

# SHAKERS

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## Sportscaster, author and winemaker *Jim Nantz* follows his heart.

By Mary Schley | Photo by Christine Bush

JIM NANTZ knows a thing or two about callings.

His calling to become a sportscaster for CBS—not ABC or NBC—led to the career he launched decades ago and continues to excel in as the voice of the NFL, PGA Tour, and college basketball. He was the first to call the Super Bowl, the Masters and the NCAA Men's Final Four all in the same year—a feat he has accomplished four times.

Nantz had a calling to move to Pebble Beach, too, and in 2012, he did.

He answered another calling, to make wine, when he launched a label with wine partner Peter Deutsch following a chance encounter at a restaurant in Connecticut, and a lot of study and hard work. Their collaboration, fittingly, is named *The Calling*, and their 2015 Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch Chardonnay was named in *Wine Spectator's* Top 100 Wines in the World for 2017, an accomplishment rarely afforded a wine brand as young as theirs. The first vintage of *The Calling* was produced in 2012.

Nantz can peer deep back into his own history to find the roots of both those passions. He was born in Charlotte, N.C., in 1959, but his parents moved around a lot, taking Nantz and his sister to New Orleans, and then to Moraga, east of the San Francisco Bay. “That’s when I first experienced Pebble Beach,” he recalled. “My folks were really committed to showing their two children all the cultural experiences they could.”

From golf courses in Del Monte Forest and art galleries in downtown Carmel, to wineries in Napa, the 10-year-old Nantz took it all in, his fascination building all the while. The family relocated back East, and Nantz graduated from high school in New Jersey before heading to college in Houston.



“I joke a little that I have a reputation for claiming hometowns,” he said.

By then, his goal of becoming a sportscaster was already well-entrenched. “I had this dream that never waned,” he said. “I was absolutely driven since I was 11 years old to be doing what I’m doing today.”

He remembers being awestruck by those who presented ABC’s “Wide World of Sports,” (“the thrill of victory...and the agony of defeat”), and the Olympics. “I was mesmerized by the art of storytelling,” he said. “The broadcasters of my youth were tour guides who talked about countries and cultures and fascinating places to visit.”

By the time Nantz was at the University of Houston, he “was already making all kinds of proclamations that I was one day going to work for CBS,” he said. “For me, it was such a burning passion that I knew it was going to happen.”

Nantz acknowledged he might have gone to another network, but he set his sights on CBS because it’s home to the Masters golf tournament in Augusta, Georgia.

“That was the perfect storytelling venue, with all its beauty and tradition,” he said. “It has a presence about it that exudes really good things. I could see myself one day being there.”

He just had to figure out how. While at the Houston Open golf tournament with some college buddies, Nantz approached a security guard outside a network TV trailer and said he wanted to meet Don Ohlmeyer, who was “Mr. Everything at NBC Sports”—and whose name he had memorized, but whom he had never seen. When the producer walked out, Nantz said he wanted a job.

The executive offered him a non-paying gig driving announcers to their broadcast locations. He did it, and was sure to thank Ohlmeyer every day. A job at the Byron Nelson tournament in Dallas followed, this one paying \$20 a day, and Nantz capitalized on it by reporting for two radio stations in Houston for free. One of them, a CBS affiliate, asked him to stay on.

“I worked 40 hours a week for free for months,” he said, getting to know people, obtaining media credentials, interviewing athletes and editing.

“That set off a chain reaction,” he said. He was interning for radio and got picked up as a part-time public-address announcer for the Houston Astros. For a while, he was the No. 1 stringer (a freelance reporter in the field) in the country for CBS Radio Sports, and he was also narrating films for NASA, all while attending classes so he could graduate on time.

“I was really getting experience on the air that was well beyond what they were teaching me in school,” he said. After obtaining his degree in radio and television in 1981, Nantz moved to Salt Lake City to anchor and call games for the Utah Jazz.

“And two years after that, I got hired by CBS,” he said. It was 1985, and he was 26.

