



Perfection through patience: a love of land, a way of wine

BRION WISE

Biographical Statement

The beer rooms of Wyoming were just as crazy as you would think; guys would be racing motorcycles through the bar. I was there in the 1960s working as a chemical engineer in the oil fields. I found I liked the grit, and the fact that you had to be on your game. Everyone you worked with had to be on their game. Your word was your bond.

I grew up on a farm in rural Washington where I learned from the age of seven how to work hard. I was right alongside my father, uncles, and grandfather. I became interested in engineering as a boy, falling in love with chemistry when I was thirteen. In college I got my chemical engineering degree from Washington State University and started with that—working for Shell Oil in the oil fields. There was something about it all—prospecting, wildcatting—that pulled me. I founded the oil company, Ecological Engineering Systems (later, Western Gas Resources) in 1971 when I was 26 years old and developed it into an international business.

As part of this work, I traveled the world—Australia, South America, Russia. I dined in some of the finest restaurants with people like Mikhail Gorbachev, and had the opportunity to drink some of the best wines. Oil taught me the business skills and I applied it. I farmed cotton in Australia. I founded Petrex, a company that designs, manufactures, and distributes equipment to various sectors of the petroleum industry. A titanium bicycle chain I developed was tested by the US Air Force in a Gatling gun for aircraft. I opened the restaurant, Trios, in Boulder and the Trios wine bar in Denver.

The emotional part for me is always development. I was never interested in buying into something already finished. I want to be part of the process from the ground up.

It was in 1993 that I came out to California looking for vineyard land. I was originally attracted to the property here in Sonoma because of the reputation of the surrounding area that would eventually become the Moon Mountain District. The property had been a cattle ranch; it had no infrastructure. There was a dirt road with no easements. I drilled a well and ran everything on generators. That's the fun for me. It's an engineering puzzle with a foundation in aesthetics.

From the time I started B. Wise Vineyards in 2002, my ambition was to make something I could hold up to the best wines I have tasted in my travels. The vision is to make a wine of the world, and in my case, it became our flagship wine, BRION.

B. Wise Vineyards is about the enjoyment of life. My wife Ronda and I make our own prosciutto; we brine olives; we grow and make wine. We share all of this with our friends. Through everything I have done, there is this love of farming and a sense of the kind of perfection you can achieve through patience.



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Brion is a member of the board for engineering advisors at his alma mater, Washington State University, helping to develop curriculum and supporting their petroleum engineering staff teachers.

B. WISE VINEYARDS

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