Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series

Paul Draper

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF WINEMAKING AT RIDGE VINEYARDS: 1970S-1990S

Interviews Conducted by
Ruth Teiser
in 1994

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

> Paul Draper, "History and Philosophy of Winemaking at Ridge Vineyards, 1970s-1990s," an oral history conducted in 1994 by Ruth Teiser, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1994.

Copy no. _____

Cataloging information

DRAPER, Paul (b. 1936) Winemaker

History and Philosophy of Winemaking at Ridge Vineyards: 1970s-1990s, 1994, viii, 77 pp.

Stanford education, wine indoctrination; army service in Italy, and foreign affairs work in South America, 1960-1966; establishing a winery in Chile, 1967: equipment, cooperage; Ridge Vineyards & Winery: history, re-starting the winery in the 1960s, David Bennion, Fritz Maytag, winemaking techniques and philosophy; other California wineries and production processes; importance of vineyard *terroir*, Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon, vineyard-designated labels, marketing; sale of Ridge to Otsuka Pharmaceutical Co.

Interviewed 1994 by Ruth Teiser for the Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Paul Draper

PREFACE

The California wine industry oral history series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated by Ruth Teiser in 1969 through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, a state marketing order organization which ceased operation in 1975. In 1983 it was reinstituted as The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed has been made by a committee consisting of the director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John A. De Luca, president of the Wine Institute, the statewide winery organization; Maynard A. Amerine, Emeritus Professor of Viticulture and Enology, University of California, Davis; the current chairman of the board of directors of the Wine Institute; Ruth Teiser, series project director; and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation.

Until her death in June 1994, Ruth Teiser was project originator, initiator, director, and conductor of the greater part of the oral histories. Her book, Winemaking in California, co-authored with Catherine Harroun and published in 1982, was the product of more than forty years of research, interviewing, and photographing. (Those wine history files are now in The Bancroft Library for researcher use.) Ruth Teiser's expertise and knowledge of the wine industry contributed significantly to the documenting of its history in this series.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and winemaking that has existed only in the memories of wine men. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some commercial winemaking did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his or her own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State

Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of materials readily available for the purpose.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of The Bancroft Library.

Carole Hicke
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California Winemen
Oral History Series

July 1994
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS
Interviews Completed July 1992

Leon D. Adams, Revitalizing the California Wine Industry, 1974

Leon D. Adams, California Wine Industry Affairs: Recollections and Opinions, 1990

Maynard A. Amerine, The University of California and the State's Wine Industry, 1971

Maynard A. Amerine, Wine Bibliographies and Taste Perception Studies, 1988

Philo Biane, Wine Making in Southern California and Recollections of Fruit Industries, Inc., 1972

Charles A. Carpy, Viticulture and Enology at Freemark Abbey, 1994

John B. Cella, The Cella Family in the California Wine Industry, 1986

Charles Crawford, Recollections of a Career with the Gallo Winery and the Development of the California Wine Industry, 1942-1989, 1990

Burke H. Critchfield, Carl F. Wente, and Andrew G. Frericks, The California Wine Industry During the Depression, 1972

William V. Cruess, A Half Century of Food and Wine Technology, 1967

Jack and Jamie Peterman Davies, Rebuilding Schramsberg: The Creation of a California Champagne House, 1990

Paul Draper, History and Philosophy of Winemaking at Ridge Vineyards: 1970S-1990S, 1994

William A. Dieppe, Almaden is My Life, 1985

Making California Port Wine: Ficklin Vineyards from 1948 to 1992, interviews with David, Jean, Peter, and Steven Ficklin, 1992

Alfred Fromm, Marketing California Wine and Brandy, 1984

Louis Gomberg, Analytical Perspectives on the California Wine Industry, 1935-1990, 1990

Miljenko Grgich, A Croatian-American Winemaker in the Napa Valley, 1992

Joseph E. Heitz, Creating a Winery in the Napa Valley, 1986

Maynard A. Joslyn, A Technologist Views the California Wine Industry, 1974

Amandus N. Kasimatis, A Career in California Viticulture, 1988

Morris Katz, Paul Masson Winery Operations and Management, 1944-1988, 1990

Legh F. Knowles, Jr., Beaulieu Vineyards from Family to Corporate Ownership, 1990

Horace O. Lanza and Harry Baccigaluppi, California Grape Products and Other Wine Enterprises, 1971

Zelma R. Long, The Past is the Beginning of the Future: Simi Winery in its Second Century, 1992

Richard Maher, California Winery Management and Marketing, 1992

Louis M. Martini and Louis P. Martini, Wine Making in the Napa Valley, 1973

Louis P. Martini, A Family Winery and the California Wine Industry, 1984

Eleanor McCrea, Stony Hill Vineyards: The Creation of a Napa Valley Estate Winery, 1990

Otto E. Meyer, California Premium Wines and Brandy, 1973

Norbert C. Mirassou and Edmund A. Mirassou, The Evolution of a Santa Clara Valley Winery, 1986

Peter Mondavi, Advances in Technology and Production at Charles Krug Winery, 1946-1988, 1990

Robert Mondavi, Creativity in the Wine Industry, 1985

Michael Moone, Management and Marketing at Beringer Vineyards and Wine World, Inc., 1990

Myron S. Nightingale, Making Wine in California, 1944-1987, 1988

Harold P. Olmo, Plant Genetics and New Grape Varieties, 1976

Cornelius Ough, Researches of an Enologist, University of California, Davis, 1950-1990, 1990

John A. Parducci, Six Decades of Making Wine in Mendocino County, California, 1992

Antonio Perelli-Minetti, A Life in Wine Making, 1975

Louis A. Petri, The Petri Family in the Wine Industry, 1971

Jefferson E. Peyser, The Law and the California Wine Industry, 1974

Lucius Powers, The Fresno Area and the California Wine Industry, 1974

Victor Repetto and Sydney J. Block, Perspectives on California Wines, 1976

Edmund A. Rossi, Italian Swiss Colony and the Wine Industry, 1971

Edmund A. Rossi, Jr., Italian Swiss Colony, 1949-1989: Recollections of a Third-Generation California Winemaker, 1990

Arpaxat Setrakian, A. Setrakian, a Leader of the San Joaquin Valley Grape Industry, 1977

Elie Skofis, California Wine and Brandy Maker, 1988

Rodney S. Strong, Rodney Strong Vineyards: Creative Winemaking and Winery Management in Sonoma County, 1994

Andre Tchelistcheff, Grapes, Wine, and Ecology, 1983

Brother Timothy, The Christian Brothers as Wine Makers, 1974

Louis (Bob) Trinchero, California Zinfandels, a Success Story, 1992

Charles F. Wagner and Charles J. Wagner, Caymus Vineyards: A Father-Son Team Producing Distinctive Wines, 1994

The Wente Family and the California Wine Industry, interviews with Jean, Carolyn, Philip, and Eric Wente, 1992

Ernest A. Wente, Wine Making in the Livermore Valley, 1971

Warren Winiarski, Creating Classic Wines in the Napa Valley, 1994

Albert J. Winkler, Viticultural Research at UC Davis (1921-1971), 1973

John H. Wright, Domaine Chandon: The First French-owned California Sparkling Wine Cellar, includes an interview with Edmond Maudière, 1992

INTERVIEW HISTORY--by Carole Hicke

As guest of a grapegrowing family at Dry Creek, California, Paul Draper gazed out the window at the colorful, autumn vineyards and told himself, "Someday I want to do this." He was then a college freshman, and it would be more than a decade and in a different part of California, but he would do it.

Born in Evanston, Illinois, Draper took a degree in philosophy at Stanford University and served with the Counter Intelligence Corps in Italy in the early 1960s. It was there, and in France where he went for a year at the Sorbonne, that Draper developed a strong interest in the production of wine and in the vineyards.

He spent the next few years traveling through South America on a government contract, meeting with young leaders to gain a sense of the future of the region. In 1966 he and Sam Armstrong joined Fritz Maytag to work there in nutrition and family planning education. Then, in 1968 he and Fritz Maytag began producing wine in Chile. Reading the literature avidly, meeting with experienced winemakers, and tasting extensively, especially Bordeaux wines, Draper developed the skills he needed. After two vintages, the changing economic and political situation in Chile sent him back to California, where he joined Ridge Vineyards in 1969 as winemaker, soon becoming one of the owner-partners.

At Ridge, Draper began making wines--mostly Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel--of bold, intense flavor, using traditional techniques. He uses natural yeasts, small oak barrels, and a submerged-cap technique for fermentation. In making the wines, he focused on quality--wanting to make what he thought was the best wine, not what someone said the market demanded.

Believing that the wine's most significant characteristics come from the soil and climate of a site, he selected vineyards with great care, and developed a program for vineyard-designated labels that became a hallmark of the winery.

Eventually some of the winery owners wanted to sell their shares, and in December of 1986, the winery was sold to Akihiko Otsuka, a fine wine collector. But Otsuka wanted nothing to change, and Paul Draper remains as chief executive officer, chairman of the board, and winemaker at Ridge.

Draper was interviewed by Ruth Teiser, accompanied by Carole Hicke, on February 10 and 17, 1994 as part of the Wine Spectator California

Winemen Oral History Series. He reviewed the transcript carefully, making some corrections and additions. His assistant, Craig Peasley helpfully retyped parts of the transcript. Thanks go to Judy Smith, who transcribed the tapes, and Merrilee Proffitt for arrangements and volume production.

This series is part of the ongoing documenting of California history by the Regional Oral History Office, which is under the direction of Willa Baum, Division Head, and under the administrative direction of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Carole Hicke
Project Director

September 1994
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Paul Draper

Date of birth 3/10/36 Birthplace Evanston, IL

Father's full name James Draper

Occupation Investment Broker/Farmer Birthplace Marion, Iowa

Mother's full name Dorothea Lucia Higbie

Occupation Mother, Manager of Household Birthplace Chicago, IL

Your spouse Maureen McCarthy Draper

Your children Caitlin McCarthy Draper

Where did you grow up? In country outside Barrington, IL

Present community Palo Alto/Los Altos

Education Choate School, Wallingford, CN
Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA

Occupation(s) Foreign Affairs Consultant; Winemaker

Areas of expertise

Other interests or activities Archetypal Psychology, mythology, languages, travel, mountain biking, running.

Organizations in which you are active Academie Internationale du Vin, Small Wine Technical Society

EARLY YEARS

[Interview 1: February 10, 1994]##

Teiser: I'll ask you to begin where we always begin, and that is your date and place of birth.

Draper: I was born on the tenth of March, 1936, in Evanston, Illinois; our home was not far away, near the town of Barrington.

Teiser: Where did you grow up, then?

Draper: I grew up in what was called the Barrington countryside, about forty miles west of Chicago. In those days it was really quite open country. It has since been incorporated with a five-acre minimum to keep it at least somewhat open. We lived on a forty-acre farm, and our nearest neighbor was a mile away.

Teiser: Did you grow grapes?

Draper: No, we didn't. I'm sure there are some hearty souls in Illinois today who are growing grapes, but in those days we were growing just about everything else. My father had been in the mortgage investment business, but with the Depression there was so little business that he was commuting into Chicago perhaps once a week at best. He was really farming. He never stated his philosophy in so many words, but I gradually figured it out. He had grown up in Iowa on a farm and I think with the Depression, he had gone back to the land in an attempt to be totally self-sufficient.

We had about forty head of steer, three Guernsey cows, hogs, sheep, chickens, and ducks. From the beginning, we had a full acre of vegetable or victory garden, as it was called during the second world war. We had fruit trees, blueberries, wild blackberries, and bees for honey. We had horses--two teams of Belgians--to do the work and two or three pure bred hunters and a former circus horse to ride. We had an old tractor, but we really used the horses; so we had the gas ration during the war to run our old Buick and get around in that.

What didn't we have? We had to buy tea and coffee,and salt, pepper and spices, but we could use the honey instead of sugar. I grew up churning butter from the Guernsey cows, separating the cream first, of course. It was a very complete life on that farm.

Teiser: That idea of self-sufficiency and the way it was worked out there was very much a concept of the time, wasn't it?

Draper: I think so. I think that a lot of the people who had come from the country and made their lives in the city when the Depression eliminated their jobs really longed for the days when they were growing all their own food and could provide for their family without depending on the economy.

Teiser: What was your earliest knowledge of wine? Did you drink wine at home?

Draper: Yes, but mainly on holidays and celebrations. That would mean that at best I would see wine once every few months. Beer, occasionally, in the summers, and sherry--my mother would have a glass of sherry before dinner. But in terms of having wine regularly with meals, that would come later in my life.

Education

Teiser: Where were you educated?

Draper: I started out in what was called the Countryside School District in Barrington. My first school was a two-room schoolhouse in the country, with 1st grade in one room and 2nd and 3rd grades in the classes combined in the other room. By the fourth grade I moved on to a building nearer town where we had separate classrooms for each grade. I stayed there through sixth grade, and then my father offered me the chance, if I wanted to do it, to go back East to a boys' preparatory school for what would have been junior high and high school.

