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Arkansas mogul Gaylon Lawrence Jr., once unknown to wine, is opening four Napa tasting rooms this summer

Lawrence just bought his sixth name-brand Napa property, which will become a tasting room for Burgess Cellars, whose main winery burned in the Glass Fire



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The company owned by Arkansas agricultural mogul Gaylon Lawrence Jr. is expanding its Napa Valley reach yet again.

Lawrence Wine Estates, which is run by master sommelier Carlton McCoy, announced on Tuesday that it has acquired a 27-acre vineyard and winery in Napa from Luna Vineyards. The new property will become part of the Burgess Cellars brand, which Lawrence acquired in 2020 shortly before the Glass Fire destroyed its historic winery.

The new deal does not affect Luna Vineyards, known for its focus on Italian grape varieties; it will remain intact and its tasting room along the Silverado Trail will remain open, confirmed Jee Park, a spokesperson for Lawrence and McCoy. Lawrence has merely purchased a portion of Luna's property, and they plan to open a tasting room there for Burgess in July. They did not disclose the price.

It's the sixth name-brand property in Napa that Lawrence has acquired since 2018. In that year, when he made his first purchase — the iconic Heitz Cellar — he was a largely unknown entity to wine-industry insiders. That has quickly changed.

This summer alone is shaping up to be a busy for the Lawrence Wine Estates teams. In addition to the new Burgess tasting room, they will open a tasting room in downtown Napa in August for Brendel, a new brand. Also in August, they will reopen the Heitz Cellar tasting room on Highway 29, a longtime landmark that has been closed for the last couple of years while undergoing an extensive renovation. And [Stony Hill Vineyard](#), the beloved Chardonnay producer that Lawrence bought last December, had been closed for tastings since the acquisition but recently reopened to visitors, Park said.

The rapidfire succession of these openings may be partly due to the gradual relaxation of pandemic-era safety measures that made it difficult to open a public-facing winery. But the pattern also suggests that Lawrence and McCoy understand the increasing value of having a tasting room in today's premium wine market. [Data](#) has shown that consumers of high-end wine value the experience of visiting a winery in person more than in previous eras.

Burgess' newly acquired parcel was originally home to St. Andrews Winery, founded in 1980 as a second label for Clos du Val, another winery on the Silverado Trail in Napa. Luna later bought the land from Clos du Val.

The location along Silverado Trail, one of Napa Valley's main arteries, is a much more appealing site for a visitor center than the main Burgess estate, located high on Howell Mountain on a remote, winding road. One of the historic buildings at the Burgess property, a winery built in 1880, was destroyed in the Glass Fire last fall. The timing was eerie: The Burgess family, who founded their eponymous winery in 1972, had sold to Lawrence less than a month earlier.

The company also announced the appointment of a new estate director for Burgess, George Lobjanidze, a sommelier from the Republic of Georgia who has worked at Bay Area restaurants including Spruce and the Village Pub. Meghan Zobeck, formerly of Napa's Melka Estates, was named the Burgess winemaker last year. They say they plan to implement "promiscuous farming" at the Burgess vineyards, referring to an ancient Roman term for an agricultural philosophy that prizes crop diversity.

These hirings align with Lawrence and McCoy's pattern of recruiting young, up-and-coming people to helm their individual wineries. Earlier this year, they brought on winemaker Jaimee Motley, a former Chronicle Winemaker to Watch for Stony Hill. Motley's husband Nico Cueva, the former winemaker at Sonoma County's Kosta Browne, was tapped to lead the estate at the Coombsville property formerly known as the Haynes Vineyard, which Lawrence acquired in 2019.

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