

## Ridge, Santa Cruz Mountains Estate 2006

8 Mar 2010 by Jancis Robinson

From \$32.99, £28.49, Can\$48.95, also in Denmark, Sweden and Liechtenstein

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I have long been a fan of Ridge Vineyards in California. They featured in my 1981 selection of a handful of producers for *The Great Wine Book*. We filmed there in 1983 for the first series of *The Wine Programme* for Channel 4, back in the Dave Bennion era. They were the only producer to have two wines featured in my 1989 book about how different wines age, *Vintage Timecharts*. And when I had to choose one red wine to represent my idea of wine quality at the [2006 Masters of Wine Symposium](#) in Napa Valley, it was Ridge's Monte Bello 1996 (which, incidentally, all but one person took for an Old World wine).

But my two days of celebrations of Ridge's half-century in California last week left me with, if anything, even more admiration for this distinctive producer of claret-style wines (and some increasingly impressive Chardonnay). I will be writing about this in detail on Saturday and have just published a set of [tasting notes on vintages back to 1968](#) on Purple pages, but here is a wine I think is a terrific price, especially in the US, where so many retailers are discounting like crazy, and one that is not too difficult to find at all. According to wine-searcher.com, it's available not just widely in the US and in the UK (our image is taken from Berry Bros' website) but also in Canada, Scandinavia and in much of the rest of Europe.

It is hardly original to claim that Ridge's top Bordeaux blend **Monte Bello** is the equivalent of a first growth. The [rerun of the Judgment of Paris](#) established that. But **Ridge, Santa Cruz Mountains Estate 2006** is the equivalent of a particularly good first-growth second wine, except that it is, conveniently, much more forward than any 2006 first-growth second wine I know in Bordeaux. We also tasted the **Santa Cruz Mountains 2007** last week. This is a very fine wine but is still pretty tight while the 2006 is almost ready to drink, tasting like a super-ripe, super-polished top-quality red bordeaux. I gave it 17.5 points out of 20 (super-generous for me) and thought it would drink beautifully throughout the decade to come. This is very sophisticated wine by any measure.

Thanks to Ridge's blessedly explicit and apposite labels, I can tell you that this wine is 13.7% alcohol and is made up of 56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 42% Merlot and 2% the Petit Verdot that was planted way back at CEO Paul Draper's instigation. After painstaking blind tasting and re-tasting of over 30 lots of wine made from old, some very old, vines high above the Pacific and Silicon Valley, the Ridge team decide what goes into the grand vin, Monte Bello. Most of the remaining lots, varying between 40 and 60% of the total, makes up this blend labelled simply Santa Cruz Mountains Estate.

And here is what was written for the back label by winemaker Eric Baugher in June 2008:

*A cold winter and heavy rainfall delayed the start of the growing season. Bloom came in late April. An unusually warm summer and mild fall ripened the grapes through October. The clusters were destemmed, but not crushed, for a natural, whole-berry fermentation. Color and tannin were abundant, so pump-overs were reduced, then eliminated by day six; we pressed on day nine. The uninoculated malolactic was complete by year's end. Thirty-four Monte Bello parcels had been fermented as thirty-six small batches; all began aging in new American oak barrels. The following spring, nineteen were selected for this outstanding Santa Cruz Mountains Estate. It was returned to barrel (half new, a quarter two years old, a quarter three/four years old). Enjoyable now for its dark fruit and elegant structure; it will develop further over the next ten to fifteen years.*

Along with those of Torres, Ridge's labels are a model of communicating exactly what you want to know and no more. No 'optimum ripeness' or 'best with red meats'. I suggest American wine lovers in particular take advantage of some especially appealing current prices on this classic wine.

And those looking for even more obvious value in Ridge claret-style reds should look out for their Zinfandels, many from very old vines such as those shown here in one of the Lytton vineyards. Their flagship **Geyserville** (aromatic and sophisticated) and **Lytton Springs** (with more grunt) can be found from \$24.95 and £23.49.

Please come back later in the week for more detail, and tasting notes on more than 40 of Ridge's favourite wines.

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