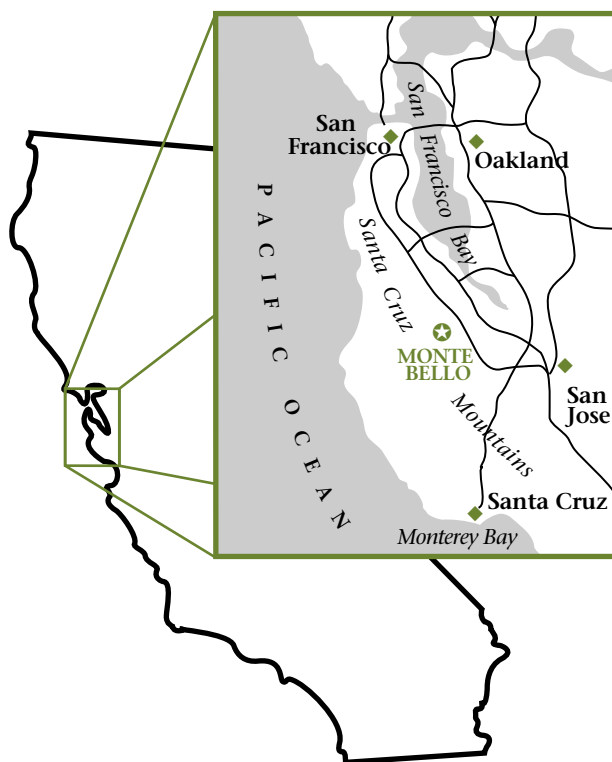


Vineyard Production:
172 tons from 83.5 acres
Selection: 45%

97 Monte Bello Vineyard, bottled May 99

This most unusual year began with torrential winter rains, followed by a long, mild spring. Flowering was early; the amount of fruit formed was unusually large. We dropped nearly twenty percent of the crop, bringing yields down to two tons per acre—and assuring intensity. This was the earliest vintage since 1962. All thirty-three parcels were fermented separately, on their natural yeast; in a return to methods employed in the sixties and seventies, part of the malolactic took place in barrel. The wine was aged for eighteen months, almost entirely in new, air-dried american oak. Ripe and well-structured, this Monte Bello is among the finest of a great decade. It is approachable as a young wine, and will develop fully over the next fifteen years. PD (3/99)



Location: Monte Bello Ridge, Santa Cruz Mountains, Santa Clara County.
Acreage: Cabernet Sauvignon - 41.9 acres
Merlot - 6.8 acres
Petit Verdot - 2.2 acres
Cabernet franc - 1.3 acres
Yield: 1 - 2 tons/acre
Soils: Decomposing Franciscan rock mixed with clay, laid over fractured limestone.
Climate: Cool, mountainous—between the Mediterranean and Maritime Zones.
Elevation: 2070' - 2660'
Exposure: Principally south/southeast

RIDGE 1997

CALIFORNIA

MONTE BELLO®

MONTE BELLO VINEYARD: 85% CABERNET SAUVIGNON, 8% MERLOT, 4% PETIT VERDOT, 3% CABERNET FRANC
SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS ALCOHOL 12.9% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS, INC. BW 4488
17100 MONTE BELLO ROAD, P.O. BOX 1810, CUPERTINO, CA 95015

The 1997 vintage was among the most unusual of Ridge's thirty-seven-year history with the Monte Bello Vineyard. From November through January, torrential storms brought rainfall equaling that of an entire, very wet, year. From February on, however, there was virtually no more rain. Temperatures turned mild, allowing flowering and fruit set to begin much earlier than usual. In turn, this gave us the largest crop—vine for vine—that our low-yield vineyards have ever produced. With major assistance from this clement spring weather, the vines were making up for the short crops of '95 and '96. Despite the early start, we were concerned that a crop of such size would not ripen fully in our cool region. So, as usual, we thinned rigorously. On the lower vineyards (1300'-1990') we dropped fifteen percent of the merlot and ten percent of the cabernet; on the middle (2070'-2390') and upper (2550'-2660'), all varieties were thinned by twenty percent, bringing total yields to two tons per acre. The entire growing season was a month earlier than usual; Monte Bello merlot was ripe by mid-September, and harvest complete by the first week of October.

Each vineyard section was kept separate, and fermented on its own yeast and malolactic culture. The average size of a fermentation was equivalent to about four tons—more typical of Burgundy than Bordeaux, where they tend to be much larger. Color was very deep, and flavors ripe; all thirty-three parcels were candidates for inclusion in the Monte Bello.

As was Ridge practice in the sixties and seventies, a portion of the natural malolactics were carried out in barrel. The rest took place in small tanks held at 68°—more characteristic of the eighties and early nineties. Ninety percent of the wine was aged in new, air-dried american oak from eight different coopers, both french and american. The remaining ten percent aged in new french oak—from two different regions and two different french coopers. This experimentation with french oak has been part of Ridge winemaking since 1971. Each year, it has served to question, and to re-confirm, our commitment to air-dried american oak.

In the final selection, forty-five percent of the Monte Bello wines were held out of the assemblage; the finished wine therefore represents fifty-five percent of the vineyards' total production.

The abundant '97 vintage is one of the ripest of the nineties. Color and fruit are rich and intense; tannins are firm, yet fully integrated. This full-bodied Monte Bello is clearly among the three or four finest of a great decade.

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