

Rock Star Winemaker

Maynard James Keenan puts his mark on up-and-coming region

BY SHELLEY BOETTCHER AND KEVIN MCLEAN
PHOTOS BY MARK PETERMAN

The term “rock star winemaker” gets tossed around a lot. But Maynard James Keenan is one, in the truest sense of the word.

Keenan is perhaps best known as the frontman for the Grammy Award-winning, multi-platinum (in other words, very famous) rock bands Tool, A Perfect Circle and Puscifer.

But he also lives and works as a winemaker in Arizona, where he’s helping to put the American southwest state on the map as a winemaking region to watch. (There are currently 63 wineries in the state, according to the Arizona Wine Growers Association.)

Keenan, 39, moved to Arizona in the 1990s as an escape from Los Angeles, he says. Then, in 2002, he met a winemaker named Eric Glomski. The two partnered to form Arizona Stronghold, a winery located in Arizona’s Verde Valley. Keenan then created other wine projects, including Caduceus Cellars and Merkin Vineyards.

In 2010, he was featured in the film *Blood Into Wine*, which documents how he and Glomski started their winery in Arizona.

Keenan believes strongly in the desert state as a place to craft top wines. He’s also very hands-on with his wines — researching the best grapes for the region, spending time

blending and tasting and fine-tuning the winemaking process.

Here, he talks about making wine in Arizona.

Q: The movie, *Blood Into Wine*, showed you doing every aspect of winemaking — planting grapes, picking, in the tasting room and working the bottling line. Do you still find time to be that involved?

Maynard James Keenan: I’m hands-on in the winery. I’ve been making wine in my own bunker [his winemaking facility] for four years. My wife does the lab, I do the wine and we have a friend who handles the washing up for us. I don’t spend a lot of time in the tasting room. My vineyard manager, Chris Turner, handles the vineyards. I pretty much trust him with my life. I am absolutely unqualified as a grower.

Q: What was your preparation for becoming a winemaker?

MJK: I travelled a lot, which exposed me to a lot of things; I worked a bit in Australia and learned from the people around me. Being an artist taught me a lot about winemaking; it’s really not that different. You understand schedules, hard work and creating a product. After that, it’s about paying attention and having a passion to do the work.

Q: Did you have a pretty good idea of what you were getting into?

MJK: We had to do it by trial and error and made a lot of expensive mistakes, but we believe there’s great potential here. Everything was wiped out during Prohibition [in the 1920s and early 1930s, when the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages was banned in the U.S.] and we really didn’t have anything to go on, except our intuition and what we’ve learned travelling to other winemaking regions.

Q: If you compared Arizona to Old World regions, what is it most like?

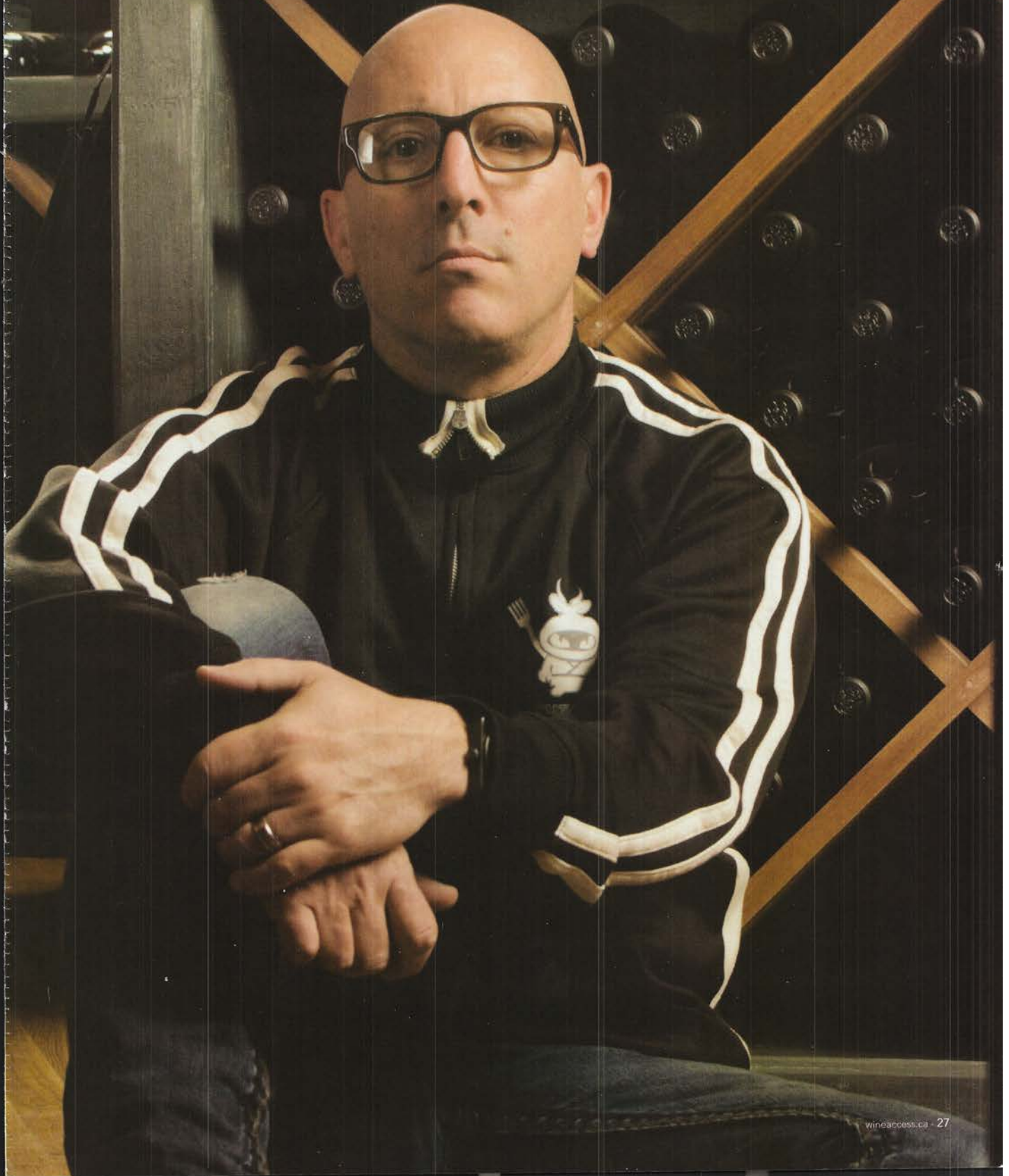
MJK: Probably Tuscany. We have more elegant wines here, similar to what you get from Chianti. But it has a lot in common with Adelaide Hills in Australia and parts of Sicily, too. We have crazy day and night temperature variations; it has a big impact on the fruit. Elevation is another big difference here, we’re over 4,000 feet [1,219 metres] in some locations.

