



JIMMY MANCBACH  
MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION

## Man on a Mission

Many thought Jimmy Mancbach was an arrogant bastard.

But he had every right to be. His friends, of which there are legions, will attest to this arrogance of his, and then laugh about it and say, “That was Jimmy.” When you know what he knew about fine wine and fine food and fine people and had the fire in him to go along with those qualities, no wonder he turned out to be exactly that way.

The world always finds the perfect place for people like Jimmy. And if it didn’t, he would have found the place himself. As he did. Such is the destiny of people like Jimmy Mancbach. They are outsize personalities; forces of nature; people larger than life with appetites to match. It is always just a matter of time before they come to rest where they are destined to be. For him it was the fine wine and food arena.

But we’re getting way ahead of ourselves. Jimmy’s story starts about fifty years ago, give or take. Two journeys were beginning. One was in the California wine country; the other in New Jersey. A handful of passionate and visionary pioneers, aspiring to recreate the quality wines of their European ancestors, set out in search of fertile soils and an accommodating climate. As we know, their quest would lead them to Northern California where they would establish wine growing regions that would one day rival the legendary areas of France, Italy and Spain.

While the California Wine Country was developing, so was a young boy who was enjoying his childhood in Metuchen, New Jersey. Neither of them could have imagined the collision course they were on. Highly charged individuals never have it easy. It’s not in their nature. Jimmy was no exception. His life education was not going to take a clear path.

Always devoted to the appreciation of great food and wine, Jimmy walked into a New Jersey wine store that stocked only California vintages. He looked around, and then blithely asked the owner where “the good stuff” was. Arrogant? Maybe. But, it was the mid-70s. The wine merchant, a very knowledgeable man, guided Jimmy over to his extensive stock of California wines and said, “This is the ‘good stuff’.” Jimmy stared at the unfamiliar bottles, expecting to see only French wines. Something happened that day. It was a rude and happy awakening and would order the rest of Jimmy Mancbach’s life.

It ignited exhilaration. Jimmy would travel endlessly to California and around the globe, learning the art of fine wine making. He scoured the land for the most unique wines being produced. Along the way he developed the uncanny ability to recognize a vintner with true passion, desire and skill and then would form relationships with these craftsmen and help nurture their success. He shared their vision and enthusiasm to create the highest quality wines and believed in hard work by ethical, generous individuals.



Because Jimmy valued integrating wine and relationships rather than point scores, many of California's greatest wineries came to him seeking his advice and guidance. He was a major source of information and direction to many top winemakers, vineyard managers and sommeliers. It is no surprise that in his last days many of the greatest wine and food legends flew to Florida to say good-bye to their close friend.

Jimmy became a fine wine connoisseur with a penchant for discovering hard-to-find and sometimes overlooked wines that demanded recognition. As his friend Michael Bittel said of him, "Jimmy was one of the most knowledgeable and passionate believers in California wine that I ever met. He brought to South Florida many of the most exotic and sought after of California's small family owned wineries." He was steadfast in his beliefs and actions to only bring in those wineries in which he personally believed. If Jimmy tasted and liked the wines and if he believed the winemakers were as passionate as he was, he would find a way to bring those wines the recognition they deserved.

In 1989 he joined Southern Wines and Spirits (*the largest distributor of wine and liquor in the United States*) where he was provided the tools and support to create what came to be known as Southern's Gems Collection. Jimmy Mancbach's expertise led Southern to endow him with broad autonomy to purchase wines according to his own distinguished palate. Under his direction, this became one of the most significant fine wine portfolios in the United States and is now known as "Jimmy's Gems."

As America embraced heightened dining experiences and culinary stars were born, Jimmy's truest passion came to be; the pairing of extraordinary wine with remarkable food. He formed relationships with many of these talented chefs, introduced them to boutique wineries that he cultivated and that they might never have discovered. Many a match between culinary stars and vintners were fostered by Jimmy.

He also took immense pride in his ability to work with restaurateurs and sommeliers to help improve their wine programs. He told them stories of the wines he sold and explained the winemaker's visions – all the while avoiding the pretense and snobbery often associated with wine. He once said "I have little to do with the political bullshit in this business or with egomaniacs – people who think they know everything about wine".

For nearly thirty years, Jimmy Mancbach crusaded to raise the bar on the quality and understanding of fine wine and great food. He grew to be one of the most knowledgeable and enthusiastic believers in the California wine world. During his career he saw his state of Florida become number three in the U.S. in wine sales. He was involved in the early years of the Miami Wine and Food Festival, FIU Food and Wine Festival, he was the auctioneer and founder of the Best of the Best at the South Beach Food and Wine Festival, and worked with the Napa Valley Wine Festival since the early days. He saw all these festivals as vehicles to enhance the community and spread the word about fine wine. He challenged and inspired the younger generation to follow their dreams, work ethically and believe in living life to the fullest as he did.

Because he was particularly passionate about wine education, Jimmy expressed his most fervent wish which was to create a scholarship for up-and-coming fine wine professionals. He wanted to provide the rare opportunity for those young wine enthusiasts to work with some of the greatest winemakers with whom he had developed strong relationships through the years. Before he passed away, he set all the wheels in motion and reached out to his friends, thus creating the Jimmy Mancbach Memorial Scholarship Foundation.

Jimmy Mancbach lived and breathed fine wine and food. He died at the age of fifty-six in January 2007 at his home in Florida. He is interred in Santa Barbara, California near the homes of his beloved parents and sister, Jane Fletcher.

His legacy and passion will live on in the Jimmy Mancbach Memorial Scholarship Fund.