

RIDGE 1999

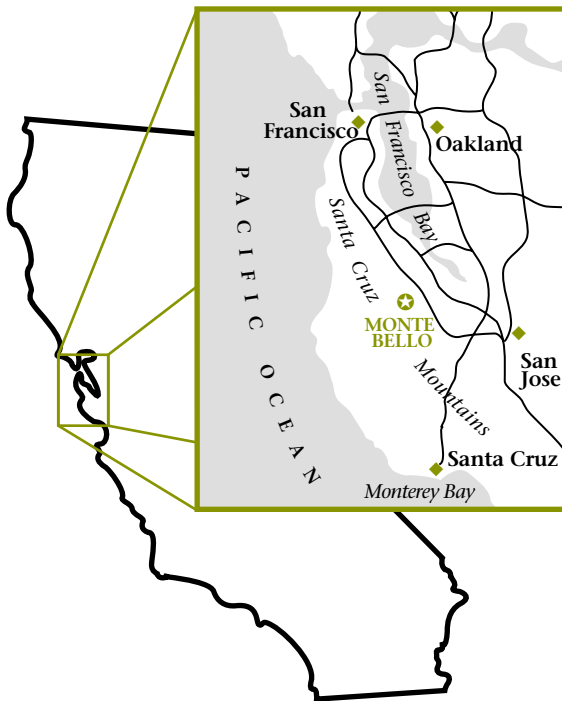
CALIFORNIA

MONTE BELLO®

99 Monte Bello, bottled March 2001

In most California vineyards, yields were cut by a cold, rainy spring. At Monte Bello, where it was colder still, flowering and set were put on hold. When summer finally came, the clement weather allowed a perfect set. Even after severe thinning, yields were two and a half tons per acre, equaling 1997's record. We harvested the separate parcels from the end of October through mid-November, as they ripened. In this vintage, fermentations destined for in-barrel malolactic were started with selected yeast; the rest—including all malolactics—were natural. Ninety-three percent of the wine was racked to air-dried american oak and—as part of our ongoing comparison—seven percent to the best french oak. In February, we chose twenty-three of the thirty-six parcels for the Monte Bello. A conjunction of intense black fruit, firm acid, and well-integrated tannin has produced one of the finest vintages of an unusual decade. Balanced and approachable as a young wine, this lovely Monte Bello will develop beautifully with ten to fifteen years of bottle age.

PD (1/01)



Location: Monte Bello Ridge, Santa Cruz Mountains, Santa Clara County.

Acres: Cabernet sauvignon - 66.4 acres
Merlot - 16.7 acres
Petit verdot - 2.2 acres
Cabernet franc - 1.3 acres

Yield: 1 - 3 tons/acre

Soils: Decomposing Franciscan rock mixed with clay, laid over fractured limestone.

Climate: Cool, mountainous—between the Mediterranean and Maritime Zones.

Elevation: 1300' - 2650'

Exposure: Principally south/southeast

**MONTE BELLO VINEYARD: 72% CABERNET SAUVIGNON
25% MERLOT, 2% CABERNET FRANC, 1% PETIT VERDOT
SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS ALCOHOL 13.0% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS BW 4488
17100 MONTE BELLO ROAD, BOX 1810, CUPERTINO, CA 95015**

Vintage 1998 set a record: the growing season started, and ended, later than any in Ridge history. For 1999, we expected a return to something resembling normal. But a cold, rainy winter set the stage, and April continued cool. We realized we might be late again. Despite a moderate May, cold rains in early June delayed flowering; on Monte Bello Ridge it was later than anywhere in California. This turned out to be a blessing. By the time fruit formation (set) could even begin, summer was here, and the weather was stable. The rough spring cut our Napa and Sonoma tonnage by forty percent in the old vines, twenty percent overall; Monte Bello was unaffected, producing two and a half tons per acre—an amount equaled only in the abundant 1997 vintage. These final yields came after some thinning at set, and still more at veraison in September, when the grapes turn from green to red to purple. The weather held through mid-November, allowing nearly all the vines to completely ripen flavors and tannins. The exception was the main petit verdot block, which did not mature sufficiently.

As usual, merlot ripened first, but not until the third week of October—two weeks behind schedule. Half the cabernet sauvignon and the small block of cabernet franc ripened in October's final week. The remaining cabernet and the tiny amount of petit verdot that did ripen were harvested in the first half of November—again, two weeks behind.

For the first time in eight years, we noticed a slight "reduced" (H₂S) character in several of the natural primary fermentations. In the exception that proves the rule, we inoculated the tanks chosen for barrel malolactics with our favorite standby selected yeast. All primary fermentations were done in tanks of five-and-a-half tons or less. Secondary fermentations were natural (uninoculated). Just over half were carried out in barrel, the rest in small tanks, keeping each of the parcels separate.

Ninety-three percent of the wine was aged in air-dried american white oak. As in every year since 1970, a limited amount (in this case seven percent) was aged in the finest french oak—from the Vosges, and from central France.

In January following vintage, we blind-tasted all lots. Of these, ten parcels and two-thirds of the press wine—forty-two percent of the 1999 Monte Bello crop—were held out. Virtually all the merlot was included, as well as the franc, and the small amount of ripe petit verdot.

The parcels chosen were assembled in March, and returned to barrel. This exceptional wine is well structured, with firm acidity and big, chalky—yet integrated—tannins. Black fruit, layered in its complexity, makes this one of the very finest vintages of this fine decade. Balanced and approachable as a young wine, the '99 Monte Bello will develop more fully with ten to fifteen years in bottle.

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