

Bronco finds its workhorse is steam

Fueling the famous wine company's production processes are the latest in powerful steam generators

By Sarah Annese

Located in Ceres, Calif., is the Bronco Wine Co., the world's fourth largest winery. Launched in 1973, Bronco now holds over thirty-five thousand acres of vineyards, creating 60 brands of wine. Among those brands are the world-famous Charles Shaw, or "Two Buck Chuck" sold at Trader Joe's stores, which, as CEO Fred Franzia says, is "Wine not to put in a closet, but to drink."

Bronco Wine is a juggernaut in the industry, with nearly 186,000 gallons of wine produced daily (61 million gallons annually).

To produce all of that wine the company needs a steam supply that is both reliable and affordable. Because Bronco Wine has two key wineries located in California's San Joaquin Valley, a region with some of the strictest air quality regulations in the world, Bronco needed low NOx (Nitrogen Oxide) burners. They also needed a boiler that comes up to pressure quickly, and one that didn't need extensive annual boiler tube inspections.

Paul Franzia, director of engineering and environmental affairs, explains, "The steam generators are operated by our Facility Refrigeration and Utility Maintenance staff." They make steam to generate the hot water used in warming bottling blends, assist



*Bronco Wine Company Maintenance Supervisor Jason Paillor checking operations of a Clayton Steam Generator in Escalon, Calif.
Photo courtesy Bronco Wine Co.*

in getting the labels to stick to the bottles when there is a condensation issue, sterilize the bottle filler and final filters, as well as warm up the freshly crushed red grapes during the cooler fall months when the low temperature inhibits the start of fermentation. "We also use a centralized cleaning system (Heliopacs) that uses steam to create pressurized hot water."

According to Paul, Bronco decided that the best way to go was to invest in Clayton steam generators. "I selected Clayton due to the short startup time, small foot print and the low NOx burner technology they offer," he says.

Chip Maguire, senior thermal sales engineer at Clayton Industries, says their steam generators stand out due to "fast startup, quick load response, high efficiency and advanced connectivity to Ethernet protocols." Clayton steam generators are compact and durable, and can be placed almost anywhere with little to no hazard that other boilers might have. They have a small footprint, have a blowdown rate of 1/10th of that of conventional boilers, and are virtually indestructible. Blowdown rate

refers to the water intentionally wasted as the generator is working, to flush out any accumulated impurities.

Paul has been using three steam generators now, for over eight years,

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each in three different locations across the state. “[Clayton assists] our operation by having service techs available immediately when issues arise, reducing the time required for startup—which eliminates having to bring personnel in early for Sunday night startup—and keeping in compliance with our local Air Quality District,” he continues. “I expect that we may add a second smaller unit at our Ceres facility to handle our off-season lighter steam demand loads.”

“The steam generators at each [Bronco] plant are well matched to the company’s production needs,” says Maguire. “In one plant, in Escalon, feedback from plant heat exchangers turns the steam generator on remotely. With a conventional boiler, steam production on demand can only be achieved by the leaving the boiler in an idling state. In idle, a typical fire tube or water tube type boiler can waste an extra eight percent in energy. Clayton steam generators can be kept in a hot standby response mode that will allow negligible losses in a rapid deployment situation.”

For Bronco Wine Company, the high efficiency steam generators work much more rapidly than other boilers. It’s been over eight years since the first Clayton generators have been installed at Bronco Wine,


and they’re still running as efficiently as ever. The generators are now in charge of warming wine prior to bottling, making hot water for cleaning and sterilizing bottles and filters, and pasteurizing raw grape juice.

This has all reduced the need for traditional boilers and natural gas consumption because the generators can be operated only when they’re needed. Since they’re

small they can be placed practically anywhere.

“More steam generator purchases are being planned for the future, meaning even more horsepower for Bronco Wine Co.” says Fred Franzia, who is more than happy with the Clayton steam generators.

“I began working with Paul Franzia about 10 years ago,” recalls Maguire. “They are very easy and reasonable to work with and are one of our highest profile

clients in the central valley. Franzia Wines go back to the 1800’s in the California wine market. Their family was a pioneer in cheap, high quality, mass produced wines.” 


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