



# ANCIENT PEAKS

**'Ancient Peaks has its origins in an ambitious vineyard development by Robert Mondavi in the mid-1990s. Many of its vines grow in deep beds of giant fossilized oysters. Today, the winery produces a bevy of keenly priced, high-quality wines that deserve to be better known.'**

- Robert Parker

**Year Founded:** 1992

**Region:** Santa Margarita, California

**Owner/Co-Owner:** Carl Wittstrom, Rob Rossi, Doug Filippioni

**Winemaker:** Mark Sinor.  
Recognized as one of Central Coast's highest-rated winemakers.

**Known for:** One of the coolest, longest growing seasons in Paso Robles region; a rare diversity of soil types originating from the tectonic uplift that created the surrounding Santa Lucia Mountain peaks; and an abundance of rainfall, totaling 29 inches per year on average.

**Fun Fact:** Ancient Peaks recently had the honor of being featured in "An Exploration of Renowned Single Vineyards," the latest episode of the Geographical Digest webinar series by National Geographic Books and The SOMM Journal.

**-SIP Certified Sustainable & Vegan-**

Our estate Margarita Vineyard stands alone and apart as the southernmost vineyard in the Paso Robles region, and as the only vineyard in the Santa Margarita Ranch AVA. Cattle were first introduced to Santa Margarita Ranch by Franciscan missionaries in 1774 and have remained prominent on this land ever since. Today, Santa Margarita

Ranch endures as one of California's oldest continuously operated cattle ranches, and the ownership families of Ancient Peaks are actively involved in the ranching operations. Steeped in Mission-era history and Wild West mythology, Santa Margarita Ranch is today owned by three longtime local winegrowing and ranching families who are committed to advancing the land's legacy of 'early California rancho hospitality.' The pronounced marine influence, combined with unusually cold spring temperatures, creates a late, long growing season that allows the fruit to develop a signature combination of fully developed flavors and fine structure. As the only vineyard in its vicinity, Margarita Vineyard is alone in benefitting from the climate conditions of this particular location. Here, the ripening process is slow and sometimes challenging, an attribute that is shared by many of the world's finest vineyards. Ancient Peaks wines exhibit a natural complexity that is a direct reflection of Margarita Vineyard's rare array of soils. Margarita Vineyard spans five separate soil types that ebb, flow and intermingle throughout the vineyard. Few vineyards boast such a spectrum of geological diversity. This diversity enables us to grow the same grape varieties in a range of soils, ultimately enhancing the texture and dimension of the resulting wines. Our practices have earned SIP Certification for Margarita Vineyard, the leading standard for viticultural sustainability.





# THE BACKBONE OF OUR WINE

## The 5 Soils



**GRANITIC:** Granite is an intrusive igneous rock. The granitic elements at Margarita Vineyard were created by the weathering of granite-based formations to the east of the vineyard. These weathered granite soils are composed of diverse minerals mixed with organic deposits, yielding fruit with fine mid-palate weight and rich flavors.



**ROCKY ALLUVIUM:** The rocky alluvium found at Margarita Vineyard is dominated by gravel with elements of clay, silt and sand. This amalgam was created by ancient water flows and erosive phenomena, which weathered the surrounding terrain into a downflow of alluvium deposits. This richer soil profile lends itself to dry farming, and that produces pure, plush fruit flavors.



**VOLCANIC:** Ancient volcanic activity has indelibly shaped the landscape of southern San Luis Obispo County—most notably in the towering ‘morro’ mountains that were formed by volcanic extrusion. The volcanic deposits at Margarita Vineyard occupy sloping terrain that includes rocky basalt. The high iron content of these blocks brings lower yields with excellent flavor concentration.



**SHALE:** Monterey shale is part of a coastal formation that accumulated in deep structural basins during the mid-Miocene period. Soil pits in parts of Margarita Vineyard reveal densely packed, orange-tinged layers of Monterey shale rock that are brittle and flaky to the touch. The abundantly rocky profile in these spots yields intense flavors with dimension and complexity.