I jumped at it; we went back East together and looked at a number of schools, and I picked the one that was my favorite, called the Choate School, just outside of New Haven in the town of Wallingford [Connecticut]. So for the next six years I went to school there, graduating in '54.

Teiser: It sounds like you got a good education.

Draper: Yes. We talk today about whether men are less conscious than women; and men have started in recent years to talk more about

their relationships to their fathers. When I was six or seven, my father set up a business for his brother and then decided to work with him. He was away from home during the day. I was with my mother, and my grandmother would visit for several months each year. My sister was my only sibling, and almost all my teachers were women. The principal of my school was a woman.

When I was age twelve, my father effectively said, "You know, I think it's time that you move into the male camp and away from the women." I think he felt my mother was spoiling me, which I'm sure she was. That's why he suggested my going away to school. He never really said this to me, but now that I look back to that age, which is the traditional age of initiation, I was able to move into an almost entirely masculine world. It was one of the most wonderful educational experiences that I had. It was the most intense and for me very positive.

Teiser: Were you heading then for higher education?

Draper: Yes, certainly. The schools were called college preparatory schools. My mother had gone to Smith, and my father had gone to the University of Chicago but had not graduated. They clearly had in mind that both my sister and I would go to college.

Teiser: Did you think you would go on to college?

Draper: Yes. It was in the days when you perhaps accepted more easily what the general track was than you do today. But I was also excited by it. I loved (this sounds kind of pretentious) learning. I loved reading, and I read a lot. My secondary school excited me immensely in terms of learning, and I had no reason to believe that college would not be a continuation of the same.

Teiser: Did you have some special interests?

Draper: I liked to build things, repair things and restore things; so I worked with my hands a lot. I thought, quite naturally, that engineering, design, and that sort of thing would be the direction I would go; although literature, myth, and history were a big part of my life, and I was--and still remain, I'm afraid--a romantic, perhaps from all the reading and from my parents' romanticism.

I thought, up through junior year of high school, that I would go into engineering or architecture. But what happened was that my grades were good enough halfway through high school so that I got put in an honors physics class when I was a junior. I remember one of my fellow students was a junior but was going to graduate that year and had already been accepted at Princeton. I simply shouldn't have been in that class. I had never taken

physics in my life, and these guys were young geniuses. I was the farthest thing from a genius.

It set me back, but it taught me what I would need to learn about mathematics, for one thing. Tables--all of that bored me to tears. Geometry I loved. Trigonometry and using a slide rule, I could not imagine; that was the most boring thing in the world. The solution might be interesting, but not working on it with some device like that and looking things up on a table.

I realized by the time I left for college that I would not be an engineer. I thought maybe I could make it in architecture, and then I found out that you needed to know all that math for architecture, too. I literally got as far as freshman year at Stanford University and picking a major before I realized that I wasn't going to be able to do architecture.

In looking at life I realized I didn't know what it was all about (and of course still don't). I'd been observing the world for eighteen years and I had the chance to experience a few different sides of it. But the thing that interested me most was knowing more about what people had thought it was all about. So, of course I went into philosophy. It was a major turning point; I realized my limitations and also found where my real interest lay.

Teiser: Did you go to college first and then go into the army?

Draper: Yes. I had been in a situation with all men for six years, except for weekends, vacations, and so forth. I certainly didn't need the army. A good, co-educational school in California was far more appealing.

Acquaintance With Wine

Draper: I should go back, in terms of wine, and say that it was during that period when I was going to school in Connecticut that I would go home with friends and roommates for the shorter holidays, like Thanksgiving as well as long weekends. One of my roommates was American, but his parents were Swiss. He lived in New York on the upper east side, and I would stay with him. From the first time I visited the family, there was a bottle of wine on the table at lunch and at dinner. The food was also more European than I was used to. It was very good food, all fresh produce, fresh fish and seafood. [At home] we had more lamb and beef cooked in a "meat, potatoes, and gravy," Midwest style. This was a more subtle cuisine, and the wine was a marvelous addition. I was absolutely charmed. My romanticism--everything that I had read for all those years certainly included wine--and here it was a part of everyday

life for the first time in my experience. I would say that from then on, whenever I had the opportunity, I would have wine with my meals.

Stanford University

Draper: That was high school. Then I got accepted to Stanford. I had never been to California, and I came out here and went through the process of giving up architecture and getting into philosophy. My major also allowed me to take political theory and aesthetic theory, so I could take classes in art, music, and political science. My area within philosophy was called "value theory." In those days schools were just getting into a more flexible approach, where you could write your own program, and value theory allowed me to do just that. There were basic requirements, but then I was able to take related courses throughout the university.

After graduation, the draft was still on for Korea though the war was over. Vietnam was still the French problem, not ours, but the draft was still in effect. I knew that as soon as I graduated I would be 1-A, and I would have to choose. Of course, the way to stay out that most of my friends took was to go on to graduate school. The last thing I wanted to do was graduate work in philosophy. It had been a great undergraduate education, but the only reason for getting a graduate degree that I could see was to teach, and if I taught it wouldn't be philosophy. I didn't think I was suited for it and I didn't think I was bright enough.

ARMY SERVICE, 1960-1963

Language School

Draper: With the draft hanging over my head, I looked at all the options. I had the opportunity to ask many of the veterans returning from Korea and entering business and law school at Stanford what they thought were the most interesting possibilities within the military services. I wanted to go to language school. I had studied Latin for five years, which was a good base, and I had studied Spanish, so I decided I would try to use the army as an opportunity to get to language school.

In the process, I found out there were really two ways to do that: one was called the Army Security Agency, where I was told you would sit and listen to radio broadcasts all day and translate them from the language you had learned into English. That sounded pretty boring--very boring. The other one was called CIC, with the romantic title of Counter Intelligence Corps. The title may be romantic, but that was not quite what was involved. At least you were not sitting and listening to a radio; you were in a foreign country, talking and working with the people of that country.

I volunteered for that branch, was accepted, and went to the army language school in Monterey, which is an excellent school. I was very impressed. I had asked for Italian and I got Italian. There were five of us in the class, and the teaching was entirely oral. We sat down on the first day, and the professor said, "*Buon giorno*," and when he or she pointed to you, you would say, "*Buon giorno*," until you got it right, and they would go around the room. That went on for six months, five days a week, six to eight hours a day.

Liaison Work in Italy

Draper: I was then sent to Italy to work in liaison. I was assigned to work as a civilian and to pack up my uniforms. I was just a

private, because I had been unwilling to spend any of my rather high tuition at Stanford on ROTC. As a private I would have a hard time working as an equal with Italian or American officers, so making me a civilian was the easy answer. I was shipped over to Verona, and from there I was assigned up to Vicenza but to live on the economy. I looked around the Colli Berici (the Berican Hills), a wine-growing area just outside of Vicenza, where Palladio's rotunda is located. I found an old house, a summer villa, up in the hills that the family who owned it rarely used and were offering for rent. I had a telephone line strung in from a kilometer away. It was a twenty-five room villa for $60 a month with a Tiepolo-like fresco on the ceiling in the master bedroom.

I found a roommate, a guy from my office, and proceeded to follow the dictate "when in Rome do as the Romans." A clothing allowance was provided by the army, so I had hand-sewn Italian suits made. At least half of my day required speaking Italian. I was probably fluent by the time I left, but no longer am. They were three of the most interesting years possible. Being based twenty minutes from Venice, I traveled all through the Veneto, up as far as the Yugoslav border, through Cortina in the Dolomites and as far west as Verona. It was fascinating for me, and I'm sure it enhanced the romantic in me no end. I ate marvelously.

Teiser: What years was that?

Draper: That was from '60 to '63. The Kennedy extension over Berlin, when the U.S. airlifted supplies into Berlin, kept us all in the service for an extra six months. It didn't bother me in the least. I had three and a half years; so I was in Italy for almost three years.

Teiser: What was the condition of the wine industry in Italy at that time?

Draper: You've got to realize that here was a guy who was a consumer, not a producer, and therefore was not looking very closely at the situation. But it seemed to be thriving. As you know, in those days, the best wines were really the local wines that you bought in a good restaurant or trattoria in a carafe. That is, the restaurant owner would either have his own vineyard, or his family would have a vineyard, and he was of course as proud of that wine as he was of his cuisine, especially in the country trattorie or small-town restaurants.

There was very little of the single-vineyard phenomena that we've seen explode, especially in Tuscany and Piedmonte in the last ten years. The replantings in Chianti hadn't taken place. Chianti was still a pretty simple, acidic wine, with a few exceptions. We used to drink Brolio, for example, in those days.

"How Wine Really Came Into My Life"

Draper: When I was a freshman at Stanford, two friends of mine in my freshman corridor asked me if I would like to spend Thanksgiving with them, because it was too far to be going home. They both lived out on Dry Creek in Sonoma County--Bob Higby and Carl Peterson, Jr. The Petersons are grape ranchers in Dry Creek today, and they have been for years. I went home with them during Thanksgiving of '54. I stayed with the Higbys, but the idea was that I would have Thanksgiving dinner with the Petersons. Carl's mother was a Mazzoni, so it was the Peterson-Mazzoni clan that would gather out in Dry Creek.

The weather that Thanksgiving was what I guess we would call football weather, beautiful Indian summer. The leaves had not yet blown off the vines, but they had turned color, so Dry Creek was just unbelievable to my eyes. It was my first year in California, and here was a sea of color to rival a New England autumn.

The Peterson house was an old farmhouse much like the one I grew up in. It was out in the middle of a vineyard at the far end of Dry Creek. They invited the entire family, and it seemed to me at least fifty people came that Thanksgiving Day. They had a line of trestle tables, starting on the front porch, running through the living room, down the corridor, through the kitchen, and out onto the back porch. About every three feet along the table there was either a turkey, a leg of lamb, a roast of beef, or a ham--with all the vegetables and trimmings in between. Bottles of wine from the local winery where the Petersons sent their grapes were strategically placed.

Three generations, and I think probably four generations were at that table, from people in their nineties to babes in arms. Having grown up in a very Victorian family with one sibling, with the four of us sitting there straight in our chairs at a quite formal table, this was something else. Of course I had eaten with relatives and friends, but never had I been at a table like this, and in that place, where I could look out the window and see the vines entirely surrounding the house, and the bottles of wine on the table. I said to myself, "Someday I want to do this."

So that stuck with me, unconsciously. Consciously, I didn't think I could be a winemaker, because I thought you needed a degree in chemistry or enology. I already knew I couldn't get through chemistry. And besides it bored me to tears. I just figured I would never be in the wine business.

But in Italy, strange as it may seem, despite being as unaware as I was, I found that a number of my friends were in the wine business. They either had vineyards or wineries, very simple ones in general--not any of the great ones of Northern Italy. I'm not sure I even knew what the greatest ones of the area were. They would invite me to visit them especially during harvest, so I got a sense of what they were doing. I think that was my second introduction.

As an undergraduate at Stanford I used to go out to inexpensive Italian and French restaurants, and I would have a bottle of wine with my spaghetti or very simple coq au vin. I would note down what the label said--the varietal, the year, and all that. I did this probably twice a week through those years. So whenever I was in a restaurant, simple or fancy, I would have wine and note down what I thought of it.

Italy was no exception. I was trying everything in terms of wine, still with no thought that I would ever be able to make wine myself, just assuming that it was out of the question.

Teiser: You certainly had a good indoctrination.

Draper: Yes, it was. I came to wine through loving it as food, as part of the meal, as part of a daily ritual. I guess I see dinner with family or friends as one of the last rituals in our culture. It is one of very few. Wine, really is, in a sense, a sacrament of nature and takes the meal to another level.

In my mid-twenties, I began to look at what wine symbolized for me, because it hadn't been a part of the family meal when I was very young. I had made it a part of my life. As someone whose bent it was to look at things somewhat philosophically, I began to ask myself what wine meant to me as I realized what it had meant for western civilization as a symbol--why it had become and remained a part of our culture. I knew how much I liked it, but why was I so attracted by the idea of wine? These are questions I still ask today, and it started back then.

POSTWAR YEARS

Traveling and Studying in Europe, 1963

Teiser: How long were you in the army?

Draper: The minimum was three years when you volunteered, and I had been extended six months by the Berlin airlift. In the spring of '63 I took a discharge in Europe, and I drove to Copenhagen, ending up in Paris that fall. I registered at the Faculty of Letters at the Sorbonne, with the idea of studying French literature and the French language. Within the Faculty of Letters there was an institute to prepare students who intended to teach the French language abroad.

I entered the program and attended for one year. It was marvelous for me. I had studied French earlier, but I didn't speak it. By now I spoke Spanish passably and Italian nearly fluently; so I assumed French would not be that big a challenge. It was, however, in pronunciation, but this was a chance to learn it and to live in Paris for a year. I lived in the 5th Arrondisement, just off the Place de le Contrascapre. I paid a dollar a night for my hotel room and ate in the student restaurants. As a student, I could eat in those restaurants almost free of charge.

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Draper: That time in Paris was also an experience of a new cuisine and different wines. Even in the student restaurants you would have simple wines, and then I had friends who would invite me out to marvelous dinners at least once a week. On weekends as students we would splurge and go to our favorite, still pretty simple but good, restaurant. So Paris was indeed a feast.

