

# Harvest at Cocavin Vineyards

## Paso Robles, California

### Colton Smith

### Fall 2015

#### INTRODUCTION

I was fortunate enough to spend the fall 2015 grape harvest as an intern for Cocavin Vineyards in Paso Robles, California. Cocavin Vineyards is a family run operation in the heart of the Adelaida District AVA. Cocavin sits at 1950 feet above sea level and consists of largely colluvial and calcareous soil. With 50 acres planted, Cocavin produces Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Syrah, Syrah, Tannat, Mourvedre and Grenache. Cocavin has contracts for all of its fruit before harvest begins every year, so the fruit is picked at the precise time that each winemaker prefers. It was an honor to be called a team member for the 2015 Cocavin Vineyard’s harvest.

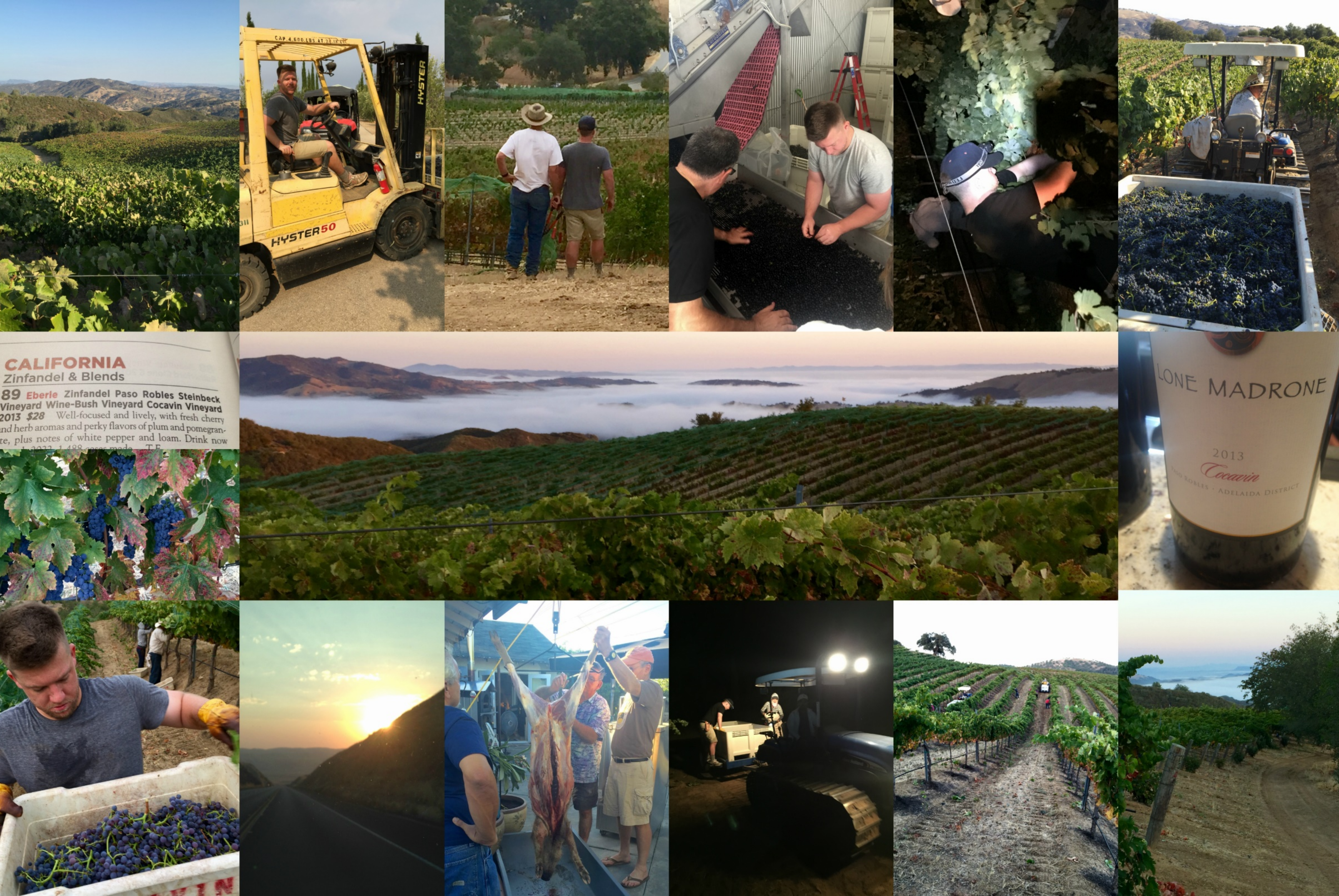


#### INTERNSHIP ACTIVITIES

This internship was both mentally and physically challenging, and pushed me to learn more about the daily experience in the wine industry while equipping me with more skills to join a winery team full time after graduation. The tasks I performed during harvest were varied and included:

- Harvesting grapes
- Weighing and moving bins with forklift
- Quality control through “mogging”
- Pre and post-harvest canopy management
- Removal of old rootstock
- Hand sorting fruit at the winery
- Removal of bird netting pre-harvest
- Cleaning harvest equipment
- Brix readings with refractometer
- Delivery of grapes to buyers
- Pest management-gopher trapping
- Wine tasting!

During my internship I was fortunate enough to follow the fruit from the vineyard into the winery and help out with initial processing for Jacob Toft and Eberle Winery. Having this opportunity to interact with winemakers and learn about their individual processes and preferences was invaluable.



#### TAKEAWAYS

This internship with Cocavin Vineyards was an invaluable experience to have during my last year at Washington State University. The mentorship I received from the owners, Gary and Wendy Schmidt, was a critical piece of my senior year curriculum in the Viticulture and Enology program. I was able to experience firsthand the amount of effort it takes to pull off a successful harvest and pushed myself to give the highest level and quality of work I could. I was very sick during my internship which made the hard work and little sleep much more difficult, but gave me resiliency skills that will help me stand out in my position after graduation. The interactions I was able to have with winemakers who allowed me to follow the Cocavin fruit into the winery allowed me to not only expand my professional network, but also let me see the variation of processing styles and winemaking philosophy that can be applied to the same fruit to get dramatically different results. I will always remember and be impacted by my harvest experience at Cocavin, not only because of the beauty of the vineyard and the Paso Robles sunsets, but because this was the true spring board to my career in the wine industry. Without this experience I would not have been nearly as competitive as an applicant and may have not been headed to the great winery where I will be starting my career. Go Cougs!

