



Brion Wise, Owner, with Maximus

BRION



Stories from the Vineyards

THE ROCK

THE VINEYARDS OF UPPER RANGE

WE HAD TO take a lot of rock out of these vineyards so the grapevines could have a place to grow. And some of the biggest on Upper Range are in Reflector, the highest elevation of all the vineyards. The rock there is andesite, a really dense volcanic basalt that remains in massive chunks over time; they break down very very slowly. That's not unusual in this area.

Historically, when people were developing vineyards here and came across a large boulder on the surface, they would move it off to the side. But if they had one that was too big for their equipment to move—and some of these can be 12 to 15 feet in diameter—they had a couple of options: they could leave it and plant around it, or, they could dynamite it.

We were able to move these rocks off. But, at one point, we came across a rock that was 40 feet tall, a 40-foot contiguous piece of rock. It was the size of a house. I've never seen anything like it. It was an engineering feat to be able to remove it from the area where we wanted to plant. In this vineyard, there were mixtures of gravels and gigantic boulders and medium-sized boulders and small boulders. Then we'd come across a pocket of just soil—no boulders at all—because all the material, over time, filtered through and filled up that spot with just soil.

So, when we developed this site, the crew would take an excavator and scoop. If they got soil, they put it in the soil pile. If they got small rocks, they put them in a small rock pile; if they got medium rocks, they put them in the medium rock pile; and if they hit a big rock, they moved all those to the edges of the vineyard.

Once we were done removing all the gigantic rocks, we would put the medium-size rocks back, then the small rocks back, then the soil back on top. And then we would be ready to start doing

traditional vineyard prep work. This process allowed us to have a vineyard that is homogeneous for each block and has been prepped to grow a quality grapevine.

When they hit that 40-foot rock with the excavator, they started digging around it. Then they kept digging. And they didn't get to the bottom or the outside edge, so they dug around it some more, and dug around it some more. And pretty soon we had these giant excavators that were down in a pit. In the middle of the pit was this 40-foot-tall rock. They got to the bottom of it. It looked like it had fallen out of the sky and created a massive crater.

I wondered how we were going to get that rock out of there. What do we do? Do we need dynamite? And the crew said, no, they were going to take that pile of loose dirt that they'd stockpiled and they were going to stack it up on one side of this rock.

So, they stacked dirt up on the side of the rock and then they stacked some up on another side. Then they took the excavator and they pushed at the thing so it just rocked a little bit. And as it rocked a little bit, soil slid underneath it, and then they pushed it a different way and it rocked a little bit that way. And soil slid underneath that, and gradually, this moved the rock up a small amount. And then they put more soil around it and rocked it back and forth, stacking more and more loose dirt until, finally, it was sitting on top of a mound of dirt at original ground level.

Then they were able to push it out of where we wanted to plant to a hole off to the side of the vineyard that they'd excavated. I think it's got to be probably the biggest rock that's ever come out of a vineyard in the history of the world.

—Giancarlo Bettinelli, *Bettinelli Vineyard Management*

Reflector Vineyard is bordered by a series of massive andesite boulders removed when preparing the soil for planting in 2014.

Look for the debut release of our Upper Range wines, coming this fall...