Teiser: Do I remember that you visited vineyards and wineries?

Draper: Yes. I had started doing that on my very first trip when I was a junior at Stanford. I left at the end of winter quarter and took a ship to Naples (this is one reason I ended up in Italy). I bought a Motoguzzi, an Italian motorcycle. I spent six months, probably three of them going through Italy. I mentioned that I am a romantic: I had seen a film with Richard Basehart, Julietta Messina, and Anthony Quinn when I was at Stanford, and it had Quinn as a carnival strongman wandering through southern Italy on an old three-wheeled motorcycle. It was called *La Strada*. I had probably seen it twenty times; so I bought a World War II aviator's jacket with a high, sheepskin collar, took a boat to Naples, bought a motorcycle, and went south.

I circled through Calabria, into Sicily, and then back up through Rome and Florence. Then to Venice and on to Austria, Switzerland, and into France. At the end of that trip I stayed in Paris with friends I had met on the trip. Coming back to Paris in the sixties was really a return, as had been my three years in Italy.

Now I've completely gotten away from your question, but that's sort of how I got there.

Working in United States Foreign Affairs, 1963-1966

Teiser: When was it that you conceived the idea of wine as a career?

Draper: After Paris, I was asked it I would like to join a branch of the U.S. government, working in foreign affairs--not as a career member, but under contract. It was an interesting group that was involved under [President John F.] Kennedy in what you might call preventive medicine in foreign affairs. The idea was that the members of this group, while making it clear that they were working with the U.S. government, would meet and get to know the young leadership of Third World countries. In my case, that was South America. On an open, straightforward basis, we would meet with young political leaders, first in university and later in their parties, and discuss what were their aspirations and those of their parties for their country.

The idea was that if we had people in the U.S. government who had personal relationships with the young leadership of all parties, and I mean all, they could stay in touch over the years as these leaders moved up in responsibility. I stress the contact with all parties, because if you were to meet the liberals and the conservatives, you were also going to meet the socialists and the communists. If you were to discriminate against one party or

another, the other young leaders would not accept it. They themselves worked daily with all parties, and they expected you to as well.

I got to know a number of the young leaders in several of the South American countries. It was a very exciting time for me under Kennedy. The idea was that in the future if a serious problem occurred, rather than responding to it out of ignorance as a crisis there would be people in the government who could call the leadership of any party in that country on a personal basis and say, "Let's meet. Let's figure out what can be done here and how this can be solved without bloodshed.

I worked at that for about three years, until [President Lyndon B.] Johnson invaded the Dominican Republic.

Teiser: What years were those?

Draper: That was roughly '63 to '66.

Teiser: What countries were you in?

Draper: I never went to Chile, which was interesting because of their wine, of course. I did go to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia. I was asked to consider going to Haiti and to contact the democratic underground, but with the paramilitary death squads similar to those today, I considered it too dangerous. I did go to Nicaragua, where it was still a dictatorship, to meet with the young democratic leaders. Chile was a strong democracy, so it was not a concern.

With the invasion of the Dominican Republic--you've probably forgotten all that--Johnson landed paratroopers on the beaches, with the sunbathers (sort of like Lebanon) standing around watching them. All of my friends and I had advised against it, and we were outraged that he would make such a stupid move. At that time Fritz Maytag had just asked me if I would join him in a private effort to work in a very small way in development in South America. He and another friend, who had just graduated from the Stanford Business School, were interested in this. It was an opportunity to work with an old friend.

Teiser: What year was that?

Draper: That would have been about '66.

South American Projects

Draper: Now we are approaching the answer to your question. We, myself, Fritz, and Sam Armstrong, visited a number of countries: Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. We were looking at two things. First, nutrition: what were the possible sources of nutritious foods in these countries, if nutrition was a problem? We were also looking at something else. In those days the U.S. government was involved in at least giving lip service to the idea that explosive population growth might be a problem, and that in very poor countries family planning had to be considered. We were not interested in getting involved ourselves, but we were interested in supporting efforts of local universities, organizations, and governments in what they thought appropriate as far as family planning education.

We initiated several small programs in two or three countries. In Chile we found a situation where more hospital beds were occupied by women recovering from the effects of badly done, unprofessional abortions than all other causes put together. You might say family planning was being practiced, but in the crudest possible form. Once they saw the studies on the hospital occupancy, the Catholic Church had unofficially told the University of Chile Medical School that they would not oppose education in family planning. They would not support it, they would not discuss it; but they would not oppose it. The University of Chile had done a particularly good film on abortion but had no funds to copy it or distribute it, and we were able to provide funds for that. That was the type of program we were involved in.

In the process, our partner, Sam Armstrong, set up experiments in soybean production for high protein meal. The Chileans no longer ate beans--*porotos*--chile beans--because after the Second World War Italian companies had introduced pasta. But the pasta was totally without nutrition; it was unfortified. So from these extremely high-protein beans in their traditional diet, they had gone to pasta, which, instead of cooking for hours, could be cooked in ten minutes. The diet of the average Chilean had gone downhill fast, and that was the reason we got involved.

There was a local soybean but not one suitable for high-protein soy meal. Through the Rockefeller Foundation, we introduced varieties of soybeans from northern Mexico all the way up into Canada to match them to the different climatic zones in Chile. Sam Armstrong was the one in charge of the project.

We then began to look for ways that Sam and I could get off the payroll of our tiny foundation to free up more funds for the

project. We set out to identify any for-profit businesses that we could engage in in Chile that could pay our way and would keep us there to direct the non-profit programs.

WINEMAKING IN CHILE, FEBRUARY 1967-MAY 1969

Beginning the Chilean Winemaking Venture, 1967

Draper: We looked at the wine business. Chile's total production was considerably greater than California's, and something over 50 percent of all the vines planted in Chile were Cabernet Sauvignon with some Cabernet Franc, unlike our situation here, where there was very little Cabernet Sauvignon planted in those days. Despite a critical need for foreign exchange, that is, hard currency, they were exporting only 2 percent of their output.

I realized or perhaps remembered that all my life, since that Thanksgiving in Dry Creek, I had wanted to be a winemaker. Here was the chance.

The middle third of Chile is a land of vineyards. In latitude it is roughly identical to California, Oregon, and Washington. We had been living on vineyards and working with farmers who grew grapes during our early years in Chile. Phylloxera had never taken hold, so the vines were and still are on their own roots. Many of the vineyards, even a number of the Cabernet vineyards, are over a hundred years old. We thought we could introduce international standards of quality and promote wine export for Chile.

With that, I came back to the States, and I worked a vintage with Lee Stewart up at the original Souverain, which is now Tom Burgess's Winery on Howell Mountain. Of course, I had worked vintages in Europe, but I wanted to see what a small, no-nonsense California producer was doing. Lee had started Souverain back in the late forties and was producing to my mind some very good Cabernets and other wines, including Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Chardonnay, and others.

I worked with him for two months and then immediately went back down to Chile, where the vintage begins in March. We arranged with a grower, who had closed his own winery to join the

local co-op, to lease and reopen the facility. We then equipped the cellar and used two of the people who had worked there previously and were well trained in traditional techniques. That was 1968 and it was our first vintage.

Learning to Make Wine

Draper: From having observed winemaking and enjoyed its resulting product all those years, suddenly I was in charge of setting up and re-equipping a cellar and making the wine, doing everything--all in six months. Having never made wine in a situation where I had to make all the decisions, I was suddenly in that role. I had read most of the literature in English on winemaking, and I had read several of the very practical books that had been written over the last 150 years, in Bordeaux. They covered day-to-day, traditional practice--first in the vineyard, then in the winery. The translations of Peynaud's books and those he did with Ribéreau-Gayon are the best we have currently available. Their 19th century equivalents, available in wine libraries, were more detailed and comparing them gave you a pretty complete picture.

Usually these were books that contrasted what they referred to as the "old ways" and the "new ways." Of course, the "new ways" in the 1850s were still very traditional and very interesting. But they were texts that discussed how things were currently seen as opposed to how they had been seen twenty-five or fifty years earlier. One of the most interesting books in this country was a book called *The Wine Press and the Cellar* by [Emmet H.] Rixford, who was the man who established the La Cuesta Winery in Woodside in the Santa Cruz Mountains viticultural area. He had written the book in 1882, and it was his own experience, plus everything he had learned about traditional European experience and what he had learned about California practice to that date--what was being done in the 1860s and 1870s in California. It is a compilation of his version of how you should make wine, not in every sense as detailed as the European texts but essentially the same very practical approach.

I was steeped in that kind of literature, and it provided me with answers, as my cellar foreman in Chile would come to me and ask, "All right, do we destem or not? How often do we punch down the grapes?" et cetera, et cetera, every step of the way, for the literally hundred or more small and large decisions you make day-to-day through the winemaking process. In that first year of making wine, I could sometimes give him an immediate answer, and sometimes I would say, "I'll tell you in fifteen minutes." I'd go back to my books, and I would read up on the choices. I would

come up with what I thought was the best approach, given our grapes and our aims.

Equipment and Processing

Draper: We learned very much by "the seat of the pants." Fritz Maytag came down and worked with me in the vintages and was a great support and assist. We had a most interesting time. First I had to find the equipment, a crusher and press, to begin. There was very little, if any, stainless steel in the wine industry in Chile, so we had to coat the crusher with epoxy. We found an old crusher/stemmer that was really quite gentle. It was hand-cranked, yet was quite large. One Sunday, when our workers were off, Fritz and I crushed some grapes, and we just about killed ourselves turning that crusher. It was as big as today's small- to medium-sized commercial crushers. I mean, the thing weighed hundreds of pounds, and the flywheel on it that you cranked must have weighed at least a hundred and fifty pounds. We exhausted ourselves, and we realized how strong our cellar men were and how hard they worked. Everything was crushed by hand--that is, by hand power.

Pumping was done by hand. We had old-fashioned, very gentle pumps, all hand pumps. We found a beautiful, big basket press--it had a cast-iron base and an oak basket. We sandblasted the base and painted it with epoxy.

COOPERAGE

Making Barrels in Chile

Draper: We then had to find barrels. There were no oak barrels in Chile. There were oak fermenters and oak casks. The oak casks and oak tanks were ones that had been brought in from Germany and France and a few from the States. The most recent importation had been fifty years before, so there was no such thing as new oak. What was being made was from the local wood, called *raulí*. It looks something like redwood, very fine-grained, very soft and easy to work, yet suited for tight cooperage; it would hold alcohol.

There is *alerce* down there, which is in fact redwood, but that was not being used; it's really not suitable for small cooperage. But *raulí* was being used for fermenters and tanks as well as barrels or pipes which were used to transport the wine, not to age it. I don't think I ever saw anyone using small barrels, small cooperage, to age wine in those days in Chile. The smallest were old oak ovals or puncheons. Small growers would transport the wine in pipes (*pipas*), which would be about three hundred gallons. They are quite large, and they were made of *raulí* typically.

Raulí has a taste, and it's different from oak. When you first go to Chile it stands out and not necessarily in a positive sense. As you stay there and become accustomed to it, you no longer notice it. We used to bring wines from both Europe and California, just to keep acute on what the Chilean wines really tasted like because of this influence of the *raulí*.

I then went out and located air-dried oak that had been cut mainly for furniture and parquet floors. I found coopers and put them to work making oak barrels, I would say probably for the first time in Chile or at least for the first time in fifty years. I had to first decide just what was needed, find a detailed design and specify the thicknesses of the staves--everything. The staves were all handmade by draw knife and bent over an oak-chip fire. Everything was traditional. That's how they made their barrels.

Of course, for them to work with oak instead of this soft *rauli* was something else, because it was so much more difficult. But they were marvelous, and they made all of our barrels. In the process I learned a lot about barrels and it helped me later on.

In packaging, we came up against similar problems and had to design and have specially made what we needed. The claret bottle in Chile in those days was very ugly and the inside of the neck that receives the corks was sloped or cone-shaped rather than cylindrical. We went to a small glass maker, designed a mold for a good, traditional claret bottle with a nice push-up and a very straight neck. Corks were like little, short plugs, and we had to find thick planks of cork and have the supplier punch out corks to the length we needed and then select them for quality.

It was an education in all aspects of winemaking, where you had to go back to the basics and have things made to your specifications. As we improved our pumps we worked with machine shops to make special equipment and bend stainless steel for racking tubes and so on; everything had to be made from scratch and from designs I could find of traditional equipment.

Different Kinds of Oak

Teiser: It was an education that not many people would get.

Draper: In this country everything would be provided so there would be no need to go through what we did. It did give us a greater understanding of each part of the process. For example, it forced me to think about oak sources and the handling of oak very early on. Someone who helped educate me was a young Frenchman, Phillippe Dourthe. He had his degree in enology from the University of Bordeaux and his family was in the wine business there. At that time the French government offered students an alternative to military service. Instead of going into the army, they were allowed to work as technicians in developing countries. Phillippe and another friend had been assigned to teach enology at the University of Chile and to work in the extension service with Chilean growers and wineries.

