

# Alums Encode Stanford Toast in Their Wines

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Jim Madsen and Santiago Achával are full of school spirit. So much so that the Stanford University business-school graduates have turned their young Paso Robles winery into a homage to their alma mater.

The duo's 160-acre winery, located on the Central Coast about 200 miles south of San Francisco, is named The Farm Winery—in a reference to the nickname given to Stanford, which was a working farm under founders Leland and Jane Stanford.

In naming their wines, Messrs. Madsen and Achával allude to individual Stanford classes and university traditions. One of the varietals, dubbed Touchy-Feely, is a nod to the business school's Interpersonal Dynamics class, a Stanford M.B.A. rite of passage informally known as "touchy-feely."

A Cabernet named LPF—for liquidity preference function—is a reference to the Friday night bar outings, or "liquidity gatherings," of Stanford Graduate School of Business students. Cardinal, another Cabernet, is also the nickname for Stanford's athletic teams. And The Big Game, a blend of a Bordeaux Cabernet Sauvignon and a Rhone Syrah, refers to the football showdown between Stanford and University of California, Berkeley.



Not everyone gets it, but "California wines are so full of fun names and original names," says Mr. Achával. "We don't do a lot of explaining."

Linking potent potables to an alma mater isn't new. A century ago, local bars on the East Coast served rounds of Dartmouths (absinthe, green crème de menthe and ice) and Princetons (gin, orange bitters, ruby port and ice).

More recently, Gene Muller paid tribute to his school, Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., when creating Flying Fish Brewing Co.'s Exit

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Santiago Achával, left, and Jim Madsen at a vineyard that supplies grapes for their winery, which pays tribute to their alma mater.

Series line of beers. Exit 9: Hoppy Scarlet Ale was released last year and references both the university's New Jersey Turnpike exit and its athletic team name, the Scarlet Knights.

Earlier this year, Cornell University graduates Chris Ryan and Nelson Crosby honored that school's founder, Ezra Cornell, and Big Red athletics with their Ezra Red microbrew, which can be found on tap at a new campus pub.

Some at Stanford have taken notice of The Farm Winery. Messrs. Madsen and Achával's wines will be featured at the Stanford Faculty Club's semiannual tasting next month. The pair have also been invited to submit wines for the Stanford Wine Program's annual tasting next spring, an event that determines the bottles that will be offered for sale to the Stanford alumni community the following fall.

"They have found a creative way to honor their alma mater that we think is wonderful," says Stanford University spokeswoman Lisa Lapin, noting that the duo's whimsical wine names steer clear of legal restrictions on using the Stanford moniker for commercial purposes.

Garth Saloner, dean of the business school, says he recalls the wine being "very good" when he tasted it earlier this year. "But the best part was seeing our students from different parts of the world find their passion for a business purpose and bring it alive together."



Messrs. Madsen and Achával met in 1987 as first-year M.B.A. students at the business school, neighbors in a housing complex for married students. They drank beers while pushing their kids on the swings, and weekend outings to Sonoma and Napa followed. Both "caught the wine bug," Mr. Achával says, jokingly crediting Mr. Madsen for "infecting" him.

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Four-day-old wine is aerated by hand.

After returning to his native Argentina after graduation and working for a cement company, Mr. Achával couldn't quash his love for grapes. In the late 1990s, he founded Achával-Ferrer Winery there. Meanwhile, Mr. Madsen worked at Qualcomm Inc. and tech start-ups in the San Diego area.

The two remained close, with Mr. Achával as godfather to Mr. Madsen's daughter. In 2009, they purchased the winery property in Paso Robles and arranged to buy and harvest rows of grapes at nearby vineyards. When it came time to name their venture, Messrs. Achával and Madsen decided to give a wink to the school that connected them.

So far, The Farm Winery is unprofitable. Messrs. Madsen and Achával began bottling in 2011; they and their families still harvest the grapes themselves. The crop is small, about 750 cases a year, and likely won't grow beyond 1,000 cases, Messrs. Madsen and Achával say. The wines average about \$70 a bottle when sold directly to consumers, and are priced higher at restaurants. They aren't sold in stores.

"It's like building a cellphone company when you have to put up all your own cellphone towers and only have 100 subscribers," Mr. Madsen says. "It would be impossible to be profitable" at this point, he says, though he is hopeful the winery will turn a profit next year.

The partners aren't doing any major marketing. But by participating in Stanford's on-campus tastings and reaching out through the alumni association, they hope to share their winery's inside joke with a few more insiders.

The wines are getting some attention outside of Stanford as well. Restaurants Il Cortile in Paso Robles, and Addison and Amaya in San Diego have added The Big Game to their menus.

Diners might not get the Stanford jokes, but it doesn't seem to matter. Addison and Amaya, both at The Grand Del Mar resort, have gone through nearly two cases of The Big Game—at \$160 a bottle—since February, according to wine director Jesse Rodriguez.

Carole MacDonal, Il Cortile's owner, says she didn't know what The Big Game referred to. But customer response to the wine, priced there at \$135, has been "phenomenal," she says.