

December 2021



Michael Bairdsmith, Assistant Winemaker at Lytton Springs
and John Olney, Head Winemaker & COO

Water was scarce during the Lytton Springs 2021 growing season. Winter rains left us with just 13 inches, leaving the vines at Lytton Springs water-stressed. This diminished overall yields, with the zinfandel vines showing particular susceptibility. The vineyard crew contended with all of the challenges of farming in drought conditions, and by late-spring/early-summer, it was clear that clusters and berries were smaller than usual, but the potential for quality was high.

Our usual summer heat waves came but were fleeting. While the light crop and dry weather had many anticipating an early harvest, the temperatures overall were relatively mild. By late July, it looked as though harvest would arrive “on time”. The zinfandel vines, along with their complimentary petite sirah and carignane vines, all went through veraison on schedule, and August sampling began. Ripening and flavor development was slow, steady, and uniform. The beginning of harvest did not start with the usual feeling of hitting the ground running. It felt more as if we were sitting on the edge of our seats, waiting for the show to start.

Harvest began at Lytton Springs on August 18, with carignane from the Sandy Lane Ranch out of Contra Costa County. More carignane, from the Buchignani Ranch, followed ten days later. These early lots were indicative of what to expect from this year’s crop: low yields and small berries. Some of the petite sirah from Lytton West looked more like black currants than grapes, and the resulting wines are beautifully concentrated. Lower yields can lead to rapid and simultaneous ripening in hotter vintages, but Mother Nature was kind this September. Cool evenings allowed the fruit to ripen steadily and gradually, which set an easy pace. These relatively cool evenings also meant the fruit retained its natural acidity, leading to well-balanced finished wines. Natural primary and secondary fermentations began slowly at first but gained inertia by mid-September. Warm days and cool nights persisted throughout September and into mid-October, stretching harvest well into fall. We picked the last grapes on October 16. All wines were finished fermenting and barrel-ready by the first week in December.

With a water-stressed crop, it was crucial to closely monitor each fermentation to avoid over-extraction, particularly with petite sirah. Several Lytton West petite sirah blocks were co-fermented with adjoining zinfandel blocks, and the results are particularly impressive. These wines are showing exceptional layered fruit and structure and have already been included in the initial assemblage of the 2021 Lytton Springs.

-Michael Bairdsmith, Assistant Winemaker, Lytton Springs