

# SAUCELITO CANYON

Z I N F A N D E L   S I N C E   1 8 8 0

## INTRODUCTION

- Summary** Saucelito Canyon Vineyard is the producer of one of California's most distinguished Zinfandels, a wine made from historic dry-farmed old vines that remain a world apart in both place and character. Nestled into the rugged terrain of the upper Arroyo Grande Valley on California's Central Coast, our vineyard features three acres of head-pruned Zinfandel vines planted in 1880 and painstakingly revived by owner Bill Greenough nearly 100 years later. Today, we remain dedicated to capturing the singular flavors native to Saucelito Canyon, and to advancing our heritage through sustainable viticulture and progressive winemaking.
- Owners** Greenough Family
- Winemaker** Tom Greenough
- Varietals** We specialize in Zinfandels from our estate and other notable vineyards. We also make small lots of Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and other varietals that are limited to the tasting room and wine club.
- Appellation** The Arroyo Grande Valley resides in southern San Luis Obispo County on California's Central Coast. It extends 16 miles inland and eastward from the Pacific Ocean, and terminates in the upper Arroyo Grande Valley, where Saucelito Canyon is located at an elevation of 800 feet above sea level. The upper valley lies above the fogline, resulting in a balance of reliable sunshine and marine breezes that is ideal for ripening the Zinfandel grape.
- Vineyard and Winery** The cornerstone of the estate vineyard is a three-acre block of head-pruned, dry-farmed Zinfandel planted in 1880—the oldest commercial vineyard in San Luis Obispo County. Cuttings from this vineyard are among a select group chosen by UC Davis for its Heritage Zinfandel Vineyard. Three additional Zinfandel blocks totaling six acres were planted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The vineyard also features a three-acre block of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Our wines are made at a small rustic winery on the estate.
- Label** Since the inaugural 1982 vintage, our label has featured original artwork by famed label designer Sebastian Titus. This image depicts the view from the vineyard, looking north toward towering Hi Mountain.
- Tasting** Our tasting room is located at 3080 Biddle Ranch Road in the heart of the adjacent Edna Valley appellation, five miles south of downtown San Luis Obispo. The tasting room is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Contact** Nancy Greenough  
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## THE ZINFANDELS OF SAUCELITO CANYON

*“Saucelito Canyon is kind of a singular Zin, made way out in the middle of nowhere from a vineyard centered around three acres of ungrafted vines that were planted in 1880...It represents what can be great and what can be romantic about Zinfandel.”*

-Eric Asimov, New York Times, 2008

*“One of California’s greatest Zins, bar none.”*

-Matt Kramer, New California Wine

The Zinfandels of Saucelito Canyon are made, first and foremost, with the intent of capturing the authentic flavors of the historic dry-farmed vineyard. Sustainable growing practices and gentle, hands-on winemaking methods are essential to this vision.

The fruit is hand picked at night, a labor-intensive approach designed to avoid the oxidative impact of warm temperatures on the harvested grapes. The clusters are sorted in the vineyard, and then carefully sorted again in the cellar to ensure that unripe or compromised fruit is discarded. Winemaker Tom Greenough ferments and ages the wines in ultra-small lots, allowing him to fine tune each blend without the muting effect of fining. New barrels are used judiciously, so that the oak is integrated into the wine without overwhelming the natural fruit qualities.

### ESTATE ZINFANDELS

**Zinfandel 1880** – This Zinfandel is made exclusively from the old vines planted in 1880. The first bottling of this wine is from 2006, commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> commercial vintage from Saucelito Canyon. This wine showcases the mature flavors, natural layered complexity and remarkable character that are inherent to the historic old vines.

**Zinfandel Estate** – The Zinfandel Estate is the wine that started it all—our cornerstone bottling that dates back to the winery’s inaugural vintage of 1982, when Bill Greenough turned heads with his first old-vine Zinfandel. This wine consistently exhibits the natural balance, pure fruit character and gravelly terroir for which our Zinfandel is renowned.

**Zinfandel Reserve** – The Zinfandel Reserve is a limited-production selection from the estate vineyard, chosen from barrels that exhibit a level of intensity and quality that befit a showcase bottling from each vintage. The House Block of the estate vineyard, which is half planted to the original Saucelito Canyon old-vine clone, typically serves as the backbone of the Zinfandel Reserve.

**Zinfandel Late Harvest** – The Zinfandel Late Harvest is a Saucelito Canyon staple, made from hand-selected clusters of exquisitely sweet late-harvested estate fruit. Crafted by hand in small lots, this unfiltered and unfiltered wine is prized for its luxurious texture and intense, balanced flavors.

