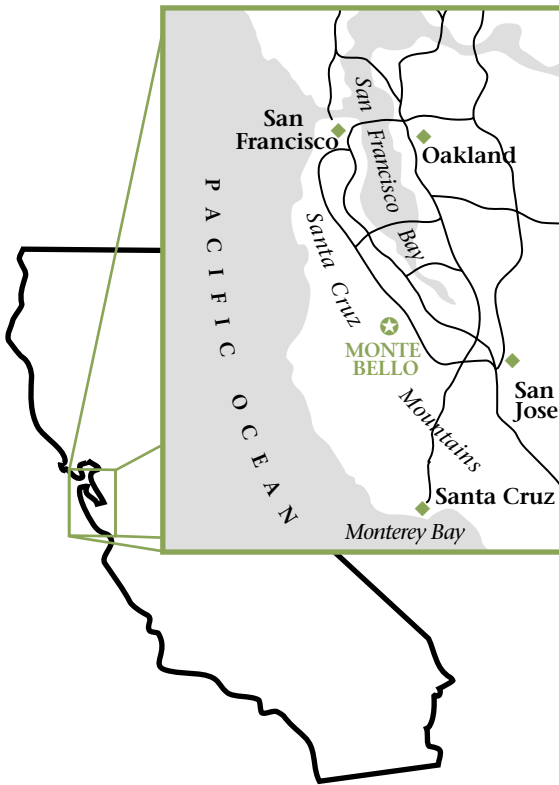


Vineyard Production:
83 tons from 62 acres
Selection: 25%

95 Monte Bello Vineyard, bottled May 97

In the Santa Cruz Mountains, welcome spring rains delayed the start of our growing season. We thinned the already moderate crop, and warm October weather brought the fruit to ideal ripeness. Fifteen of the twenty-five parcels were chosen in February as most intense and most typical of the vineyard's character. They were assembled in three stages over the following months. Tannins are the biggest to date in the nineties, yet the fullness and complexity of the wine render them supple. Aged almost entirely in new, air-dried american oak, this is classic Monte Bello. Though approachable now, the great '95 vintage will develop fully over the next fifteen to twenty years. PD (3/97)



Location: Monte Bello Ridge, Santa Cruz Mountains, Santa Clara County.
Acreeage: Cabernet Sauvignon - 48.5 acres
Merlot - 6.0 acres
Petit Verdot - 3.0 acres
Cabernet franc - 1.5 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: 2300' - 2600'
Exposure: Principally south/southeast

RIDGE 1995

CALIFORNIA

MONTE BELLO®

69% CABERNET, 18% MERLOT, 10% PETIT VERDOT, 3% FRANCISCA
SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS ALCOHOL 12.5% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS, INC. BW 4488
17100 MONTE BELLO ROAD, P.O. BOX 1810, CUPERTINO, CA 95015

Winter and early spring rains totaling over fifty-six inches swept Monte Bello ridge in 1995. Combined with cold temperatures, the inclement weather delayed bud break at our upper vineyards until mid-April—dangerously late for the 2600' elevation. The bloom of the vines, already late, was drawn out from mid-June through mid-July, setting the stage for another high-quality harvest. In early September, the grapes turned color. Beautifully warm days and moderate evenings in October steadily ripened the fruit; by harvest, intensity and balance were exceptional.

We began harvesting merlot at Monte Bello in the second week of October. By October 18, the cabernet harvest was underway. The weather remained warm and dry as we picked small amounts almost every day through October—over twenty separate lots were fermented separately in small stainless steel tanks. The last of the Monte Bello grapes were picked October 31, only hours before a cloudburst brought fall's first rains.

Natural yeast fermentations started easily within two days; it was immediately apparent that this would be a year of very highly-colored cabernet—the wines were black-purple one hour after crushing. We pumped over twice daily, aerating the juice slightly as it was drawn off into a tub and circulated gently over the skins. While still in the fermentor, the wines showed exceptional promise: flavors, tannins, acidity—all in balance. Once they are close to dryness, we taste the fermenting wines daily to ensure this balance remains. Each lot was pressed after fourteen to eighteen days on the skins, depending on flavor and tannin extraction. Natural malolactics finished by early December, when we again began tasting the more than twenty wines—this time to determine which were typical enough, and fine enough, to warrant inclusion in the Monte Bello.

The best lots—identified by taste as potential Monte Bello components—were initially kept separate, allowing the color and tannin levels to stabilize. In February, we confirmed our selection of those wines (now fully stable) and assembled them. All but a small portion of the wine was aged in new, air-dried american oak barrels. The remainder went to new french oak, continuing our annual comparison of the two.

As in the previous two Monte Bello vintages, a significant quantity of petit verdot was included for complexity and spice. Most of the press wines were held out to age separately. We tasted the first press—finned early with twelve egg whites—after it had spent a year in barrel. During the final assemblage, we decided unanimously that it should be included for its contribution of liveliness and firm structure. After a total of seven racks, the wine was bottled in late spring of 1997. This vintage stands as one of the biggest-structured and most complex in the exceptional decade of the nineties. Balanced and approachable when young, it will reward bottle aging with increased depth and complexity. It is easily a twenty-year wine.