I saw him quite often and we became good friends. We would discuss anything and everything related to wine. I was very interested in the idea of using American oak rather than French oak, and in Chile I was using Chilean oak--that is, trees grown and cut in Chile. He knew that by this time I was looking toward the future and that, at some point, I would be moving back to California to work in winemaking there.

He mentioned that he had written his enology thesis at the University of Bordeaux on the oak-aging of wines. The most important research he used in the thesis had been a study done in Bordeaux with the vintage of 1900 (in fact a very, very good vintage), because back in the nineteenth century the French had been more interested in oak. The University of Bordeaux enological station had placed two barrels each of six different oaks--that is oaks from six different regions--and into these went a series of the first growths of that day: Latour, Lafite, Margaux, Haut Brion, and two other chateaux. They then aged out the 1900 vintage wines in those barrels for the then typical two-and-a-half to three years.

During those years in barrel and for seven more years in bottle, they analyzed and tasted the wine. The researchers had thought there might be an ideal oak for each of the regions--for Graves, Margaux, and Pauillac, and maybe even for each of the *terroirs* of the individual sites, that they would prefer one oak with one chateau and another with another.

In fact, as it turned out, that statistically they found they agreed on the finest oak, and that it was the best for all the chateaux. There was very minor deviation, where it moved into second place in one chateau and then moved back into first. But effectively the result was that the European oak, cut from the area of Riga, in Latvia, on the Baltic, was their favorite. Their second favorite I believe was Lubeck, also on the Baltic, in the area near the Polish-German border. The third area, also on the Baltic, was Stettin in Germany.

Their fourth favorite was American white oak. Fifth was Bosnian, Yugoslav oak. Their last was "Center of France," and that is--

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Draper: --the source of the majority of the French cooperage used in California, let alone, of course, in France. It is referred to as the "Center of France" and includes the areas of Nevers, Tronce, Alliers, and neighboring regions.

Phillippe's encouragement and that study convinced me to experiment with American oak and to use it if it proved its quality.

When I moved back to California, I got the chance to see how individual the wines could be from different single vineyards--to see their uniqueness.

Cabernet was my first interest, because I had been growing that in Chile before I came back here. The Cabernet grape was being grown all over the world; however, the most famous wines were from Bordeaux. They really represented in many ways, especially in those days, a standard of quality, a standard of excellence to which you could compare Cabernets from other regions. I liked Bordeaux wines very much and knew quite a bit about them. I had had a chance to taste them extensively, including 19th century clarets that were still in perfect condition.

As I saw how much the individual site determined the character of the wine, I became more interested in an absolute standard of excellence rather than one tied to the particular characteristics of certain Bordeaux vineyards. I didn't want to make an imitation Bordeaux. Even though I was using traditional methods, I wanted to let the fruit express itself. That idea carried over into the oak. If I could find American oak of equal quality, I could avoid adding a French taste to a California wine that already expressed this soil and climate. Then by using American oak, my Cabernet, though made from a grape that came to California from France, whose ancestors may have come to France from the Middle East, would be a step further removed from imitation.

Oak Trees for Corks and Barrels

Teiser: Was it Doug Meador who was going to experiment with California cork oak? Have you ever looked into that?

Draper: No, I haven't. Part of the problem is that the culture of cork is not an easy one. Of course the soil and climate have to be suitable and then the delay of decades before the tree can be harvested. The harvesting and subsequent handling is very labor intensive. The existing mature trees in California are not in groves but are grown as specimens, I would assume. If so, then they develop too many limbs, which makes for breaks in the bark and doesn't allow you to cut large pieces of quality cork from that tree. It's the same thing in making barrels from a tree that is a specimen tree. With each branch you have ruined that piece of wood for use as a stave. What you need is oak that is grown in tight forests, where the trees are tall, straight, slender, and with no branches--the branches being at the top, trying to get to the light, and down below the tree is straight. Perhaps something similar applies to cork and oak.

Oak Barrels at Ridge

Draper: In getting into oak I'm skipping ahead, but I'd like to tie it up. Ever since I returned to California and joined Ridge, I have worked with air-dried American oak. I guess the other point is to stress "air-dried." Again, being a traditionalist, I had understood from the beginning that you had to air-dry the oak that was to be used to age wine. If you kiln-dry it, it has a different effect on the wood. When I got back here and found that the only oak available was kiln-dried, I went back East to visit the cooperages. I was looking for tight grain oak that had been dried in the open air long enough to be down at about 12 percent moisture. At that level it can be worked and does not need kiln drying.

For many years I would select the staves from the oldest on a yard and have them reserved for us in order to get air-dried oak. We've continued that to the present day. There have been some years when we have not been shipped what we ordered. It's an old story--I keep thinking of the little restaurant in the country in France or Italy where they have three different wines on their list. But there's only one barrel down in the basement. So whatever you ask for, they'll go down and siphon it out of the same barrel. [laughter] That happens or used to happen with a number of things. I really think we have moved away from it in cooperage, where you might specify to certain coopers exactly what you wanted; but unless you were there, selected the oak, and you set it aside, and maybe even paid for it in advance, you could not guarantee, unless you had a personal relationship with the management, that you were going to actually get air-dried American oak.

I have no illusions that there were some years in the last twenty-five that I have not gotten what I ordered. On the other hand, we have pursued it continually, and we really think that in the majority of cases we have gotten it. The quality of the wines aged in those barrels speaks for itself. What you probably know is that in just the last two years there have been a number of technical lectures in California on air-dried oak. One by a top researcher with the Scotch whiskey industry, and another by a professor from the University of Bordeaux. Both these men stressed the absolute necessity of air drying oak.

For all these years, virtually everyone who bought American oak did not specify and therefore received kiln-dried oak. Now it has become the Holy Grail, you might say, that it must be air dried, so all of the major players producing American oak barrels are guaranteeing that it is air dried. California winemakers are insisting on it. It's a marvelous step forward.

MOVING FROM CHILE TO CALIFORNIA

Ending Production in Chile

Teiser: We should get you back from Chile to California.

Draper: We had leased a winery in Chile and equipped it, and produced two vintages of Cabernet Sauvignon. We were on our way to bottling, as the first vintage approached two years in oak. We knew by this time that we wouldn't have any market in Chile for the wine, but that hadn't been our intent. We had planned to open up the U.S. market to the idea that Chile could produce fine wines by making limited amounts and placing them with high profile retailers.

When I was there, the average price of the best wines being exported was typically around $7.99 a case f.o.b. I think the very highest price might have been about $12 a case f.o.b. These were the top names in Chile--[Vina] Santa Rita, [Vina] Santa Carolina, [Vina] Cousino Macul--many of the names that you might see today--and that was the price of the wine. We saw our effort as trying to break that image of cheap wine even if we only made a very small amount. We felt there were enough fine-wine tasters in the United States who, if shown a single-vineyard, traditionally made Chilean Cabernet that could stand up to a good Bordeaux, would be willing to pay a higher price.

With that idea in mind we set up an import operation here in San Francisco. Before our own wines were ready, we also began to work with wines that we could import to get the operation started. We imported a wine from Cousino Macul that we had selected. We also imported two wines from the Cánepa family. No sooner had all this gotten underway than the upcoming Chilean elections became an issue. During these years, the president had been a Christian Democrat named Eduardo Frei. Land reform and other social programs were moving forward in what was a pretty conservative country. The Christian Democrats, a party in the middle of the spectrum, and the conservatives--the right-wing--had voted

together to put Frei in office. As this election approached, they each decided to put up their own candidate.

It did not appear obvious to the Chileans I talked to that if the center and right didn't vote together they would not elect their candidates, and the socialists and the communists voting together would win. It was so clear to us that we immediately began to sell our assets, not because we thought we couldn't operate under a socialist government but because the business climate in Chile was already difficult. Importing equipment and, for that matter, just running a business was such a problem in Chile that we realized that with any further shift to the left, the business community would lose confidence, and our job would be virtually impossible.

So we began to sell the wine in Chile before it was bottled, sell our equipment, and to gradually dismantle the operation. Sure enough, we had completely moved out of Chile when the elections came, and of course Salvador Allende was elected. Not long after, Chile suffered one of the greatest tragedies in its peaceful and democratic history. The military took over, and many, many civilians were executed by the police, the military, and by death squads. It was a sad situation from which Chile is still recovering today. I've never been back to Chile. I'd love to go back someday. I would prefer to see General Pinochet, the single individual most responsible, completely out of power before I go back; he's still in charge of the military. Chile has come a long way and is doing marvelous things, but they lived through a tragedy for democracy that was almost unbelievable.

Return to the United States

Draper: We had already decided to leave when I attended a tasting on the San Francisco peninsula during a visit to California. Both Fritz Maytag and I had been invited by a Stanford University group interested in wine to taste with them. They were having a Chilean wine tasting, and they asked us to bring some examples of good wines and to talk about them. They provided, as well, other Chilean wines, California wines, and European wines to taste blind. The Chilean wines did extremely well. At that tasting I met Dave Bennion, who with his two principal partners had started Ridge Vineyards five or six years earlier. Dave then recommended to his partners, Hew Crane and Charlie Rosen, that they ask me to join them. When I returned from Chile definatively, they had already been in contact and had asked me if I would visit Ridge and interview for the job of winemaker.

I took the job and and in August of '69 began to work full time in preparation for the crush.

Teiser: Did you consider any California alternatives?

Draper: Yes. I interviewed with one other man, Donn Chappellet. He was in the process of designing his winery, and hadn't yet built it. His previous business had been very successful and its sale, I was told, was going to finance the winery and vineyard. His partner in the earlier business was a friend of my brother-in-law, and based on that connection I called for an interview, although Ridge had already made me an offer. We had a marvelous time. I liked what he was doing and his ideas. Perhaps, fortunately for me, he had already hired a winemaker, so it was more a matter of getting to know each other.

RIDGE VINEYARDS AND WINERY

History of the Winery

Draper: I was interested in what Ridge was doing, I liked the people, and I liked their approach. It fit in with my beliefs at that time and as they have developed since. Of course, most of all, I liked the wine.

Teiser: How would you define the approach?

Draper: Let's put it this way: the founding of Ridge, which was more a reopening of winery operations on the upper reaches on Monte Bello Ridge was taken very slowly and very much in stages. As I describe it, it may sound extremely well thought out and very conscious. I don't believe it was quite this conscious. I'll describe, in my rewriting of history, what seems to have occurred.

A group of, initially, four men with science degrees, principally in electrical engineering, working at Stanford Research Center [SRI], got together through a mutual interest. They were looking for property just outside the developed part of the Bay Area that they could afford. They wanted a place where they and their families could spend weekends. Their excuse was that it would also serve as a reasonable investment.

Two of them had independently come up to Monte Bello Ridge in the process of the search. Charlie Rosen, who was head of artificial intelligence--that is, robotics--at Stanford Research, and David Bennion, who was a Stanford electrical engineering Ph.D., also at SRI, had come up separately. They were two of the three members, who with Hew Crane, formed the core group.

They looked over the William Short property at the 2,300-foot elevation, for sale at the time. It included mature Cabernet vines and mature Chardonnay, as well as a small winery that had been established back in the 1890s but was no longer operating. The grapes that Short was growing were being sold to various local

wineries in the Santa Cruz mountains, but he was not making wine himself. He had been a theologian and had retired to the Ridge, and he was now going to retire again.

My partners bought the land because they loved the site and they loved the idea. They wanted to continue to grow the grapes, but they were certainly not clear that they would re-open the winery there. Before they bought the property they were able to taste some of the wines that had been made from the grapes and were impressed.

They purchased the property in '59, and that same year David Bennion kept back grapes to make a handful of cases. He made very small amounts again in '60 and '61. The rest were sold to other wineries, but the partners could get some of the bottled wines and were able to taste what others were making from the vineyard. They invited friends and friends of friends who were wine collectors and tasters to try the wines with them. Back in the early days even Harry Waugh, the English writer and former wine merchant, had a chance to taste the wines. The consensus was that the concentration and distinctive character of the Cabernets were something not matched in California at the time. The typical wines of the period were nowhere near as intense, and there was an individuality that may have come from the low yields or perhaps from the soils and cool climate. All these people encouraged the partners to make the wines themselves.

In planting land that has never grown grapes or at least never grown the varieties you are planting, you have very little idea what the final quality and character of the wine will be. You can find out all you can about the soils, the drainage, the exposure, the heat summation, etc. so as to have the best shot at quality. However, until the vines are mature and you have made wines from them, you don't really know. The partners at Ridge had the chance--so rare in the New World--to see what quality, mature vines would make before they decided to reopen the winery. I think it was crucial to their financial success that they were able to base the quality of the wine on the quality of the vineyard, not the sophistication of the winemaking.

