

## On the Winemaking Borders

An Interview with Jim Silver, Managing Director, New Frontier Wine Co.

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Jim Silver is a wine industry veteran with more than three decades of experience in many facets of the wine business. After attending Hotel and Restaurant school in Philadelphia, he began his career in that city spending time as a wine buyer for a large retailer, and in time as Sommelier for the Four Seasons Hotel. Subsequently, he spent several years in sales, working with Hess Collection and Remy Martin in and around New York City, eventually settling down for a decade of elevating wineries on the North Fork of Long Island. Silver then joined Bonny Doon Vineyard as General Manager, and subsequently became General Manager of Anderson's Conn Valley Vineyards. Four years ago, he founded the New Frontier Wine Co. with his team at Bulgheroni Family of Vineyards, a global winemaking enterprise.*



Jim Silver

**COMPANY BRIEF** *New Frontier Wine Co. (newfrontierwines.com) is a collection of 44 premier wine brands from around the world, linked by a commitment to excellence in farming and winemaking. Named for the "new frontiers" referenced by Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy in his 1960 presidential nomination speech, New Frontier Wine Co. strives to use technology and collaboration to explore both the literal and figurative frontiers in the modern wine industry. Based in the heart of downtown Napa, New Frontier Wine Co.'s flagship tasting lounge showcases some of California's most prestigious vineyard sites to visitors daily. The collective is owned by global vintner and humanitarian, Alejandro Bulgheroni.*

**What was your vision for creating New Frontier Wine Co. and how do you define its mission?**

A number of brands of fine wines, primarily from Napa, had been developed over the years by the creative people behind the Bounty Hunter, a mail-order wine company and restaurant group. The brands, by virtue of their very high quality, established a great base of followers and customers. Our company had most recently been producing these wines for the Bounty Hunter, so when faced with the capital-intensive, and long-term nature of producing great Napa wines, the Bounty Hunter

decided to give up the labels. I felt it would be an ideal time to reorganize the structure of the production, the allocations of great vineyards and unique barrels, and build a portfolio of exciting wines under a new name, New Frontier Wine Company.

The mission of New Frontier was, as the name implies, meant to find, create and deliver extraordinary products on the winemaking borders. Our frontiers are the unique terroirs of Napa, of Sonoma, and in Australia, Argentina, and France, but our bound-

aries extend beyond that to explore fascinating winemaking philosophies, organic practices, and principles, and deep dives into the geology of these exceptional vineyards.

**Will you highlight New Frontier Wine Co.'s business and how you describe the New Frontier difference?**

New Frontier operates on multiple fronts including the actual maintenance of physical vineyards, the hands-on production of the wines, design and construction of imported wines for the U.S. market, wholesale distribution



to the trade, exports to two dozen countries, and direct sales to customers all over the U.S.

New Frontier is different from many companies and similar to some, in that we are vertically integrated and fully in control in terms of our domestic production, and directly involved in our import portfolio, sharing a parent company with those overseas producers. We are, in that way, nimble and creative, quick to shift and change when needed, and responsive to market conditions.

**Will you provide an overview of New Frontier's wines and winemakers?**



A selection of New Frontier wines



At the outset of New Frontier, it was critically important that a top winemaking team would be needed to establish the credibility a new company with old labels would require to build market share, especially at the very high end of the market.

Our flagship Lithology label, which is the home estate in St. Helena, features a very special collaboration between the great winemakers Michel Rolland and Philippe Melka. It is because they possess two different stylistic ideas of the finished wine that Lithology becomes so remarkable – the final wine becoming an accord between these two masters.

It was very important to us that Philippe would lend his Atelier Melka team to our New Frontier wines, including partner and head winemaker Maayan Koschitzky. The establishment of such high standards for these new wines makes every label exciting, and each one over-deliver at their levels.

In domestic production, winemaker Matt Sands is not only the wrangler of hundreds of barrels and vineyard contracts, but he keeps the complex organization and his consulting winemakers moving in the right direction. It is up to Matt to have the final decision on the quantity and quality of each wine ultimately bottled.

**Are there common characteristics of the brands that are a part of New Frontier Wine Co.?**

In the broadest of terms, we can say that Lithology is a modern wine, and Justice is a traditional wine, and Waypoint is a dynamic wine, but the commonality between all of the brands from top to bottom is the over-delivery of excitement, quality, and value at the price points.

**How critical is innovation to New Frontier Wine Co. and where is innovation taking place in the business?**



*New Frontier Wine Co. tasting room (above and below)*

Following the principles of our founder, Alejandro Bulgheroni, innovation is especially important, and it begins for us in the vineyards where organic practices are either already established or underway in almost every location around the world. Further innovation comes from where these great vineyards are planted, including the southernmost vineyard on Earth, in extreme Patagonia, as a prime example. In each of these vineyards, extensive research is done on the geological strata to best understand what we can expect from the terroir.

Innovation in the wine business is also important as we try to create a balanced portfolio in terms of price, value, and overall quality. Having both inexpensive and expensive wines is not something new, but to have an outstanding representation in every price point from \$20 to \$400 a bottle is something we take seriously.

I believe the next innovation for our business will be in packaging materials with an eye toward good environmental practices. Lighter glass, responsible and renewable outer packaging, and shipping methods will be all the buzz in the near future. Lithology, for example, ships in reusable boxes designed by OtterBox that are safe, temperature-controlled, and traceable from our winery to the customer, and then make a return trip to the winery.

**Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for New Frontier?**

I think at this moment the momentum is behind Argentina's exports to the U.S., and we participate by producing our brand Devocion in Mendoza. We believe the Cabernet Franc is a top growth category of wines – as Argentina's version of the grape is on par with French versions, but far easier to understand and is

quite affordable. Additionally, the Devocion Cabernet Franc and a Malbec are both certified organic, and that is a growth channel as well. From Bordeaux we are now importing Chateau Maubert, produced from one of our two Cotes de Bordeaux properties. Chateau Maubert is both certified organic and free of sulfur, which is remarkably rare, but highly sought after. The fact that all of the wines mentioned here are below \$25 retail truly marks them for strong growth.

**Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build a business?**

Yes, it's where I feel I am able to apply the 30 years of experience I've built up in the wine business. I tend to pour what I know into a product, in the context of what it is, and where it is from, and try to slot it into a price category I think will really work. I have never had more opportunities to demonstrate this than I do now with New Frontier Wine Company. Plus, when you have the best possible inputs, in terms of winemakers and vineyards, the output should exceed expectations. I may not in reality own the company, but I have that sense of pride in ownership in what we are doing here and the products we are creating.

**What are your priorities for New Frontier Wine Co. as you look to the future?**

To me today, and now that COVID-19 is essentially in the rearview mirror, it is important to compartmentalize our business units and guarantee that each of them is self-sustainable for the long term. I think that makes an overall healthier company structure. We will continue to fine-tune each business unit, each label, each vineyard contract, right down to the cork and bottle, until we have it perfect. ●