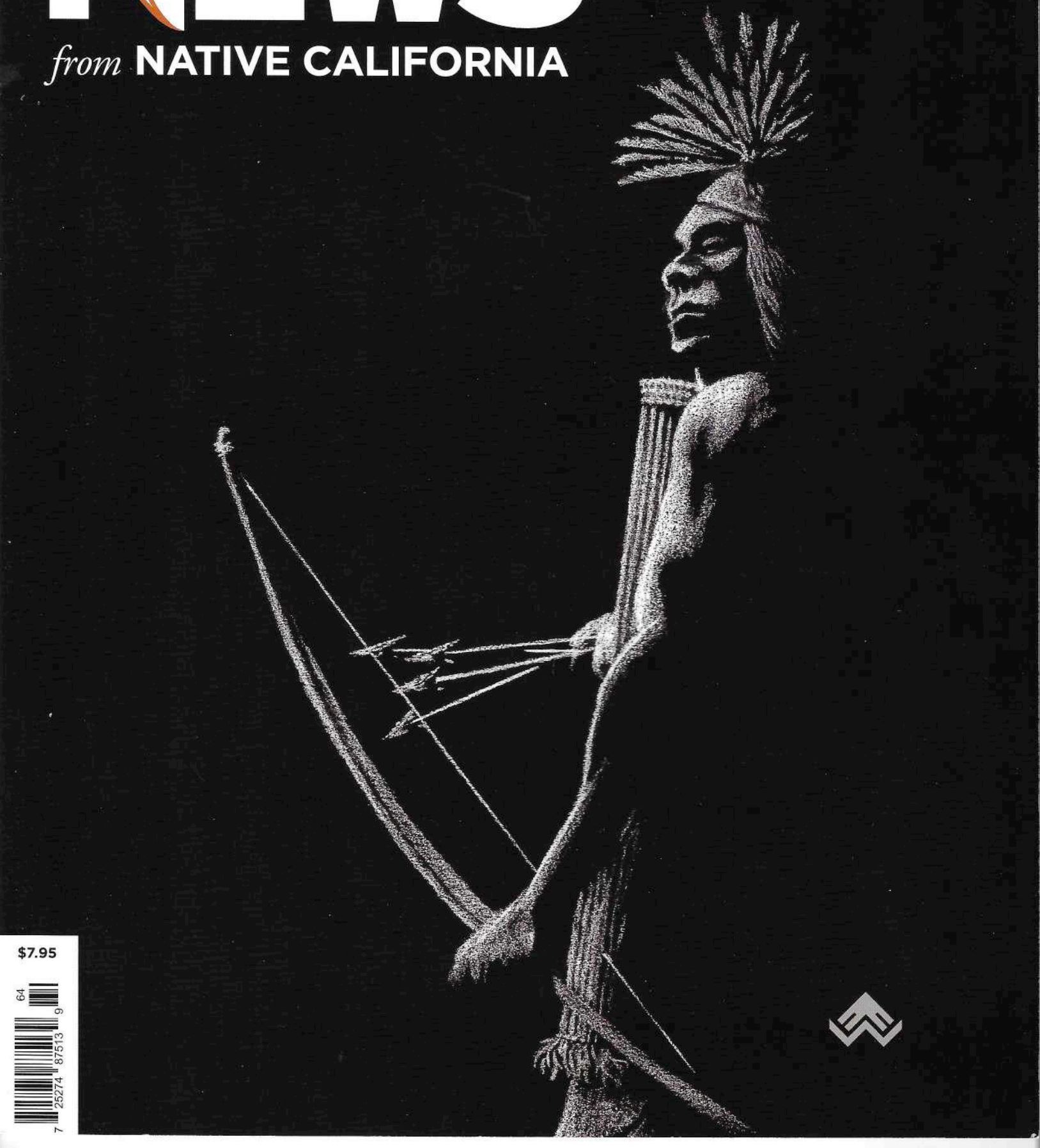
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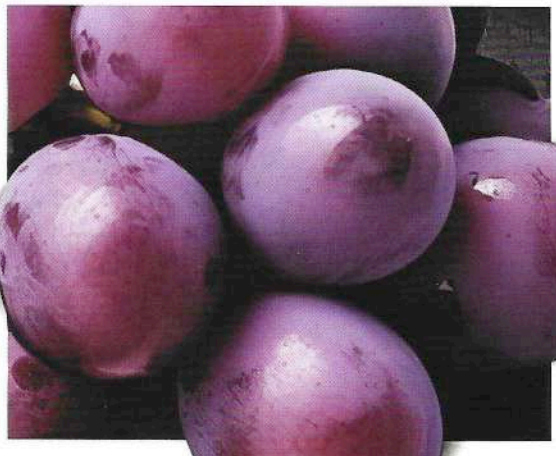
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$7.95

NATIVE HANDS WINE



RECREATES A NEW WORLD

Indigenous Viticulture

"These bottles have become cultural ambassadors for conversation. I take every opportunity to educate non-Native communities in Orange County and San Diego—up and down the coast. And eventually across the nation."

