



## J. McClelland Cellars

Review by [Dave](#)



**J. McClelland Cellars** is a joint project between several members of the long time wine making family, the Scotto's and wine industry pioneer John McClelland. The Scotto wine making heritage began in Italy and continued in the United States after family migrated to New York. They operated a wine retail shop in Brooklyn. In 1948 the family started Villa Armando wines – which still continues production some nearly 70 years later. In 1963 the family moved to California (along with their wine operations). Today the fifth generation of the Scotto Family operates a number of wine businesses and brands including J. McClelland.

J. McClelland Cellars is a tribute to John McClelland (a family friend). In over 60 years John has compiled an impressive resume weighted with numerous significant contributions to the wine industry. His first position in the wine business was working for Robert Mondavi back when Robert Mondavi was still associated with Charles Krug. At various stages in his career, John ultimately became President of both Almaden and Geyser Peak wineries and General Manager of Alderbrook.

Their wines are made at Steele Canyon Cellars (formerly Moss Creek Winery) in eastern Napa County (only about a 10 minute drive to the shores of Lake Berryessa).

In 2014 veteran winemaker Mitch Cosentino was hired in a consulting capacity (Paul Scotto is the primary wine maker). Mitch is the first person we have met born in Gustine, California (a small town south of Modesto). He discovered an interest in wine during college, prior to a

career with wine he earned a degree in Broadcast Communications. Finding the job market in this field somewhat challenging in the mid to late 1970's he turned to wine. He signed on with a regional distribution company as their most junior salesman (Stanislaus Distributing Co). Within a year and a half his talents for sales was evident; he soon started managing this small company.



Part of Mitch's work at the distribution company involved wine maker dinners – where he met some of the icons in the industry – Myron Nightingale and Ed Spragia (both Beringer Winery veterans) and John Parducci (Mendocino County wine pioneer). Mitch considers all of these individuals as role models – they are the ones who helped encourage him to become a winemaker – recognizing his excellent sense of smell and taste.

Mitch's first commercial wine was made in 1980. Moving to the Napa Valley in 1990 he has since been responsible for creating, designing and building nine wineries in the Napa Valley and Lodi including the winery that still carries his name, Cosentino Winery just north of Yountville on Highway 29. Mitch was also the early winemaker for Napa brands such as Gemstone and Hoopes.

The focus of the J. McClelland brand is currently on three varietals – Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Each year they produce what they call a “one off” wine – or a surprise wine. In 2012 it was a rare Charbono – in 2013, a Petit Verdot.

All their wines are crafted to be balanced, food friendly and to showcase the varietals rather than results of extended hang-time.

Mitch did not initially work on the first vintages but provided consultation and direction prior to bottling.

The 2013 Chardonnay was fermented in stainless steel and aged in once and twice used oak barrels. This wine sees no malolactic fermentation. Reveals aromas of citrus blossom, orange peel and as it opens a sweetness of vanilla and brown sugar. Texturally, the wine is rounded and creamy – it is layered on the palate showing a rich expression of this varietal. A sweetness of fruit shows on the palate with some lingering spice notes. Drinks very well by itself.



Charbono is a rare varietal in California – with at least half of the total acreage in the United States growing in the northern part of the Napa Valley (Calistoga area). Inglenook Vineyards produced a Charbono; today there are only a few select producers making this wine each year. Charbono’s genetic history dates to the French Alps of the Savoie region where translated into English it was known as the “Soft Black” grape. Charbono thrives with temperature swings during the growing season

and Calistoga certainly has these. The northern part of the Napa Valley is the warmest but during the summer nights the temperature can drop 30 and 40 degrees from that day’s high.

J. McClelland is one of the very few Napa producers to have made wine from this varietal. The 2012 Charbono reveals an elegant nose – initially showing aromas of dried rose petal, as it opens notes of dried herbs (sage) show. There is a savoriness about the bouquet that makes you want to taste this wine. Higher toned fruit shows on the entry – the wine is very balanced with a brightness and liveliness of fruit across the palate. Very good acidity. A red currant/red cherry tartness lingers on the finish for some time. Shows dusty well integrated tannins.

As the 2012 Merlot opens, it displays a somewhat spicy bouquet – black pepper interwoven with a darker earthy note. It opens further to aromas of cherry with subtle tinges of vanilla and toasted cedar. A brightness of fruit shows across the palate. The finish lasts for some time – with robust tannins interwoven with tartness of fruit. This wine clearly has the components for aging. Allen Balik, wine journalist with the Napa Register (who we met along with Mitch for this review) says this wine reminds him a little of the early Three Palms vineyard Merlots – “opulent fruit wrapped around a dense structure”.



The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon initially shows a minty, somewhat earthy characteristic with some noticeable smokiness. AS the wine opens more red fruit shows, mainly cherry. The smokiness and dustiness continue on to the palate – more noticeable on the finish. Robust somewhat grippy tannins hold your attention on a long finish.

Total annual production is around 1,000 cases. They have some distribution in New York, New

Jersey, and Arkansas (among other states) but the focus of this brand is on selling direct to consumer. In Fall of 2016, J. McClelland Cellars began tasting their wines in the Wines on First Tasting room in downtown Napa along with pureCru Wines, and Jean Edwards. Unlike most

tasting rooms, this tasting room stays open later in the evening. The tasting room is small but can seat up to 14 people and host up to 40 people for private events.

For more information and or to join one of their wine clubs, visit: [www.jmcclellandcellars.com](http://www.jmcclellandcellars.com)

<http://www.napawineproject.com/j-mcclelland-cellars/>