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ROBERSON WINE PRESENTS:

THE WINES OF  
**RIDGE**

A TASTING WITH PAUL DRAPER

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 26th 2009

# RIDGE VINEYARDS

Most serious wine regions have estates that are held in high esteem around the world and California is, of course, no different. Of all such estates, Ridge Vineyards is perhaps more revered than any other in the United States and many a wine lover would place them among the very best producers of red wine on the planet. For 50 years Ridge has appealed to lovers of both old and new world styles, famed for fashioning wines of generosity, balance, elegance and ageing prowess.

It was back in 1959 that three scientists from Stanford University decided to purchase an 8 acre vineyard on Monte Bello ridge that had been replanted in 1949, after years of neglect thanks to Prohibition. The vineyard was adjacent to the original Monte Bello property (planted by Dr Osea Perrone back in 1886) from which the first 'Monte Bello' wine was made in 1892. 70 years after Perrone's first vintage, Ridge Vineyards produced their inaugural Monte Bello - a wine that would become part of vinous history within 15 years.

The early years at Ridge were a time of replanting, recruiting and expansion. During the 1960s they purchased some of the original Perrone land and the Monte Bello winery, and they began working an abandoned Zinfandel vineyard (dating back to the 19th century) that would give them the first vintage of Geyserville in 1966.

Much of the Cabernet Sauvignon vines were replanted during this period, but it was the appointment of a new chief winemaker in 1969 that would perhaps be the most important decision the founders of Ridge would ever make. Paul Draper, a fellow graduate of Stanford University (in philosophy rather than wine), was recruited in 1969 and so began the rise to international prominence that continues to this day.

One of the most famous episodes in Ridge's history was also a landmark for Californian wine in general - the 1976 'Judgement of Paris' tasting organised by British wine merchant Steven Spurrier at his store in Paris. The story has been told and retold innumerable times, including the recent Hollywood film 'Bottle Shock' starring Alan Rickman, but by finishing 5th out of 10 Ridge 'Monte Bello' had secured itself a place in the history books and the hearts and minds of wine enthusiasts all over the world.

In the following thirty years Ridge has continued to go from strength to strength. In '86 the original partners were bought out by Otsuka Pharmaceuticals and this financial backing enabled expansion of the estate to continue as the eastern and western sections of the vineyard the Lytton Springs winery were added to the Ridge portfolio in the first half of the 1990s (although Ridge had been making a 'Lytton Springs' since the 70s).

In 2006 Steven Spurrier organised the 30th anniversary of the Paris tasting with the original wines retasted by an esteemed panel judges at two events - one in Napa and one in London. This time the 1971 Monte Bello was victorious, beating Bordeaux luminaries like Mouton-Rothschild, Haut-Brion and Leoville Las Cases.

Paul Draper was named Decanter's man of the year in 2000 and a string of accolades has since followed. It is an absolute pleasure to welcome him to Roberson Wine tonight and a privilege to be tasting the Ridge wines in his company.

## THE WHITES: SANTA CRUZ & MONTE BELLO CHARDONNAY

The first Chardonnay produced at Ridge was made in 1962 from vines on the Monte Bello estate that had been planted back in the 1940s, but it was during the 70s that a string of fine vintages demonstrated the quality that could be achieved. Plantings were extended on to the lower vineyards beneath the original Monte Bello estate and these came onstream during the 80s, by which time production had been significantly increased from the original 10 barrels.

Nowadays the majority of wine produced from the 12 blocks of chardonnay at the estate is labelled as '**Santa Cruz**' Chardonnay, but in top vintages the best parcels are selected to go into the '**Monte Bello**' bottling.

Ridge's chardonnays are barrel fermented and matured in American oak for a further 16-18 months - between 1/4 - 1/3 of which are new barrels, depending on the cuvée.