Monte Bello Vineyard, Winery, and Bottling Company

Draper: A few years later, the partners had the opportunity to purchase the old Monte Bello Winery one mile up the ridge. Prior to Prohibition, the vineyards had extended in a solid block between the two cellars. The first owner, the man who founded and built Monte Bello, was an Italian doctor named Osea Perrone, who had

emigrated to San Francisco in 1885 and had the land purchased for him that year. He then had it transferred to his name in 1886. The major Italian emigration had not occurred; it came at the turn of the century and around 1910. So he was ahead of his time and was one of the members of the early Italian community in San Francisco. As a medical doctor, he became one of the leaders of that community.

In 1886 he then began to plant a vineyard and construct a stone-and-redwood winery on three levels built into a steep ravine. The vineyard was mature and the winery completed in time to produce a first commercial vintage in 1892. Their brand name was Monte Bello. Perrone then opened a small bottling and distribution operation in San Francisco, called the Monte Bello Wine Company.

In those early years, wine was sold by the barrel to restaurants which they kept in the basement and simply brought up in pitchers to serve to their clientele. People would bring bottles to the Monte Bello Wine Company, and they would be filled and carried home. A limited amount of bottling was beginning, but it certainly was not worth carting the bottles all the way up Monte Bello Ridge. People even wonder today about our doing it [laughs]. It was more logical then to bring the wine down by wagon to the railhead at Palo Alto or California Street--what was called Mayfield--and then take it on the Southern Pacific up to San Francisco and over to his small bottling operation. He sold most of the wine there in San Francisco. He lived and practiced medicine in the City and spent a great deal of time down at the winery.

He entertained. He was an opera lover, and virtually every major figure--Tetrazzini; there's a list somewhere of the people who came down to Monte Bello in those years. They would come for a couple of days, because the trip itself was almost a full day. He would bring them up to the winery, and they would stay there. They would cook marvelous meals, and the singers would sing for their supper.

I remember talking to Anthony Silvani, who founded the California Glass Company. He told me, while I was enjoying one of the marvelous lunches he would cook at Cal Glass, about when he was a teenager. It was 1912 and war was looking more and more like a possibility in Europe. In those days the Italian and other immigrants held dual citizenship, so many received their draft notices from the Italian government to go back and fight the Austrians in the First World War. Anthony had a disability--a minor one but significant in terms of military service--and the only person who was authorized by the Italian government to issue medical deferments was Dr. Perrone.

That's how Anthony Silvani as a young man met him. Anthony Silvani was a marvelous cook, and Dr. Perrone asked him if he would come down to Monte Bello and cook. Anthony described the winery perfectly. We've remodeled it--I mean, the rooms are changed around--but he told me exactly where the kitchen was. We are now using that space as a lab. Everything that he described in the room was just as it was when I arrived in 1969. I should have known that it was the kitchen because of the huge flue that went up through the roof and all of the water and gas pipes that came into that room. He described to me where the tables were placed for those marvelous dinners.

On the first occasion he had cooked there for Dr. Perrone and his guests. He cooked again at the end of Prohibition, for Perrone's nephew. The nephew had taken over after Dr. Perrone had died from the injuries of an accident on the mountain when his carriage went over the edge. His nephew had a big party up at Monte Bello as a celebration for the end of Prohibition. They entertained the members of what became the BATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms] at that dinner, and Silvani told me about that dinner as well. That was years later, of course; it was in '33 when they were reopening the winery.

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Draper: I should go back briefly to Dr. Perrone's death. When his carriage went off the steep mountain road near the winery, he broke his leg badly, and gangrene set in. He was a very handsome and rather vain man, I guess, from his pictures, in which he strikes marvelous poses. Despite being a doctor he refused to have his leg amputated and died of the infection a few months later.

In the meantime he had gotten his nephew, who had originally emigrated to the Argentine and was named Osea Perrone after his uncle, to join him and take over the operation of Monte Bello. This nephew continued on until his death in 1936. After Prohibition the winery reopened, and in San Francisco the younger Osea Perrone went into partnership with several people in the wine and spirits business. Years ago I met Pete Bricca, who owned a major distributorship here in San Francisco. I believe his father was one of the partners with Osea Perrone in reopening the Monte Bello Wine Company--the bottling operation--in San Francisco. After Prohibition they bought wine, not just from the Monte Bello Winery that Perrone owned but from Sunny St. Helena Winery in St. Helena as well. They would bring the bulk wine to San Francisco, and would then blend and bottle it under the Monte Bello brand.

From Prohibition on, the Monte Bello label was used for blended wine that came from both the Santa Cruz Mountains and from Napa Valley--and possibly other sources, but those were the two

that were mentioned to me. The people I have talked to were very proud of their connections to the Monte Bello Winery. One man named Henry Bugato had worked with Perrone and with the partners at the Monte Bello Wine Company when he was quite young. When I met him he was working for Larry's distributorship here in San Francisco.

Henry was the one who provided me with most of the information about where the wines came from. He said that Perrone was president of the Monte Bello Bottling Company as well as sole owner of the winery, two separate operations. He had partners in the bottling company, not in the winery. Perrone considered, and apparently so did his partners, that the wine coming from Monte Bello was the finest of what they were buying, and they paid the highest price for it of any wines they bought. It didn't hurt that Perrone was president, but other partners were willing to do it. But that meant that the wine under the Monte Bello name was no longer 100 percent from the Monte Bello vineyard, and it was really a different operation. At some point after Perrone's death in 1936--and I've never followed this out--the name Monte Bello was sold. Anyway, the name went back East and was being used by a small distiller on the East Coast in the Baltimore area, if I recall correctly.

The Ridge Label

Draper: When we were about to bottle our first wine labels, Dave Bennion had asked if we could call the wine Monte Bello. The man who was his contact with the company back East said, "No, the people controlling the name will sue, and I will recommend that they sue." Dave then asked, "What if we call it Monte Bello Ridge," which is the geographic location. He said, "No, they'll still sue." So Dave and his partners said, "All right, we'll call it Ridge." When we couldn't have Monte Bello, we settled for Ridge.

Interestingly enough, in recent years, looking at trademarks, we found that the Monte Bello trademark was up for renewal. We renewed it and were able to get the trademark. Then, rather than a lawsuit, we ceded to the company back East the right to produce distilled spirits under the name Monte Bello, but Ridge would retain all rights for wine, both still and sparkling and sweet, under the name Monte Bello. So after all these years we came full circle and were able to bring back to the Perrones' hundred-year-old winery the name Monte Bello. We hold the trademarks for wine, and vineyards on the names Monte Bello, Lytton Springs, and Geyserville.

Early Days as Winemaker at Ridge

Hicke: You had just about decided to join Ridge. What did you start out doing?

Draper: This was in August of '69. In your suggesting that we do this taping, I realized to my horror how history is written and made. It can be an inexact science when there are people like myself involved. What I mean by that is that I remember selectively. I know how I felt about what was happening and how things were proceeding. You would need to interview the whole group of people involved in the evolution of Ridge to get a really accurate historical picture. What I remember is that I was hired full time--because I had to work full-time to support myself to make the wines at Ridge. Dave Bennion, who had acted both as president and winemaker through the previous seven vintages--our first vintage as a bonded winery in '62, and this was the vintage of '69--was still the president. I intended to work very closely with him in my first vintage at Ridge, to see how he had been making the wines. I very much admired what had been done with Monte Bello in the vintages that I had been able to taste, which included the very fine '59 and '62. The others I had as reference were the '63 which was good but a lighter wine; the '64--a marvelous vintage, and the '65--big, but awkward. These were the vintages that had been bottled right up to the date when I joined. I felt I might know something about Cabernet and traditional winemaking, but Dave's approach at Ridge had brought out the distinctive character of the site. I wanted to know how that had been done.

In '69 I was living in San Francisco and commuting to Ridge every day. None of the partners lived on the ridge. It was my job just to be present at the winery and to make the wine, so I was there--on a flexible schedule--basically every weekday. Dave would be up a couple of times a week, and more often during harvest, and we would talk in detail about how he had made the previous vintages. Though on a practical, day-to-day basis I was doing most of the racking and making the individual decisions, he was advising me and passing on his experience. I then drew on what my very traditional experience in Chile had been, and we decided how to proceed.

Teiser: How did Dave Bennion develop his taste for wine?

Draper: You know, it's a good question, because Bennion is a good Mormon name, and Dave grew up on a farm in Utah in a Mormon family. When he came out here to California, I think he moved a step back from the church--I really don't know that history; perhaps it had to do with the fact that he was a scientist. He had a very detailed mind, and scientific evidence and experimentation were important

to him. He may have applied that scientific approach to more difficult aspects of the church history. That was the sense I got in any case.

I think the warmth, the camaraderie, everything that wine brought with it--good food, a different kind of camaraderie than he may have known in a more formal rather stiff upbringing, somewhat like my Victorian. I really don't know the details, but he was interested in wine, and with the purchase of the Monte Bello vineyard, became a home winemaker. He may have made beer and fruit wines, but I don't know that he had ever made any grape wines prior to the '59 Monte Bello.

Fermentation: Submerged-Cap Method

Draper: One of the things that he brought to the Ridge tradition, something that I then carried on and use today with all our Zinfandels, was submerged cap fermentation. It started with a large crock in which he was fermenting what became the twenty gallons of '59 Monte Bello. He and his wife, Fran, were going on vacation, so he built a cover or grid to submerge the cap of the grapeskins below the surface of the liquid. They were away for two-weeks, and when they came back the wine was dry. He pressed it, put it in a very small barrel, aged it out, and bottled it, I believe only in tenths. His use of that grid was, of course, a very old technique, which I'm sure he had read about, called submerged-cap fermentation.

When I joined Ridge in '69, we had one four-ton fermenter, and we soon introduced another. They were open-topped tanks, and both of them had wooden grids with which the grapes could be submerged. Prior to 1967 Dave was still working at SRI, as were the other partners. During harvest they would all come up on the weekends and harvest the grapes that were ripe, crush them, put them in the fermenter, submerge the cap, and go back to SRI for the week. Then they would come back the next weekend. For those very early vintages, submerged-cap fermentation was absolutely essential to make sure the cap did not develop acidic acid. It allowed them to make sound and incredibly intense wines right from the start.

When I joined in '69, I fermented part of the Monte Bello vintage in some new, very small tanks. It was an experiment in "non-action" fermentations as I called it. The idea was to gently destem and crush the grapes to the tanks, check it everyday to make sure the natural, "uninoculated" ferementation began in two or three days, and then leave it alone. I pumped over once after

fermentation started to provide air for further multiplication of the yeast. After that no pumpover, no punching, and no submerged cap. I would check the sugar and temperature each day and taste the juice as well as smell the top of the tank to make sure there was no off character. At twenty days it was pressed and the press wine, which was much darker than the free, was all added back. It made a very supple, yet intense wine. By '71, we moved the winemaking operation to the old Monte Bello winery, which had been purchased in 1968 and was just a mile up the road. I ordered three 2000-gallon stainless steel tanks from the Mueller company. In the first year we built wooden grids in these stainless steel closed fermenters for submerging the cap. For the next vintage I designed stainless steel grids and a support system for four more new tanks. That was perhaps the first time. That was in '72. Ever since then, a major percentage of our tanks--over 50 percent, and for many, many years 90 percent--have had stainless steel grids to allow us to continue the old technique of submerged-cap fermentations.

One thing that was a joy to find out, and which Dave had not known when he introduced this approach, was that when the Mid-Peninsula Open Space District bought a ranch below us--one of the other 19th century grape ranches, owned the by Picchetti family--they began to renovate the buildings that had been used for the old winery. They found in the vat house huge, circular grids, and asked me what they were used for. I realized that they had been used from the 1870s on to submerge the grapes during fermentation at the Picchetti winery. There is good reason to believe there had been open fermenters with this same style of submerged-cap grids up at Dr. Perrone's winery as well. I don't know how typical this method was in California prior to Prohibition, but there at Picchetti today are these huge redwood grids stacked against the wall. In 1959, we were just taking up an approach that had been traditional to our area for the last hundred years.

Teiser: Is that an alternative to punching down the cap?

Draper: Yes.

Hicke: What effect does it have on the wines?

Draper: I'm afraid the answers are very unscientific, despite all the experimentation that we do. When you submerge the cap in making red wine, to a degree you are eliminating the necessity for pumping over, and of course you cannot punch down. You are achieving what you would by both approaches; that is, you are wetting the skins, which contain the color, the seeds which contain the tannins and other phenolics in the juice as it evolves into wine. It's a very gentle technique. Even if you do pump over, which we do and have always done, initially at least you

cannot damage the grapes or the skins. That is, you cannot use that most unfortunate of old California techniques (or perhaps modern; I don't know when it started--I assume after the thirties) of using a high-powered centrifugal pump and a fire nozzle on the wine hose to macerate the grapes--to literally "break up the cap," as they still say. We find that one very clear way to lose quality.

When you have a grid between your grapes and your pump, even if you're pumping at high pressure, you couldn't damage the grapes if you wanted to; the stream of wine will be broken up by the grid before it can reach the skins. So it's a very gentle process. We have found that, depending on how extractable the seeds are and how fully you crush, you get very good extraction, because they're continually submerged. In fact, with mountain-grown grapes you have to be very careful not to extract too much tannin.