**ANCIENT SEA BED:** In the Oyster Ridge block of Margarita Vineyard, thousands of large white oyster fossils are literally spilling out of the soil—testifying to the land’s origins as an uplifted sea bed. Wine&Spirits Magazine called it “perhaps the most dramatically calcareous chunk of earth in the state.” Here, elevated calcium content yields high-toned flavors with pretty aromatics.



### 2024 Sauvignon Blanc

Our aim is to produce an authentic Sauvignon Blanc that reflects both the marine influenced growing conditions at Margarita Vineyard and the tropical fruit tones of warmer Paso Robles vineyard sites. The 2024 growing season began with a wet winter and cool spring, followed by warm summer temperatures that prevailed into harvest. Each Sauvignon Blanc lot was cold fermented at 55 degrees to retain delicate aromatics and pure fruit flavors over fermentation periods spanning three to four weeks. The individual lots were then aged for six months in stainless steel tanks to further preserve textural crispness. After the final blend was assembled, it matured in tanks for an additional two months prior to bottling.

**90 Points - '23 Vinous** - “*Opens in the glass with a blend of spring flowers, lemon zest and sage. It's soft upon entry yet quickly builds tension as citrus-tinged orchard fruits cascade throughout. It finishes wickedly fresh with a tactile crunchiness that calls the taster back to the glass.*”



## 2024 Chardonnay

**'Top Value Wines'** - Wine Spectator 2020

100% Chardonnay. Our estate Margarita Vineyard is cradled along the coastal Santa Lucia Mountains just 14 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Here, amid one of the Paso Robles region's coolest growing environments, we are able to produce a varietally true Chardonnay with a singular sense of place. We aim to strike a fine balance between the leaner and richer styles of Chardonnay, all with the intent to create a versatile, food-friendly wine. After producing limited-edition Chardonnays for several years, we were recently inspired to include Chardonnay in our core family of wines. The 2024 growing season began with a wet winter and cool spring, followed by warm summer temperatures that prevailed through harvest. Our Chardonnay nevertheless recorded ample hang time with a final pick landing on September 19. After harvesting and light pressing, 85 percent of the juice was cold-fermented in stainless steel tanks for the preservation of delicate aromatics and bright fruit flavors. The remainder was barrel fermented and aged on the lees in 40-percent new oak to add roundness, texture and complexity. This oak-aged lot also underwent secondary malolactic fermentation and consistent lees stirring, which ultimately lent a touch of creaminess to the wine.

The 2024 Chardonnay presents a luscious nose of pear, citrus zest and tropical melon with hints of butterscotch. The mouthfeel is lush and lively, cascading across the palate with flavors of honeydew, peach, lime and underlying minerality. Notes of poached pear spice and vanilla emerge on a smooth, satiny finish.



## 2022 Merlot

100% Merlot. Merlot excels at our estate and has been a mainstay in our small family of wines since day one. Here, ancient sea bed soils combine with a long growing season to yield a Merlot with silky dark fruit flavors and a luscious texture, resulting in what has become one of the Paso Robles region's most notable Merlots. Our aim is to capture the signature velvety fruit character of Merlot while showcasing the cooler climate nuances and structure inherent to Margarita Vineyard. The 2022 growing season was moderate through mid-summer in the wake of dry winter conditions. While a sustained heat wave landed on Labor Day weekend, our Merlot blocks maintained a nice pace of ripening into the first of October. After harvesting and destemming, each lot was cold soaked for 48 hours prior to fermentation for a gentle extraction of initial color and flavor. After fermentation and light pressing, the lots were aged for 18 months in a combination of French (50%) and American (50%) oak barrels, 20 percent of which featured new oak. We combine French and American oak barrels with our Merlot to cultivate complementary flavor profiles and to enhance overall complexity.

