



MARK WEST

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Great Economic News: Everything's Coming Up Pinot for Mark West Winery As They Share News of A 2008 Filled With Increased Sales, Scores and Green Kudos

Graton, CA, January 30, 2009... While the economic crisis may be gloom and doom for some, it's been a boom for wine companies like Mark West Winery, who deliver great quality at a value price. As the dominant player in the Pinot Noir space, the company is proud to share the good news that:

- 2008 sales increased 45% over prior year
- December 2008 were 46% greater than prior year
- Mark West is now the largest selling single SKU of Pinot Noir in the U.S.

“Our business proposition has always been to deliver single-varietal, hand-crafted wines at a value price,” shared founder, Derek Benham. “We had great traction going into 2008 which set the stage for us to respond well to the economy driven demands of the savvy consumer looking for a great wine.”

No strangers to success, Derek Benham is a veteran of the wine world, who sold his first varietally driven venture, Blackstone Winery to Pacific Wine Partners in October 2001. This success was due to understanding consumer trends and predicting the next one. When he acquired Mark West, he knew the benefits of a focused varietal approach and chose Pinot Noir as his next hot wine. It certainly didn't hurt that his efforts coincided with the film *Sideways*, which brought great attention to the California varietal, putting the relative unknown grape on the map in America.

Choosing to work with high-end winemaking genius turned value-driven craftsman Alex Cose (formerly of Peter Michael Winery), was also prophetic for the times. Cose has applied his talents to

Mark West, which has raised the wine's profile and popularity among consumers, restaurateurs and critics alike.

One boost to sales in 2008 was the fact that Mark West Pinot Noir was featured in *The Wine Trials*, a book by Robin Goldstein. In the book, Goldstein challenged sommeliers to blind taste value-driven wines along side their high-end sisters. The 2005 Mark West Pinot Noir beat the old guard hands down – ranking #1 of 52 wines. Not bad for a wine at a remarkable price of around \$12 a bottle.

Media in the fourth quarter highlighting consumer trends toward purchasing wines under \$15, combined with the fact that the economic woes hit right before the holidays proved to be another boost for Mark West in 2008. The holidays traditionally are a time when Pinot Noir sales are at their peak since the wine pairs so well with turkey, salmon, lamb and other favorites. Consumers flocked to Mark West to share a popular, affordable and trusted brand at the holiday dinner table.

In addition to the perfect storm of varietal foresight, craftsmanship, and an economy that drove consumers into the value-priced market place, Mark West scored points as it hit its stride in 2008 on the green frontier, gaining recognition for its energy efficient, water-conserving, eco-conscious winemaking facility in Graton. The facility, which works under the name of Sonoma Wine Company, was recognized by the EPA and became an accredited Sonoma County Green Business in 2008.

For more information on Mark West wines and the people behind them, contact Kimberly Charles or Kendall Johnson, Charles Communications Associates, press@charlescomm.com or 415.701.9463.

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