

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

April 28, 2007

## VINEYARD IS A NEW STAGE FOR ROCKER

*Richard Ruelas, The Arizona Republic*

As an amateur winemaker, Maynard James Keenan is having great success, but that's largely because of his other occupation: lead singer for the multiplatinum hard rock band **Tool**.

"Isn't it amazing?" Keenan said during a tour of his vineyards in Arizona's Verde Valley. "Because I wrote a song, apparently my wine is desirable."

Keenan sold out of his first batch of Caduceus wine. He released his 2005 vintage this month, on his 43rd birthday. During the first week it was available through his Web site, he was selling \$10,000 worth of wine daily. The Primer Paso sells for \$49.99; the Naga for \$69.69.

The people buying the wine have not had the chance to taste a drop of it. Nor read any reviews. They are buying it because it's made by Keenan, a man who made his name singing, or some would say shrieking, about Satan and the violent nature of man. Admittedly these are unlikely credentials for a vintner.

One day, Keenan hopes his wine sells because of its quality, rather than his celebrity. But for now, he's a success in a business that requires a lot of up-front investment, and he's not about to complain.

"I'm a businessman, and I'm going to sell you wine. But it's just funny to me," he said. "Imagine someone discovering something artistic and something of substance because of Vince Neil," Keenan said, mentioning the lead singer of metal band Motley Crue. "You rarely equate rock with quality. More like break (stuff)." Keenan, dressed in boutique jeans, a Caduceus hoodie and designer baseball cap, still looked more LA rock star than rural Arizona farmer. He gassed up his black Crown Victoria Interceptor, a former police car, at the Casey's Corner general store in tiny Cornville. A man walking out of the store saw the car and said, "Whoa. How do you get one of them?"

Keenan tapped the trunk and said, "Cop's in here."

Keenan hopes to strip off the mystique of fine wine, just as he did when he discovered it himself, swiping bottles from executives backstage.

"There's been this mystery surrounding this ritual of wine and making it intimidating," he said, taking on the voice of a hoity-toity connoisseur. "Don't you taste the tobacco, the cherries?" He dismissed that notion with an expletive.

"It doesn't have to be snooty anymore," he said.

Keenan has lived in Arizona since 1995. The secluded area east of Jerome suited him more than smog-filled Los Angeles, where he had formed his band **Tool**.

Keenan discovered wine while touring. The band would feast on Gatorade and packaged meats backstage. Meanwhile, they would see managers and promoters drinking wine. Curious about it, and figuring his band paid for it anyway, Keenan and his drummer grabbed a few bottles.

"I thought, wow, there is something to this stuff," Keenan said.

His appreciation grew deeper in 1997 after he appeared at a benefit concert with the decidedly quieter pianist and singer Tori Amos. She gave him a bottle of 1992 Silver Oak Cabernet Sauvignon as a thank-you. He opened it to have with a meal and was astonished. "Oh my, what just happened?" he said. "A little light went on."

Keenan started collecting fine wines. In 2000, he was enjoying a glass of Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape on his back porch, overlooking the river valley. "I thought, 'I can make this here,'" he said. The Verde Valley reminded him of the vistas of Italy or Spain's wine regions, with the addition of the heat of Australia. "(Those countries) all make pretty good wines," he said. "It should stand to reason we could make some pretty good wines here."

Keenan bought a book and planned his vineyard. A friend suggested he talk to an expert first. Keenan became a regular at Echo Canyon Winery in Sedona. He met with owner Jon Marcus and learned everything he could about the business. He also became fast friends with Eric Glomski, the young winemaker there.

"It was an energy thing," Keenan said of Glomski. "We see life from a similar perspective as far as how we think about art and business." It also helped that Glomski wasn't a wide-eyed fan. "I had never heard of him," Glomski said, "which is probably to both of our benefits."

Keenan eventually hired Glomski as a consultant. And after Glomski started his own winery, Page Springs, he agreed to craft Keenan's wine. Glomski takes personal pride in Keenan's wine sales, knowing that he made the wine. But he can't help but rib Keenan when he bemoans that his wine is selling only because he's a rock star. "Oh yeah, you have such a tough life," Glomski said he tells Keenan. "You make a bunch of \$100 bottles of wine and sell them all out in a few weeks."

Glomski, meanwhile, sells his Page Springs wine for between \$15 and \$35. "I have to spend the whole year selling mine. But I retain artistic integrity," Glomski said. "Great."

Keenan could put little work into his wine and still have it be popular. But that's not his nature. During a visit to his vines, Keenan talked about frost, dormancy, stress, temperature zones and other wine technicalities. Last year he was involved in the

punch down, pushing the grape stems and skins back through the fermenting tank to bring out the wine's color. He drew wine out of the barrels to taste how it was aging. He helped feed the bottling machinery. Keenan smiled as he talked about his hands getting purple at the winery.

This summer will be the first harvest for Keenan's Arizona vineyards. But, for the next few months, Keenan will have to settle for periodic updates about how his grapes are doing. His band is heading off on a summer tour of arenas that will last at least through July.

Keenan sounded weary about the tour and the music business in general. "It's not in my nature to be in a rock band, honestly," Keenan said. It doesn't make sense to him, he said, to have lawyers and managers and business-savvy people "tiptoeing around these volatile insane people."

The vineyard does make sense. An amateur can't be in control here. An amateur has to learn from the experts, and even the most seasoned winemaker is a slave to the vines and nature.

It made even more sense when Keenan discovered, after he had already planted his vines, that his great-grandfather had vineyards in Italy. "I was going to find my way back here somehow," Keenan said.

Keenan yearns for the day he can concentrate on being a winemaker rather than a rock star, one who has to worry about obsessive fans tracking down where he lives, or finding hidden meaning in his obtuse lyrics.

"There's a point when it's all going to go away," Keenan said, standing by a row of Cabernet in his **Merkin** vineyards. "I'm just not going to be relevant."

"People aren't tripping over themselves to go track down David Bowie, and that's where I want to be. I just want to make some music, make some wine and live a somewhat peaceful life."