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Execs launch new wine producer

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BY [Chris Rauber](#)

Two former Foster's Wine Estates Americas executives said Thursday they're starting [Axiom Wine Co.](#), a Sonoma-based super-premium and luxury wine producer.

Dan Leese and Doug Walker said they launched the company by acquiring the Red Truck and White Truck Wine brands, formerly owned by Sonoma's [Cline Cellars](#). The sale included the brand name, inventory and "key brand icons," such as labels and graphics, they said in a Dec. 1 statement.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

The Red Truck brand, which includes red Rhone and Bordeaux varietals, was launched in 2002, according to Axiom spokeswoman Mora Cronin; White Truck, featuring sauvignon blanc, pinot grigio, chardonnay and viognier varieties, followed two years later. Between them, the brands account for just under 200,000 cases per year, Cronin told the Business Times.

Red Truck was named one of Wine Business Monthly's "Hottest Small Brands" of 2004.

Axiom is owned and managed by the two, in partnership with a small group of investors, including Fred and Nancy Cline of Cline Cellars. The Clines continue to own the Cline Cellars wine brand, Oakley Wines and Jacuzzi Family Wines, according to the companies.

"We see an opportunity to take a non-traditional approach to an 8,000-year-old industry," Leese said, focusing on high-end brands.

Leese, the new company's president, was formerly Australia-based Foster's managing director for North America (then known as [Beringer Blass Wine Estates](#)), while Walker, now Axiom's chief operating officer, was Foster's North American senior vice president for strategy and business development.

Leese left Foster's in July, Walker in November, their spokeswoman said.

Robert Nicholson of Healdsburg's International Wine Associates served as a strategic advisor to Cline Cellars in the transaction.

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