

# Ridge Wine

By Melanie Bolduc

The first time I sampled a Ridge Wine was at Yamamori Restaurant on the Quays in Dublin, Ireland. On that evening, I was at a dinner with friends. My friend, Trudy had ordered a bottle of Ridge from Lytton Springs. I asked if I could have a glass when my beef stir fry arrived. Now, there is an incredible experience that happens when you taste a fantastic bottle of wine for the first time. This wine blew me away. It was big, and had great structure, tannins, and elegance. It was almost Old World in style, but had this lush, fleshy fruit character. And that day, I made a mental promise to myself that if I ever ended up in California again, I would visit them, to taste some more of their wines.

My initial journey to Ridge Vineyards tasting room was an ambitious one. I went early on a mid September Sunday morning to meet the tasting room manager, Christopher Watkins. On this sunny Sunday morning, Christopher had planned to meet me before noon. Having departed the canyon of San Ramon early in the morning, the state of California seemed a quiet place. I drove South through toward San Jose and took a right, I eventually found a highway that would lead me directly to the vineyard. After retrieving directions from my iPhone, I drove into the town of Cupertino. Taking a left after the highway, I drove to the base of the mountain. The previous day, Christopher did warn me on the phone that I would have to climb a mountain to find the winery. This was the mountain in question. In most of the area surrounding the Santa Cruz Mountains, there are windy roads that climb steep mountains. I followed the road that led to the top. There were several cyclists on the road on this particular morning. I did my best to avoid them but also to stay within the narrow road. At one point on my way up the hill, I started to second guess my directions. I asked a local if I was headed toward the winery. She said I was on the right track. She added that the winery was further up the mountain. The old Volvo wagon climbed lethargically up the winding, hairpin turns of the road.

When I arrived at Ridge Vineyards, I did what I had been avoiding for the past 15 minutes – I turned around and looked down the hill. Quite simply, the view from Ridge tasting rooms is breathtaking. Although it was a bit foggy on this morning, you could see the ridges on the lower mountain, as well as parts of San Francisco and the sea. The winery's location is nearly at the very top of the mountain. Grapevines grow above and below the tasting room site. There are few trees as compared to the thicker Redwood forests of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The space feels very open and faces due north. As a result, it seems as though you are on top of the world.

The tasting area is broken into a few sections. First, there is the tasting room itself. This room has large windows that look onto the view. Then there is the event area, which is nestled on a porch above the tasting rooms. Across from these areas is a garden set up with picnic tables. The gardens have some carefully planted wild flowers. There is also a seating area on the upper hill among the grape vines. People who travel to this tasting area usually come for the day, as it is such a breathtaking, secluded location. The views from the tasting area are truly amazing.

Christopher and I met to discuss our business for the day. He gave me a brief overview of the wine company and its operations. He presented the tasting area and the Ridge philosophy. Chris was very clear that the integrity of Ridge was always held to the highest standard. He furthered that the Old World style winemaking that they maintained, was another testament to their commitment to producing world class wines. Then, I was escorted into the tasting room to

commence tasting some new vintages.

In the tasting room I was introduced to the lovely Tara. She explained to me that Ridge has two main Vineyards: Montebello (Santa Cruz Mountains) and Lytton Springs (Sonoma). Furthermore, Ridge owns several estates throughout Northern California. The best grapes are then selected from each vineyard and estate to create wines that are signature to their territory. The methods by which the grapes are grown are European in style. For example, they do not train their grapes on trellises for maximum sun exposure. Instead, they let the vine grow naturally. Only wild yeast is used for fermentation, and yields are kept low. It is this commitment to quality that has made Ridge wines internationally recognized.

Tara presented the wine selected for tasting this morning. All of the wines



I sampled at Ridge were reds. The first was the **2006 Lytton Springs** (80% Zinfandel, 16% Petite Syrah, and 4% Carignane). I found this wine to be quite subtle for a Zinfandel based wine. It was deep in color and smooth in texture. I think this wine would open up a bit with a bit of age. The **2003 Petite Syrah Dynamite Hill** (100% Petite Syrah) I found to be interesting. Although this wine is produced from 35-year-old Petite Syrah vines in Napa's York Creek Vineyard, I found it needed a bit more time to open up. This Petite Syrah

definitely had some outstanding character, and I look forward to enjoying it again in the future.

Next on the wine list was the **2002 Lytton Estate Syrah** (76% Syrah, 21% Grenache, and 3% Carignane). This wine was outstanding with great complexity and spice. The Syrah had a fantastic intense bouquet with a rich finish. The final tasting wine was the **2002 Petite Syrah, Lytton Estate**. (93% Syrah, 7% Zinfandel.) This wine was the finest of the bunch, deep purple in color with rich, bold tannins. This wine had great depth, complexity, and a hint of spice. Moreover, this wine had a velvety finish and would pair well with a hearty meal.

It was easy to see how Ridge has earned itself an international reputation for excellence in winemaking. The good folks at Ridge keep producing incredible vintages each year. And Ridge's commitment to quality is felt in every corner of the globe. From Dublin to Tokyo to Paris, Ridge wines are an international success. Paul Draper, Ridge's chief winemaker, is said to be one of the most respected American winemakers in Bordeaux.

My visit to Ridge was shorter than I would have liked. I could have taken in the view all day. Overall, I found the location and the wine very impressive. The journey up the mountain was well worth the trip. I would highly recommend any wine enthusiast travelling to this area to make the trip. However, if you were travelling in a group, I would call the winery in advance. I found all the staff at the winery to be smart, thoughtful, and as individual in character as the wines they pour. The Ridge tasting room is a destination well worth the journey.

Many thanks to Christopher Watkins and the staff at Ridge for allowing me to visit them and tasting their world class wines.

[www.ridgevine.com](http://www.ridgevine.com)



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