

RIDGE 1996

CALIFORNIA

LYTTON SPRINGS®

96 Lytton Springs Vineyard, bottled Jan 98

A late spring with difficult weather during flowering and set severely limited yields from the outset of the 1996 growing season. Quality, however, was excellent. Five percent more petite sirah than in any previous vintage contributes to the lush, full-bodied character. The wine was put in air-dried american oak in December after vintage, and racked every four months until bottling fourteen months later. We held the number of new barrels to roughly fifteen percent of the total, as the percentage of one-year old oak was quite significant. With its black fruit and lively spice, this fine zinfandel will be enjoyable at the time of its release, and at its best (as an explosively fruity wine) over the next five years. PD (12/97)



- Location:** Eastern edge of Dry Creek appellation, Sonoma County.
- Acreage:** Lytton East: 106-year-old petite sirah, zinfandel, grenache, 45 acres.
Maple Vineyard: 86-year-old mixed zinfandel, petite sirah, 6 acres;
37-year-old zinfandel, 12 acres.
Lytton West: 43-year-old zinfandel, grenache, 13 acres.
- Yield:** 1.5 - 3.0 tons / acre
- Soils:** Varied within each vineyard with a predominance of gravelly clay; gravelly clay loam on hillsides.
- Climate:** Fog in a.m., warm sunny afternoons, breezes in late p.m.
- Elevation:** 80' - 160'
- Exposure:** Southeasterly
- Owner:** Lytton East & West - Ridge Vineyards
Maple Vineyard - Tom & Tina Maple

78% ZINFANDEL IN A TRADITIONAL VINEYARD BLEND WITH 19% PETITE SIRAH, 2% CARIGNANE, AND 1% GRENACHE
DRY CREEK, SONOMA COUNTY ALCOHOL 14.5% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS, INC. BW 4488
17100 MONTE BELLO RD, BOX 1810, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA 95015

This is the eighteenth vintage in which Ridge has made wine from the old zinfandel and mixed-varietal vineyards along Lytton Springs Road in the Dry Creek Valley appellation. Our 1972 Lytton Springs Zinfandel marked the first use of the Lytton Springs designation. With the purchase (1991) of these hundred-year-old vines, and subsequent purchase of the neighboring Norton Ranch, we now own most of the vines that make up the Lytton Springs.

In contrast to the past few vintages, the 1996 harvest was very early—among the earliest on record for the vineyard. A series of storms in late winter and early spring brought the vines more rain than usual as the shoots first emerged; a mid-May storm arrived just as they began to bloom. The storm knocked off a considerable number of flowers, reducing the total crop by roughly thirty percent. In the case of the oldest vines, as much as fifty percent was lost.

The storms of spring were followed by a very warm summer. Temperatures were unusually high—over thirty days exceeded 100° F. This extended heat wave resulted in a harvest at Lytton Springs that was perhaps two weeks ahead of schedule. The first grapes—at Lytton West—were picked on August 28; as the heat continued to push ripeness, we picked right through. Almost all the grapes were crushed and fermenting by the second week of September.

As always, the primary and secondary fermentations were carried out by naturally-occurring yeast and malolactic bacteria. The old-vine zinfandel was fermented in small tanks, the skins held beneath the surface of the juice in a process called "submerged cap" fermentation. The petite sirah and carignane were also fermented in small tanks, but the skins were allowed to float—juice was pumped gently over the cap of skins to extract color and richness.

In combining the fourteen different parcels, we found that the lovely raspberry fruit characteristic of the zinfandel was enhanced by the deeper, spicier flavors of the petite sirah from Lytton West. The wine was so well balanced with just these two varietals that only a small amount of carignane was included, adding a velvety texture to the finish. To show off the ripe fruit, we limited the amount of new oak to sixteen percent. Twenty-one percent was aged in one-year-old oak, and the remainder in older barrels. Enjoyable now, the 1996 Lytton Springs will age well. Its fresh, lively fruit will be most appealing during the first five years in bottle.

TASTING NOTES

- COLOR:** Deep ruby
- NOSE:** Ripe, aromatic, perfumed berry; sweet blackberry predominates. Briary, with hints of eucalyptus/mint, lemon zest, sweet oak, vanilla.
- PALATE:** Briar and bright, sweet blackberry components intensify on the palate. Cherry, black raspberry, black currant. Licorice, peppery spice, vanilla. Nicely rounded tannins, firm—though not overpowering—acid, exquisite balance.