

BRION

MARK HEROLD

WINEMAKER



“I wanted to learn about everything in college—I majored in film studies, ceramics, art history, but ultimately settled on the biological studies. That was at UC Irvine. Then I wanted to further my education; I wanted to learn everything there was to know about aquaculture, so I went to UC Davis and entered into their PhD department in ecology and I couldn’t just study aquaculture. That couldn’t be my area of expertise; it had to be more particular. So, I decided I was going to study fish nutrition. My PhD is in the utilization of lipids in larval sturgeon.

“After graduating with a doctorate in ecology with an emphasis in nutritional biochemistry. I was truly amazed that I couldn’t find a job in my field. There was a paucity of opportunities for a fish nutritionist in northern California.”

—BRION Interviews, 2016–2020

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After emerging from this Alice-in-Wonderland dive down the rabbit hole of scholarly hyper-focus, Mark emerged with newly developed skills in biochemistry and chemical analysis and a confirmed instinct for pushing things to the brink of scientific certitude and beyond, into the magical and the creative. He and his then-wife Erika Gottl would go on to found Merus. Initially a 500-case winery operated out of their garage in Napa, the Cabernet wine project quickly achieved cult status and drew the admiring attention of Robert Parker.

Prior to Merus, Mark's lifelong interest in cooking and the odd experiment in making beer and wine was what first brought him to the northern Napa Valley, where his laboratory skills landed him a job at Joseph Phelps after their reputation had been established with the Insignia Cabernet. His work with the analysis of grape maturity and various approaches to fermentation helped them dial in the phenolics of their wines.

“My job at Phelps was to do experiments. As part of that, I was privy to all the materials to analyze the phenolic data. The grapes, once they were made into wine, were sent for analysis, and the data that came back was the kind that shows total anthocyanins and monomeric anthocyanins, complexed anthocyanins, and free anthocyanins. Essentially, it shows you the profile of the phenols in these grapes.”

Mark found he enjoyed using the scientific method to debunk wine myths that aren't supported by data. He also spurns the overly rigid UC Davis approach to winemaking as an exercise, essentially, in avoiding faults. He knew this is not what would ultimately make a wine of any distinction.

When Mark and Erika sold Merus in 2007, he was left free to explore and debunk and consult while his non-compete clause expired so that he could again begin making wines under his own name.

It was about this time he met vintner Brion Wise at Caldwell Vineyard in Coombsville...

“I first met Brion, I believe that was 2010... He came across as an extremely intelligent, very soft-spoken man who knew what he wanted.

“When I first started working with Caldwell Vineyards, using my method of chemical analysis, I could tell which blocks excelled in John Caldwell's vineyards. Over time, I picked the best blocks for Brion, for his BRION Caldwell Vineyards Cabernet, and that happens to be Block 15. It's one of the oldest planted blocks. This

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was planted from John's "suitcase clones" of 337 and Clone 15. John was the first to bring these in to the US; these are considered "ENTAV" clones [Etablissement National Technique pour l'Amelioration de la Viticulture, France]. And now we're working with—this is a new block—Block 18 and these are newer ENTAV clones. So, we have Clone 169, Clone 337, Clone 338, Clone 341, Clone 191, and when I was doing my Merus project I would buy a ton of each one of these for many years to see which clones excelled.

"My conclusions back then were further supported by similar clonal trials at BRION. Working with Brion over the course of three years I expanded my early trials using larger fermentations, and confirmed the blocks we would use for the BRION Caldwell Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon."

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BRION is about single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, fulfilling an ambition to make a wine of the world through a focus on site. Founder Brion Wise determined that place, a particularly memorable place, was behind each successful wine he encountered in his travels. Every wine that intrigued him inevitably led to stone and soil and a working tradition.

"Each time I have sought out wines that have something particular going on, it always comes out that if there's an epiphany, it's the fact that there's something special about the vineyard. This is what BRION is all about. This led to my conviction that great vineyards and great farming goes all the way through to the bottle. Working with the right sites and the right people is everything." —Brion Wise, *Founder*

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MARK HEROLD :: WINES FOR BRION

Explore some of the results of Herold's hand on the BRION Caldwell Vineyard and Oakville Ranch Cabernet Sauvignons:

CURRENT RELEASE: <https://www.brionwines.com/wine>

LIBRARY WINES: <https://www.brionwines.com/library-wines>

CRITICAL HIGHLIGHTS

- :: Began working for BRION with the 2010 season
- :: Merus (Latin for undiluted, unmixed, or complete), founded 1998, sold in 2007
- :: The eight vintages of Merus released under Mark's ownership all scored in the outstanding or classic ranges—three of them earned 96 points on Wine Spectator's 100-point scale.
- :: Consulting Winemaker
- :: Mark Herold Wines: 2010 to today

EDUCATION

Bachelor's Degree in Biology, with a minor in Psychology, *University of California at Irvine*
PhD in Ecology, *University of California at Davis*

CONTACT

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