

RIDGE

VINEYARDS

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2014



1964 - 2014; Fifty Years of Zinfandel

The Ridge founding families purchased the old Torre winery on Monte Bello Ridge in 1959. (It's where our tasting room is today.) All Monte Bello's cabernet vineyards had been abandoned during Prohibition (1920-1933), though two small 19th-century zinfandel parcels near the base of the ridge survived. In 1949, Torre's then-owner replanted eight acres of cabernet near the top of the ridge. Now sixty-six years old, it is one of the oldest cabernet vineyards in California.

One of the partners, Dave Bennion, made an astounding half-barrel of this wine in 1959, and its quality convinced the families to re-bond the winery. In 1962, they officially produced four hundred cases of Ridge Monte Bello Cabernet.

The partners all had full-time jobs. As they began more replanting, they realized they could not expand the vineyard and improve the winery on the income from such limited production. They looked for cabernet grapes to buy, but the few existing cabernet vineyards either had no grapes to sell, or did not meet their standards.

Driving up to Ridge for their weekends of vineyard work, the families often stopped at Picchetti winery to purchase gallon jugs of zinfandel—the last made before the old vines were abandoned in the late fifties. The wines showed the full body and intense fruit of those 19th-century vines. Seeing a chance to increase production, Dave Bennion approached the Picchettis, arranging to restore the abandoned vines and buy the grapes. And we made our first zinfandel, labeled simply “Ridge California Zinfandel 1964.”

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RIDGE
CALIFORNIA
ZINFANDEL
1964

PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY BCRZ RIDGE VINEYARDS,
17100 MONTE BELLO ROAD, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA.
ALCOHOL 12.6 PERCENT BY VOLUME BOTTLED 11-65

RIDGE
CALIFORNIA
ZINFANDEL
GEYSERVILLE
1973

LATE PICKED GRAPES FROM TWO HILL VINEYARDS
BOTTLED OCT 1975 ALCOHOL 14.3% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS
17100 MONTE BELLO RD, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA

RIDGE
CALIFORNIA
ZINFANDEL
LYTTON SPRINGS
1974

GRAPES APPROX 92% ZINFANDEL, 8% PETITE SIRAH
BOTTLED NOV 1976 ALCOHOL 13.3% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS
17100 MONTE BELLO RD, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA

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Released a year-and-a-half later, it was a success. By then, the partners were negotiating with Leo and Evelyn Trentadue, owners of fifty acres above the Torre property, which included an old winery building, but no surviving vines. The Trentadues had recently sold their Santa Clara valley orchards, and moved to Sonoma to grow grapes. The partners had convinced them to sell the abandoned building—the eighty-year-old Monte Bello Winery—and, in the process, in 1966, arranged to buy some of their old-vine zinfandel grapes—our first Geyserville.

In 1967, Ridge made a Jimsomare zinfandel from Monte Bello's other 19th-century parcel, and also its first zinfandel from Benito Dusi's ranch in Paso Robles. 1969 brought several Lodi zinfandels, and one from Fulton, in Sonoma. I joined Ridge that same year, and my first zinfandel epiphany was the 1969 Picchetti. The Monte Bello had lured me to Ridge, but I now found myself with two loves, as I discovered the depth of fruit and complexity of fine zinfandel.

In 1970, we made the first of four vintages from surviving 19th-century vines on the Morelli ranch near Occidental. In 1971, we bought zinfandel from the Pronsolino vineyard on Vinegar Ridge, above Anderson Valley, known today as DuPratt. My good friend from university and winemaking partner in Chile, Fritz Maytag, provided the old-vine fruit for our first petite sirah, the 1971 York Creek, from Spring Mountain above Napa Valley. Three years later, we made our first York Creek zinfandel.

On a cold, rainy day in the winter of 1971/72, I joined Dick Sherwin for a tramp through the mud at his Valley Vista Vineyard, on Lytton Springs Road. Those old, head-trained vines with their thick, twisted trunks persuaded me to buy his fruit that year. When we released the wine two years later, I named it "Lytton Springs." (Ridge was able to buy the vineyard in 1990.) In 1972, we also bought old-vine zinfandel from George Zeni's vineyard above Anderson Valley. In 1973 came the first of several Langtry Road wines from John Gantner's School House Vineyard above St. Helena. In 1974, we explored the Sierra foothills, and made zinfandel from the Fiddletown, Esola, Story, and Baldinelli vineyards.

Since then, we have made zinfandel from thirty more old-vine vineyards, among them Park-Muscatine and Beatty on Howell Mountain; Evangelho on the Sacramento River Delta; Nervo, Mazzoni, and Buchignani in Sonoma, as well as Pagani, Ponzo, and East Bench.

Last fall, I was invited to a dinner at New York's Café Boulud. All the wines were from Ridge, and all were forty to fifty years old. The 1973 Geyserville and 1974 Lytton Springs were included. One of the collectors who organized the evening said of the forty-year-old Geyserville "My favorite wine of the night... wonderful perfume of lavender and berries...a long, layered finish showing how well great zinfandel can age." Further..."The massive structure of the Lytton Springs was mostly tamed...dark fruit in the glass...seamless, with a lovely, long finish...a perfect complement and contrast to the Geyserville."