Q: Have you started to see an Arizona style develop yet? If so, how would you describe it?

MJK: We have more subtle wines, perfumed — not the big bombs you see from other places. These are lighter wines, food wines

Dragon also brought wine to the table. Kevin O’Leary Fine Wines is selling an unoaked chardonnay and a cabernet-merlot blend made by Vineland Estates Winery in Niagara, Ont. • Former Montréal Canadiens and Calgary Flames forward Valeri Bure transitioned from NHL hockey to wine. He and his wife, Hollywood actress

Rock star Maynard James Keenan
sees great potential in Arizona wine.



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A BIG BUDGET BUYER

In 2003, Maynard James Keenan paid \$47,387 US for a six-litre bottle of 1998 Penfolds Grange. The price set a new record for Australian wine. "It was a good year in the vineyard," Penfolds' chief winemaker Peter Gago told the *Los Angeles Times* that year.

and, hopefully, wines that can age. Arizona wines have a definite elegance.

Q: It sounds like you're still in a pretty experimental stage. What are you noticing?

MJK: We're having some success with negroamaro in Verde Valley, at higher elevations, and we're looking at nebbiolo and aglianico. We've had good results with Rhône varieties and sangiovese, so we'll be looking at more of those.

Q: Do you ever think about one day trying to make wine in another region, perhaps outside of North America?

MJK: No, I live in Arizona. But I am having conversations now with a guy in Piedmont about some Barolo. He makes fantastic Barolo, and he's fairly unknown in the U.S. It's hard to get his wines here. I want to do a collaboration with him, just so I can get his wine here. Edoardo Sobrino, that's his name. I don't speak Italian at all, and he doesn't speak English, so it's a great dinner conversation with lots of grunts and pointing. I would like to see his wines become known around the world, so his family will be able

to continue making wine and I'll be able to continue buying his wine.

Q: When you're not drinking your own stuff, what are some of your favourite regions to drink from?

MJK: I like Old World wines, mostly; Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Tuscan wines and Spanish. The wines from Mount Etna in Sicily are interesting, but really I drink from all over, as long as it's good. I spent some time working with Peter Gago at Penfolds and I like their wines, as well.

Q: What about wine heroes? Do you have any?

MJK: [Penfolds' chief winemaker] Peter Gago has been quite the resource for me. For those complicated, odd winemaking questions, he tends to have answers... I've been pouring him some stuff, having him give critiques. He's very observant.

Q: What do you hope Caduceus will be in 20 years?

MJK: I'm not trying to grow it much. We're trying to stay small and focus on

MORE ARIZONA WINEMAKERS TO WATCH

There are more than 60 wineries in Arizona, including Maynard James Keenan's projects. Here are a few of his favourites:

- Todd and Kelly Bostock, Dos Cabezas WineWorks (doscabezaswineworks.com)
- Kent Callaghan, Callaghan Vineyards (callaghanvineyards.com)
- Keeling-Schaefer Vineyards (keelingschaefervineyards.com)
- Michael Pearce, Oak Creek Vineyards and Winery (oakcreekvineyards.net)
- Tim White, Arizona Stronghold (azstronghold.com) and Iniquus Cellars (iniquuscellars.com)
- Joseph Bechard, Chateau Tumbleweed (website TBA)

quality, probably stay around 3,000 cases. I hope in 20 years we'll know a lot more about the area, and we'll have a library we can taste and look back on. We can learn a lot from how these wines age.

Q: You're a busy guy. What kind of discipline does it take to keep up with your many pursuits?

MJK: You just have to basically look ahead and schedule what you need to do. Don't bite off more than you can chew. It's about budgeting your time, then focusing on one thing at a time. **WA**

(Parts of this story were published in 2012 in *FFWD Weekly*.)

Candace Cameron Bure, produce Napa Valley wines through Bure Family Wines. • Following an acting career that saw him play characters such as Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone, Fess Parker, who passed away in 2010, entered the wine frontier with his own winery near Los Olivos, Calif. • When he retired from striking