We've done a lot of tannin and color research over the years, starting back in the mid-seventies. We were certainly the first of the small wineries to have high-performance liquid chromatography equipment, and we've improved that over the years until we have a highly automated, computer-driven model today that does all kinds of wonderful things. So we began to look at phenolics, and of course tannins are phenolics, and they are the phenolics that will react with protein. (You have to realize that this is a philosophy major talking, not a scientist, so my knowledge is very shallow.) If you have destemmed, more than 95 percent--as I understand it--of the phenolics are in the seeds.

There are tanniferous phenolics in the stems. You might include the stems or source of them in a Pinot Noir fermentation while you would rarely use use them with Cabernet, Merlot, Zinfandel, or Petite Sirah. If you destem, you are not getting any tannin from the stems, and there is very little tannin in the skins; a couple of percent. So you are getting phenolics, including the tanniferous phenolics from the seeds. If you expose that seed throughout the fermentation as the level of alcohol rises in the juice, you're going to extract that seed much more than if you leave pulp and skin surrounding the seed. If you are already dealing with low-yield, potentially very tannic grapes, if you go for a twenty-day fermentation, which is what we have done since 1969 when I joined--you may well get some wines that are undrinkable for the first five or ten years.

From the beginning we believed in very gentle pumpovers, very gentle fermentation using submerged cap, moving the pumice by hand from the tanks to the press, and on and on, working as gently as possible once it is in the barrel, of course, racking rather than filtering for clarity as the wine ages. It became clear to us over the years that one of the most important things was not to

over-extract the seeds. We got to the point where we would destem, as we do today, with a very large, very slow-speed crusher, and we were able to pump the grapes to the tank with about 40 percent of them still unbroken. So in the fermentation in a tank of Cabernet or Merlot, it would take a long time during fermentation for those 40 percent to break down and for those seeds to be exposed. We could make very big, tannic wines but much rounder and much more supple wines that would be approachable even when they were young.

This whole thing about gentleness that started with the submerged-cap fermentations really came together to bring us where we are today on the handling of the wine from fermentation to bottling. With Cabernet we use what I would call more typical fermentations and pump over with a floating cap. We make use of a large tub in front of the fermenter to draw the juice off and to aerate it somewhat and then to pump it over the top. That's our alternative to submerged-cap. What we do is experiment with virtually every wine to see whether a particular vineyard responds best to one technique or to the other.

I have not answered your question about what difference does it make. The gentleness of the extraction is one thing. It seems to be more of an anaerobic fermentation. To the degree that you aerate some of the juice that you are pumping over, if you pump over, you get some air into it. But if the grapes are just submerged and you are doing nothing, which is a major part of submerged-cap fermentation, it really is more of an anaerobic fermentation. So there are differences.

Marcel Gigal from the Cote Roti, who is the major high-quality producer in his appellation, was visiting a number of years ago. He was looking for somebody who was using submerged-cap, because his uncle or grandfather before him had used submerged-cap in their winery. With the advent of enameled metal tanks and later stainless steel tanks, everyone had given up the grids and the submerged-cap approach and had gone to *remontage*, as they call it--pumping over. He was looking for somebody who was using grids in a modern setting--that is, with metal tanks--because his family's tradition and his experimentation had shown him that you could get, he felt, greater depth of fruit and more complex wines with submerged-cap fermentations than you did with pumping over.

Now, it's not that clear cut. It really is just another choice that you have in deciding your winemaking approach. The only way to determine which is going to give you, in your opinion, the finer wine is to do both. Even today, every year with the Monte Bello, our estate Cabernet, we ferment at least two pairs of tanks out of twenty-odd blocks and separate fermentations of Monte

Bello as comparisons of submerged cap and pump over. We take each tank through malolactic separately. And we blind taste the two to see if we still prefer pumpover with the Monte Bello.

The answer is never final. We want to be aware always of why we are doing what we are doing. There is never any recipe. For now, we feel that with the Monte Bello we prefer to pump over, using a large tub--these are fermentations of, say, three and a half to five and a half tons--rather than use submerged-cap. For Zinfandel, we use almost exclusively submerged-cap. But it's an ongoing question. We look at it in Zinfandel, we look at it in Cabernet, Petite Sirah, Mataró, every year to see which is going to give us what we feel is the finer wine.

Fermentation: Yeast

Hicke: We're still back at what you started doing when you first came to Ridge.

Draper: That's right! I joined in August, and we started picking around the end of September. We fermented the '69 Monte Bello with the submerged-cap as usual, but as I mentioned I used the very old, traditional approach of nonintervention or non-action on part of the vintage.

I should mention that in the early sixties, the partners had done a number of fermentations on the natural yeast. They had moved to adding a small amount of selected yeast by the time I joined Ridge. I moved right back to noninoculated fermentations. So from the time I joined, that is, for the last quarter century, we have used the wine yeasts coming into the winery on the grapes to carry out 90 percent of the fermentations.

Filling a fermenter you would check it everyday to see if the natural yeasts had taken off. If they hadn't, which in fact very rarely happened, we would consider adding a small selected yeast culture so as not to risk off-character in the final wine. In 1969 within thirty-six hours or so, forty-eight at most, my small experimental "non-action" fermenters had taken off. I would look at it every day, but neither punched down, pumped over, or submerged the cap; we just let it ferment. The cap was of course floating, and it was fully crushed and destemmed.

We had incredibly intense, low-yield, mature Cabernet vines that produce small, intense berries. The natural fermentation ended at about fifteen days, when it went fully dry. I would typically let it sit a few more days on the skins and then press

the tank and combine the pressed wine right back in with the free run. I would taste it first but always put it back in. With the "non-action" technique the pressed wine is incredibly deeply colored and quite tannic. The free run is not as deeply colored and not very tannic, but when you combine the two, you then get a deeply colored wine but with moderated tannins. The seeds are not so extracted, because you've done no pumping over, no punching down, no maceration that would strip knock the skins and pulp from the seeds.

Sure enough, this little experimental lot of the '69 Monte Bello was more supple and more elegant than the main lot. We in fact had a very difficult time with the main lot. My small, "non-action" lot went right through fermentation and went dry, and we pressed. The main lot that I was doing with Dave did not go dry, and it stuck. So right from the first year I had something interesting, something that had never happened to me in Chile. In Chile I had done all natural yeast fermentations and all natural malolactics as well.

With the '69 we had to add a selected yeast starter to get it going again, and the fermentation dragged on for a couple of weeks before we were able to press and have a dry wine. It did go dry and we were well beyond twenty days before we pressed, and there was still a little sweetness, but it did finish after pressing. The end result was a wine that had slightly higher volatile acidity then other Monte Bellos. Dave and I were always horrified by that wine, because as much as we loved it, we would immediately pick it up and see the volatile and say, "Oh, my God, it's the '69." As the years went by, and various groups would put on vertical tastings of ten or fifteen vintages of Monte Bello, the '69 was inevitably in first place. Dave and I would have it in last place, but the group voted it first. We never cease to laugh about how the one wine that we saw as a problem won the tastings. Even today it's one of the better rated wines of that era, partly because it is so complex, with that added level of volatility.

Ridge and Other California Wineries##

Teiser: Can you pause here and characterize Ridge that year that you first went with it in terms of the whole California wine industry. How was it, compared to other wineries?

Draper: Good question. I have a couple of things to say about that. Though the people who had founded it were scientists--every one was a Ph.D. in his field, and was working in science at a high level--none of them were enologists. Their knowledge of wine was

limited and they were more interested in how wine was made naturally. That is, despite their advanced scientific degrees, they were interested in the idea that fine wine was basically a very straightforward process. If you understood it chemically it was not simple, but the way wine had been made for centuries was very straightforward.

They felt--and this was principally David Bennion--that most California wine of that day was not as interesting, complex, or flavorful as it could be. It was being made in a simpler style because of the techniques in use in California since Prohibition. The "fine wine" was a simpler beverage of less quality than it was in Europe and than it needed to be in California.

Their very straightforward approach involved low yields, long skin contact--that is, long fermentations. Even before I joined, the fermentations were running well more than two weeks and sometimes went out to as long as I then typically extended them. The partners were making very big, rich wines. They were not fining, they were not filtering before bottling those wines. That was heretical to the California wine industry of the day.

Maybe that harks back--and here I go on one of my long digressions again. You mentioned in your outline a tasting at The Potluck Restaurant of old Zinfandels from the thirties and early forties. From that tasting and from some of the conversations that I've had (while you have had conversations that can give you actual facts, mine are usually based on supposition), those Zinfandels from the thirties that we tasted from The Potluck included Larkmead [Vineyard] from either '37 or '39, and Fountain Grove [Vineyard] in one of those two vintages. One of the people tasting that day, Bob Knudsen, brought a Louis Martini '42. There were several others as well.

We tasted the wines blind. What was immediately apparent was that there were two different styles of winemaking involved. The Larkmead and the Fountain Grove in that tasting were incredibly complex, rich wines of absolutely first quality and had a quarter inch at least of sediment on the bottom of the bottles. The Martini '42 that Bob Knudsen brought was poured out, and there wasn't a drop of sediment; it was clean right to the bottom of the bottle. It tasted as though it were six years old, even though this was in 1973, thirty years later. Now, there were one or two that were going over the hill and getting oxidized, but the Larkmead and the Fountain Grove were not faded. They were unbelievably lovely, fully developed wines. The Martini was not developed. It had been held in suspension at about five or six years of age.

For me, the methods in those days (I think Martini has changed, too) that Martini was following were the methods that were being taught in those days in California and epitomized most of the wines through the forties, fifties, into the sixties, and even through the sixties and into the seventies and so on, before what I would call the renaissance of California fine winemaking. They were really dominated by the techniques developed--and this is my apocryphal history. You've got to realize that you have the real history. I am now reinventing history, just from my experience, not from anything I know. So please take this with a big grain of salt.

Maynard Amerine graduated, I believe, from Modesto High in the class with Ernest Gallo. They knew each other then, and I surmise that as Maynard Amerine went on to Davis and the Gallo family for the first time got into winemaking and bought all this used equipment--old redwood tanks and stuff--and started making wine, having problems, because these were old, rotten tanks that hadn't been used for years, he turned to his friend Maynard Amerine and said (this is very simplistic), "How do you make good, solid, sound wine?" Maynard Amerine and company figured that out as chemists in a new tradition. In a sense, they reinvented winemaking, and that involved selected yeast strains and all kinds of good things like temperature control, separating the free run from the press, and of course it went on into viticulture.

The few remaining old winemakers, who were soon to retire, made the Larkmead and the Fountain Grove in the old traditional approaches, where pressed wine was not necessarily not included, where you had long fermentations, natural yeast fermentations, and natural malolactics. You made a different style of wine from that traditional wine. The Martini at the tasting at The Potluck was for me a perfect example of the triumph of modern technology. This is my reading of what really shifted here.

You did not again see in the forties, fifties, and sixties wines like the Inglenook Cabernets from the thirties. You did not see that incredible complexity of the old traditional techniques. What you did see were very clean wines that held. Did they age? Did they really improve with all the years in bottle, as the old wines used to? Nobody was saying that we should be worried about making wines that will continue to develop in quality through the years. Nobody said that. That wasn't the aim. I guess my objection was that I began to get the impression, when I came on this scene, that there was a feeling that the way you made good, sound table wine--hearty Burgundy or other--was the same way you made Chateau Latour if you were a Californian. There was that assumption that there was one way of making wine, and there were all these people out there, in Europe especially, who had not ever heard of Pasteur, who really didn't know what was going on, and

who were allowing all of these natural yeast--or "wild," as they were known--fermentations to go on in their tanks. They were not in control, and all kinds of awful things were happening--off-characters in the wines and so on.

Of course it was true in California. You reopen an industry after all those years--in a sense, you could say that nothing better could have happened than this concentration on how to make sound wine. Here you had all this equipment that had gone rotten in the years of Prohibition and was being reused again, finally. And there were a lot of people--the majority--who didn't know how to make wine; the tradition had been lost. People had left the industry, and no sons had gone to follow their uncles, fathers, or grandfathers into the business, so there was no depth of knowledge. You really needed something. What that something was, was the new technological revolution, so to speak.

I used to think it was only California, but I was in a big tasting in Florida not long ago, and I was on the podium with Robert Druin, who has the winery in Oregon that his daughter runs, and who is a major Burgundy producer. I was standing up there, haranguing the audience with some of this, and when I sat down he said, "You know, it wasn't just in California. After the Second World War, all these kids went to college to learn technical winemaking. It's only now, with my daughter's generation here in the eighties and nineties, that finally these kids who came pouring out of the schools in the forties, fifties, and sixties, hell-bent on making technological wines, have finally realized the value of traditional winemaking and are beginning to bring the two together. In France, the apprentices who worked for me used to laugh at me when I would rack the wine when it was high pressure so that the wine wasn't stirred up. They would laugh at me when I would propose that we would make it in the old way. It wasn't just California; the whole world was caught up in this love affair with technology. So don't be too hard on your Californians for shifting so completely to technology."