—Chris Lobo, cofounder of Native Hands Wine



by
Jeanne Ferris

FOR SOME PEOPLE, TRACING FAMILY HISTORY BEYOND THREE GENERATIONS IS DIFFICULT. DNA kits, like those from 23andMe, have become popular for completing family trees when records are missing. The results can be surprising and sometimes unexpected.

Chris Lobo, cofounder of Native Hands Wine in San Juan Capistrano, can trace his maternal and paternal roots back nine generations—all within ancestral territory. His lineage dates back nearly three hundred years, tracing a continuous presence.

He asserts that his tribe, the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians (Acjachemen Nation), first grew Alta California's grapevines in 1779 at Mission San Juan Capistrano with Father Mugártegui. The mission records mark the first days of Indigenous involvement in California viticulture. He confirms historical information that will forever change the history of California viticulture.

Left:
Wine production at Mission San Juan Capistrano relied on Acjachemen (later called Juaneño) labor. Grapes were crushed by foot and their juice collected in the mission's wine vat (shown here) before being transferred to vessels for fermentation and storage.

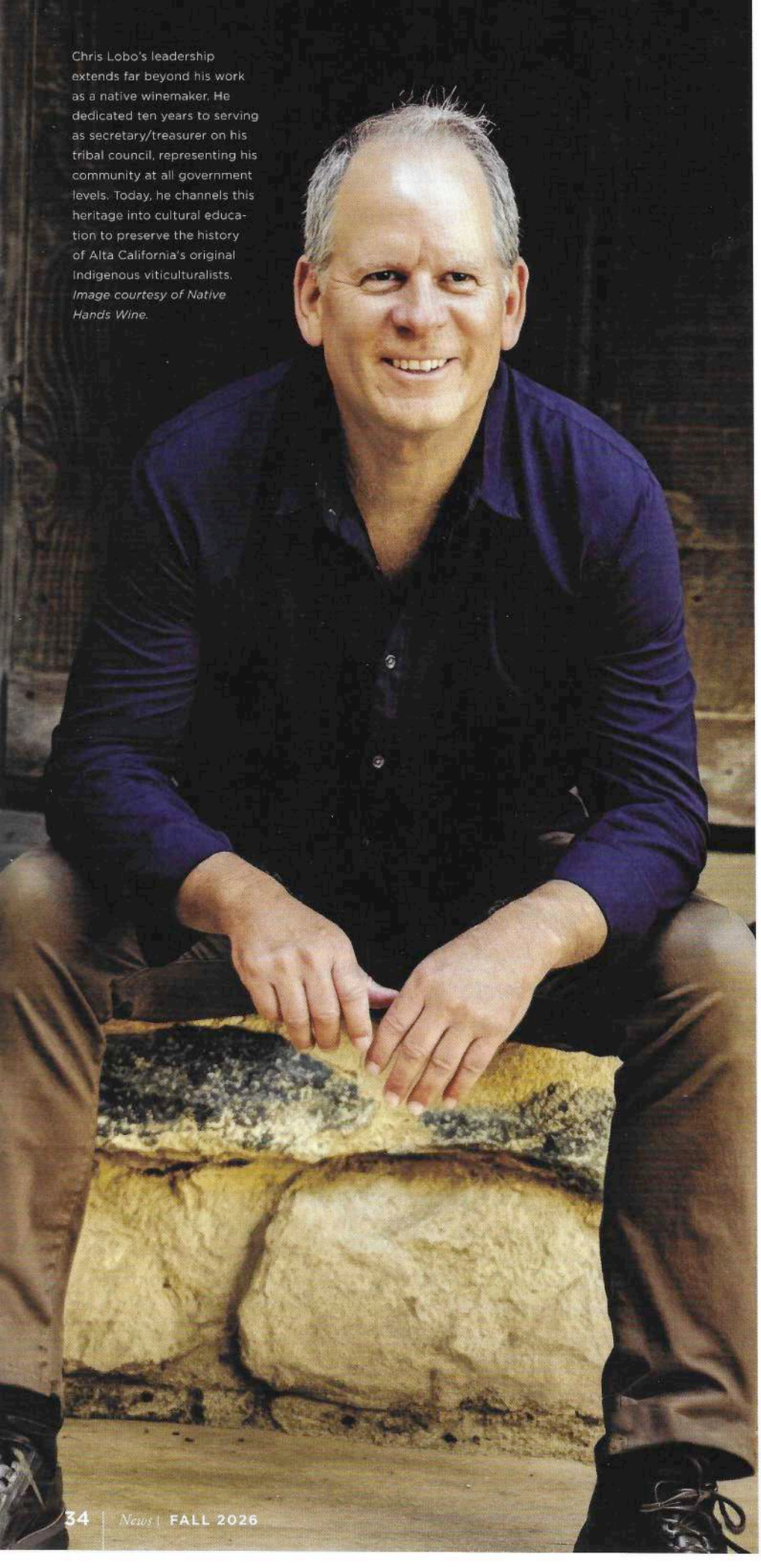
For the first time, the thirty most likely descendants of the Acjachemen people who planted Alta California's first sustained vineyard have been identified through research, independently reviewed by Orange County historian Eric Plunkett. According to Mr. Lobo, the names of these descendants, with complete historical methodology, documentary evidence, genealogical analysis, and supporting source material, will be presented in forthcoming scholarly publications.

