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Some celebrity wines earn star status all their own

Celebrity wines: marketing gimmicks, they certainly are, but darn good ones. Tying wines to celebrities, dead or alive, is proving to be good business. Peering out from a wide variety of bottles are such iconic figures as Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and Davy Crockett (OK, Fess Parker). The late Jerry Garcia has his own line of Sonoma wines, as do a slew of movie and music celebs.

The 2003 Marilyn Merlot (\$25) was released June 1, the late cinema queen's birthday. Bob and Donna Holder, who brokered an exclusive agreement with Monroe's estate for the use of her name and image, first came up with the idea at a dinner party at their Napa valley home in 1983. Ch-ching! The lineup now includes a Marilyn Cabernet (\$38), a Norma Jeane Merlot (young, of course, \$10.50) and a limited-edition "Velvet Collection" in magnum (\$200). The local distributor gets 400 cases of the mainline Marilyn and, reports sales director Scott Murphy, "it comes and it goes, which is quite nice!" Sold out at the distributor, but some bottles may still be available at retail or through the winery Web site, www.marilynmerlot.com.