

WINE ENTHUSIAST[®]

Q+A with 3-Time NBA Champion Dwyane Wade

BY MATT KETTMANN



Photo by Bob Metelus

We obviously are going to talk about your wine, but I want to know how you got there first. You had a rough childhood, so I'd guess wine wasn't a big part of your upbringing?

No, not in good way. That's what's crazy about growing up the way I did; I watched my mom and dad abuse drugs and alcohol, and it pushed me away from it. I didn't drink anything. I wasn't into it. It always turned out bad. As I started getting older, into my late 20s, I started understanding that alcohol was how you use it. So I started liking drinking wine. I liked what wine stood for at dinner parties and how it was a conversation piece.

Where were you on your career at that time?

I was probably 26 or 27, a few years into the league, after the championship, and after our 15-win season as well. You start looking for vices! [Laughs.]

But I started changing. When I was young, I wanted to be young, I wanted to party. When you get to a certain age, when I was fighting for custody of my kids and looking at life in a different way and building a life with my now wife, I started experiencing different things.

When did start thinking about making your own wine?

When my new deal started with Li Ning, the China-based shoe company. I had just turned 30 and was thinking about what's next, what the future looks like for me. I was expanding myself, expanding my brand, and getting into other things than the typical deals I've done. It was around the same time, so like four years ago.

What were your initial steps getting into the wine business?

First was getting down to experience Napa Valley. It was my first time there when my wife and I met with the Pahlmeyer family, and had this conversation about starting this wine. Then it was going out and drinking every wine we could find. We also had the opportunity to spend time with the Pahlmeyer family, go into the vineyard and learn from Jayson about how they make their wines, what years are the best. We were also able to walk through the vineyards and pick some grapes, touching and feeling the project.

Did you immediately gravitate toward Napa?

Napa is what we all hear about. People were saying, "You need to go," so I knew about it, but I didn't know anything about winemaking or how it's done. I just knew I wanted to be in the business. I thought it was a down-the-line kind of thing, something to get into when I was almost done playing basketball. I didn't think it would take off as quick as it did.

But we looked into it and were able to find what we feel was the perfect relationship and partnership with the Pahlmeyers. They were able to jump-start it quicker than expected.

Jumping back a second, wine is just one part of your bigger business portfolio, right? You studied at Harvard last summer, and seem to be smartly building something for your post-basketball life.

First of all, thanks for the compliment. Hopefully it is. One thing you learn, the more you travel, the more places you go, the more people you met, you understand that you have more interests. As I'm getting older, I'm getting into more things and I just want to know. Knowledge is power. Every time I can get more knowledge, I do. Sometimes something authentic comes from that, and maybe it doesn't. Going to Harvard last summer was to open my mind, to be around people way smarter than me, and learn business from a different perspective.

So you are letting your passion and curiosity lead your business moves?

I've been blessed and very successful in basketball and some of the things I've done off the court. If I'm going to do anything now at this age, it has to be something I'm really passionate about and something I want to spend time doing, not because it's cool or it's a check. I'm finding passions that I didn't even know were inside of me.

Are wines popular with NBA players these days?

In the circles that I am in, they are. I think enjoying wine comes with age and sophistication and a certain kind of maturity. All of my friends that are 30 and up, a bottle of wine is what we go to when we sit down and have a conversation. When you're younger, you're totally different. Your conversations are different. Now, we sit down and drink wine and talk about investments.

“I don’t think a lot of people understand wine... I want to educate our culture, and hopefully, it takes off more.”

I saw that popular Twitter picture of you drinking wine in the Bahamas with LeBron James, Chris Paul and Carmelo Anthony. That got some attention.

We’re good friends, and that was cool being able to take a vacation together with our wives and just have that moment of guys sitting back and looking at how far we’ve come and what we’ve got. I pulled out the Pahlmeyer wine and we had a good time.

Back to your label. It first launched in China, right?

Yes. We went this past summer with Jayson to Shanghai and Beijing. It was very good for our brand. We understood China was this emerging market in wine, and it was great to bring something different than just my sneakers there, to really show them that I am expanding my brand.

What about America?

Like I said, we didn’t expect it to happen this fast, and when we released our first wine in China, we got calls from the U.S. asking, “What about us?” So far, we’ve started slowly with an online presence, so you can order wine through my Web site, DWadeCellars.com. Hopefully we do way more than we’ve done now, but we have to make sure we do it the right way.

You’re a big philanthropist. Is there any of those efforts wrapped into the wine?

Not at this point. It’s still small, so right now is just a passion and pleasure. But if it grows, obviously. And as my businesses grow, my foundation benefits.

How many wines do you have now?

We have the first two. The one released in China first was a Cab just called Wade. The second is called Three By Wade, and it’s a blend. I like wine that’s not too hard when you first drink it, so these are pretty smooth and fruitful—and I’m not just saying that because my name’s on it! [Laughs.] Jayson has done a great job with the wine we’ve picked.

Wine is also an emerging part of African-American culture. Was that on your mind, too?

That’s another part of the plan. Obviously, as an African-American being into the wine business, I looked at that as well, and this is an avenue and a lane I want to own. The one thing is education. I don’t think a lot of people understand wine. We have hard liquor and vodka pushed in our faces all the time. That’s all we see, but wine hasn’t been shoved in our faces, so we’re not educated as such. I want to educate our culture, and hopefully, it takes off more.

Do you plan to slowly expand your offerings?

That’s the plan we’re working on. It’s all been a lot faster than we expected, but these are good problems to have. Right now, we have two great wines and more in the future hopefully.

You should check out the Central Coast. I live in Santa Barbara and review like 200 wines a month down here.

Sounds like I should come intern with you.

Published on March 23, 2016