 2020. “This has enabled us to be much closer to our customers, both local and national,” Quinttus says. In addition, the company operates the direct-to-consumer membership club Fida Wine, a service consumers join for an annual \$1,000 fee—which is applied to future purchases—that gives them access to Vintus’ portfolio of wine imports and exclusive older vintages from its estate partners, shipped direct to their home. In all, the company employs 90 people across all three facets of the business.

“We have one of the strongest wine portfolios in the country and our first objective for our experienced teams is to design and execute growth opportunities for our suppliers and customers,” says Vintus vice president of operations Christian Quinttus, Michael’s son. “That execution would not be possible without top



class logistics. For all three companies, sales, marketing, and logistics remain at the core of what we do. The thread behind all our major departments is technology, an area we expect to dedicate more resources to than in years past. Managing the complexities of the industry to effectively connect with all our customers and reach consumers is more critical than ever.”

## The Benchmarks

The Vintus wine portfolio has evolved greatly from the company’s early days, and while Michael says all of the company’s brands have filled an essential niche for the business and added integrity to the portfolio, he notes that some of Vintus’ more prominent anchors include Chateau Montelena in Napa Valley, which the company partnered with in 2009; E. Guigal in the Rhône Valley, which they started importing in 2010; Tommasi from Veneto, which they partnered with in 2012; the Bollinger Group in Champagne, which joined the fold in 2015; and the group of Italian labels that comprises Ornellaia, Masseto, Tenuta Luce, and Attems, which they began working with in 2017. All of those producers have history and scale, and have grown along with Vintus.

“It would be impossible to single out a particular wine success since there have been so many over the years that



*France makes up the largest import collection for Vintus and the company represents wines from all over the country, including Bollinger in Champagne (grape harvest above) and Domaine Hubert Brochard in the Loire Valley (top).*

VINTUS AT A GLANCE	
<b>Founded</b>	2004
<b>Key Executives</b>	Founder and CEO Michael Quinttus, president and COO Alexander Michas, vice president of operations Christian Quinttus, and vice president and general manager of distributor Vintus New York David Forman
<b>Headquarters</b>	Manhattan, New York
<b>Number of Employees</b>	90
<b>Annual Case Volume</b>	500,000
<b>Number of Core Brands</b>	45
<b>Annual Revenue</b>	Undisclosed
<b>Website</b>	Vintus.com
<b>Future Plans</b>	The company has several growth moves on the horizon. Executives say deals are underway for the addition of a few new brands to the Vintus portfolio, though nothing was set at press time. Additionally, several existing import partners are working to add new labels and varietals, and the company is seeking opportunities in Tuscany for a Chianti Classico and in Spain for a Rioja.

have brought our business to where it is today,” Michael says. “It’s the coherence of our portfolio of distinctive producers that is actually our biggest success. With our diverse portfolio of different sized producers representing many regions and price points, I’m proud of each brand in different ways.”

France makes up the majority of imports for Vintus. The company represents wines from throughout the country, including Champagne, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Beaujolais, the Loire Valley, the Rhône Valley, Languedoc, and Provence. Vintus president and COO Alexander Michas says the company has celebrated some great successes in France this year. “Guigal has pushed forward strongly and we’ve had a string of good vintages from the Northern and Southern Rhône,” Michas says. “Domaine Chanson in Burgundy is revitalized and energetic,



## VINTUS PRODUCER PARTNERS

### WINE

#### UNITED STATES

NAPA VALLEY  
Chateau Montelena

#### SONOMA

Iron Horse Vineyards  
Gary Farrell Winery  
Far Mountain  
Marietta Cellars

WILLAMETTE VALLEY,  
OREGON  
Ponzi Vineyards

#### FRANCE

CHAMPAGNE  
Champagne Bollinger  
Champagne Ayala

#### BORDEAUX

Château Margaux  
Château La Fleur-Pétrus  
Château La Serre  
Xavier Milhade Wines

#### BURGUNDY

Domaine William Fèvre  
Domaine Chanson  
Lucien Le Moine  
Domaine Talmard



#### BEAUJOLAIS

Château de La Chaize

#### LOIRE VALLEY

Domaine des Baumard  
Langlois  
Domaine Hubert Brochard

#### RHÔNE VALLEY

E. Guigal  
Château de Nalys  
Rotem & Mounir Saouma

#### LANGUEDOC

Domaine D'Aussières

#### PROVENCE

Roseblood d'Estoublon

#### ITALY

##### TUSCANY

Ornellaia (Bolgheri)  
Masseto (Bolgheri)  
Le Macchiole (Bolgheri)  
Poggio al Tufo (Maremma)

Casisano (Montalcino)