**94 Points - The Tasting Panel** - *"Dark, luscious, dripping with finesse."*

**90 Points - Vinous** - *"Opens with a darkly floral bouquet of wild blueberries and violets, lifted by nuances of mint. Silky smooth on the palate, it offers ripe wild berry fruit and a tinge of citrus guided by juicy acidity. The finish tapers off with subtle tension and excellent length, leaving sweet tannins and a bitter hint of black tea to fade slowly. Incredibly fresh and pure, this Merlot is easy to like and a fantastic value."*



## 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon

**'The best California Cabernets for \$20 or less right now'** -San Fran Chronicle 2021

**'Central Coast's Central Players'** - Wine Enthusiast **'Best Buy'** -Wine&Spirits 2020

**'The Ancient Peaks Margarita Ranch is a nuanced steal.'** -Wine Enthusiast

Cabernet Sauvignon (77%), Malbec (9%), Petite Sirah (7%), Syrah (5%), Petit Verdot (2%). The 2022 growing season was moderate through mid-summer in the wake of dry winter conditions. While a sustained heat wave landed on Labor Day weekend, our Cabernet Sauvignon vines maintained a nice pace of ripening into mid October. Each individual block of Cabernet Sauvignon was picked at individual ripeness during a two-week period. The lots were gently destemmed and cold soaked for 48 hours prior to fermentation for a smooth extraction of color and flavor. After fermentation, the lots were racked to an equal combination of French and American oak barrels, where they aged for 20 months prior to blending and bottling. Small complements of estate-grown Malbec, Petit Verdot, Syrah and Petite Sirah were incorporated into the final blend for enhanced color, mouthfeel and flavor dimension.

**91 Points – Vinous** - *"Wafts up with an inviting mix of crushed blackberries and violet pastille. Soft textured and round, it splashes across the palate with ripe wild berry fruit lifted by a hint of citrus and spice. Gently tannic and long, this leaves a dark floral resonance and a slight licorice tinge to linger on."*



## 2023 Zinfandel

**'Best of Class'** -San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition

**"A joy to drink."** - Jeb Dunnuck

100% Zinfandel. Our estate Margarita Vineyard has become renowned for producing one of Paso Robles' most acclaimed Zinfandels. Here, amid one of the region's coolest growing environments, the Zinfandel grape achieves a rare balance of robust flavors and elegant structure. Zinfandel has been a cornerstone variety of Paso Robles for more than 100 years, and we are proud to feature it in our small family of wines. We aim to produce a Zinfandel that faithfully reflects the terroir of Margarita Vineyard, balancing varietal richness with an elevated sense of elegance and spice. The 2023 vintage was marked by relatively cool spring and summer conditions, followed by a pitch perfect warming trend that brought the harvest season to a long and steady conclusion—making it a true winemaker's vintage. While a sustained heat wave landed on Labor Day weekend, our Zinfandel blocks maintained a nice pace of ripening into October. Prior to fermentation, the separate lots were cold soaked for 48 hours for a soft extraction of flavor and color. After fermentation and light pressing, these lots were racked to a combination of French and American oak barrels (20% new oak), where they aged for 18 months prior to blending and bottling. The barrels were minimally racked during aging to preserve varietal aromatics.

**93 Points – James Suckling** - *"Ripe, expressive blackberries and plums are nicely balanced by peppercorns and unexpectedly grippy tannins. Flavors of blueberry cobbler and lavender meld with cocoa powder, dusting the layered, brambly finish."*

## 2021 'Renegade'



Syrah 83%, Petit Verdot 14%, Malbec 3%. A Syrah-driven blend with complements of Malbec and Petit Verdot, all from Margarita Vineyard. The winemaking vision of Renegade is to craft a bold Syrah-driven wine with the structure and finesse provided by classic Bordeaux blending varieties. Each lot was cold soaked for 48 hours prior to fermentations spanning 12 to 15 days. After fermentation, the individual lots were aged for 20 months in a combination of French (60%) and American oak (40%) barrels, including a total of 25 percent new oak. A majority of the Syrah was aged in barrels with medium-plus toasting to accentuate the varietal's savory, smoky nuances. The Bordeaux varieties were matured in medium-toast barrels for pure fruit expression. In the final blend, Syrah sets the tone with deep black fruit and savory nuances. The Petit Verdot intensifies the overall color, nuance and tannin profile, while the Malbec brings juiciness to the mouthfeel. The result is a uniquely styled blend and a true Ancient Peaks original.

