

BRION

MASSIMO MONTICELLI

WINEMAKER



“When I was growing up, I didn’t think much of going into my dad’s line of work, which was winemaking. So, when I turned 18, I went to UC Irvine for the full four years. I doubled in chemistry and biology and was going to be a doctor. I volunteered in an emergency room; came home one day and said, ‘No, I don’t want to do this.’ It wasn’t the blood or guts; it was actually just the doctors and the lifestyle. I thought, ‘Are these people going to be my friends later on? No.’ I went to UC Davis and did my postgraduate work in winemaking instead. It was the way I was raised—good food, not wasting time with bad food.”

—BRION Interview, 2017

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A California native and now a fourth-generation winemaker, Massimo Monticelli has over 50 years' experience in the appellations and terroir of Napa and Sonoma. Massimo's eventual calling to winemaking and viticulture began in early childhood while pruning, picking, and making wine at his grandfather's ranch in central California. His Italian heritage has had just as much influence, instilling in him a reverence for good food shared in intimate gatherings of friends and family. Together with his brother, Massimo founded Monticelli Brothers Winery, combining the best of both worlds. Their production includes both the classic Cabernet Sauvignon and a range of Italian varietals as well as a Vin Santo, named after his grandfather, Lito, who emigrated to the US from Italy after World War II, bringing vine cuttings in his suitcase.

Massimo studied enology and viticulture at UC Davis and then went to work as a harvest intern at Silver Oak, and ended up working four harvests. Justin Meyer, founder of Silver Oak, gave him a thorough understanding of high-end Cabernet Sauvignon. But he credits Meyer with more than just a rigorous training in the finer aspects of Bordeaux-style winemaking. Meyer taught him how to pace himself, insisting that they knock off before the end of the day and enjoy a beer together. It took a while for Massimo to understand the invitation. But then one day Justin was standing in the way of the forklift he was driving and told him simply that he would fire him if he didn't park the forklift and take a break.

After Justin Meyer passed away and Silver Oak became much larger, Massimo realized he was becoming a little restless. He was tired of making one wine in a single style and wanted to work with more variety, both in winemaking style and in grapes. Massimo's brother Mario, who had started making wines at B. Wise Vineyards, introduced Brion and Massimo professionally and Brion hired Massimo to start helping with the winemaking for his projects with B. Wise in the Napa Valley and on Moon Mountain in Sonoma.

Working for Brion, Massimo was immediately exposed to a much wider variety of wine grapes. At the vineyards in Sonoma, Wise was growing, in addition to Cabernet Sauvignon, Tannat, Zinfandel, Syrah, Petite Sirah, and Cabernet Franc. He was sourcing Chardonnay from the Sonoma Coast and making a name for himself with Pinot Noir, both from Sonoma and the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Massimo's grounding in Cabernet Sauvignon allowed him to step in and help organize Brion's passions.

"I'd say the biggest strength of working with Brion is his way of going after fruit. His tenacity in getting better and better quality grapes is really what changed everything. It's not like we have any new way of making wine now or anything like that.

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So, we got our hands on better fruit. And even some of the vineyards that we worked with, we got them to farm better, and that was critical. I remember telling Brion we should drop this or that vineyard; I'd asked them three times to do things a certain way and they weren't doing it. I thought the only way they'd understand is if we quit and maybe when they couldn't sell their grapes, they'd come back to us and promise to actually start doing the things we asked for in the vineyards. But Brion was more diplomatic and actually talked to the guys and it took a few years but eventually we started getting better grapes. We were able to make great wine from those grapes and I thought 'Good job, Brion.' Because if it was up to me, we would have fired them and probably never dealt with them again. And we wouldn't have those grapes right now."

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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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MASSIMO MONTICELLI :: WINES FOR BRION

Explore some of the results of Monticelli's hand on the
BRION Moon Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon:

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

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

CRITICAL HIGHLIGHTS

- :: Began working for Brion Wise with the 2003 harvest
- :: Previously worked as enologist at Silver Oak under Justin Meyer and Dan Baron before starting to consult for small lot boutique wineries
- :: Founded Monticelli Brothers Winery with his brother, Mario

EDUCATION

Bachelor's Degrees, double major in Chemistry and Biology (pre-med)
University of California at Irvine

Post-graduate studies, enology and viticulture
University of California at Davis

CONTACT

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