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## Wine Talk: Usher

**R&B singer talks about his new wine bar and the possibility of launching his own label**

*Heather Morgan Shott*

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R&B singer Usher Raymond IV, 28, has sold more than 35 million albums worldwide, and earned five Grammy awards. Last year, the Atlanta-based star made his Broadway debut as slick lawyer Billy Flynn in the musical *Chicago*. He's appeared in dozens of TV shows, including *7th Heaven*, *Saturday Night Live* and *American Dreams*, and such movies as *She's All That* (1999) and *Texas Rangers* (2001). In 2005, he launched Usher's New Look, a nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching children and teens about the business side of the sports and entertainment industries. The singer is also delving into the wine world. In December, Usher opened his own franchise of the Grape wine bar in Atlanta's Inman Park neighborhood, and he's hoping to open more in New York, Las Vegas and Los Angeles, and overseas, in Tokyo, Shanghai and several South American cities. He's also contemplating launching his own wine label. He's currently recording his next album, due out in November.



Joe Hans/The Reynolds Group

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**Wine Spectator:** How did you become interested in wine?

**Usher Raymond IV:** I travel all around the world, and I've tried a lot of different wines in restaurants. I've [developed] a taste for what I like and don't like ... I'm moving into a new house soon, and I'm going to build a cellar there to hold the gems I find throughout my travels.

**WS:** What inspired you to open your own franchise of the Grape?

**UR:** I had been looking for business opportunities in Atlanta that worked with my profile, something that had longevity, and I felt like [the Grape's] brand did ... I was definitely inspired by the model they had set: They make great wine affordable. There are around 120 wines on the list, with a range of glasses sold at \$7, \$9, \$11 and \$13.

**WS:** Why Atlanta?

**UR:** I've lived in Atlanta for close to 10 years. Inman Park was one of the locations [the company] was interested in, and I felt like it would be a groundbreaking opportunity to be a part of, because the neighborhood is still developing. By opening the Grape, I'm able to bring something positive to the community and support other local businesses.

**WS:** What are some of your favorite wines?

**UR:** There are so many. Caymus Special Selection is one of my favorites. I love Oriel, especially the Credo Pinot Noir [a 200-case wine made exclusively for the Grape]. I drink De Venoge. I also like Corton-Charlemagne. I've had a Merlot or two that was pretty nice ... When I go out, I try to find new things and bring them back to the table.

**WS:** What do you have in your wine rack right now?

**UR:** Oriel Credo, De Venoge Rosé, Oriel Jasper [Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir], Belle Glos Pinot Noir and a variety of *grand cru* white Burgundies.

**WS:** Any plans to launch your own wine label?

**UR:** Of course. I'm still in the process of thinking it through—I've only been in the wine business for a few months. I'll probably start with one of my favorites, a Cabernet or a Pinot Noir ... I've also thought about introducing a very nice Riesling.

**WS:** Do you celebrate with wine after a performance?

**UR:** We drink Champagne afterward, everything from Moët to Cristal. Soon, hopefully, we'll have Champagne in my name that we can celebrate with—Usher de Venoge would be nice.

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