

Pushing The Boundaries Of Creative Winemaking

An Interview with Jesse Katz, Founder and Head Winemaker, Aperture Cellars and Devil Proof Vineyards

EDITORS' NOTE Early adventures to legendary vineyards and wineries around the world with his family and father, photographer Andy Katz, gave Colorado-native Jesse Katz a profound respect for the creativity and art of winemaking. It was through his father's work that he recognized and fell in love with the importance of terroir, balance, and the beauty of a winemaker's influence – setting him on a path he has pursued ever since. Today, he creates distinct and nuanced



Jesse Katz

wines for his brands, Aperture Cellars and Devil Proof Vineyards, while serving as a consulting winemaker for some of the world's elite wine programs. Since his debut as a first-generation talent out of college, Katz has emerged as one of the most exciting – and accomplished – winemakers globally. His diverse experience spanning over 24 harvests at wineries, along with a passion for travel, fueled his aspiration to learn from the best in the industry. After graduating from Fresno State's Department of Viticulture and Enology, he spent time studying at Pétrus in Bordeaux, Screaming Eagle Winery and Robert Foley Winery in Napa Valley, and Viña Cobos and Bodega Noemia in Argentina. In 2010, he became the youngest head winemaker in the U.S. at Lancaster Estate. During his five-year tenure there, he orchestrated the building of the new Roth winery, production facility, and tasting room. Behind the scenes, he received 90+ scores on every wine scored by The Wine Advocate and secured Lancaster Estate's inclusion on the list of Wine Spectator's Top 100 Wines. In 2013, Wine Enthusiast named Katz one of its 40 Under 40 Tastemakers, and he also earned the distinction of becoming the first winemaker on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list. He has served as a consulting winemaker for some of the biggest names in entertainment – including Von Miller, Tony Hawk, and Justin Timberlake. In 2017, Katz's wine collaboration with Shep Gordon, under The Setting Wines label, earned the designation as the most expensive 750 ml bottle of wine in the world ever sold. He then broke his own record in 2021, when a 6L of his Cabernet Sauvignon sold for \$1 million, setting the world record for most expensive bottle of wine ever sold. Katz's wines have garnered superlative recognition over the years from the top wine critics in the industry. The Aperture Chenin Blanc has earned the highest

Wine Enthusiast rating for the varietal in the history of California. In 2021, his work with Devil Proof's Farrow Ranch vineyard led him to joining the elite group of winemakers receiving 100 points from both Robert Parker's The Wine Advocate and Jeb Dunnuck. Katz has gained multiple 100-point scores not only for his Devil Proof brand, but also for Aperture. He finds joy in utilizing his craft to raise funds for charitable causes, nonprofits, and charity events. Devil Proof, Aperture, and The Setting Wines actively donate

and participate in a large variety of charitable auctions, donating numerous cases of wine and custom winery experiences to causes they firmly believe in each year. Katz has raised over \$7 million for charities and foundations since starting his brand and has recently joined the Board of Directors for the SommFoundation, an educational-based nonprofit benefiting professionals in the wine and spirits business.

WINERY BRIEFS Aperture Cellars (aperturecellars.com) champions a range of stunning Bordeaux style wines from Sonoma. Founded in 2009 by winemaker Jesse Katz, Aperture wines are crafted from unique, cool-climate vineyards in Sonoma's top regions for Bordeaux varietals. Wanting to craft wines on par with the quality and refinement that are so integral to a Bordeaux, the winery set roots in Sonoma, believing it offers the best of both worlds: new-world fruit and old-world elegance.

The vineyard-designate wines produced for the Devil Proof (devilproofvineyards.com) labels offer interpretations as singular expressions of each site – of grapes grown within the ecosystems of those vineyards. Those vines are well-tended throughout the growing season, from winter pruning and springtime bud break to summertime bunch growth and fall harvest. Devil Proof remains the highest-rated California Malbec by the top wine critics, including Wine Advocate, Wine Enthusiast and Wine Spectator.



Aperture Cellars May 2025 launch party for its new Collage wine (above and opposite page)



What have been the keys to Aperture's success?

Aperture's success is a reflection of the extraordinary team that has come together around a shared vision – a team driven by passion. Aperture's innovative approach blends cutting-edge technology with an artistic, terroir-driven philosophy, elevating underappreciated regions like Alexander Valley. Earning the first 100-point Cabernet Sauvignons from Alexander Valley and receiving global recognition for producing the highest-achieving Malbecs in the United States are milestones that speak to the dedication and talent of everyone involved. While we're honored by this acclaim, we remain focused on continuing to grow, learn, and push the boundaries of what's possible for luxury Sonoma County wine.

Will you provide an overview of Aperture's wines?

We produce elegant, balanced Bordeaux varietal wines from traditionally cooler climates for the varietals, drawing from a diverse collection of vineyard sites across Alexander Valley and Sonoma County. The portfolio is organized into three distinct tiers: the Soil Series, which features focused blends from single soil-type origins; the Site Series, showcasing single-origin wines from uniquely placed vineyard sites; and the Estate Series, highlighting small-lot wines crafted from estate-owned vineyards selected for their exceptional character. In May 2025 we launched the next chapter of the Aperture journey with Collage, a wine that pushes the boundaries of creative winemaking.

What can customers expect from Collage?

Collage is the evolution of my work with Aperture – a deeply personal project that brings together the finest vineyard lots from over 200 acres across five Sonoma County appellations.

For each vintage, I carefully select from more than 300 individual lots with the finest elements from that vintage to craft two wines: a Proprietary Red and a Proprietary White that embody the depth and diversity of Sonoma's terroir. Collage is a true boundary-pushing creative endeavor, one that expresses the artistic sensibilities that drew me to the craft of winemaking in the beginning of my journey.

What was your vision for creating Collage?

Collage is the wine I've always aspired to create – a true culmination of years of exploration, artistry, and craftsmanship. It represents the best of what we've achieved, drawing on an extraordinary range of vineyard lots that our team has meticulously cultivated for over a decade. With the advanced tools of our custom-built winery, we set out to craft a wine that redefines creative expression in winemaking. The label design is a visual extension of this vision – a layered, artistic tribute to both structure and spontaneity. It features a collection of photographs taken by my father, Andy Katz, from around the world. Each image is a piece of our journey, capturing the diverse stories and landscapes that define Aperture wines. Together, they form a collage that reflects the essence of our portfolio.

What has made the wine industry so special for you?

Within the wine industry, there is a deep-rooted respect for the land, a commitment to preserving tradition while embracing innovation, and a genuine sense of community among those who grow, make, and share wine. It's an industry built on passion, patience, purpose, and that's what continues to inspire me every day. Each vintage is a chance to blend nature, craft, and creativity into something truly meaningful and evolving. I have a deep respect for the land and Sonoma County's unique and diverse terroir, and I'm constantly inspired by the collaboration with growers, artisans, and creatives who share this journey with me. ●