**92 Points - Vinous** - *"Wafts up for the glass with a sweetly seductive blend of wild blueberries, violet flowers and crushed stones. It's sleek and racy in style with crisp wild berry fruits and tactile mineral tones that swirl under an air of lavender. It finishes with a reverberation of tension, leaving a tinge of cocoa and licorice to slowly fade."*

**92 Points - Editor's Choice - Wine Enthusiast** - *"Presents complex aromas of violets, blue fruits and pomegranate. The palate is rich and racy with flavors of cherry, currant, raspberry and smoked meat. Trailing accents of cedar and white pepper add intrigue to a lively, chewy finish."*

## 2020 'Oyster Ridge' (Black Label)



The 2020 vintage is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (75%), Cabernet Franc (12%), Petit Verdot (7%), Merlot (3%) and Malbec (3%), all from meticulously farmed vineyard blocks cultivated for the Oyster Ridge program. After hand harvesting, each lot was cold soaked for two to three days. More than 90 percent of the blend was fermented in small 10-ton fermenters to generate added thermal energy for enhanced extraction, with attentive phenolic monitoring to dial in an ideal mouthfeel. After fermentation, only the free-run juice was selected. Each lot was aged separately for 23 months in premium French oak barrels, inclusive of 75 percent new oak. The final blend was assembled from only those barrels that exhibited exemplary complexity, structure and aging potential. Cabernet Sauvignon is predominant with broad, polished layers and classic varietal expression. Cabernet Franc enlivens the aromatic profile with suggestions of violets and savory spice, while Petit Verdot contributes color, structure and aromatic nuances of cedar and pencil shavings. Merlot adds lift and silkiness to the palate, and Malbec completes the experience with undertones of juicy red fruit.

**90 Points – James Suckling** – *"A rich and chewy red with blackberries, dark plums, currants and baking spices. Full body with firm tannins. Serious and generous with a compact finish."*



## 2020 'Pearl' Cabernet Sauvignon



Cabernet Sauvignon (95%), Petit Verdot (5%). The Cabernet Sauvignon Pearl Collection is crafted as the ultimate expression of Cabernet Sauvignon from our estate Margarita Vineyard. The 2020 growing season was marked by a mild spring and summer, punctuated by two late-summer heat waves that accelerated the pace of ripening into harvest. The fruit was gently destemmed, cold soaked for three days and fermented in small 10-ton fermenters. Detailed phenolic management allowed for the development of a full, round mouthfeel during fermentation. The individual lots of free-run juice were aged in 100-percent new French oak barrels by Taransaud, Tonnellerie Ô and Sylvain. Each of these barrels featured naturally tight-grained wood for seamless oak integration, as well as medium to medium-plus toasting for judicious complexity. Extended barrel aging for 23 months allowed for perfect integration and maturation prior to bottling. This wine showcases Paso Robles as a world-class region for Cabernet Sauvignon while revealing Margarita Vineyard's striking sense of place.

### 96 Points – The Tasting Panel

## 2021 'Quarry' Cabernet Sauvignon



The 2021 growing season was marked by cool spring temperatures and steady summer conditions, with moderate weather prevailing into harvest -- all contributing to a banner vintage. After harvesting, the fruit was gently destemmed and the must was cold soaked for 48 hours prior to fermentation. After fermentation, the wine was racked to French and American oak barrels, where it was aged for 18 months prior to blending and bottling. All of the new wood (35%) was French oak, enhancing the overall integration and sophistication of the experience.

Dances in the glass with aromas of red currant, plum, black olive and anise. The mouthfeel is supple and polished, with vivid layers of cherry, boysenberry, blackberry and tobacco. Notes of vanilla cream, coffee and cinnamon linger deep into the finish with fresh acidity and chalky tannins.