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For Loren Kagan of **Cask & Vine Distribution**, global wines of exceptional quality are ripe for the picking.

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Rosé-Colored Glasses

FOR LOREN KAGAN OF **CASK & VINE DISTRIBUTION**, GLOBAL WINES OF EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY ARE RIPE FOR THE PICKING.

by **Leigh Stuart**
photos by **Alison Dunlap**

is spearheaded by founder Loren Kagan, who walked into the world of hospitality as a student at the University of Denver about 20 years ago. What started as a restaurant concept transformed into a beverage business sparked by a genuine passion for organic wines.

“My accounting professor and one of her friends, who was also my attorney, were my first business partners,” he recalls. “It was 2008, and back then everything was ultra-premium in the organic spirit place.”

Though the passion was there, a wide spectrum of options was not. It wasn’t until 2016, after he arrived in Philadelphia, that he relaunched his concept. The Baltimore native evolved that business, Kagan Imports, into its current iteration less than two years ago. Kagan has come full circle in a way, as he estimates 75 percent of his business now deals with high-end restaurants and country clubs.

“We’ve been doing a private label rosé for Aronimink,” he says. “And then this year, that wine got approved to be served during the PGA [Championship], so we’re the exclusive rosé for the tournament this year, which is kind of cool.”

While Kagan’s wines are for sipping and appreciating over time, his business is fast-paced and dynamic. He travels often to New York, among other locations, to sample the

For some, flowers are enough to mark a special occasion. Others prefer a different kind of bouquet—rich Cabernets, top-shelf tequilas, and the finest rosé a renowned establishment such as Aronimink Golf Club can offer.

Such is the case with the devotees of Cask & Vine Distribution, a local concierge beverage and spirit supplier committed to connecting connoisseurs with the finest libations from Europe and beyond. Cask & Vine

latest vintages of top wines and spirits from abroad, including France, Spain, Italy, and South Africa.

“We’re a luxury distributor,” Kagan shares. “What we’re always looking for is high quality with good value. To explain, a certain Pinot Grigio maker produces more bottles of wine than Pinot Grigio [grapes] are grown in Italy. How do they do that? Well, in order to be called Pinot Grigio on the label, only 85 percent of the bottle actually has to be Pinot Grigio. Nor do the grapes have to come from a specific region of Italy.”

While casual wine drinkers might not care to know about such information, true oenophiles would likely be appalled.

“My Pinot Grigio is 100 percent Pinot Grigio, from a small geographic region,” he makes sure to note. “It says that on the bottle.”

A Market for Excellence

While different wines suit different occasions, so-called “grocery store wines” are of no interest to Kagan. “They don’t excite me,” he says plainly.

The libations that do catch his eye



Earlier this year Kagan hired Brian Walsh as Cask & Vine's director of sales. Walsh has been a certified sommelier since 2009.

connect with diners at establishments such as Ilu in Fishtown, where a Cask & Vine vermouth is in a cocktail and about to be on draft; The Dandelion in Rittenhouse Square, home to one of the distributor's best-loved Syrahs; and the iconic Parc restaurant, which partners with Kagan for a number of selections.

Cask & Vine also reaches consumers who prefer greener pastures—namely, the greens and fairways of golf clubs around the area. The company does business with the likes of Rolling Green Country Club in Springfield and The Cynwyd Club in Bala Cynwyd.

In a world where the digital landscape

seems to be replacing reality, Kagan takes a hands-on approach to connecting with the community when spreading the gospel of good libations.

"Clients want consistency," he says. "They want you to know that you'll show up for them. They want you to be able to help them out in a jam. So one of the company's core values is that we're accessible 24 hours a day."

That includes 24-hour, seven days a week, next-day delivery. Kagan is proud of the fact that clients do not pay a fee for such expediency.

"I will make sure that the restaurant, the buyer, they have the wine they need

Saturday before they open the next day so that they don't run out of wine," he says. "And no one else does customer service like that. They can't, because they're too big. They wouldn't even know where to go to get their wine from someone that quickly."

In January, Kagan brought Brian Walsh to his team, as director of sales. Walsh has been a certified sommelier since 2009. Together, they have expanded and created a larger portfolio, which has a placement for all styles of cuisine. Walsh has an 18-year history in the hospitality industry, prior to working for another distributor for the last seven years. From working on both sides, he understands any and all issues that each account may be going through.

"In our current times, many establishments are struggling from increased costs, be it increased cost from tariffs or plain overhead of the work force," Kagan states. "This is where Walsh shines in his new role. He is also a great consultant for the hospitality industry."

Such dexterity is among the greatest benefits of working with a concierge beverage purveyor like Cask & Vine. It's also a matter of competitive necessity.

"Our accounts love it and they know that we really care—and it shows," Kagan adds. "We're committed to them and we want everyone on their team to succeed. It's little details like that, across every area in our company, that set us apart."

In addition, clients benefit from the life-earned skill of such purveyors, who have palates so well developed that they can be a skilled matchmaker of sorts.

"We ask our restaurant and country club partners what they want, and we bring them options," says Kagan. "We flip the business model on its head. If someone comes to us and says they're just looking for a new white wine and rosé, we will look at their menu, take a look at their pricing, and then bring wines that match the vibe of that restaurant."

Kagan says Cask & Vine even offers concierge service for private events. The company has had a hand in everything from Main Line Mom's Night Out events, private chef-led dinners, and weddings, among others.

With immersive experiences and human connection at the heart of Cask & Vine's mission, Cask & Vine's business is only poised to grow. Kagan's also deeply committed to letting the good times roll.

As he says, "Creating good times is a lot of hard work, indeed." ■

Cask & Vine's luxury wines and spirits can be found at some of the area's finest restaurants and country clubs. For example, the company does a private label rosé for Aronimink Golf Club.



For more information about
Cask & Vine Distribution,
 call (410) 982-7000 or visit
www.caskandvinedistribution.com