

December 2021



John Olney, Head Winemaker & COO

After the widespread fires of 2020, we hoped for a winter and spring with ample rain to replenish groundwater and diminish the intensity of any fires in 2021. Unfortunately, the rain never came and instead California entered into one of its most severe droughts. While there were no serious fires near Monte Bello in 2021, the lack of soil moisture had an impact on the vines. At Monte Bello, we saw stress throughout the vineyard as the vines struggled to find water and nutrients. To combat this, we dropped crop, especially in the young cabernet, to lighten the load.

An early budbreak coupled with warmer than normal weather throughout the growing season, including several heat waves in August, hastened ripening. By mid-August, the earliest ever in Ridge history, we began picking the chardonnay, followed quickly by the cabernet and merlot. Most unusually, we began picking at the upper vineyards of Perrone and Torre and worked our way down the hill, whereas typically we start below at Klein and move upward. Once we began picking, we did not stop for four weeks, making 2021 also one of the shortest, most condensed crops ever for Ridge.

While yields were down for all the Bordeaux varieties, cabernet was a full third below average. Also notable and another effect of the drought was the very small size of the berries. This resulted in wines with tremendous concentration but posed a challenge in managing the level of tannin of each fermentation. As the year comes to an end, forty-five lots are slowly completing malolactic fermentation. We expect all to finish in January, leaving us plenty to work with during our initial Monte Bello assemblage tasting.

Elsewhere, we harvested a full crop of zinfandel from the Dusi Ranch in Paso Robles. Zinfandel, especially from older vines with more developed root systems, fared better in the drought than most other varieties. Also from Paso Robles, the grenache blanc from the Adalaida Vineyard looks very promising. Overall, while the drought posed a big challenge and yields are generally down, we have a great deal of excellent wines to work with and much to look forward to as they evolve in barrel.