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## From Vineyard To Bottle: How A Wine Importer Chooses Its Brands

Inside the art of wine curation and how one leading importer builds its portfolio after 20 years in operation.

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A collection of French wines in the Vintus portfolio. VINTUS

When it comes to selecting wines for import, the choices made by a company can shape not just its portfolio but its identity in a competitive global market.

And those choices are more critical than ever as the global wine industry has struggled in the last couple of years due to a number of contributing factors, from inflation to climate change. Global wine consumption fell to a 27-year low in 2023, according to the International Organisation of Vine and Wine. And global wine production in 2023 declined compared to the previous year, with 237.3 million hectoliters produced, down from 262.6 million hectoliters in 2022, according to Statista.

For Vintus, a wine importer that has grown steadily since its founding in 2004, curating the right collection is both an art and a science. Over the past two decades, the company has built a portfolio that includes over 50 landmark wine brands from various countries, including France, Spain, Italy, Argentina and New Zealand.

Michael Quinttus, founder and CEO of Vintus, said in a Zoom interview that the company's strategy focuses on a balance between smaller family-owned estates and more globally recognized producers.

“When Vintus considers adding a new wine brand to its portfolio, it looks for certain essential qualities that align with its strategic vision, values and market positioning,” Quinttus said. “Most fundamental is the quality of the wine itself, which must have a clear sense of place and reflect a brand's commitment to being exceptional. Wine should be deeply tied to its terroir—meaning the geography, climate and soil which together play such an important role in shaping the wine's characteristics.”

The challenge, he said, lies in balancing iconic, globally recognized producers with smaller, family-owned estates that offer distinctive, artisanal wines. Each addition to the company's portfolio is a calculated decision, driven by a commitment to quality, craftsmanship and authenticity.

“Our producers are committed to sustainable, organic or biodynamic farming practices,” Quinttus said. “A new brand should also align with our focus on representing premium and luxury wines.”

And it's a strategy that appears to be working; the company has seen more than 50% growth in the last five years. Quinttus attributes this to key decisions, such as the launch of Vintus' own distribution business in New York in 2019.

“Moving our office to Manhattan in 2020 and incorporating event and tasting facilities was another important investment,” he said, adding that these developments have allowed Vintus to engage more directly with its customers, both locally and nationally. “This enabled us to work directly with restaurants and retailers to develop our brands in the most important and concentrated fine wine market in the U.S.”

Alongside its operational expansion, Vintus has significantly increased the range of brands it represents. Since 2020, the company has added several domestic and imported estates, including Sonoma’s Gary Farrell, Marietta and Iron Horse, as well as international brands such as William Fèvre Chablis, Château de La Chaize Beaujolais and Juvé & Camps Cava.

Despite its growth, the company faces industry challenges, particularly with shifting consumption trends and economic pressures. Inflation, high interest rates and changing preferences among younger consumers have impacted the wine industry as a whole.

Quinttus acknowledges these challenges but remains optimistic.

“Fortunately, our focus on premium wines puts us in a stronger position since demand for that category has been more resilient,” he said. “There are encouraging recent economic developments with healthy employment statistics, decreasing inflation and the recent Federal Reserve half-point interest rate cut, which should offer more favorable conditions for the continued growth of our business.”

In response to the growing popularity of ready-to-drink (RTD) beverages and non-alcoholic options, Vintus is exploring opportunities to diversify its offerings.

“The more concerning long-term issue is shifting consumption trends as younger consumers are drinking less alcohol than previous generations, and are more open to alternative products,” Quinttus said. “By remaining agile and responsive, our intention is to navigate these industry challenges while sustaining our growth.”

Looking to the future, Vintus is set to expand further, notably beyond its core wine business. Quinttus mentions upcoming additions to the portfolio, particularly from Italy and Spain. The company also plans to invest in technology and process improvements to enhance its partnerships with distributors and customers.

“We will also look to develop categories that are complementary to our wines business,” Quinttus said. “Non-alcoholic beverages are an example, and though spirits are presently a small part of our business, they will undoubtedly become more important in the years ahead.”

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