



BRADFORD MOUNTAIN VINEYARD

High above Dry Creek Valley, Bradford Mountain's soil and climate produce wine grapes of exceptional intensity and character. With a rich winemaking history that boomed in 1890 and busted in 1930, the mountain is enjoying a 21st century renaissance led by Fred Peterson, an independent winegrower who reveres tradition and sustainable farming.

The *Terroir*: Location Matters

Although Bradford Mountain is not an official American Viticultural Area (AVA), Fred Peterson defines the appellation as bounded by Pena Creek to the north, West Dry Creek Rd to the east and Wine Creek to the south and west above the 650 feet elevation. At 1264 feet, Bradford Mountain is the highest point directly contiguous to Dry Creek Valley and juts into the valley. The mountain's soils are ancient alluvial deposits, remains of a pre-historic sea and subsequent riverbeds pushed up by the clash of the Pacific and Continental plates.

Hundreds of millions of years of leaching and weathering created soils that are extremely well drained, but very nutrient poor. Their red color results from the high levels of iron still clinging tightly to the clay particles after most of the other nutrients have been leached out. The soil is also acidic, and its acidity increases with depth. As a result of their dark color and exceptional drainage, the soils on Bradford Mountain warm earlier in the spring than the valley soils and promote early root growth and most often early bud break.

In the coastal mountains of Northern California, terrain higher than 650 feet sits above the summer fogs. The combination of morning sun and warmth allows for photosynthesis to begin earlier each day. On a typical summer day, after the fog burns off in the Dry Creek Valley and the valley warms, upslope breezes cool off the vines on the mountain.

This unique combination of soil and climate produce lower vigor vines that yield less but produce more intense grapes, smaller berries that can be fully ripe yet have incredible balance.

The Historical Perspective

In the 1850s and 60s, early settlers planted the first vineyards in Dry Creek Valley in the deep soils along Dry Creek. By the late 1880s, with the influx of new immigrants and a shortage of available bottomland, aspiring vineyardists looked to the hills for fresh planting opportunities. Many of these immigrants were Italians from Tuscany, drawn to the Dry Creek Valley because it reminded them of their ancestral homeland. The low price of hillside land made the arduous work of clearing the hillsides and developing vineyards very worthwhile.

By the end of the 19th century, considerable acreage of vineyards and orchards were planted on Bradford Mountain. The vineyards, and the wines they produced, were of high quality and commanded a price that made up for the lower yields. Even Prohibition didn't put a stop to winegrowing on the mountain. Good wine and grape brandy remained in high demand during those times. Wine Creek, which originates near the mountain's summit, was named for the illegal stills operating along its banks. When the winter rains began each year, the accumulated residue from the stills washing down the creek caused the creek to run red on its path to the Pacific Ocean.

It was the Great Depression that sounded the death knell for winegrowing on the mountain. The end of Prohibition opened the floodgates for wine production, much of it bad and most of it sweet, which drove down prices of all wine, even the good Bradford Mountain wines. When repeal was followed by the depression, growers abandoned the mountain, unable to make a living. It wasn't until 2000 that the number of houses on Bradford Mountain equaled what had existed during the 1920's.

An Ideal Match: Fred Peterson & Bradford Mountain

Fred Peterson first laid eyes on Bradford Mountain in the late fall of 1982. He came up from Mount Eden Vineyards to look at a property along with Bill Hambrecht, who was considering purchasing 160 acres on the mountain.

When Hambrecht bought the property, Fred moved to Healdsburg in early 1983 to develop it. They called the property Wine Creek Ranch after the creek that ran through it. At that time, the ranch had an acre of ancient Zinfandel still being cultivated and a couple of decrepit shacks and rusty windmills, along with acres of long abandoned vineyards. As soon as the rains ended in the spring of '83, Fred began replanting the vineyard and building his home on the mountain.

