

Our History

1838: Rancho La Zaca granted to Chumash by the Mexican Government.

1972: Zaca Mesa is founded by a group of 6 friends. The original property was 1700 acres.

1973: Zaca Mesa breaks ground.

1977: Ken Brown is hired as Zaca Mesa's first winemaker.

1978: Zaca Mesa plants the first Syrah in the Santa Barbara County in the Black Bear Block.

1988: John Cushman, one of the original 6 investors, takes ownership of the winery with his twin brother, Lou Cushman.

1990: Zaca Mesa Pinot Noir is served at Ronald Reagan's 80th Birthday.

1995: Zaca Mesa's 1993 Syrah is the first Central Coast wine to make the Wine Spectator's Top 100. It was #6.

1996: Zaca Mesa's 1993 Estate Syrah is served for French president Jacques Chirac at the White House.

2001: Eric Mohseni starts his first harvest at Zaca mesa. In 2008 he becomes Head Winemaker.

2010: Zaca Mesa's 2006 93 point Estate Syrah was #29 in Wine Spectator's Top 100.

2011: Kristin Bryden starts at Zaca Mesa. She is now our Associate Winemaker.

2015: Zaca Mesa continues to experiment with winemaking techniques.

Purchased in 1972 by John Cushman and five friends, the first vines were planted a year later in 1973. Only the third winery in Santa Barbara County at that time, Zaca Mesa became a Santa Barbara County "vineyard wildcatter"- experimenting with many varietals, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, and Chardonnay to see what would work. After several years of trial and error, Syrah was planted in 1978. Unbeknownst to the early winemaking team at the time, this block would become what is today the renowned Black Bear Block, the oldest Syrah block in the Central Coast.

As a vineyard and winery pioneer in the Santa Barbara County, Zaca Mesa also became the training ground for many great winemakers. Ken Brown was Zaca Mesa's first winemaker who later started Byron in Santa Maria Valley. Adam Tolmach, Jim



Clendenen and Bob Lindquist worked at Zaca Mesa before venturing out on their own to start Ojai, Au Bon Climat and Qupé, respectively. The number of winemakers that got their start at Zaca Mesa helped create what is now known as Zaca University. The first Central Coast wine to achieve a Wine Spectator Top Ten was the 1993 Zaca Mesa Syrah, which came in at #6 and was the creation of winemaker Daniel Gehrs. This wine was also the wine of choice served at the White House on February 1, 1996 for French President Jacques Chirac official State Dinner.

It was Daniel Gehrs who realized that while Zaca Mesa's vineyards were too far inland from the coast to produce quality Pinot Noir, and not quite hot enough to produce quality Cabernet Sauvignon, they turned out to be ideal for Rhone Varietals. The soil, climate, and altitude of the Zaca Mesa vineyards were great not only for Syrah, but also for Roussanne, Viognier, Grenache, Mourvedre, Cinsaut, and Grenache Blanc which were planted in the 1990's and 2000's.

Since 1997, the vineyard and winemaking practices have focused on growing the best Syrah, Viognier, and other Rhône varieties. Since then, Zaca Mesa has ripped out over half the original vines, and replaced them with high-density plantings of new rootstock and clone combinations to significantly improve quality. The result is Zaca Mesa wines consistently receive high scores and praise industry wide.

In 2010, another Zaca Mesa Syrah (the 2006 vintage produced by Clay Brock) burst through with a #29 ranking in Wine Spectator's Top 100. Eric Mohseni became head winemaker in 2008 and the consistent 90+ scores, including the #59 Wine Enthusiast ranking of the 2009 Black Bear Block Syrah.

John Cushman, along with his brother Lou, became 100% owners of Zaca Mesa in 1988. Still family owned and deeply rooted in Central Coast winemaking tradition, Zaca Mesa is a place where you can enjoy quality made wine in a rustic setting among the mountains and scattered oaks.