With this established connection, Native Hands reclaims the legacy of Indigenous viticulture by directly linking present-day winemaking to its ancestral origins. This commitment to research is also reflected in the brand name, which honors Mr. Lobo's ancestors and the First Peoples of California, who lived here pre-contact.

Drawing on more than four decades in the beverage industry, including his role as a former beverage operations director at the Ritz-Carlton, Mr. Lobo continues to evolve his work. This evolution is strengthened by his expertise, knowledge, and passion. He knows what it takes to succeed in viticulture, which is the science and practice of cultivating grapes for winemaking. In recognition of these efforts, *Wine Enthusiast* magazine featured Native Hands in 2025 as an emerging Native American winery reconnecting with Indigenous heritage. Mr. Lobo's partner, Curt Schalchlin, is a Rhône-style blend winemaker in Tin City (Paso Robles). Two of their wines are from Paso Robles, Salinan and Chumash ancestral land, known for award-winning grapes.

On best water management practices, Mr. Schalchlin said, "We use as little water as possible in the vineyard. We prefer organic practices but will use sustainable methods when the site requires it." Water is not a major issue here, unlike in Sonoma or Napa. For example, Paso Robles has ancient marine-based limestone soils and large underground aquifers, which are natural water-bearing rock formations that store groundwater. These features store rainfall, creating natural irrigation and making the area self-regulating.

Continuing the discussion on vineyard care, Mr. Schalchlin said, "I also follow the biodynamic calendar—a farming approach that times vineyard tasks according to seasonal cycles—for harvesting, targeting fruit days first and secondarily flower days." All of the Native Hands grapes are nurtured in contracted vineyards in Paso Robles, Santa Barbara, and the Central Coast.



Chris Lobo's leadership extends far beyond his work as a native winemaker. He dedicated ten years to serving as secretary/treasurer on his tribal council, representing his community at all government levels. Today, he channels this heritage into cultural education to preserve the history of Alta California's original Indigenous viticulturalists. *Image courtesy of Native Hands Wine.*

HEALING THE PAST WITH EDUCATION

Mr. Lobo's dedication to Native Hands and his tribe consumes much of his time, "24/7, 365 days. At three in the morning, when I can't sleep, I'm researching and reading history," he said. "Either working or studying." For his sixtieth birthday last year, he spent the day at a "gem" of a library at the Sycuan Cultural Center, reading works of anthropologist Florence Shipek. Reflecting on his ancestry, Mr. Lobo shared: "My bloodlines in Southern California run deep, tracing back to 1707, before first contact. I visited San Raphael de Corral (in the Viejas territory) and Matamo (the site of the Sycuan Cultural Center).

"I wanted to establish a firsthand connection to the lands of my ancestors and to ensure these stories are passed down to my family. It was a deeply emotional experience for me, acknowledging both the incredible journey of my relations and the trauma they endured. Both villages were part of the 1775 revolt against the Mission San Diego."