That's my little apocryphal history of what happened back then. Into this scene steps Ridge Vineyards. The Santa Cruz mountains area is unlike Napa and Sonoma, where you have both the hills above and then the valley connecting everybody, most of the vineyards and wineries are close to each other, and people are seeing each other all the time; they're all grape ranchers. In the Santa Cruz mountains, when someone is making wine, their nearest winemaking neighbor may well be an hour and a half or two hours away on another mountain. So who are the people, in the first place, who move up to these mountains? They tend to be very strong individualists. They don't tend to be people who assume automatically a culture or listen to what the wisdom around them is.

Here were these three scientists who came out there, saying, "We think that with straightforward, simple winemaking techniques, allowing the wine to make itself--not fining it, not filtering it--and using low-yield, good grapes to begin with, you can make some wines, the like of which California has not seen in years." An attitude like that, even if you don't criticize openly the established wisdom of the day, is taken as implicit criticism. I really feel that in those years, much of the wine industry and people at the University of California at Davis, to the degree that they even noticed that anything was going on, thought that the Santa Cruz mountains, for example, and people doing this were beyond the pale; that they were eccentrics, to say the very least; that they were involved in such small operations that it was a miracle that these things could pay for themselves or keep them going anyway.

We had perhaps one great disadvantage or advantage, depending on who you are. We had another winemaker in the Santa Cruz mountains who had started some years earlier, named Martin Ray. He was extremely controversial and was, in fact, a very difficult character. So it was very easy to say, "Ah, here is another winery in the tradition of the eccentrics like Martin Ray. I mean, my God, they're only just across the canyon from Martin Ray, and they seem to be cut out of the same cloth."

The sense you got at Ridge was that the industry was really not interested in the way we were making wines and that we were really rather removed from it. Nobody had gone to Davis, and so on. We certainly tasted and drank--I had always drunk California wines. I had worked up at Souverain, you know, and I had a lot of friends in the wine business. But in the Santa Cruz mountains at Ridge, you really got that feeling. We felt that we were alone in the world. We didn't have neighbors. It was a wonderful period in the sense that I could focus entirely on winemaking and quality.

Almost no one knew of us. We sold all the wine we made pretty much locally, although I shouldn't say that. In 1969 we opened up distribution in both New York and Boston, and we were almost immediately selling as much wine on the East Coast as we were selling in California, which was unheard of for a California winery, and very unusal even today. But the quantities of wine were tiny. I'm speaking of when I joined in '69, not when my partners started in '59 and then in '62 with their first commercial vintage.

When I stepped into it, you have to realize that it was the end of the sixties. None of the partners was there full time. By '67, Dave Bennion was working full time at the business of Ridge, but he was operating out of his home office in Menlo Park and was

only at Ridge a couple of days a week at most. So I was the first person, you might say, in a responsible position who was there every day. Dave was the first full-time employee, and I was the second full-time employee. We had a number of part-time employees whom I was now directing.

In the sixties in the Santa Cruz mountains and up in every remote area in California--all over the country, perhaps, but especially in California--there was a whole new thing going on. People were working at places like Ridge because it was an alternative to the established jobs and what was going on in the Bay Area in terms of the growing silicon valley and the whole community. Ridge was that kind of alternative.

After I joined and became the second full-time employee, the partners made it possible for me to begin to buy an equal share of ownership, so within about two years I became one of the owners. Within a few years beyond that I gradually worked up to full equal ownership in Ridge, albeit I still owed something for some of that ownership, but at least it was in my name so that I could then feel I was directing Ridge along with Dave. He and I were on the board of directors with the others.

What was happening at Ridge was this really very cooperative type venture. One of the great triumphs of those early days is that we had a young man join us to be a caretaker and to oversee the day-to-day groundskeeping and security (although security isn't the word)--just as caretaker, to work at Ridge full time. He was working with us for I think he said six weeks before he realized that I was in charge. We would have meetings every morning in the kitchen, and he would come to those meetings. We would decide what we were doing that day. It was one of the great triumphs of my life that for six weeks he had no idea who was in charge. It was a cooperative society. I think that was rather typical of the sixties.

Teiser: Let me suggest that we wind up for today and pick up next week to describe in detail what happened at Ridge.

Who was your young caretaker?

Draper: He was a young man named Walter Potterbin, and he lived in one of the small houses on the ridge. His brother-in-law was a young man named Leo McCloskey. Leo had just gotten his undergraduate degree in biology from San Jose State [University], and Walter asked if Leo might come up and help wash barrels. I said sure, because we needed some extra hands washing the new barrels before harvest and preparing them with hot water. So Leo came up and washed barrels. Then Leo said to me, "You know I have my degree in biology and my minor in chemistry. You have this little, tiny lab down here

where you are doing titrating acid and doing alcohol, measuring your sugars, keeping your hydrometers, and so on. You're moving the operation from the old winery down here at the Short location, the old Torre winery, and you're moving it up to the old Monte Bello Winery, just a mile up the hill. I could help you set up a lab, and then I could help you run it."

I said, "Help me run it? Hell, I'm a philosophy major; I can't run it anyway." He joined us then, in the early seventies. He still works for me as a consultant, three days a week. We put him through his Ph.D. program at UC Santa Cruz in microbiology in the early seventies. He now runs a very successful consulting firm called McCloskey Oranius (his wife's name was Oranius). He has a lab in Santa Cruz and a lab and office in Sonoma. He consults for the top small producers in California, he consults for Chateau Lafite, and he still works for me about three days a week. Though I have not seen Walter, and Leo is no longer married to Walter's sister, Leo is still working for Ridge [laughs].

[tape interruption]

More on Operations in Chile

Draper: The name of the foundation that Fritz Maytag, Sam Armstrong, and I set up in Chile was called Pacific Development International. Very pretentious--three guys and a little family money--but we liked "Pacific" for the ocean, and we also liked what it meant in terms of nonviolence. "Development" was what we were working in--agricultural and community development. The winery that we reopened was the Fundo San José, and it was in a little town called San Ignacio de Palomares. It was in the hills of the coast range of Chile, just north of Concepción, so near the southern limits of where you can grow grapes. It was a coast range that looks very much like this. It had been first planted across the street. Where I lived, across the road was an orange grove planted four hundred years ago by the Jesuits. There were vines in our valley that were four hundred years old that had been planted by the Jesuits.

The Ridge Group: Partnership and Direction

[Interview 2: February 17, 1994]##

Draper: We were talking the other day about how I first met the partnership at Ridge in a tasting. Dave Bennion, who was then acting as president of the group, had also acted as winemaker in those early years. He was interested in my approach--that is, the hands-off and also the traditional approach--and that I had had the chance in Europe, and then actually applied it in Chile, to make wine in a style that he very much approved of. I think that was why he was interested in the possibility of my joining the group.

I may have mentioned that they had this chance that so few California wineries have to look at the wines that had been produced by others from their grapes. That really led to their even deciding to reopen the winery. At the initial purchase of the property their intention was not to rebond, reopen the Monte Bello winery.

Teiser: Were they acquainted with Gemello?

Draper: Yes, certainly. In fact, before they purchased the mature Cabernet vines at Ridge in '59, Mario Gemello had been getting those grapes. One of their chances to taste it was to look at some of Mario's wines. It was not 100 percent from the ridge, but he was using grapes from some very good properties back up in the hills there, what would now be the Santa Cruz mountains, to make his Cabernets. They sold grapes to him in '59 when Dave just made the twenty gallons; the rest of the vintage, as I understand it, was sold to Gemello.

As this then developed with the partnership, the other partners who had continued on--Charlie Rosen and Hew Crane--had been joined, roughly two years previous to my joining, by several other investors. They realized that in order to make this into something that could turn a profit, they had to expand. They needed more capital, so they brought several more partners in. But that original group of Dave Bennion, Hew Crane, Charlie Rosen, and myself, would meet every week, late into the night. This went on for many, many years, often until one or two in the morning. We would have dinner together and then meet. The subjects of discussion were not simply the winery and finances and how we were going to make this thing work. We were so limited in our capital that we really had to make this as quickly as possible into a profitable venture, and they had been working toward this. These were working scientists, and they all had families. They all had to send their kids to college, and they were not looking at

something as a hobby or as some kind of a toy that they could fund. It had to make a profit. So that was a very good orientation, and of course we had some bright minds to watch over our finances in this ownership group.

We all worked very well together. These are extremely bright guys. I look back over those years with great affection. I was a bachelor, and I was accepted into this family organization, basically these three original partners and their families. Subsidiarily there were the other outside partners and their families, but their involvement would be more in board meetings, and their families' involvement would be perhaps a little bit during harvest. I had no family in California; they were all back East, so these three families really took me in. I became--I don't want to say the eldest son, because I wasn't that much younger than a couple of the original partners. On the other hand, I was younger, and I was not married and did not have a family. That kind of cooperative situation really worked well for us.

Teiser: You were the only one who had European wine experience?

Draper: Yes. Certainly Dave and two of the outside partners had collected European wines, but they weren't involved in the day-to-day running of the winery. What they could say would be to definitely approve, as they did all through those years, the direction we were moving in. To some degree from them came the idea that, "These are incredibly intense wines and very rich and complex. But is there as much finesse as a parallel wine of this type in Europe? Does the '62 or '64 Monte Bello have as much finesse as some of the great Cabernets from Bordeaux?"

They didn't want to make Bordeaux. On the other hand, they wanted in every way to make a wine that on an absolute scale was equal or superior to those wines. They definitely didn't want to make Bordeaux in California. As soon as I had gotten to know those early Monte Bellos, I had decided that if you were going to make imitation Bordeaux, why would you do that? People were going to buy the real thing. If in fact it is an imitation, who needs that, at least on the upper end of the scale? I suppose if you produced an imitation that was very cheap, there would be a reason for it. Also, what were the satisfactions in doing it, if all you were doing was an imitation?

I think I touched earlier on one reason we went to American oak. That was another way--not just with our climate and our soil--that we were producing wines that were distinct from Bordeaux, let along the rest of California. Even in not using French oak we were able to give the wine an individuality that owed nothing to Europe. I felt I owed so much to the history of

wine throughout the world, which was of course principally Europe, in terms of traditional techniques. We had just moved a hundred years back in time, you might say, and taken the techniques that were typical in the fine wine regions of Europe in the 1850s, and we had applied those again in the 1960s and seventies. Moving forward for us was moving back to a time that was prior to the whole technological California approach.

In keeping with a few words on the partnership, the partners recognized and articulated the fact as time progressed--and I'm taking us from the late sixties and right on through the seventies--that as I applied what I knew of traditional practice and my drive for excellence in wine and what I saw was possible at Ridge, they really saw that they had provided me with an ideal arena in which to exercise this, in which to bring this to fruition. I wasn't a wealthy young man who could go out and set up my own winery and do this on my own. In fact, the partnership with Ridge had provided me with the ground in which to do what I have spent the last twenty-five years doing as far as winemaking.

Yes, I was bringing a lot to this, but they were providing a great deal, too. We wouldn't be where we are today if the two hadn't come together. Their openness to what I wanted to do and their support of that allowed me to do it. It was really very much of a partnership in every sense of the word, and that carries through to today. I am one of the heads of company who insists on remaining the winemaker, because it's the most interesting and to me the most challenging part of the wine business.

The Production Team

Draper: We must make twenty to thirty wines every year, but we start with about 250 different lots of wine to make them. Every decision as they are fermented, combined, barrel aged and bottled, I make with my production team.

I am in the position of making the final decisions, but none of this in the winemaking itself could have happened, at least not in the last ten or fifteen years, without the team that we have assembled to work in production. It's sort of like the astronaut who gets sent to the moon and gets all the attention but its the team behind him that got him there. As head of company and winemaker I may articulate our vision, but without the people on the team--production manager Gordon Binz; Mike Dash, assistant winemaker; Hiro Oguri, assistant winemaker; Leo McCloskey, director of research; and the technical people, let alone the cellar crew and cellar foremen, the majority of whom have been

with me for more than fifteen years--we would not be making the quality of wine we are today. There is a real sense that is very strong at Ridge, of just how important this team effort is.

The Potluck Restaurant Tasting

Draper: Part of that is the way the wines are made, which goes back to traditional winemaking. You mentioned the tasting we did at The Potluck in the mid-seventies. The reason we could even attempt it, as you probably know, is that The Potluck headed by Hank Rubin with Narsai David as chef, had a collection of old California wines, the like of which I have never seen in any other restaurant. It is certainly possible that there were private collections that I didn't hear about, that included these old wines. I knew people who had one or two of the wines; I even had some of them myself. But to find a situation where there were all these Zinfandels, in this case from the thirties, that were in excellent condition and had been well stored was a fantastic opportunity.

On several occasions I had gone to The Potluck and had one or another of these old bottles. Yes, at the time they looked terribly expensive on the wine list, but in fact they were incredible bargains. They were very reasonable, given what they represented.

We got a group of people together, all involved in the wine business in one form or another--in import, in writing about wine, in production, in retail or simply as knowledgeable collectors. We all chipped in and said, "We're going to order up all the wines from this era that The Potluck has. We'll give Hank notice so that he can get them out of the cellars where they're stashed off premise. We'll set it up, and whatever the bill is, we'll divide it evenly. That way we'll be able to afford it."

