

Brion Wise in conversation: A new Pritchard Hill site marks a new chapter for BRION

With the acquisition of more than 51ha in Napa Valley's prestigious Pritchard Hill – and the development of a new 50-room hotel – proprietor Brion Wise is ushering in a new phase for the BRION portfolio.



The prized vineyards of the BRION estate. Credit: Jak Wonderly

BRION proprietor Brion Wise seems fond of avoiding well-trodden paths.

Wise's foray into the world of fine wine production began in the early 1990s. Seeking to return to his rural roots, he purchased a former cattle farm in what would become one of Sonoma County's top areas: Moon Mountain District. Wise wanted to pick a vineyard site that could eventually produce wines to rival those he'd come to admire during his worldwide travels as a chemical engineer.

His choice was prescient – it preceded the creation of the Moon Mountain District AVA by nearly two decades. Less helpfully, it also predated any meaningful local infrastructure: a well had to be dug for access to water, and the early operation had to be run via generators.



Brion Wise, proprietor of BRION. Credit: Jak Wonderly

Wise has come a long way since, enlisting the help of leading winemakers Julien Fayard, Mark Herold and Massimo Monticelli. Since founding BRION in 2002, Wise has invested in several drinks brands, including B. Wise Vineyards, Amapola Creek Winery, Wise Caldwell Distillers and the soon-to-be-relaunched Mark Herold Wines, as well the annual Napa Valley music, food and wine festival Bottle Rock.

More recently, Wise has acquired vineyards on Pritchard Hill (regarded as one of Napa Valley's most prestigious sites) and announced plans for a Napa Valley hotel. Decanter caught up with Wise to discuss his new projects.

You have vineyard holdings and winery estates across Napa Valley and Sonoma. How would you describe them to someone new to your wines? What do they contribute to your portfolio's identity?

Brion Wise (BW): My vineyards are in locations that I believe will make great wine, simple as that. The farmer in me is constantly keeping an eye out for rare sites with world-class potential that I believe will be expressive of their singular terroir. If my portfolio has an identity, it is the site specificity in every bottle.



. Credit: Jak Wonderly

How has living among the vines and winery caves in Moon Mountain shaped your philosophy as a vintner?

BW: The property is very close to the town of Sonoma, yet being perched so high also feels wonderfully remote. Living among my vines has made me appreciate new things about the wines they produce – most notably perhaps, how well they complement food. Preparing our meals overlooking our vineyard, it's impossible for my wife Ronda and I to resist opening the wines that were grown in those very soils.

At BRION, you've cultivated an approach of pairing specific winemakers with singular vineyard sites, while also collaborating with a Master Cooper for your barrels. How do you decide who to match to each site, and how do you think this approach sets BRION apart?

BW: I believe each winemaker has a style that is entirely their own. I try to match that style with what I believe will best complement the vineyard, to bring out the optimal character and flavours from each site. In my opinion, the style should fit the vineyard, not the other way around.

These vineyards are so unique that I also believe they deserve to be matched with winemakers whose stylistic approach complements their inherent character. This is why I work with several talented winemakers, all of whom coax different qualities out of the vineyards with which I've paired them.



. Credit: Jak Wonderly

What do you aim for collectors and drinkers to experience when they open a bottle of BRION or B. Wise?

BW: Of course, I hope that certain collectors will appreciate our terroir-centric approach, but ultimately, I really just want them to experience beautiful aromas, great complexity of flavour and perfect balance.

You recently acquired over 51ha on Pritchard Hill for what will become BRION Estate. Why did you select that particular site, and how do you see it folding into BRION in future?

BW: BRION Estate will eventually become the home base for BRION. Not only does Pritchard Hill have commanding views of Napa Valley, it also has some of the most enviable terroir in all of Napa Valley.

Its high-elevation exposure and well-draining volcanic red soils produce incredible Cabernet Sauvignon. With neighbors like Bryant Family, Chappellet, Colgin, Continuum, David Arthur and Ovid, we were so fortunate to have access to this highly sought-after piece of land.



. Credit: Jak Wonderly

Tell us about your plans for the new Mark Herold Winery.

BW: Mark Herold has been consulting for my B. Wise Vineyards and BRION labels for over 15 years, so it was an honour to acquire his namesake label in 2023, keep him on as winemaker and move the whole operation from a downtown Napa tasting room into a permanent Oakville winery location.

The tasting room is going to be extremely accessible for visitors, especially prospective collectors who didn't plan ahead with reservations. For them to be able to just drop in is a rarity in Napa Valley these days.

Beyond viticulture, you're investing significantly in wine country hospitality with a new 50-room hotel in Napa Valley. How do you see the evolving relationship between fine wine, luxury hospitality and place-based storytelling shaping the future of the area?

BW: I am a big believer in developing the culture of Napa Valley, because people come here for so much more than wine. As an investor, I believe I am responsible for enhancing that culture, driving it forward and ensuring that everything I help to build serves only to further enrich our experiences around wine.

