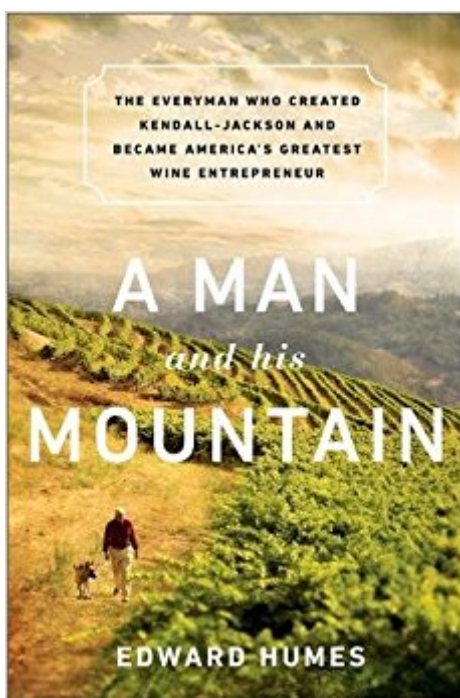


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A Man And His Mountain: The Everyman Who Created Kendall-Jackson And Became America's Greatest Wine Entrepreneur



Synopsis

The story of self-made billionaire Jess Jackson, who put Chardonnay on America's tables as he built the Kendall-Jackson wine empire from a few mountainous acres of grapes, and raced the Horse of the Year three years in a row, is a remarkable tale of romance, risk, and reinvention—perhaps the greatest second act in the history of American business. Jess Stonestreet Jackson was one of a small band of pioneering entrepreneurs who put California's Wine Country on the map. His life story is a compelling slice of history, daring, innovation, feuds, intrigue, talent, mystique, and luck. Admirers and detractors alike have called him the Steve Jobs of wine—a brilliant, infuriating, contrarian gambler who seemed to win more than his share by anticipating consumers' desires with uncanny skill. Time after time his decisions would be ignored and derided, then envied and imitated as competitors struggled to catch up. He founded Kendall-Jackson with a single, tiny vineyard and a belief that there could be more to California Wine Country than jugs of bottom-shelf screw-top. Today, Kendall-Jackson and its 14,000 acres of coastal and mountain vineyards produce a host of award-winning wines, including the most popular Chardonnay in the world, which was born out of a catastrophe that nearly broke Jackson. The empire Jackson built endures and thrives as a family-run leader of the American wine industry. Jess Jackson entered the horseracing game just as dramatically. He brought con men to justice, exposed industry-wide corruption in court and Congress, then exacted the best revenge of all: race after race, he defied conventional wisdom with one high-stakes winner after another, capped by the epic season of Rachel Alexandra, the first filly to win the Preakness in nearly a century, cementing Jackson's reputation as America's king of wine and horses.

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Customer Reviews

Whatever Jess Jackson touched seemed to turn to profit, whether lawsuits, grapes, or horses. Compelled to work from childhood on, he proved resourceful and able, overcoming Depression-era poverty and an abusive father before emerging as a successful real-estate attorney. A chance encounter on an airplane offered the lawyer an opportunity to buy some northern California land and thus fulfill a longstanding ambition to become a farmer. Throwing himself into wine-making, he created the now-renowned Kendall-Jackson brand. Passionate and even ruthless, Jackson sought out the best talents and finest vineyards in California's emerging wine business and made chardonnay a household word in America. Then he turned to owning winning racehorses. Triumph came not without personal costs—a shattered marriage and agonizing brushes with business failure. Humes makes his charismatic subject's every venture vividly and intensely dramatic. This book will attract readers of diverse interests, from the law to wine-making to business to horse-racing. --Mark Knoblauch

"Humes makes his charismatic subject's every venture vividly and intensely dramatic. This book will attract readers of diverse interests, from the law to wine-making to business to horse-racing." #151; Booklist#147;A well-rounded, absorbing narrative of entrepreneurship, wine and the extraordinary man who made it all happen. #151; Kirkus Review, starred#147;Thoroughly engaging#133; this biography is as well-suited for those interested in people as those interested in wine. #151; Minneapolis Star Tribune#147;A classic American story#151;a man of the people becomes one of the greatest visionaries and qualitative titans the wine world has ever witnessed. Very highly recommended. #151;Robert M. Parker, Jr., The Wine Advocate#147;With dexterity and style, Edward Humes captures Jess Jackson, making his larger-than-life personality come alive and his rollercoaster story jump off the pages. A Man and His Mountain shows the inspiration, boundless energy, and tenacity that Jess Jackson embodied, but also the real man who was in ways like the rest of us, fallible and human. I expected a book about a winery, but what I got was an exciting, motivating, and epic journey of a man with laughs, tears, and surprises. #151;Jennifer Simonetti-Bryan, master of wine, author of The One Minute Wine Master