Since then, he has earned three Emmy Awards, five National Sportscaster of the Year awards, the Pro Football Hall of Fame Pete Rozelle Radio-Television Award, and the Curt Gowdy Media Award from the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. Nantz serves as the lead play-by-play announcer for the NFL on CBS, including the Super Bowl and Thursday Night

Football games, and for college basketball, including the NCAA Men’s Final Four. He’s the lead anchor of the network’s golf coverage, announcing the PGA Tour, Masters and the PGA Championship. In 2007, he became the first commentator in history to broadcast the Super Bowl, NCAA Men’s Final Four and the Masters all in the same year—a feat he repeated in 2010, 2013 and 2016. Anticipation of that achievement was the impetus for Nantz’ writing a book about his dad, Jim Nantz Jr., who suffered from Alzheimer’s for 13 years. *Always By My Side*, co-authored with friend Eli Spielman, reached No. 3 on the *New York Times* bestsellers list in 2008. Former President George H.W. Bush, a friend and father figure, wrote the foreword.

“It was the most important thing I ever did—of all the things I’ve been blessed to do, whether the Super Bowl or the Masters or the Olympics, it was that,” he said. “It was a labor of love.”



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The idea came partly through his own wish to set that broadcasting record in 2007 with his father alongside him—a dream that was thwarted by illness. “I was about to embark on this 63-day journey,” he recalled, and his agent suggested he consider writing about the experience in terms of finding his father in the people he encountered and met along the way, whether they be then-Indianapolis Colts coach Tony Dungy or pro golf luminary Arnold Palmer (who was also a co-owner of the Pebble Beach Co. and passed away in 2016, and at whose memorial service Nantz delivered a eulogy).

“Now I suddenly had the fire to do it,” he said.

The process gave Nantz the opportunity to relive cherished moments with his father. “It was really cathartic for me,” he said.

What he hadn’t expected was how much it would resonate with so many. “I’d come out of a golf announce tower or off a football field, and there would be people standing there with the book, and they all had their stories,” he said.

The experience also led him and his wife, Courtney, to establish the Nantz National Alzheimer Center at Houston Methodist Hospital. The NNAC helps fund innovative diagnostic discoveries for early and accurate detection of Alzheimer’s disease and other dementing illnesses, in hopes of one day finding a cure, and focuses on the possible connection between concussions and other traumatic brain injuries in athletes. “It’s all because of that book,” he said. “That’s my proudest accomplishment.”

The book is also what brought him and his wine partner, Peter Deutsch, together. Nantz had decided he wanted to get into the wine business—not as a celebrity with his name on the label, but as a bona fide producer of a top product—and had been traveling, studying, and talking to experts in the field (including Carmel Valley’s Bill Parsons of Parsonage winery) for six years when he met Deutsch in 2009. “I was in Greenwich, Conn., having dinner with my lawyer,” said Nantz. “Over to the table comes a guy who says, ‘I’m sorry to interrupt. I’m

Peter Deutsch. I just read your book.’ He said he was in the wine business with his father, ‘and he’s my best friend.’”

Deutsch and his family had been importing, distributing and marketing wine for generations, but never worked on the production side. The two reconnected later to discuss Nantz’ ideas.

“I explained how I’ve seen a lot of people get in the ‘celebrity wine business,’ and that it’s not a very successful venture, in most cases,” he said. Nantz told Deutsch he’d put his name on the label if he thought it would help, but he had a feeling it wouldn’t.

“People are not going to believe you’re involved in the process,” he explained.

Deutsch shared that if Nantz had, in fact, wanted his name on the label, the business partnership never would have happened. But, as it was, they formed the Deutsch Nantz Alliance, DNA for short, and got to work.

They were both busy men with a lot going on in their lives already. “The only reason both of us were interested was if we had a chance to be great—to create the next great premium American wine brand.”

They visited vineyards in California and ended up collaborating with highly regarded Dutton Ranch, eventually becoming the vineyard’s largest grape client. “Joe and Steve [Dutton, whose father started the vineyard in 1968] were the ones we came in and made a pitch to,” Nantz recalled. “We were anxious to create a relationship with them. They were our first-round draft choice.”

The inaugural wine from The Calling was released in 2012, and the winery now produces Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley, and Cabernet Sauvignon from the Alexander Valley.

“We wanted to do something that would make our dads proud,” he added. “And I wanted to show I had enough dexterity outside the broadcast world to create something iconic.”

*“I had this dream that never waned, I was absolutely driven since I was 11 years old to be doing what I’m doing today.”*





Photo credit: Gary Land

The Calling wines have achieved scores of 90 and above multiple times, and *Wine Spectator* put the 2015 Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch Chardonnay at No. 67 in its Top 100 Wines in the World in 2017. James Laube described the 91-point wine as “Ultra-rich and extracted, offering a firm core of pear, apple, melon and spice flavors. A truly impressive effort, with depth and dimension.” He recommended enjoying it now through 2022.