Of special note from the Kumeyaay Community College website: Dr. Florence Shipek's research materials and archival collection are housed at the Kumeyaay Community College Library and Archives, located on the Sycuan Reservation in El Cajon, California. Her life's work of historical, cultural, and ethnobotanical research was donated to the college. As these are private tribal archives, contact Kumeyaay Community College directly to check access policies.

In his tireless pursuit of the truth, Mr. Lobo was invited by Mechelle Lawrence Adams, executive director of Mission San Juan Capistrano, to serve as a keynote speaker on July 23, 2026, for "History of Winemaking at the Mission."

Beyond his winemaking work, Mr. Lobo also served ten years on his tribal council, which led to his current role as tribal director of governmental affairs. By fostering dialogue, Mr. Lobo and Native Hands seek to heal past injustices through community outreach and the sharing of Indigenous perspectives on the history of the first winemakers, the Mission Indians: "These bottles have become cultural ambassadors for conversation. I take every opportunity to educate non-Native communities in Orange County and San Diego—up and down the coast. And eventually across the nation."

Since Native Hands launched in 2023, Mr. Lobo has poured wine at more than two hundred events—from hip-and-bougie weddings to high-profile events such as the Indigenous Fashion Collective Gala in Los Angeles to the Ritz-Carlton with Michelin-star chefs.

In conversation with *News*, several sensitive questions came up. Mr. Lobo addressed a reporting question from another outlet on his own accord:

"How is this not capitalizing on and monetizing Indigeneity?" His response: "I try to use community engagement not just for Native Hands. I also aim to reclaim the narrative that has yet to be updated in public education."

Asked how he addresses sober lifestyle advocates in Indian Country, Mr. Lobo answered with complete candor: "I have dealt with alcoholism awareness since childhood, with a complete understanding of both the Al-Anon and Alateen programs, which is why my messaging is always about the finer aspects of enjoying our wines with food or dining experience. With my extensive food and beverage background, our focus is always on the quality of the dining experience, the history behind the project, and the education that can come from our labels, but never on the wine being overindulged. I'm offering our wines to the food and wine industry at the national level, a multi-billion-dollar market. Tribal Chairman Nathan Banda and my tribe fully support Native Hands Wine in expanding the conversation about our history."

How does one move forward in forgiving the mission's historical mistreatment? Mr. Lobo says, "I/we've all been to so many baptisms, weddings, and funerals at the mission; it's such an integral part of our lives and our history. It's in our blood, and our families are in the cemetery. I *can* say there's been a collaborative shift: physical signage is being updated, and the mission's language is now heading in the direction of reflecting more of the truth. This September 2026, during the 250th [anniversary] celebration, the mission chose to honor and recognize Chairman Banda and the Acjachemen tribe. It's in conjunction with a formal gala—a thousand-dollar-a-plate fundraiser—and about five hundred people will attend. Native Hands Wine will also be featured."

The esoterically beautiful wine labels are intended as a national brand featuring a time, place, ceremony, or position of the Mission Indians. Mr. Lobo explains the origin of the designs: "Our label designer is Erin Clark Kuzma of Inked Red Art, and our logo was inspired by the Sacred Garden at Mission San Juan Capistrano. It's an imprint of the keystone at the entrance. As a tribal citizen of the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians (Acjachemen Nation), I initially felt a great deal of anxiety about whether these cultural concepts would translate to a broader audience, but Erin's work far surpassed my expectations and provided strong [images] for our brand in the wine industry. [Our] successful collaboration was instrumental in winning First Place in the Best Classic Series Category at the 2024 Pack Design Awards hosted by *Wine Business Monthly*."

CREATING A LIVING LEGACY

Native Hands is available at select fine-dining establishments and boutique eateries in San Juan Capistrano, including the Inn at Mission at San Juan Capistrano, a Marriott Autograph Series Resort. In San Diego, it's found in brick-and-mortar spots like Native Star Boutique. Owner Ruth-Ann Thorn (Payómkawichum) said, "Chief is definitely my favorite! It's a bold and smooth Cabernet and I love the fact it pays homage to the Acjachemen Tribe." Looking ahead, Native Hands plans to begin offering statewide shipping. In addition, distribution is scheduled to five other states: first Minnesota—including Chef Sean Sherman's newly relocated Indígena by Owamni—then New York, New Jersey, and Arizona. "We are very excited about being a part of Chef Sean's grand opening," Mr. Lobo said. "The freshly bottled wine is being shipped at the end of the month." Entering the international market is also a part of Native Hands' future projections. As Native Hands flourishes, spirit willing, may each glass honor the legacy of all the Mission Indians and the Lobo family in Indigenous viticulture. And to that, *looviqan* [loo-vee-kahn]. Translation: to your health.

