

Raised in Arizona

[BY SCOTT JUNGMAN, SUN SPORTS EDITOR](#)

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PHOENIX - Arizona winemaking partners Eric Glomski and Maynard James Keenan sat a short distance away from the entrance to Sportsman's Fine Wine and Spirits shop on Camelback Road and watched a small group of silver-haired patrons stroll into the front entrance from an otherwise peaceful strip-mall parking lot.

"They actually look like adults," Keenan quipped.

The duo, who have led the way in the quest to develop a fledgling wine industry in this state, were about to undergo their second-straight Saturday of bottle signings for their newest creation, a white wine named Tazi, from their recently purchased Arizona Stonghold Vineyard located near Wilcox in Cochise County.

The wine, a fruity and delicious combination of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling and Malvasia Bianca, is the first 100 percent Arizona-produced wine to be distributed in retail stores throughout the state.

Just a week earlier, on April 12, the scene at the signing at a pair of Whole Foods Markets in Phoenix was a stark contrast. After Whole Foods heavily marketed the event and local rock radio stations pumped it up, nearly 1,000 people waited in line - not so much to buy the wine, but instead to get a close-up experience with Keenan, the vocalist from Tool and A Perfect Circle - two of the more respected and successful rock groups to come around in the past two decades.

The Sportsman's signings fell under the radar, however, which suited Glomski and Keenan just fine.

"In a crazy way, (April 12) was a circus," Glomski said. "This is the type of thing today where we might actually be able to get to sit with people and talk about our wine. That's a lot more fulfilling than just signing 2,000 bottles."

Keenan, forever in conflict with the idolatry associated with being in a mega-successful music group, realizes the reality that his celebrity brings to promoting his other artistic endeavor, one that rises from vines instead of speakers.

"I was trying to explain to some of the kids about what temperature to drink the Tazi at and it was like showing card tricks to dogs," Keenan said.

But at the same time, the Verde Valley resident wishes the product and movement associated with farming grapes would eventually wash that out and make his name just another in the long list of those who are changing the face of agriculture in this state.

That certainly includes the thousands on the first day of sales who picked up a bottle of Tazi, named after the mighty Chiricahua Apache chief Cochise's eldest son.

"I'm hoping that those people that took the bottle home - that were excited about the

experience of going there for whatever initial reason it was - I hope that someday, in their opinion for the lack of better judgement, just open the bottle and TRY IT," Keenan said. "See what's happening inside the bottle. You got here because you trusted me on some level ... now I hope you'll try this new thing and it might open a whole new door for you that has absolutely nothing to do with me.

"It's never had anything to do with me. In your mind it has, but this is a whole new expression for this entire area, for this entire community, for this entire state, for this country."

After watching the formerly-named Dos Cabezas vineyard continue to disintegrate, Keenan and Glomski purchased the 60 acres of vines in January, 2006, and hired an Argentine, Fabian Grandoli, who had worked at several other mass-production wineries such as Gallo and Kendall Jackson, to rejuvenate the fruit production.

"Fabian has completely turned the place around," Glomski said.

The first result of that is Tazi, with a pair of red wines, Nachise and Mangus, expected to hit stores in the fall. Although the wines are produced in much greater quantities than the duo's more exclusive juice from their Page Springs and Merkin vineyards located in the Verde Valley, the same care is taken in its quality.

The Stronghold wines are still aged in wooden barrels and each one of those barrels is tasted for quality.

"Tazi is a really quality wine and has a lot going on," Glomski said. "It's going to appeal to a lot of serious wine drinkers. ... It's very fresh and fruity and exotic."

The movement is also being made to make the vineyard organically farmed in similar fashion to Page Springs, but for the first time the two trusted their wine with a wholesale distributor, Quench Fine Wines, based in Phoenix.

"Initially our thought is just to make it exclusively available here in Arizona to kind of help people in this area who are so reliant on selling God's-eye earrings and rubber tomahawks to tourists so they can go stare at big red rocks somewhere," Keenan said. "We want to start to instill in them the sense of actual industry, something that blends the utilitarian with the artistic and showing what we can do as a community and as a state."

Tazi is moderately priced below \$20, but "It's really more like a \$25 or \$30 bottle," Glomski said.

"We want it to get out there for people to go 'Oh, wow, that's from Arizona?'" he added. "That's what we're trying to accomplish with the Stronghold brand. We want something that appeals to both the serious wine drinkers as well as the novices who are just starting to drink wine. We want broader appeal."

Glomski and Keenan's previous Arizona wines have received high marks for their quality, but the best is yet to come out of the state's infant vines that are increasingly growing into maturity.

"The Arizona wine industry is fledgling," Glomski said. "There's 24 wineries here and we want to be leaders. We like to lead the way and want this to become a quality effort. Not

something where we slap a sunset on the bottle and sell it to a tourist and they never open it or it gets dumped in a pasta sauce or something."

For Keenan, this latest artistic outlet is a breath of fresh air. And at the very least, it's the best chance for his work to finally speak louder than his name.

"The beauty of this industry is that it has nothing really to do with the idols," Keenan said of winemaking. "It has to do with farming, artistry, and there's a sense of professionalism that comes along with somebody reviewing a wine or talking about an event.

"This does not exist in the music industry. It's brutal."

WHERE TO FIND TAZI:

***AJ's - Camelback**, 4430 E. Camelback Rd., Phoenix (602) 522-0956

***AJ's - Tucson**

***Bashas' 28 - Sedona**, 160 Coffe Pot Drive, Sedona (928) 282-5351

***Enotria Fine's Cellar**

***Phoenician**, 6000 E. Camelback Rd., Scottsdale(480) 941-8200 ext. 3728

***Sportsman's - Arrowhead**, 6685 W. Beardsley, Glendale (623) 572-WINE

***Sportsman's - Camelback**, 3205 E. Camelback Rd., Phoenix(602) 955-WINE

***Vino Loco**

***Whole Foods Market - Chandler** , 2955 West Ray Rd., Chandler (480) 821-9447

***Whole Foods Market-Mayo**, 7111 E. Mayo Blvd., Phoenix (480) 515-3777