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
1: 2007 Santa Cruz Chardonnay 14.5% ABV	n/a	£ <del>39.95</del>	n/a
2: 2006 Monte Bello Chardonnay 14.5% ABV	on request*	£ <del>44.95</del>	£40.46
3: 1999 Monte Bello Chardonnay 14.5% ABV	n/a	£ <del>44.95</del>	n/a

## THE ZINFANDELS: LYTTON SPRINGS & GEYSERVILLE

### The Lytton Springs winery and surrounding vineyard

Ridge have become renowned for the quality of their Zinfandel and their two most famous cuvées based on this Californian varietal are '**Lytton Springs**' and '**Geyserville**'.

The Lytton Springs estate in the Dry Creek Valley and first came to prominence during the 1870s when it was owned by 'Captain' William Litton. Over time ownership of the various vineyards of the estate fragmented and the name swapped Litton's 'i' for a 'y'. Ridge made their first wine from Lytton vines in 1972 and by 1995 they had completed the purchase of the winery building and the Eastern and Western sections of the vineyard. The Lytton blend includes Petite Sirah and Carignane and is typically aged for 15 months in American oak barrels, around 20% of which are new.

Just north of Lytton, in the Anderson Valley, are the three adjoining vineyards that make up the Geyserville site where Ridge have been making a Zinfandel dominated cuvée every year since 1966. The vineyards are not owned by Ridge, but in 1990 they secured a long-term lease on the site in order to ensure the supply of grapes for years to come. The Geyserville blend often includes a small portion of Mataro (known elsewhere as Mourvedre) and is matured in American oak for around 14 months with around 20% new barrels.

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
1: 2006 Lytton Springs 14.5% ABV	n/a**	<del>£29.95</del>	n/a
2: 2006 Geyserville 14.5% ABV	38	<del>£29.95</del>	£26.96
3: 1992 Geyserville 14.5% ABV	n/a	n/a	n/a

\*\* 37 bottles of 2005 Lytton Springs available at £27.95

## SANTA CRUZ: CAB SAUV/MERLOT/PETIT VERDOT

Back to the Monte Bello ridge for the third flight and a Bordeaux blend called '**Santa Cruz**' that is the 'second wine' of Ridge's top cuvée, Monte Bello.

The first vintage was made in 1979, when the Cabernet vines replanted during the 60s were coming to maturity. While many of the 36 parcels at the Monte Bello estate were venerable enough to go into the top wine, there were many of these newer vineyards that yielded fruit more suitable for an early drinking style of wine. These prompted the creation of Santa Cruz and this process continues today - 19 of the 36 parcels were de-selected from the final cut for Monte Bello in 2006.

Santa Cruz is aged for 20 months in American oak barrels, just over 50% of which are new.

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
1: 2006 Santa Cruz 13.5% ABV	46	<del>£36.95</del>	£33.26
2: 2002 Santa Cruz 13.7% ABV	n/a	n/a	n/a

## MONTE BELLO: CAB SAUV/MERLOT/PETIT VERDOT/CAB FRANC

Undoubtedly one of the new world's first growths, Ridge's '**Monte Bello**' was first made in 1962. The 8 acres of vines that gave the fruit for this wine were relatively young, having been replanted in 1949 following years of neglect in the wake of prohibition.

The 180 acre Monte Bello ridge was originally planted way back in 1886 and over the years, the guys at Ridge have replanted much of the original estate with Bordeaux varieties. The 36 parcels of red vines are now used in the production of Monte Bello and Santa Cruz, with the chardonnay vines used to make the wines in flight one.

Following success in the 'Judgement of Paris' tasting back in 1976, Ridge acquired an international reputation for their wines that has gathered pace ever since.

Monte Bello is made from the best vineyards at the estate and aged for 18 months in new oak - almost all of it American, but a small amount of French (for comparative purposes).

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
1: 2006 Monte Bello 13.5% ABV	n/a	n/a	n/a
2: 1999 Monte Bello 13% ABV	on request	<del>£190</del>	£171
3: 1994 Monte Bello 12.5% ABV	on request	<del>£250</del>	£225