### SPECIALTY ZINFANDELS

**Zinfandel Backroads** – The Zinfandel Backroads is the result of our forays over the Santa Lucia mountain range and into remote local vineyards that are close in spirit to our own estate vineyard. Approachable in both flavor and price, the Zinfandel Backroads is a perfect complement to the daily dinner table.

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***Zinfandel Dos Ranchos*** – Our Zinfandel Dos Ranchos merges our estate Zinfandel with fruit from Rancho Arroyo Grande, a blending first made in the 1880s by the original homesteaders of these neighboring ranches. The result is a robust, spicy and complex Zinfandel.

***Zinfandel Peterson Ranch - Lodi*** – Brad Peterson worked in our vineyard and cellar before returning home to tend his family's 45-year-old Zinfandel vineyard in Lodi. This Zinfandel exhibits classic Lodi character, with fresh berry flavors and a round, soft spicy finish.



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## THE ESTATE VINEYARD

A trip to the estate vineyard reveals a lot about the wines of Saucelito Canyon. Five miles east of coastal Arroyo Grande, the road winds around Lopez Lake, then curls into the upper valley for another several miles. Civilization recedes into the rear-view mirror as you take a dirt road even deeper into the canyon, where you finally encounter the small vineyard tucked gently into the chaparral, as it has been for more than 125 years.

This dry-farmed vineyard is clearly a place apart, exhibiting a natural individuality that is ultimately captured in the wines. Here, “terroir” isn’t a buzzword, but rather something very real and ultimately unavoidable. The subtle gravelly character, brambly fruit and cardamom spice nuances of our Zinfandel are native to this place, a reflection of the vineyard’s ecosystem.

The upper Arroyo Grande Valley occupies its own distinct geography. Here, the gentler coastal terrain of the lower valley yields to the rugged wilderness of the Santa Lucia mountain range and Los Padres National Forest. The rippled terrain and surrounding mountains were forged by ancient seismic events, a geologic mashing and fracturing that uplifted the ancient Pacific sea bed, leaving behind the oyster and scallop fossils that are found in the soil today. Only a handful of vineyards and wineries can call this place home.

The estate vineyard lies at 800 feet above sea level, yet just 16 miles from the Pacific Ocean, enabling the Zinfandel grape to achieve exquisite balance amid inland warmth that yields daily to the prevailing coastal breezes. The vines are dry farmed on deep, sandy well-drained soils composed of marine deposits and organic materials eroded from the surrounding chaparral ecosystem. The use of sheep for weed management is one of several sustainable practices employed to integrate the vineyard into the natural landscape while nurturing the pure quality of the fruit. Saucelito Canyon is S.I.P. (Sustainability in Practice) certified by the Central Coast Vineyard Team, a nonprofit organization dedicated to researching and promoting sustainability.

The Zinfandel vineyard is comprised of four blocks totaling nine acres. Each of these blocks exhibits its own personality, bringing fullness and complexity to our blends. Following is a summary of these four blocks:

### **1880 Block – 3 Acres Planted in 1880 and revived in 1974**

Beautiful dark fruit with layered flavors and tremendous complexity. Hints of brown spices. Firm natural acidity for nice ageability.

### **Winery Block – 2.5 acres planted 1976**

Rich, brambly fruit with the gravelly character and cardamom accents for which the estate Zinfandel is known. Velvety soft acidity.

### **Willow Block – 1.5 Acre Planted in 1978**

Dark, dense fruit with leathery spice character. A core component of the Dos Ranchos blend.

### **House Block – 2 acres planted in 1981 (half planted to the 1880 old-vine clone)**

Brambly, layered flavors with excellent complexity, a bit of a spiritual hybrid between the 1880 and Winery blocks. A regular backbone of the Reserve blend.

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## THE SAUCELITO WAY

At Saucelito Canyon, there will always be a vivid sense of history, heritage and continuity. Yet at the same time, the winery is ever moving forward, embracing modern winemaking and viticultural methods while bringing new talent into the fold.

This synthesis of tradition and progression, combined with geographical isolation, is something we call the “Saucelito Way.”

Tom Greenough recently took the winemaking reins of Saucelito Canyon Vineyard, following in the footsteps of his father Bill, who spent more than 30 years at the helm of the vineyard and winery. Tom is dedicated to maintaining the established Saucelito Canyon style of Zinfandel while seeking new ways to improve the operation, including the implementation of new sustainable practices.