By June 1984 they had replanted 35 acres of vineyard and Fred finished his house. By 1987, Hambrecht had acquired the adjoining Grist and Tarman Vineyards and Fred found himself farming over 100 acres of vineyard on Bradford Mountain, as well as vineyards in Alexander Valley, Russian River Valley and Anderson Valley.

Peterson Winery and Bradford Mountain

1987 was also the year Fred began Peterson Winery at Bill Hambrecht's central vineyard location off Lytton Springs Road. In 1995 Fred purchased the majority interest in Peterson Winery from Hambrecht and made the winery his main focus, though he did continue consulting for Ridge Vineyards.

Bradford Mountain continued to provide Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot grapes for Peterson Winery's vineyard-designate wines. In 2000, Fred planted a small hillside above his house (what he calls his "Gravity Flow Block") to a Syrah/Viognier field blend.

Replanting: an Opportunity for Change

Having planted the Bradford Mountain vineyard using AXR1 rootstock, which in the late 1980's was found to be inadequately resistant to phylloxera, Fred knew it was only a matter of time before the vineyard would be in decline. By 2005, the effects of the phylloxera were starting to show and Fred took out all of the vines on AXR1 rootstock after the 2006 harvest. Though disappointed at having to replant, he seized the opportunity to create an even better vineyard than the one he'd planted in 1983.

In the intervening 20 years, Fred had learned a great deal about this site, the soil and how grapevines and their grapes respond on the mountain. His goal was to provide the vineyard conditions to create balanced and healthy vines.

Balanced, Sustainable Viticulture Practices Equal Exceptional Fruit

Fred believes his sustainable farming approach results in healthy vines that produce the best wines.

Fred had learned the hard way how the mountain soil's combination of low nutrients, low organic matter, high clay and high acid added a couple of extra years for the young vines to get established. Since he didn't use chemical fumigation to sterilize the soil prior to planting, he decided after removing the old vines to deep plow and hand pick all of the old vine roots, which removes most of the soil borne pests and toxins. Prior to plowing and root picking, he broadcast 12 tons per acre of organic compost (enriched with chicken manure), 5 tons per acre of limestone and 2 tons per acre of mined gypsum. Fred used a 3 feet deep Italian plow to incorporate these beneficial amendments deeply into the soil, creating a homogenous and ideal environment for the young vine roots to become established.

Though Fred put in a drip irrigation system for the vine establishment, his goal is to have a dry-farmed vineyard, meaning a vineyard that in most years subsists only on the winter and spring rains. (The average November to April rainfall on Bradford Mountain is 48 inches.) Fred believes that dry-farmed vineyards create more intensely flavored and better-balanced fruit at lower sugars than their over-watered counterparts.

Depending on the variety of soil, Fred is using relatively high-vigor rootstocks—110R, 1103P, 140R and St. George. He believes that the somewhat greater vigor of these rootstocks in this low vigor soil will produce vines that will achieve balance with little supplemental water and nutrients.

Fred's original vineyard planting was 6x10 feet. The new acreage is 5x8 feet. The extra 50% vine density allows for 20% less fruit/vine, and still achieves better yields than on the original spacing. The Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Merlot and Malbec vines will be cane pruned. Although it is more difficult and expensive than cordon pruning, cane pruning allows every individual vine to have just the right number of buds left for its particular vigor and growth. The field-blend Zinfandel (a 10% mixture of Petit Sirah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Carignane and Verdelho is scattered throughout the block) will be non-trellised and head trained to recreate the traditional plantings and keep the yields low. The trellised Grenache, Mourvèdre, Carignane and Petit Sirah will be cordon-trained, but thinned to one cluster per shoot to reduce the crop but increase intensity.

Taste the Difference

Bradford Mountain is an extraordinary place, with a rich history and a *terroir* that allows skilled vineyardists like Fred Peterson to coax the best out of every vine. The proof is in the bottle, so try one of Peterson Winery's Bradford Mountain wines and decide for yourself.