

January 2026



Plentiful winter rains replenished groundwater, starting the growing season off on a positive footing. Cool spring weather delayed budbreak until early April. The growing season then followed a yo-yo pattern of warming up, then cooling down. Temperatures throughout July rarely climbed out of the 70s, signaling that a late harvest was in store. Absent the dry drought conditions of recent years, the vines—especially cabernet sauvignon—responded with a full crop. In the last half of August, at veraison, we dropped crop to even out ripening. Warm weather then followed,

bringing the first grapes to full ripeness on September 2nd.

Temperatures in mid-September, however, once again cooled off so we paused picking. The grapes continued to ripen but very slowly, making 2025 a true exercise in patience. As the first grapes began to ferment, it became clear that while color was deep, dark and plentiful, tannin was not extracting as quickly as usual. We therefore increased pump-over times and extended macerations. Typically, Monte Bello fermentations can be as few as six days. In 2025, the average fermentation lasted ten days. The long ripening time with cooler temperatures also meant the grapes ripened at slightly lower sugar levels. Often, in warm years, sugar concentration in the grape can outpace flavor development, making picking decisions difficult. In 2025, we had the luxury of surgically picking each block at optimal ripeness.

With still 50% of the grapes on the vine, October continued much as September, with grapes arriving to the winery at a slow but steady pace. There were several periodic rains, one with over half an inch accumulation. Fortunately, of the grapes grown at Monte Bello, only chardonnay is susceptible to negative effects such as rot due to rain. By the time the rains arrived, the chardonnay had already been picked. The remaining varietals, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and petite verdot, have thick skin and loose bunches that allow good air flow. These, therefore, were unaffected by the rain.

We picked the petite verdot (always the last variety to ripen) on November 4th, bringing a long drawn-out harvest to an end. Traditionally, to make a long-lived wine, growers seek balance because it is balance in ripeness, in tannin, in acid, in fruit, as well as the potential of the site, that determines the ageability of a wine. Thus far, this quality in the 2025 Monte Bello wines is what stands out. In February, we will sort the more-than-sixty individual lots out during our 1st assemblage tasting and provide an update soon thereafter.

—John Olney, Head Winemaker & CEO