Bill now joins his wife Nancy in managing their tasting room adjacent to their longtime home in the Edna Valley, about 20 miles from the winery and vineyard. Opening the tasting room in 2006 was the realization of a long-held dream to provide an accessible place for people to sample the wines of Saucelito Canyon Vineyard.

But the more things change at Saucelito Canyon, the more they stay the same. The canyon is still isolated and “off the grid,” the vineyard is still dry farmed, and the making of the wine is still a physical, hands-on endeavor.

Making wine at Saucelito Canyon will never be easy. A trip to the hardware store to replace a gasket takes well over an hour. A generator breakdown means no electricity, bringing everything to a grinding halt. All of the daily forklifting, pumping, barrel washing, tank cleaning and blending are performed by the team of two—which is double the manpower Bill had in the early years, when he was a team of one.

Managing the vineyard is similarly labor-intensive, particularly with the implementation of advanced sustainable farming practices over the years. A flock of sheep is introduced each spring as a natural means for weed control, in contrast to tilling and herbicide application. Other sustainable practices include composting and cover cropping. The vineyard has always been dry farmed, a water-conserving approach that requires intensive monitoring of the vineyard during the warmer months. Alternative energy, including solar, is also being integrated into the operation.

The driving inspiration behind sustainable farming is balance. A naturally balanced and healthy vineyard results in a flavorful, balanced wine that exhibits the character of its place.

Saucelito Canyon's intimacy between people and place, vineyard and environment, is what fuels the “Saucelito Way.” It accounts for the individuality and continuity of the wines, and it is the foundation for the next generation of Greenough family ownership.

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## THE HISTORY OF SAUCELITO CANYON VINEYARD

In the spring of 1974, Bill Greenough camped out at the remote property he was considering purchasing—the abandoned Rancho Saucelito in the upper Arroyo Grande Valley.

Surrounding him were the denuded and seemingly dead crowns of old Zinfandel vines, laid out in an 8x8-foot grid so that they could be farmed by horses. The vines were entangled in dry scrub brush and poison oak. A few were completely covered, piquing Greenough's curiosity. And when he pulled the overgrowth back, he made a startling discovery—little grape clusters.

Indeed, the vines that were protected from the elements and wildlife were actually still thriving nearly a century since they had been planted by the canyon's original homesteader Henry Ditmas in 1880. This wasn't a dead vineyard. It was a *living* vineyard.

In his subsequent research, Greenough learned that Ditmas was an English expatriate who reinvented himself as a farmer and rancher after unsuccessful stints as a sheep herder and grocer. He planted Zinfandel and Muscat vines in addition to apple and pear trees. The grapes of Rancho Saucelito—so named for the property's little willow trees, called *sauce* in Spanish—proved to be so good that they inspired neighboring rancher A.B. Hasbrouck to establish his St. Remy vineyard and winery at neighboring Rancho Arroyo Grande.

Ditmas and his wife Rosa divorced in 1886. Ditmas moved away to San Francisco, then Boston, and died of pneumonia in 1892. Rosa married Hasbrouck, and together they continued to run St. Remy and Rancho Saucelito.

Prior to Prohibition, Rosa, now widowed, shut down St. Remy Winery and leased the Rancho Saucelito property to tenants who continued to tend the vines until the early 1940s. The property was subsequently used for dryland grazing until Greenough acquired the property from the Ditmas granddaughters in 1974.

Greenough had grown up in the Mountain Drive area of Montecito in the chaparral foothills south of Santa Barbara. There, he participated in the communal grape stompings of the famed Pagan Brothers Winery, which made wine for local events and pageants under the guidance of renegade winemaker "Wild" Bill Neely. Greenough later made the acquaintance of pioneering Santa Barbara County winegrowers Michael Benedict and Richard Sanford, and it wasn't long before he set out to find a place to plant his own vineyard.

Greenough looked at properties in the coastal valleys up and down the Central Coast. He knew that these valleys provided the cooling marine influence that was essential to growing high-quality fruit. Nothing jumped out at him, however, until he discovered Saucelito Canyon. The canyon's chaparral was a familiar environment, and the potential of the vineyard was obvious.

It wasn't just the vineyard, however, that spoke to Greenough. It was Saucelito Canyon itself, a sanctuary of rugged beauty tucked amid narrow canyon walls that opened northward to expose the majestic edifice of Hi Mountain. This was a place with a soul and a history. This was a place he could call home.