Tenuta Luce (Montalcino)  
Petrolo (Val d'arno di Sopra)

#### PIEDMONT

Sandrone

#### VENETO

Tommasi

#### FRIULI

Attems

#### ABRUZZO

Masciarelli

#### BASILICATA

Paternoster

#### PUGLIA

Masseria Surani

#### SPAIN

PENEDÈS  
Juvé & Camps

#### PRIORAT

Ferrer Bobet

#### RIBERA DEL DUERO

Pagos de Anguix

#### PORTUGAL

DOURO VALLEY  
Quinta do Noval

#### ARGENTINA

MENDOZA  
Finca Decero  
Flight of the Condor

#### AUSTRALIA

MCLAREN VALE  
Mitolo

#### NEW ZEALAND

MARLBOROUGH  
Dog Point Vineyard  
Settlement

### SPIRITS

#### SPAIN

BARCELONA  
Ginraw gin  
Bonanto aperitivo

and we had a record setting year of en-primeur sales. Our early sales with Hubert Brochard in Sancerre and Domaine William Fèvre in Chablis are very promising. And Bollinger has bucked slowing Champagne sales and pushed forward. Our launch of Roseblood d'Estoublon in a crowded and slowing rosé market has been a surprise, and even in a slow Bordeaux en-primeur year, we saw success with Christan Moueix's Château La Fleur-Pétrus and Chateau Margaux."

Michas adds that the company is seeing consumer interest in "fresh whites," pointing to wines from Sancerre and Chablis, as well as Italian offerings like Lugana from the Tommasi family and wines from Bolgheri. Vintus recently added Sancerre's Hubert Brochard wines thanks to Bollinger's acquisition of the brand and Chablis' Domaine William Fèvre after it was acquired by Domaines Barons de Rothschild (DBR Lafite).

Italy is Vintus' second-largest country for imports, and it has been performing well over the last year. Michael says the company's varied range in Italy, spanning brands large and small and estates well-known and up-and-coming, has been particularly helpful. "We have a synergistic combination of brands with scale, such as Tommasi from Veneto and Masciarelli from Abruzzo, along with smaller high-image estates

like Ornellaia, Luce, Sandrone, La Macchiole, and Petrolo," Michael notes. In all, the company's Italian portfolio includes wines from Tuscany, Piedmont, Veneto, Abruzzo, Basilicata, Friuli, and Puglia.

Domestic wines are also important at Vintus, and the company represents brands from Napa, Sonoma, and the Russian River Valley in California, as well as the Willamette Valley in Oregon. The company's domestic producers span from Chateau Montelena, Gary Farrell Winery, and Iron Horse Vineyards to Far Mountain, Marietta Cellars, and Ponzi Vineyards. Like many of its peers, Vintus has seen California labels struggle recently, but the company remains committed to its domestic partners and is optimistic about the future.

"We expect a reset in California," says Michas. "Market data indicates that imported wines have been outpacing domestic producers, and in a broad sense we see that reflected in our portfolio. U.S. fine wine was dealt a devastating blow with the 2020 vintage fires and the timing of necessary price increases after Covid-19 premiumization trends slowed. We're very focused on developing the sales of our domestic portfolio and we believe there are areas where we can add complementary estates to develop an even stronger domestic footprint."



*Having wines from all over the world has been key to Vintus' success (the Spanish vineyard for Juvé & Camps is pictured). The importer seeks out international producers who are quality leaders in their regions and remains committed to family-owned wineries.*





Although there are myriad challenges for domestic wines, and many consumers are spending more cautiously these days, Christian points to bright spots among Vintus' brands. "Chateau Montelena is growing this year," he says. "The brand's quality, history, and consistency have maintained its presence in the consumer basket. The excitement for Far Mountain, which is a new project, is increasing each year, and now with (winemaker) Rodrigo Soto full time there, we expect even more dramatic progress."

## Expanding Globally

As Vintus has grown, the company has purposefully expanded its global presence. Along with France and Italy, the company also has wines from Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Australia, and New Zealand. The Spanish lineup includes Juvé & Camps from Penedès, Ferrer Bobet from Priorat, and Pagos de Anguix from Ribera del Duero. Michael expects the Cava portfolio from Juvé & Camps, which joined the Vintus fold in 2021, to grow steadily as sparkling wines continue to excel in the United States, and he adds that the boutique Ferrer Bobet offerings are among the top products from Priorat. In nearby Portugal, Vintus represents Quinta do Noval from the Douro Valley, an estate that Michael says is widely considered a leader in Port.