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Discalimer: The Native Hands Wine collection is only for those twenty-one and older:

Founder Chris Lobo uses each label and wine description to connect each wine with a place, cultural role, teaching, or tradition drawn from Juaneño and other Southern California Native traditions. Cultural meanings and interpretations presented here are those of the winery.



2022 CABERNET

Chief/*Nu*

The *Nu*, or chief, held a significant role within the designated villages of the Juaneño people, contributing to the social structure and governance of the community. This position was hereditary, typically passed on to the eldest son as the next in line.

The *Nu*'s responsibilities extended beyond governance; they were often regarded as mediators, peacemakers, and protectors of the village, working to ensure the well-being and unity of the community. Through their wisdom, experience, and commitment to the tribe's values, the *Nu* played a vital role in preserving the cultural heritage and traditions of the people.



2025 CHARDONNAY

Sand Painting/*Turóhhayish*

Sand paintings served as intricate and symbolic depictions of the natural world, spiritual concepts, and human symbolism in Southern California. These paintings were foundational communication tools used during both boys' initiation and girls' ceremonies among many of the Mission Tribes in California.

The depictions had particular religious functions, embodying spiritual aspects of human personality and the broader astronomical view of the world and its relationships. Key physical elements of the paintings include rings that represent the Milky Way, the Sky, and Spirit, symbolizing the world itself.

Astronomical knowledge, as conveyed through these paintings, was a blend of beliefs rooted in the observation of phenomena and mythological explanations for their origins. This communication instrument is thought to be thousands of years old.



2022 PINOT NOIR

The Council/*Puupulum*

The Council (*Púupulum*) was composed of individuals with diverse expertise, including star readers, astrologists, shamans, and spiritual leaders. The *Púupulum* served as the primary advisers to the chief, wielding considerable influence over tribal affairs.

Their wisdom and guidance were sought in matters ranging from governance and decision-making to spiritual teachings and community welfare. The *Púupulum* ensured the cohesion, stability, and well-being of the tribe, fostering a deep sense of community and reverence for tradition among all the Mission Tribes of California.

Native Hands Wine labels pair each wine with original art drawn from Juaneño culture, land, plants, the sky, and traditional forms. Each label gives the wine its own look while tying the collection together.



2023 GSM

Initiation/*Máani*

During the young male initiation ceremony, the preparation and administration of the jimsonweed elixir were typically overseen by tribal shamans or spiritual leaders known as *Pahas*, who possessed knowledge of the plant's medicinal and visionary powers.

The initiation process involved guidance from elders and special members of the council *(Púupulum)*, who played critical roles in mentoring and overseeing the initiates. The ingestion of the elixir induced altered states of consciousness, believed to facilitate spiritual experiences and insights for the initiate. The object or animal that the initiate encountered after drinking the elixir became his guardian spirit.

This ceremony was performed every few years, with only select elite males chosen to participate. It dates back thousands of years and was practiced by nearly every tribe in Southern California, including all Mission Tribes.

2023 GRENACHE BLANC

Summer Solstice/*Táwsunla*

The solstice has held significant cultural and spiritual importance for every tribe in California and across the country for thousands of years. The Mission Tribes, among others, have historically observed and practiced ceremonies and rituals during both solstices, often at specific mountains or geographical locations that hold sacred or astrological significance. Additionally, the positions of the moon phases and the Pleiades star cluster, also known as the Seven Sisters, are often incorporated into these solstice observations. The Pleiades, a prominent star cluster in the night sky, holds cultural significance in many Indigenous cultures worldwide, frequently associated with agricultural cycles, navigation, and spiritual beliefs.

2023 GRENACHE ROSÉ

Village of Roses/*Úshmay*

The village known as Úshmay, translated and recognized by anthropologists as the "village of wild roses," has historical ties to Chief Chululeck dating back to the early 1700s. This connection is documented in mission sacramental records and was noted by Father Geronimo Boscana in 1822, identifying Ushmay as the fifteenth village.

Geographically, Úshmay is defined by a creek and valley at the boundaries of the Juaneño and Luiseño territories. This area later became known as Las Flores and is located a few miles south of the coastal area known as San Onofre, California. Despite these transformations, the coastal region retains its historical and cultural significance, serving as a reminder of the ancestral lands of the Juaneño and Luiseño tribes, as well as the diverse histories that have unfolded in this area over time, particularly in the village of the wild roses.