After purchasing the property, he moved to Saucelito Canyon on July 4, 1974. He painstakingly cleared the scrub from the vineyard, cut the dead wood from each vine, then dug down a foot to find a strong shoot that could be trained into a new fruit-producing crown.

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At that time, Greenough hadn't intended to make commercial wine. The first crop came in 1977 and he sold the grapes as planned. He made a little wine for family and friends with each subsequent vintage, and in time his bond with the vineyard extended to the wine itself. By 1982, he knew that his fate included commercial winemaking as well as winegrowing.

Greenough built a small winery building. Operating without a generator or electricity in those early days, he used a manual-crank crusher, a hand pump and buckets to get the job done. Greenough sold his inaugural 1982 vintage from the trunk of his car, and the wine was met with widespread praise.

Thus, more than 100 years after its planting, the old vineyard had come full circle. A landmark of local viticultural history was now reborn, helping pioneer a new era of commercial winemaking on the Central Coast, and ultimately producing one of California's most acclaimed Zinfandels.

*\*\* Historic photos viewable at [www.SaucelitoCanyon.com](http://www.SaucelitoCanyon.com) \*\**



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SAUCELITO CANYON PEOPLE

## **Bill Greenough – Founder and Owner**

Bill grew up in the chaparral foothills of Montecito south of Santa Barbara, where he participated in the communal grape stompings at Pagan Brothers Winery on Mountain Drive in the early 1970s. When he later went searching for his own vineyard property, he found his home in the similar chaparral ecosystem of Saucelito Canyon, where he literally built the winery from the ground up. Bill recently stepped back from his winemaking duties, allowing him to focus more on the business side of the winery, and to enjoy his hobbies, which include fishing and motorcycle riding. Bill recalls, “In the early days of the winery, there was no electricity. I used a hand pump and a manual crusher. I filled the fermenter with a bucket, and my first barrels were used American oak whiskey barrels. Of course, we’ve modernized everything over the years. But we’ve still retained that rugged, hands-on attitude in the vineyard and cellar, which is important to the sense of place that we are always trying to capture in our wines.”

## **Nancy Greenough – Owner and Sales Director**

After graduating from UCLA, Nancy moved to Montecito and, like Bill, participated in the communal winemaking adventures on Mountain Drive. Bill, she says, was always her “secret love.” After he bought the vineyard at Saucelito Canyon in 1974, she and others from the old Mountain Drive gang would drive up on weekends, helping plant vines during the day and consuming Hearty Burgundy by night. Soon, Nancy’s secret was out, and she and Bill were married in 1980. Says Nancy, “It was a dream come true. I got to start a real family of my own with a hardworking gentleman who followed his dreams. I guess it was a dream he wanted to share with someone as lucky as me. It was a dream big enough for both of us. It was before the wine industry, before the maps and tours. Wine was a natural, homegrown product. Live off the land, grow your own food, and the only man there was your old man. It was an adventure, and it still is.”

## **Tom Greenough – Winemaker**

Tom literally spent his first year in the vineyard, before his parents Bill and Nancy moved from their house in the canyon to a more convenient location in Edna Valley. Tom would visit the vineyard regularly throughout his childhood, helping out during harvest and doing odd jobs for his father. He later attended St. Mary’s College of California in the Bay Area, where he studied history and excelled as a member of the crew rowing team. After graduation, he returned to the Central Coast—and to the vineyard, of course. He ascended to the position of winemaker in 2009. “This is where I am at home,” he says. “I’m like my father. I like working outside and getting dirty, and taking a hands-on approach to the winemaking. I am looking forward to trying new things while maintaining the family traditions that we have here.”

## **Katharine Taylor- Sales & Hospitality Director; Tasting Room Manager**

Katharine grew up in the heart of Sonoma Valley, surrounded by vineyards and winemaking families. Yet it wasn’t until she ventured to the Central Coast to attend Cal Poly university that she caught the wine bug. An avid equestrian, Katharine was initially drawn to the area by San Luis Obispo’s beautiful open spaces. She graduated at the top of her class with a degree in criminal justice, intending to pursue a career in law. But her growing love for food and wine, as well as her experience in customer service, inspired a detour into the field of winery sales and hospitality. Of working at Saucelito Canyon, she says, “Bill and Nancy are very nice and very authentic, and I think their attitude is reflected in the bottle. No one is wearing a suit here. We work hard, but we keep it real. I love talking to customers who have been drinking our Zinfandel for 20 years. Their loyalty says a lot about the winery and the wine.”