

## Marilyn Merlot Bares All With Peek-a-boo Label

Posted: Friday, September 17, 2004

By MaryAnn Worobiec Bovio

The owners of the Marilyn Merlot label know sex sells. Their new Velvet Collection brand features the famous "Red Velvet" nude photo of Marilyn Monroe on a peek-a-boo label, a first for the wine industry. The movie star's figure is partially covered with iridescent sparkles; to see all of her, you simply peel away the overlay.

Marilyn Merlot is a curiosity in the wine world. Its clever name and labels featuring images of the iconic actress (licensed by her estate) made it an instant collectible when it debuted in 1985. Napa Valley-based Marilyn Wines later followed up with a Marilyn Cabernet and the Norma Jeane line, also with colorful labels featuring Monroe. Currently, Marilyn Merlot is one of the fastest-appreciating wines in the United States. The 1985 sells for \$3,500 a bottle, and a vertical from 1985 through 1996 fetches more than \$7,000.

The 2002 Velvet Collection is a limited-edition blend of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. Its label shows a famous photograph taken in 1949 by Tom Kelley; the image became the first *Playboy* centerfold, appearing in the magazine's debut edition in 1953.

The story goes that before Monroe was a star, Kelley paid her \$50 for a photo shoot in which she reclined nude on a bolt of bright red velvet. One of the images was used in a calendar (with her billed as "anonymous") before *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner purchased the likeness. Ten additional photographs from the 1949 photo shoot will be featured on subsequent vintages of Velvet Collection wines.

Individually numbered magnums of the 2002 Velvet Collection retail for \$225. There are also fewer than 1,000 boxed sets, which include one double-magnum, one magnum and one 750ml bottle, cost \$1,000. The wines can be purchased starting next week from [www.marilynwines.com](http://www.marilynwines.com) or by calling (866) 669-4637. They will also be available at select retailers and at the Napa Wine Co. in Oakville, Calif., [where Marilyn Merlot is made](#).

Royalties from the wine company's use of the images benefit the Lee Strasberg Theater Institute and the Anna Freud Foundation Monroe Young Family Center.

