

Cults, Connoisseurs & Cool Wines

Vine Street Imports Captures Critical Acclaim

By Travis Lamb

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Even as a child, wine was a big part of Ronnie Sanders' life.

"My father was a big wine collector," Sanders says. "When my family would sit down to dinner, he would always have a good bottle of wine at the table. He sort of helped pass that passion on to me."

This passion, combined with stunning vision, has led Sanders to the top of cult wine circles and acquired him praise from acclaimed connoisseurs. Now, as CEO of Vine Street Imports (VSI), Sanders continues to find gems from fresh regions and wow the wine world with wonderful wines.

"We'll go all the way back," Sanders says, "to 1999. The business got started by two friends of mine." The original business model for Vine Street Imports was buying Bordeaux wines in Europe and selling them stateside on their Web site. "They asked me to join because of my passion for wine. I jumped at the chance, because I was unhappy in my job of textile imports." Sanders' now-legendary vision quickly took root. "I wanted to build new brands," he says, "and develop wine from emerging regions."

The chance for this dream to come true came quickly. Sanders had been friends with Michael Twelftree, proprietor of Two Hands Wines, through another company. "I had a wine export company called Australian Fine Wine Exporters," Twelftree says. "Ronnie was one of my best customers."

Vine Street has not failed to please since. "Our involvement with VSI has been great," Twelftree says. "Ronnie is a great salesman, and he knows wine inside out and back to front. We are the two guys who always have great bottles of wine open in front of us, and we love it when we disagree on wine."

Sanders' passion is evident to all with whom he comes in contact. "I think we are both in it for all the right reasons," Twelftree says. "We love great wine, but hate all the pomp and ceremony that, at times, is associated with the wine industry."

The account of the financial beginnings of Sanders' career with VSI is indicative of how far the company has come. "When I started here I got connected with Michael



Ronnie Sanders' vision has helped Vine Street Imports succeed with a unique strategy.

(Twelftree)," Sanders says. "We were friends before. He asked if I would import his wine, and I thought that was lucky, because I had just joined up with these guys. The first shipment was a whopping 400 cases. Though we're still small, in 2004, we brought in close to 22,000 cases."

Moving On Up

In 2000, Ronnie Sanders' renowned vision took VSI to another level, adding a facet to the company that since has been trademarked. The new addition, called the Lost Highway Project, is both innovative and progressive. VSI gets together with the finest winemakers worldwide and ends up with a totally new wine creation.