What gratifying accolades with which to launch our Fifty Years of Zinfandel!

Paul Draper, Monte Bello Ridge, February 2014



On the Market, cont'd from page 3

- We monitor our vines with sap-flow sensors from Fruition Sciences. This latest vine-based technology allows us to irrigate only when necessary, using the least amount of water.

So in 2014 the skies are dry and the business environment is raining opportunity. But both these environments are cyclical. Eventually the rain will return, and the business environment become more challenging. Meanwhile, Ridge remains committed to conservation, quality, and sustainability.

David Amadia, V.P. Sales & Marketing

LESSENING THE IMPACT OF DROUGHT

Going into 2014, I feel very optimistic about the business environment for fine wine. At the same time, however, the drought has everyone in California concerned about the upcoming harvest.

Many positive factors affect the 2014 business climate. Fine wine sales are predicted to grow by up to 10%. After two small vintages (2010 and 2011), the 2012 comes to market with a great combination of abundant quantity and amazing quality. But all of this optimism is blunted by the reality of a drought now officially in its third year. Calendar year 2013 was the driest since record-keeping began, in 1849. In a normal year, Monte Bello receives 30" of rain, Lytton Springs nearly 40". Since last July, each location has received less than 3". We can already say, with a high degree of certainty, that the 2014 crop size will be below average.

At Ridge, we are taking steps to mitigate the impact of drought on the vines, and to ensure the highest-possible fruit quality. We are pruning even more aggressively than usual, allowing the vines to carry less crop, which will use less water to ripen the grapes. All normal farming practices (suckering, weed control, leaf- and fruit-thinning) will be done earlier. Only our young vines are irrigated, to develop their root systems. But, for the first time, we are putting drip lines on the rest of the vineyard; this will give the older vines just enough water to survive if the drought continues. If we do get some rain, we will still look closely at crop levels this summer, to make sure the vines carry only as much fruit as they can ripen. Managed properly, drought conditions can produce wines with great concentration and aging potential.

Ridge is also using conservation to minimize water use:

- We have increased organic matter in our soils by reducing tillage, adding more compost, and using cover crops. All help to retain moisture.
- We recycle our wineries' grey water, and use it to irrigate young vines. We have done this at Lytton Springs for over a decade, and last year made a significant investment in a bio-reactor to clean the water at Monte Bello.

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2012 Geyserville

Tasting Notes: Ruby color. Pungent bramble fruit, wintergreen, licorice, sweet toasted oak. Rich black cherry fruit on entry. Elegant chalky tannins, gravel/rock, ginger root. Layered, sensuous finish.



2012 East Bench Zinfandel

Tasting Notes: Ruby red in color, spicy raspberry nose with notes of vanilla and clove. Black cherry, plum and mint on the palate with elegant tannins and an accent of lavender on the finish.



2012 Paso Robles Zinfandel

Tasting Notes: Deep garnet color. Aromas of ripe black cherry, plum, toasted oak, caramel. On entry: mincemeat, plum, old-vine pepper spice. Firm acid, defined tannins in an intense finish.



2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate

Tasting Notes: Ruby/purple color. Blackberry, red currant, exotic barrel spice, crushed rock. Intense red fruit entry. Coated tannins, full body, firm acid, toasted oak. Complex, layered flavors; long finish.



2011 Merlot Estate

Tasting Notes: Ruby color. Dried cherry, rhubarb, olive, sun-dried tomato. Cherry fruit on entry, chaparral, dried herbs, currant. Firm acid, polished tannins, refreshing finish.



2012 Chardonnay Estate

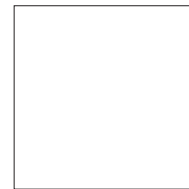
Tasting Notes: Pale gold. Tropical notes of ripe pineapple, fig, honey-suckle. Sweet entry; rich, oily texture. Full-bodied, with crisp acidity. Strong apple/pear fruit in an intense finish.



VIRTUAL TASTING Spring Releases

RIDGE
VINEYARDS

PO Box 1810
Cupertino, CA 95015



Friday, April 4, 10am Pacific Time

Taste along online as our winemakers explore the Spring release wines and provide you information about the winemaking techniques, vineyard history, and the unique aspects of each wine. You'll be able to ask questions in real time and hear what the winemakers have to say about these exciting new wines.

Details: www.ridgewine.com/wholesale



www.ridgewine.com/wholesale

CURRENT RELEASE



2012 Three Valleys

Tasting Notes: Garnet color; cherry and raspberry fruits, wintergreen, savory herbs, barrel spice; cherry fruit on entry, lively acidity, medium body, smooth tannin texture, gravelly-clay mineral finish.

Wine & Spirits

24TH ANNUAL RESTAURANT POLL

A Top Zinfandel in the
Best US Restaurants for
9 Consecutive Years

April 2013

ANNUAL TOP 100 WINERIES FOR 2013

A Wine & Spirits Top 100
Winery for the 16th time in
the past 20 years. October 2013