Very well written, and for this genre it is reasonably honest and unblinking about its subject. Given that Jess Jackson was obviously a great bay area pioneer in wine, law & real estate, and by most accounts a man with a tough exterior, an authorized biography with the necessary access to the family regarding a recently deceased family member could easily slip into a worshipful whitewash. Thankfully this book does not do that. Being in the wine industry I sure wish someone would write a book with the kind of thoroughness that Robert Caro does on Lyndon Johnson et al, because all these books seem a little light on substance to me. That being said, I thought it was way more interesting than the recent "Barefoot Way" book was, but I think we probably did not get to see enough of Jackson's real genius, namely the art (and science) of his deals. I loved that part about how he nailed the Cambria Vineyard. It's worth the 3 hour or so read for sure, and I hopefully await the definitive history of the California Wine Industry with Jess Jackson and others, in the vein of Caro's the "Power Broker", now THAT was a real biography.

Jess Jackson a lawyer at the twilight of his career purchases a small pear & walnut orchid just next to California's wine valley. He decides to grow grapes as a potential retirement job when one cold evening he is confronted with a broken watering system resulting in a cold night time scuba dive to unclog a filter and save his crop. He reflects on this difficulty and ponders: "why the trouble for other wineries and not his own". This moment is the beginning of a transformation of the American wine industry from cheap swill to world class vintages. I like the pace of this book. It reads very well while taking you into the strong character of a man with vision and drive. Jess Jackson a man in his middle 50's develops a unique blended Chardonnay that takes the country by storm in the early 80's. A big risk and a huge success which drove him into a steep growth curve by buying up and capturing the California Wine Industry before anyone else. Jess Jackson turns his life & family upside down on his 54 birthday by leaving his wife because of her reluctance to risk everything on his dream. He goes head first - changing the course of the American wine industry. Jackson a smart lawyer & gambler had total confidence in his vision by betting everything to deliver the Kendal-Jackson wine brand. Jess the horse track gambler visits the Kentucky Oaks (the Kentucky Derby for the 3 year old fillies) held yearly at Churchill Downs (1 day prior to the Derby), and is impressed by the massive led of a thoroughbred named: Rachel Alexandra. He spends millions to buy her, and then races her weeks later in the Preakness & wins! Again, a newcomer taking a big risk by racing a Filly among colts - a filly hasn't won since Seabiscuit took it in 1938. The book is short (300 plus pages) and to the point. I would of liked a little more detail about the in's/outs of grape growing and winery operation, but that does not diminish this fabulous book. I recommend it,

and believe those interested in business, fresh starts, risk taking, and pure guts should read this book. Edward Humes a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist shows his writing talent by describing the complex man Jess Jackson's climb to the top and his contribution to "Made in America".

There is an interesting story here; Edward Humes just doesn't seem to be up to the task of telling it. His biography of Jess Jackson crosses far over the line into hagiography, as Jackson's mastery of persuasion and marketing apparently rendered Humes unable to tell a balanced story of this remarkable life. (In short: in every good trait, Jackson is the best; in every dispute, win or lose, Jackson is right; in every endeavor, Jackson did the right thing and came out on top.) The book suffers from that lack of balance as it feels much more like a family favor than an honest portrait of what was surely a complex man. But beyond that, Humes seemed to struggle to turn this epic life story into a full-length book, returning to the same stories over and over as though he was terrified that the reader was only half paying attention and might not recall some pertinent information from 20 pages earlier. This trait is exacerbated by the lack of structure to the book that leaves the reader pointlessly moving back and forward through time for much of the first half of the book. It's as though Kendall-Jackson's meteoric rise didn't give the author enough to say so he drags out the story as best he can. It's an interesting tale and a quick read, but not a particularly good one.

Great story about how a non-wine person became one of the greatest wine empire owners of all time. Jess Jackson and his family created Kendall-Jackson and many boutique wineries that produce some of the best wines in the world at all price breaks. It covers his positives and negatives (yes there are plenty). In doing so he changed the status quo in the wine industry and also did the same exposing questionable business practices in thoroughbred racing also. A fascinating driven person who also was quite gruff .

Fascinating book, so far a love/not sure/and a bit of jealousy on how motivated he was.maybe a bit too driven,not much consideration for others feelings, needs. Great read, author's writing is excellent in his delivery of the story.

I am local, in Sonoma County, so many of the names and places were familiar to me, so it was interesting from that perspective. And, the story was good. Essentially, blind ambition and a good dose of luck result in a billionaire. JM

More than merely about a single man, this book is about the indomitable spirit that characterizes creativity in any industry in any generation. Reading this book sometimes makes you wince, sometimes makes you smile, but never makes you yawn. I learned some new things about the wine industry; and I came to the book knowing a lot. I learned something about horse racing, even though I have owned a race horse. But I learned even more about success and spirit.

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