

CAIN

VINEYARD & WINERY



The McCormick Ranch era barn; photograph by Olaf Beckmann

History of Cain

In 1980, Jerry and Joyce Cain purchased 550 acres, part of the historic McCormick Ranch, on Spring Mountain. Five generations of a family have grown up on the McCormick Ranch. Much of the ranch is still in the hands of that founding family. The tradition of the homestead is embodied today in the McCormick Sanctuary, which, through the generosity of the founding family, has become part of the California State Park System.

The planting of the Cain Mountain Vineyard began shortly after the Cains purchased the property. This initial phase continued through 1988, followed by replanting from 1996 through 2006 onto phylloxera-resistant rootstocks. Replanting has begun again after the 2020 Glass Fire burned directly through the bowl of the Cain Vineyard, taking most of the vines and all of the buildings.

The first crush at the new winery, christened “Cain Cellars,” was in the fall of 1982, at the newly constructed winery. Jim and Nancy Meadlock joined the Cains in 1986, and, in 1991, assumed sole ownership of the property. Chris Howell, who began consulting to the Cains in 1990, took over direction in 1991.

Since then, the entire project has been known as Cain Vineyard & Winery. 1990 saw first vintage of estate-grown Cain Five, continuing through 1994, and beginning again in 2007, as the replanted vineyard matured.

Cain Vineyard & Winery could only have developed as it did through the continuity of more than three decades of ownership and the very long term stewardship of a core group of the Cain team.

McCormick Ranch

At one time, the McCormick Ranch encompassed some 3,000 acres. Before the time when the Cains purchased the property, hundreds of sheep grazed on both the Napa side and the Sonoma side of the Mayacamas Range in the area known as Spring Mountain. The historic barn was completed in the 1870s (this beautiful barn from another era was entirely destroyed in the Glass Fire of 2020). Sheep ranching continued into the 1970s, until it became financially unviable.

Cain's Founders

When Jerry and Joyce Cain purchased the McCormick Ranch in 1980, their vision was to develop a mountain vineyard dedicated to the classical blend of varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec, and Petit Verdot. The fruit of this vineyard would inspire the creation of the Cain Five—its first vintage was 1985. As Jim and Nancy Meadlock partnered with the Cains and eventually became sole owners, they carried forward this core idea of preserving the classical blend of Cain Five.

Cain Mountain Vineyard

In 1980, with the advice of James Lider, the Cains retained Laurie Wood to begin the development of what they called the Cain Mountain Vineyard. The first vines of Cabernet Sauvignon were planted around La Piedra in 1981 and 1982. Cabernet Franc was planted in the Orchard in 1984. The next year, Vineyard Manager David Hudgins planted Merlot, Malbec, and Petit Verdot, thus completing the classic set of five varieties. 1987 saw a new planting of Cabernet Sauvignon on the winery hill and, in 1988, the last area to be planted was cleared and terraced below the “Picnic Tree” on the Napa–Sonoma county line. The last planting of that time was completed in 1992 utilizing a series of phylloxera-resistant rootstocks. Eventually, all of the original plantings of the first decade had to be replaced using different rootstocks.

Cain Cellars Winery

Once the Cains had completed purchase of the property back in 1980, they obtained the necessary permits required to design and develop the original winery. The winery was christened “Cain Cellars” at its first crush in the fall of 1982. Tanks continued to be installed, and a new barrel room was added in 1984. The structure as it existed prior to the Glass Fire was completed in 1986. The Cain Cellar had a capacity of about 25,000 cases per vintage, and it was initially designed to make both white and red wines. Utilizing both tanks and barrels, the Cain Cellar operated as a facility for making red wines, with two vintages of wines aging in barrels.

The Cain Team

Over more than forty years, the threads of all those who have worked at Cain have been deeply woven into the viticultural fabric of the Napa Valley. Throughout this time, many people have contributed to the Cain wines. While some have continued to work at Cain for more than ten or twenty years, others have gone on to plant other vineyards, make other wines, and to sell other wines: some are working for other vineyards and wineries, and others have begun their own projects. We can count literally dozens of wines that have been touched by those who also touched the wines of Cain.

The Glass Fire & Renewal

After the Glass Fire, replanting of the Cain Vineyard commenced again. Beginning late in 2020, Vineyard Manager Ashley Anderson-Bennett and her dedicated team of vineyardists replanted a couple of acres and in the Spring of 2021 moved forward to replanting another ten acres. The work is slow; the baby vines are growing well. This has given us an opportunity along with the time to think about how we would want to improve the Cain vineyard, an opportunity that has come out of a lot of hardship and loss.

For Cain, the most reassuring event over the early period of work was that we had a 2021 vintage. Though the harvest was quite small, the wines we produced continue to recognizably reflect the Cain Vineyard, as we have come to know it, over four decades of work. There will be a 2021 Cain Five, grown in the Cain Vineyard.