

Tracing PEDIGREE

by Jess Lander
photos by Pinto Productions

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The Herzog Family Reflects on Nine Generations of Winemaking Through Their New Lineage Portfolio

There are many multigenerational winemaking families in California, but few can trace their roots as far back—or have endured as much—as the Herzog family. Spanning eight generations with four members of the ninth already involved, the Herzog winemaking tradition has outlasted innumerable global conflicts, crises, and relocations, so it's truly apropos they've named their latest Herzog Wine Cellars portfolio Lineage.

"There's a lot of great wine being made in California—a lot of great winemakers and great stories—but eight generations in wine? We don't think that exists," says Joseph Herzog, Herzog Wine Cellars General Manager and eighth-generation member of the Herzog winemaking family. "It's something unique regardless of winery or country, and very few people in the industry can say that."

The Lineage line comprises six single-vineyard and single-varietal wines with the exception of a rosé and a field blend featuring a dozen varieties. That may sound like the recipe for a top-tier brand, but all the wines are priced at a serious value: \$20. "We feel the market is trending and

moving toward a \$20 wine, and we really didn't have a Herzog brand at that sweet spot," Joseph says.

Because they're all kosher, the wines share another common thread, but to the Herzog family—pioneers in the kosher wine industry—that's simply a notation on the label, as Herzog wines are sipped by a wide demographic of drinkers. "Our goal was to bring a quality \$20 retail wine to market. We know what quality wine is, and these wines are quality wines which just happen to be kosher," Joseph explains.

A Story of Survival

A triumphant tale of overcoming adversity, the Herzog family story could easily serve as fodder for the silver screen. It begins in Slovakia during the early 19th century, when Philip Herzog made wine for the Austro-Hungarian court and was named a baron by the emperor.

But more trying times were on the horizon. Philip's grandson Eugene hid from the Nazis throughout World War II, reclaiming the winery when the war was over, and soon after the family fled to New York after power shifted to the Czech communist regime. As they

rebuilt their lives in this foreign place, they made wine for—and eventually acquired—a kosher winery, and nearly 40 years later, the family moved their winemaking operation to California in 1985.

Yet even then, the wandering continued: The Herzogs jumped from winery to winery for another two decades before finally reaching their “promised land,” opening a facility of their own in Oxnard in 2005. “The Jews wandered the desert for 40 years, and we were wandering in California for 20 years before we decided to build our home,” Joseph quips.

property, Prince Vineyard. The site was planted with 12 Portuguese varieties, from Primitivo and Sangiovese to Viognier and Malbec, but with so few rows planted of each, it was impossible to sell the grapes or make single-varietal wines. The solution? Throw them all in together and “see what happens,” says Hurliman.

Enter Choreograph, the anchor of the Lineage brand: It could be called a happy accident, but the Herzogs do everything with intent. “A sample was given to me and it was one of those wines where you taste and smell it and go, ‘Wow,’”



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HERZOG FAMILY

The Herzog family can trace their winemaking roots back eight generations to Slovakia during the early 19th century.

An Expression of Experience

The newest addition to the Herzog portfolio, Lineage, serves as a celebration of the family’s unwavering commitment to wine. The label lists the names of seven generations of Herzog family members with the year of their birth and, if applicable, death, starting from 1750. “Lineage really is an indication of the winemaking, the wine, and the grape knowledge of the lineage of this family,” says Herzog Winemaker Joe Hurliman. “You can see they really understand how you go about making quality wines and what it takes.”

Developing the Lineage line didn’t come without risks. The portfolio hails from a small parcel of land the Herzogs acquired along with their Clarksburg

Hurliman recalls. “That sort of gives you an indication of what you can do if you’re a family that’s been making wine for eight generations and understands this might be something of great value. Otherwise, maybe we would have just chopped the top of the vines off and grafted it right then and there.”

Lineage’s other five wines are crafted from carefully chosen vineyards, each with its own story and significance to the Herzogs. For instance, the family has been sourcing Chardonnay from Prince Vineyard since they first started producing in California 33 years ago. After purchasing it in 2010, they now grow the fruit for Lineage Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Rosé, and Choreograph there.

Meanwhile, a recently purchased vineyard in Lake County has both Herzog and Hurliman particularly excited, as it’s planted to Sauvignon

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Blanc’s Musqué clone. Their first vintage, 2017, was released earlier this year. “I always wanted to make a Sauvignon Blanc from the Musqué clone—you’re looking at a totally different wine, different entity. It’s reminiscent of Austrian Sauvignon Blancs that I’ve had,” says Hurliman, noting that the Lineage line also provides a preview of what the future holds for the Herzog legacy. “It’s not a conclusion, but it’s a continuation of what the Herzogs have been able to do for eight generations.” ■■■