

NBA Star Yao Ming Makes Highly Acclaimed Wines And Fights Wildlife Poaching



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Talk about your win-wins. If you are going to drink very good wine anyway, why not save endangered animals at the same time?



NBA Hall of Famer Yao Ming has been devoted to wildlife conservation and anti-poaching efforts for a decade, and his

As a fan of animals and a huge fan of wildlife-viewing [safaris](#), a [travel topic](#) I have written on [over and over again](#), I have come to loathe, hate and despise all forms of animal poaching and illegal wildlife trade, from decorative ivory to shark fin soup

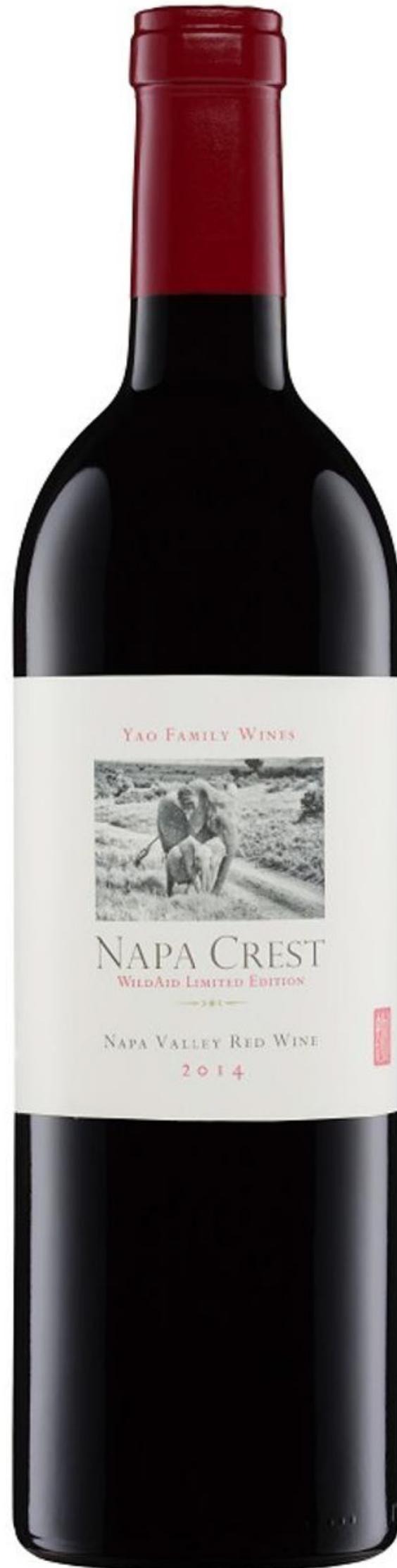
to idiotic beliefs in the magical powers of pseudo-medicinal concoctions made from rhino horns.

Because the illegal wildlife trade is entirely driven by demand and market forces, one way to fight it that makes sense is to reduce demand. One NGO that has been especially effective at this approach is WildAid, a nonprofit organization whose concrete mission is to end the illegal wildlife trade in our lifetimes. While many wildlife conservation groups try to directly protect animals from poaching (not a bad approach either), [WildAid](#) focuses on reducing global consumption of threatened products by changing consumer perceptions to eliminate demand. To this end, they have assembled an impressive global portfolio of celebrity ambassadors and media partners, leveraging nearly \$200 million in annual pro bono media support to get out one vital message: When the Buying Stops, the Killing Can Too.

One longtime WildAid spokesperson is Yao Ming, an NBA superstar who was the League's tallest player when he retired in 2011. He was a 5-time All-NBA and 8-time All-Star Game starter, and hailing from China, is the only foreign-born player ever to be number one in All-Star balloting. He is wildly popular in his native land, which is also the source of many wildlife trafficking issues, so his impact on Chinese consumers is especially important - *TIME Magazine* named him one of the world's 100 most influential people. Joining Sir Richard Branson in a campaign to save sharks, he has been very publicly against shark fin soup and is also involved in documentaries and campaigns to curb elephant and rhino poaching. Earlier this year Yao was inducted into the NBA Hall of Fame and has continued in his role and humanitarian and a newer role - as a vintner.

He founded [Yao Family Wines](#) in California's Napa Valley in 2011 and while many celebrity wines fizzle, he has quickly enjoyed the same level of success he had in the NBA. *Robb Report* magazine named the label to its Best of the Best list in 2012, the same year *Wine Enthusiast* magazine nominated it for 2012 American Winery of the Year. The world's single most influential wine critic, Robert Parker of *The Wine Advocate*, awarded a stunning 95 point rating to the 2010 Yao Ming Family Reserve Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (and 90 points to the 2010 Yao Ming Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon), writing: "I am aware of all the arguments that major celebrities lending their names to wines is generally a formula for mediocrity, but that is not the case with Yao Ming. These are high-class wines. The two Cabernets are actually brilliant, and the Reserve bottling ranks alongside just about anything made in Napa." *Wine Enthusiast* went even further, awarding the labels extraordinary scores of 97 and 95 points respectively. The winery specializes

exclusively in cabernet.



These limited edition bottles have a label shot by a famous wildlife photographer, and 100% of profits go to WildAid.

Now Yao is commemorating 10 years of his partnership to end illegal wildlife trade with a limited edition release to benefit Wild Aid. The Yao Family Wines 2014 Napa Crest Red Wine features a custom WildAid label with an image by acclaimed wildlife photographer Chrystina Geagan. Prices range from single bottles for \$100 to the \$1,500 “Elephant Pack” dozen, including one autographed by Yao and a suitable for framing 8x10 black-and-white glossy reprint of the label art signed by the photographer (only 24 packs available). The “Rhino Pack” includes six bottles and the signed print for \$500. The “Shark Pack” includes three bottles and an unsigned print for \$250. Yao Family Wines says it has already raised more than \$400,000 for the charities it supports ([here's the list](#)) and in this case, one hundred percent of the profits from all these orders go directly to WildAid. Wines are available for pre-order at the winery website and will ship in November 2016. Yao Family Wines is located at 929 Main Street in St. Helena and open seven days a week.

Yao will also be appearing along with a handful of other celebrity ambassadors at WildAid's 2016 Gala at the Ritz-Carlton in San Francisco (November 12). This is the organization's biggest event and fundraiser of the year, and a handful of [tickets are still available](#) (from \$1,000).

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