

WINE Loading...

This little known wine brand just scooped up a piece of a \$65 million legacy Napa Valley estate

By **Jess Lander**, Staff Writer

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Arborum Napa Valley's Hidden Key vineyard. The brand's purchase from from Vineyard 29 increases its estate to 44 contiguous acres, roughly 10 of which are planted to vines.

Provided by Arborum Napa Valley



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About 6 Minutes

Almost a year ago, a prime Napa Valley wine estate, complete with a high-tech winery and 13,000 square feet of caves, [hit the market for \\$65 million](#). It finally has a buyer — but only for one of its three hillside vineyards.

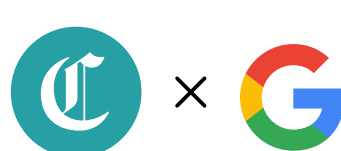
The owners of St. Helena's Vineyard 29, founded in 1989 and located on coveted grape-growing soil on the slopes of the Mayacamas Mountains, have agreed to sell 24 acres of land to one of its neighbors: Caren and Nick Orum, the owners of a relatively unknown but high-end wine brand, Arborum Napa Valley. Notably, the Orums donate 100% of Arborum's net proceeds to charity. Wine Spectator [first reported the acquisition](#); a purchase price was not disclosed.

The parcel, which includes just over seven acres of vines, was first purchased by Vineyard 29 owner Chuck McMinn in 2008 as part of the winery's expansion. Nearly 20 years later, it will now aid in Arborum's expansion, increasing its estate to 44 contiguous acres, roughly 10 of which are planted to vines. This will enable Arborum to become a total estate winery, as the Orums currently purchase grapes for two of its three wines. "Since we started this endeavor, we really dreamed of having the property be such a central part of the story," Caren Orum said. "It's this little jewel box up on the hill."

Vineyard 29's original \$65 million listing price included the winery, visitor center and caves; three vineyards totaling 38 acres; an additional tasting room; two wine brands and their inventory; and a 2,700-square-foot residence with a pool. "We had heard that the whole property was for sale, and obviously, that was too big a chunk for us even to consider," Orum said. "We didn't even think about it."

The Vineyard 29 downtown tasting room closed in January; McMinn said it "wasn't economically viable" because there "seems to be about 30% less bodies coming to Napa Valley." But the estate is open to visitors, and McMinn said it is continuing to make wine until the winery is sold.

The Orums, who share a fenceline with Vineyard 29, then heard that McMinn had decided to sell various assets separately. McMinn said that many potential buyers "wanted different pieces" of the estate, so he decided to create separate listings for each of the three vineyard parcels, plus one for the winery, visitation center and caves, which also includes seven acres of vines.



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Last year, McMinn told the Chronicle that the [wine industry's headwinds](#) weren't a factor in his and his wife Anne McMinn's decision to sell. Vineyard 29 is the latest in a [string of Napa Valley wineries](#) put up for sale by an older generation of retiring owners who don't have a succession plan. "My kids have other lives and we decided over the last year that they need to pursue what their passions are," he said, noting that he'd prefer to sell to another family instead of a corporate entity. "It's time to look for somebody else, who hopefully shares the same passion we do."

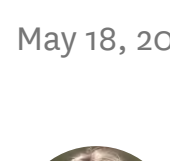
Still, the wine industry crisis has created a sluggish real estate market, and many winery owners are struggling to sell. Benessere Vineyards, for example, hit the market in November 2024 and [went to auction this month](#) after price reductions didn't generate interest. "It did what I wanted it to," McMinn said of his new strategy. "It found where the buyers are. People are not necessarily interested in the whole enchilada."

The Orums moved to Napa Valley in 1999 and purchased their historic forested property from the San Francisco Ballet in 2013. First planted to grapes in 1871, the estate, which had years of deferred maintenance when the Orums purchased it, includes a restored olive grove and a 1930s-era hunting lodge-turned residence. Noted Napa winemaker Andy Erickson makes Arborum's three wines, which include a Cabernet Sauvignon from its estate vineyard (named Hidden Key), priced at \$345.

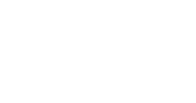
The Orums buy three grape varieties (Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Musqué and Semillon) for Arborum's white blend; they will plant all three at the new vineyard this summer. Orum said the plan is to stick to those wines for now, but that an estate Cabernet Franc "is in the cards." Recently, they added the grape to Hidden Key, which they've historically purchased for Arborum's red blend. Once all the new vines mature, Orum won't have to purchase any more grapes. They will also transition the new vineyard to organic and regenerative farming practices.

Since its inaugural vintage in 2021, the Orums have donated the proceeds from Arborum sales to nonprofits that support "people who live and work in Napa," Orum said, such as farmworkers, and environmental conservation efforts. (Nick Orum runs an investment firm in San Francisco.) But she maintains that this isn't a "charity wine" — which often carry a stigma of lower quality. "The number one purpose is to create exceptional wines," she said. "We love the Napa Valley, and we just wanted this to have a greater purpose beyond us."

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**Jess Lander**

SENIOR WINE REPORTER



Jess Lander joined the food and wine team at the San Francisco Chronicle as wine reporter in 2022. Her writing encompasses the California wine industry — from Santa Barbara to Mendocino — with a focus on Napa Valley and Sonoma County. Jess reports on winery and vineyard acquisitions; controversial Napa land use debates; wildfires; a growing farmworker rights movement; and Wine Country's most exciting restaurant and tasting room openings.

Originally from Boston, Jess moved to Napa Valley in 2010 and has extensively covered California wine country for numerous national and international publications. In 2021, Jess published "The Essential Napa Valley Cookbook," a project that raised more than \$100,000 for Napa Valley restaurant workers impacted by the pandemic.