



# Platinum Wine Club

90+ Rated, Ultra Premium, Collectable Wines from California's Best Winemakers.

## Brian Benson Cellars | Paso Robles

Not many winery owners or winemakers can claim to have made their first Cabernet Sauvignon before the age of 13, but Brian Benson most certainly can. While there were only two bottles made, the experience and the fact that his dad enjoyed the wine was enough to propel Brian Benson into the wine business.

To explain further, Brian Benson descends from a wine related family. His grandfather, John Chavez, planted vineyards in the late 1980's and his father, Norm Benson, followed suit with his own vineyards and winery several years later. Even though Brian was born and raised in Thousand Oaks, CA, most of his wine related activities took place around the Paso Robles District of the Central Coast.

At the age of nineteen, Brian Benson made the decision to make his own wines and Brian Benson Cellars took life as a commercial winery. The company's first release occurred two years later, a representative 147 cases. He started the business with a bankroll of under \$2,000, but was determined to make his new brand a success.

"When the wines were first released, I asked my father what he thought," recalled Benson. "My Dad owned Dark Star Cellars and knew his wines. He told me that he thought my wines were quite good and so did a number of others who tasted them. On my 21st birthday, he even allowed me to begin selling Brian Benson Cellars wines alongside his own at his Dark Star Cellars tasting room. Next, we received some excellent ratings and scores and we were on our way."

For the record, 'we' is actually Brian Benson and his wife, Christina, who handles the company's wine club, office and tasting room. Brian Benson does everything else himself. His production has steadily risen to its present levels of around 1,500 annual cases.

"I have no intention of increasing production," he added. "I can control my destiny at this level and that is incredibly important to me. I focus on finding unique growing sites in Paso Robles where the fruit can be farmed to its true potential. I don't do a great deal after pressing and prefer to let the grapes tell their own story."

The labels adorning this month's *Platinum Wine Club* selection is a story unto itself. The

year before his first releases, Brian lost two people to whom he was extremely close. His grandfather, Allan Benjamin and his close friend Ryan Beckett passed away, and both were impact figures in Brian's decision to open his own winery. As a tribute, Brian chose two praying angels to honor his friends and in the process designed a most intriguing label.

Somewhere along the line, Brian Benson became a huge fan of Rhône varietals. "When I tasted Syrahs, Grenaches and other Rhône's, I realized I really enjoyed their flavors and tastes so I stopped making Bordeaux varietals to concentrate on the Rhône's. I know it was the correct decision for me and for Brian Benson Cellars," he determined.

His passion has led him to several important vineyard locations including this month's featured Caliza Vineyard that is situated on Anderson Road and is part of the well-respected Willow Creek AVA.

The secret to Brian Benson's success lies in the manner in which he handles his winemaking. He does very little to the wine, no racking, no filtering, and few of the basics that other wines receive.

"I have no perceived notion of how to handle things," he admitted. "I let the grapes tell me what to do. I will admit that sometimes I do give them a gentle nudge."

This approach is not novel to California winemakers, but it has certainly benefitted the handiwork of Brian Benson. His wines are considered ultra-premium, which is no mean feat when you consider the competitiveness of the high end California wine industry.

Such wines from Brian Benson Cellars bear a ring of honesty both in the feel and taste. Brian Benson is considering venturing outside the comfortable confines of the Paso Robles District that has become so familiar to him. He feels that other pristine growing areas abound that will offer him additional challenges in the future and he feels ready to take the first steps.

Visitors to the Central Coast can taste all of Brian Benson Cellars' wines at the company's tasting room in the Tin City Section of Paso Robles.





BRIAN BENSON  
CELLARS

Dear Platinum Series Members,

I'm excited to share with you my 2013 S&M from the Caliza Vineyard. 2013 was a whirlwind of a vintage, but one of the best we had seen in several years... We had 80% of our block's ripen within 8 days of each other, and we processed more fruit in those 8 days than we did in all of 2012. While I didn't get much sleep during those 8 days, we were able to co-ferment almost everything I normally blend.

Now, a little bit about myself... I founded my winery in 2001 at the ripe age of 19, releasing my first vintage the weekend after I turned 21. My goal was to focus on Rhône varietals from unique sites across the Paso Robles AVA. I got into the business hanging out at my Grandparent's vineyard in Paso, and later my father's winery. I started to learn about winemaking before I was out of elementary school, and made my first wine when I was 13. I made my wine at several different wineries around Paso before moving operations to Tin City in 2015. I run the winery with my wife Christina, and our 18-month-old son, Brayden. We have no other employees...for better or for worse.

The wine you are about to try is 78% Syrah, co-fermented (fermented in the same tank) with 22% Mourvèdre. I kind of geek out on tech notes for my wines, so I thought I would share them with you. Like life, everything that happens molds you into who you are. Wine is no different. I feel the journey is an important part.

Here's some wine geeky info... 2013 S&M - The Caliza Vineyard is made up of 2 separate fermentations. One picked 9/12/13 and the other 9/18/13. It is a co-ferment of roughly 78% Syrah & 22% Mourvedre. One with Clone 877 & Estrella, and the second Clone 470 & 383. 15% was left whole cluster with an additional 30% dried stems added after the ferment began. The average time on the skins was 28 days, and then it was then aged in 300L French oak barrels for 22 months. Bottled unfiltered and unfined.

I hope you thoroughly enjoy my efforts. The S&M blends from Caliza are always my favorite. Big but elegant, just how I like them.

Cheers!

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This month's  
Platinum *Plus!*  
Featured Wine:

**Ballentine  
2014 Zinfandel,  
Reserve**

91 Points  
- Robert Parker's  
Wine Advocate

## Brian Benson Cellars | 2013 S&M Caliza Vineyard, Paso Robles



**93 POINTS**

— Wine Enthusiast

**91 POINTS**

— Wine Advocate

**90 POINTS**

— Wine Spectator

Don't let the S & M distract you. It stands for Syrah and Mourvèdre; the two Rhône varietals that make up this wonderful wine from Caliza Vineyard, one of Willow Creek AVA's top vineyards. Compelling aromas of smoky plumb and boysenberry blend with intense bouquets of lavender and purple flowers. Middle palate is filled with fresh spice tones, blackberry, anise, and pepper to tarragon to create complexity. Tannins are laced with minerals and are silky to the finish. A blend of 78% Syrah and 22% Mourvèdre were used in this wine that was aged for 22 months in new French oak. Try a grilled Ribeye or Flank Steak with this big one, but go light on the barbeque sauce. Duck and Venison will also stand up to this Rhône varietal. Enjoy now and until 2023.

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