New World wines are a smaller part of the Vintus roster, but they're by no means an afterthought. The company works with Finca Decero and Flight of the Condor in Mendoza, Argentina; Mitolo from McLaren Vale in Australia; and Dog Point Vineyard and Settlement from Marlborough, New Zealand. "We suffered with a short crop in New Zealand's 2022 vintage, but we're building back perennial star Dog Point Vineyard," Michas says. "Argentina has slowed from its heyday, but we continue to see bright spots. Argentine wines are showing creativity and quality today that is light years ahead of when the country's big boom occurred. Australia is a similar story. It's vastly different for us today than it was 15 years ago, but the quality and originality of the wine is unbelievable."

This global approach has become a key tenet of Vintus' mission going forward. "While our focus is on long-term brand building, the effect of having leading brands across the world allows us to reach and meet the needs of our trade customers more often and effectively," Michas explains. "There's always a cycle of demand from various regions, and having a broad portfolio helps."

Michas adds that Vintus' national portfolio, at roughly 45 estates from 30 suppliers, is fairly contained, but that in New York, where the company operates its own distributorship, the portfolio is broader. "We're working with an additional 30 suppliers that have



*Many of the imported wines in Vintus' portfolio are showing steady growth (France's E. Guigal top), though California labels (Far Mountain above) have slowed down. Regardless, the company remains committed to its portfolio.*

an additional 150 producers," he notes of the New York distributorship. "We move slowly and focus on building partnerships with the right families and companies."

Further proof of the company's dedication to measured but steady growth is its emerging spirits portfolio. Vintus added two spirits from Spain in 2018—Ginraw gin and Bonanto aperitivo, both produced by Vanguard in Barcelona—and they continue to do well. "Both are forward thinking brands," Christian says, noting that Vintus has expanded the labels into 30 markets nationwide. Ginraw is a small-batch gin distilled with seven botanicals, and the brand is working on the addition of three flavors—Orange Blossom, Lavender, and Cherry Blossom—which Christian says will debut within the next year. Meanwhile, Bonanto plays into Spain's rich vermouth history and the modern popularity of aperitivos. The label is all natural and produced with less sugar than many of its counterparts.

Adding spirits into a wine-focused company brings challenges, of course, but Vintus welcomed the expansion into new territory. "Converting a wine organization to a wine and spirits organization is no easy feat, but it has been an exciting journey," says Christian. "Many at Vintus are passionate about spirits, and the growth of the category over the years is difficult to overlook. When we found two promising spirits that shared the ethos of our wine portfolio, we couldn't say no. The growth of our spirits allows our team to offer a more complete service to our customers."





Spirits are expected to be a solid avenue of growth for Vintus going forward. David Forman, vice president and general manager of the company's Vintus New York distributorship, is building a comprehensive spirits strategy for continued expansion. "We believe the market will continue to provide opportunities for spirits that closely mirror our philosophy on wines," Forman explains. "We look for spirits that are additive free, organic or sustainable, and handmade from grain to bottle as much as possible."

## Sustaining Growth

Vintus executives have lofty goals for the company's continued growth and evolution. Michael says there are a couple exciting new brand partnerships on the horizon, though none are yet set, and he also says the company is working on some internal initiatives to position it for expansion, including more streamlined operations, distributor support, and outreach with key customers and accounts in its markets. He notes that several existing clients are making exciting moves, including E. Guigal, who's constructing a new cellar at Château de Nalys in Châteauneuf-du-Pape; Domaine Chanson, who's launching new packaging and new wines from brand owner Bollinger Group's recent vineyard acquisitions; and the Tommasi family, who are set to introduce wines from their new estate on Mount Etna in Sicily next year.

Excitement is building as 2024 comes to a close. "This is a very exciting year for us with the addition of five important new brands: Roseblood from Château d'Estoublon, the historical Beaujolais estate Château de La Chaize, the Sancerre estate Hubert Brochard, one of the most respected domaines in Chablis—William Fèvre, and Domaine D'Aussières in Languedoc," Michael says. "We expect to further strengthen our portfolio with some important additions in the coming months. Two important regions in which



*Italy and the United States are also key players in the Vintus portfolio. Michael says wines like Ornellaia (top) and Chateau Montelena (above) are anchors for the company in large part because of their history and scale.*

we have a keen interest are Chianti Classico from Tuscany and Rioja in Spain. We hope to add both regions to our portfolio when the appropriate opportunity arises."

This has been a landmark year, but really, Vintus has been busy for the last several years, and the company is preparing to keep that pace going. "We've grown over 40% in the last five years through a combination of organic growth and new brands we've added," Christian says. "From 2019 to now, we've added 11 new brands, with five new in 2024 and many wine extensions within our current book. And we'll continue to offer new innovation and extension opportunities to our distribution network, as we prioritize family-owned winery leaders who share our culture and ethos with a true respect for terroir and a view for the future." **mw**