“We’re really proud to make that list,” Nantz said. And the wine sold like wildfire.

Nantz savors the moments when he sees one of their wines on a restaurant’s list alongside the heavy hitters of the world, and when he hears stories from people who enjoy drinking it. On a recent flight home after calling a game between the Minnesota Vikings and the Carolina Panthers, the man next to Nantz mentioned he and his wife had recently sampled six different Chardonnays and had picked The Calling as their favorite.

““She went back to the store, and she brought back two cases of The Calling,” he said the man told him. “And now I’m sitting next to you.””

Nantz said he also enjoys being involved in the distribution of The Calling, which can be found in all 50 states.

“To go into any city in America and know there’s going to be anywhere from a couple of restaurants to maybe 100 that are carrying The Calling, and to support those who are supporting us,” is very rewarding, he said, especially in tricky states like Pennsylvania, where the liquor laws and import rules are daunting.

He is, of course, very grateful for the support The Calling wines enjoy here at home on the Monterey Peninsula.

“People come here as a bucket list item, and they get an experience here that they carry home with them that is very special,” he said. “And if they sample The Calling, and there’s something memorable about the name and they had it in Pebble Beach or Carmel, and then they see it at home and associate us with that experience, we’ve made an impression in some tiny way.”

*Shakers* spoke with Nantz to explore the worlds of broadcasting and winemaking further:

***What would you tell someone who wants to get into broadcasting?***

You have to be enterprising; you have to be creative. Nobody cares about your schoolwork in our world. Can you write? Can you execute? Can you perform?

***Where did your desire to enter the wine business come from?***

It was really born out of the lifestyle that I was exposed to at an early age in the business, going out to nice dinners and important events. I saw a lot of golfers and celebrities who have their names on the labels and wondered, how much are they really involved? What is their passion? Their purpose?

***How involved are you in the winemaking process?***

They send shiners [bottles with no labels] here to the house or wherever I am on the road. They take stuff out of the barrel and FedEx it to me, because it has to happen pretty quickly. We have three winemakers: Wayne Donaldson, who handles Cabernet and red blend; Dan Goldfield—because we wanted to go with the best—and James MacPhail, a Pinot specialist.”

***What are your goals for the brand?***

We got into this venture to create the next iconic, premium wine brand. We want it to be multigenerational. We want to be able to hand it off to my kids and Peter’s kids. I want my kids to hopefully one day have the same pride in it as their father does and as Mr. Deutsch does, and his kids, as well. We feel like we’ve got the ball rolling on a project that came together through this moment of serendipity.

***Which wine do you feel best embodies The Calling?***

The red blend we make called “Our Tribute.” It’s our platinum level, a very limited production of wines. We wanted to do something that reflected our tribute to our fathers. We don’t want to make

a ton of it. It gets snapped up in a hurry. It’s primarily Cabernet and then a little Malbec, Merlot and Petit Verdot. It changes every year.

***What’s your favorite part of being in the wine business, as opposed to sportscasting?***

The fact it’s successful, and creating something good — really good. One of the biggest thrills is to walk into a restaurant, open up the wine list and see The Calling side by side with significant brands. We built every step along the road to get there. It’s not easy to get in 10 restaurants, much less thousands.”

***Why did you move to Pebble Beach?***

The Pebble Beach calling for me was a big one for a long time, and I can really relate it back to being marched around here as a 10-year-old. I held onto the dream for a long time and in the process looked at so many homes in Carmel and Pebble Beach, and always had the tug. I don’t have any desire to ever live anywhere else. It’s paradise.

***Katy’s Place restaurant in Carmel has an omelet on the menu that’s named after you. How did that come about?***

Pre-residency here, I would go to Katy’s every single morning and have breakfast when I was in town. I love the place. Carmel is maybe the best breakfast town in the world, and I’m a breakfast guy. I went through a stretch where I was trying to eat a little healthier, so I created this egg white omelet with Monterey Jack cheese and some healthy things inside of it. I like finely diced jalapeño peppers, but they made those optional, because some people don’t like spicy. I didn’t want potatoes and wanted fruit. They put it up on the board, and it’s been there for years. I have no financial stake in it. As long as it makes them happy, it makes me happy, because they deserve it. They claim it’s their best-selling omelet.

***More at [thecallingwine.com](http://thecallingwine.com)***