We pulled this tasting off. I think I talked to you about the surprise and shock for all of us in tasting those wines. Many of us had had a chance to taste Cabernets particularly from the top producers of the forties, fifties, and sixties. That would be principally BV [Beaulieu Vineyard] and Inglenook. This was a group that was also tasting a great deal of European wine. Though we had found individual vintages of these California wines that showed complexity, the majority, though they held well, weren't as interesting or as alive as the best of the European wines of the same age. There hadn't been the positive development in the bottle that you would expect. On the other hand, from the forties on, they had been made with the modern techniques in mind which

didn't really take into account what structure and depth were necesary for long aging.

The surprise with these Zinfandels at the Potluck was that several of them--and particularly, my favorite, the Larkmead, and second favorite, the Fountain Grove--were wines of a complexity and a richness that we had rarely if even ever seen in an older California wine. There was no sign in the Larkmead that it was fading. I believe--Dennis Foley would have the actual list, because he was present; or Hank Rubin's old wine list would have the vintages--the Larkmead was either a '37 or '39. Thirty-seven sticks in my mind, but I'm not sure. He had only one vintage of Larkmead Zinfandel, and that's what we tasted.

This was a bottle from a vintage forty years earlier, no sign of fading, no sign of oxidation, just great complexity, depth, and richness of body. And--what can I say?--developed fruit. It was not just cedar; there was still definitely the richness and exotic character of the Zinfandel fruit that had gone through a metamorphosis.

It was a surprise for all of us and particularly for me as a winemaker--I was the only one there who was involved in production at that time. I said "All right, these wines were made differently than anything that we have been tasting made from the forties on. What was the difference?" I should note that the same point was made for me again at a tasting at Ben Ichinose's house in the late seventies. Robin Daniels brought a number of Inglenook Cabernets from vintages between '33 and '39, that era. Again I found those to be different wines than that we then saw in the forties and fifties. And these were Cabernets, not Zinfandels. Several were faded, one had an off nose, but at least two were absolutely superb. Great wines that had aged well. But all of them had a structure and a depth missing in subsequent vintages.

Teiser: My mind keeps flipping back to trying to remember who the winemakers were at each of these wineries in those periods. It would be interesting to trace that.

Draper: It really would be. My little revisioning of history needs some data from you.

I mentioned last week how we had a '42 from Louis Martini that Bob Knudsen brought to that tasting. These were all blind. The Larkmead and the Fountain Grove had a quarter- to half-inch of sediment on the bottom of the bottle, and the Martini had not an iota; you emptied the bottle, and the glass was clean. We said, "This one tastes as though it is five or six years old, and in fact it's thirty. But it hasn't progressed beyond a six-year-old wine. It's not very fresh, but it hasn't changed. And these

others have clearly gone through something very, very different to arrive at the point where they are now."

When I saw that again with Cabernet, I realized it wasn't the varietal; it was the winemaking. So what was going on in some wineries in the thirties that seemed to end somewhere in the late thirties or early forties and not be seen again for twenty or thirty years? I said "What happened here was that in some of these wineries, a winemaker who had made wine pre-Prohibition, though he might be close to retirement, was brought back in to make these wines. The traditional methods that he would have used prior to Prohibition were the ones that then he used again in the late thirties.

Teiser: The Fountain Grove and the Larkmead.

Draper: Yes, and I would bet at Inglenook in the early thirties at least. I'm thinking back to the '33, '34, and '35 vintages. A couple of those were just amazing--complex, intense, concentrated Cabernets. You place them beside a very fine, old Bordeaux and say, "Here is a wine that has the intensity. It isn't just nice wine that has held well but one that has developed beautifully."

That's my fantasy--without knowing anything about the history--that some of these men were brought back in after Prohibition. But they were so close to retirement that by the time the forties rolled around, they stepped back. By that time the whole reinvention of winemaking at the University of California at Davis was underway. That is, the team you mentioned of [Albert J.] Winkler and Amerine had gone around to the wineries after Prohibition, seen what they were doing, and said, "You guys have got to improve this. These conditions under which you are making wine and the quality of the wine you are making is not good enough." I mention again the apocryphal story I told last week about Ernest Gallo coming to Maynard Amerine and saying, "We're getting bad wines out of these old rotten redwood tanks. What are we going to do here to make some good, clean table wine?" Maynard, among others, proceeded to tell him. I call that the reinvention of winemaking in post-Prohibition California. My feeling is that this modern approach to winemaking began to dominate the industry in the forties, fifties, and sixties.

Teiser: They then boasted, correctly I guess, that with wines made in the European tradition you couldn't always expect the same wine from the same label; they were variable. They used scientific techniques, and thus established wines that were predictable for the buyer.

Draper: That's a very important point. Davis is a public agricultural university, and it should owe its loyalty to the people, not the

collector and not the man wealthy enough to buy a bottle of Chateau Latour. The fact that they would take that approach is not only justifiable, it's probably essential.

Consistency and Excellence

Teiser: What do you do at Ridge to make the kinds of wines that you had in mind?

Draper: If you're trying to turn out a reasonably priced if not actually inexpensive beverage, a wine that a very broad public can afford, then these aims of consistency from year to year and the particular style represented by your label are very important. On the other hand, if what you are trying to do is produce something of real excellence--and in my case I had those wines from the thirties as examples. I could look around and say, "I can count on one hand the producers in the sixties who are even moving in the direction of making wines like those wines I saw from the thirties. The rest are predictable, no excitement, just clean, simple wines. Which would I rather be making for the rest of my life? The one that stops you in your tracks out of wonder at how delicious it is--that's the one I want to make.

What basic philosophy in the winery produces true quality and what determines the distinctive character of the great wines? These tastings were a confirmation of what already interested me--I was convinced that given excellent fruit, the gentler the handling the better--at each stage of the winemaking. As far as the character of the wine, I had an excellent introduction in Chile where we worked with Cabernet from four different vineyards. We picked them at virtually the same sugar and handled them identically, yet from the start, they were distinctively different. Our favorite, from Carlos Longieri's vineyard near the coast, had an intensity and quality to the fruit that we didn't see in our home vineyard at Fundo San Jose, yet yields were very close to the same. So quite early in my career I began to realize that the wines owed their character to the particular piece of ground, the exposure, the rainfall, the structure of the soil--everything involved in that piece of ground--and its match with the variety of grape grown on it, the way it's trained, the crop level. All of those things come together in the great pieces of ground to produce an essence, an identifiable character, just as in a child. Every child has his own character. No matter what his parents or society may do to repress it, he/she is unique. It may take a long time to show through, but that uniqueness is there.

The majority of sites simply don't have very intense or very interesting character, and those produce excellent blending wines. They need to be combined into a reasonably priced wine, because on their own they're not interesting enough. They aren't worth the cost involved in putting them out as separate bottlings, and who would pay that price if they are not really distinctive? That description fits the majority of wine in the world. No matter how well you grow the grapes, on most sites in the viticultural regions of the world, the character of the finest fruit will be average at best. But within any one of those viticultural regions, the winemakers can find pieces of ground where there is a strong individual character of fine quality to the wines.

So I realized that as winemaker my role was important--in fact essential--but it was secondary to the site--to nature.

Teiser: What were the practical practices that you initiated or carried on from this?

Draper: The first was to try to locate the fine vineyards, the distinctive sites. In the New World we don't have the advantages of a thousand years of tradition where the monks or somebody else made wine from each little plot, and the local buyer preferred one of them to another. Gradually over the years people decided they would rather drink this wine than that, or they would pay a few more pennies for this wine than that one. The old wine-growing regions, long established, got sorted out as to which were the better sites. When that ground was sold, it was sold for more money than some other piece.

California, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, and South Africa don't have the history to have gone very far in sorting out the sites. We have to do it ourselves as winemakers. We have to look around at the grape variety that we want to work with and find where it produces particularly high quality and distinctive character. In the last twenty-five years that I have been a winemaker at Ridge--

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Draper: --we have harvested, fermented, aged out and bottled separately thirty different Zinfandel vineyards from all over the state--from Mendocino down to Paso Robles, over to the Sierra foothills, and everything in between. In Cabernet we've worked with nine or ten different vineyards. Napa, Sonoma, and the Santa Cruz mountains would have been the three areas where we have looked most carefully at Cabernet and to a lesser degree Merlot. We have taken fruit from Mendocino and Santa Maria as well. Even in a varietal of which we make very little wine--Chardonnay--we have

taken fruit from seven different vineyards and kept five of them separate, labeling them separately.

Zinfandel

Draper: The Zinfandel example is prime. The Cabernet search was a kind of luxury, to look around California and see what areas other than Monte Bello might be as interesting and distinctive as it was. At the estate vineyard the partners had been able to assess the quality of the wines before the property was purchased and more importantly, before any investment was made to reopen the winery.

The Zinfandel vineyards on our ridge were so tiny that they were not really economical, and we had to look further afield. That's why we worked with those thirty different vineyards. We found that only by making the wine, could we get a good idea of the quality of the vineyard. Most vineyards we stayed with for at least two years, because there were some surprises as a wine aged out and it was worth giving it that extra time.

Teiser: An Englishman who knew the wines of the world once said to me, "We consider Zinfandel a provincial California taste. We don't consider it a world wine." [laughs]

Draper: I don't believe that the true experts, free of their cultural prejudice, thought that way--the few people that got a chance to taste fine Zinfandel, that is. The Zinfandel Club in London, I was astonished and disappointed to find, had nothing to do with Zinfandel. It was simply a name. Rather than calling it the California Club or the New World Wine Club or whatever to set it apart from those looking at European wines, they called it the Zinfandel Club. In fact, very, very few of their tastings ever involve Zinfandel. When I have tasted with them, I don't think we ever tasted Zinfandel.

There are a number of Englishmen who have very open minds, and there are a number of Englishmen who have very closed minds, for whom wine is claret, wine is red Bordeaux, and there is nothing else. Jancis Robinson, in writing a book titled *The Great Vineyards of the World*, picked sixty-some vineyards as her favorites. In Bordeaux she has probably five, a number of Burgundies, a couple of Rhones, and so on. She goes on around the world--Germany, Italy, and so on--picking favorite vineyards. One of the lovely things for us about that book was that not only did she include Monte Bello, but she very much wanted to include Geyserville Zinfandel and did.

That was probably the first international recognition by a qualified and respected wine writer that Zinfandel could be one of the great wines of the world. People had to look at that. The English magazine *Wine* is highly respected; writers and merchants tell me that it is probably the most effective magazine with the broadest readership. *Decanter* is very fine too, but it is more focused on the traditional side of the wine business. *Wine* magazine did something last year, and I guess they do it every year, in picking their one hundred great wines of the world. Once again, both Monte Bello and Geyserville were chosen as two of the one hundred finest wines of the world. They used wine writers and winemakers from all over the world as judges.

So to go back to the Englishman in your original question; the English have recognized, more than any other overseas market, that Zinfandel can be one of the great wines of the world. We do not make enough Zinfandel to fill the demand in England.

Teiser: I can't get it! [laughter]

Draper: They sell hundreds of cases of two of our top Zinfandels every year, the Geyserville and the Lytton Springs, and we cannot provide them with as much as they would like to sell. So years after that English gentleman said to you that Zinfandel is a provincial wine, his own countrymen are contradicting him. There are so many good examples now of Zinfandel, so many serious makers who are doing a fine job with the grape, that more and more people are recognizing it for its quality.

Choosing Vineyards

Teiser: How did you go about finding vineyards to try?

Draper: We started first by looking around for other Cabernet vineyards. The old Monte Bello vineyards around us had been planted in the nineteenth century, and had been let go during Prohibition. The abandoned vineyards were there, but we owned only a part of them. To raise the funds to buy more of the former Monte Bello vineyards in those early days was beyond us. What we could afford to do was go out and buy grapes.

So we looked for Cabernet grapes that were the equal of the Monte Bello, that would give us the same intensity. We made a '71 vintage from a vineyard that Milt Eisele had bought up in Napa Valley. I think it was the first time that it was kept entirely separate, certainly as a commercial wine. I set out with the attitude, "All right, we'll see, with our methods, what can be

done with some good Napa Valley grapes to make something special out of it." In the far smaller field of that day, it won two major tastings and was greatly acclaimed. It established the name of the vineyard.

The Eisele vineyard was a very small. It grew in size over the years, but in those years production was very limited. At that time, Fritz Maytag had offered me his grapes up on Spring Mountain, and he did have enough planted and coming into production that we could, within a few years, have enough to distribute nationally. At that time that was not true of Eisele, and although we really liked its quality, we moved up to York Creek as our source for Cabernet from Napa. Over the intervening years we have tried Cabernet from Howell Mountain, from Bradford Mountain in Sonoma, and from Mont Madonna in the Santa Cruz Mountains, but none of them have given us the same degree of intensity and complexity as the Monte Bello. However, we did find, on our mountain, two nineteenth-century Zinfandel vineyards. One we made first in '64 just two years after our first commercial Monte Bello and the second in '68. These were very small, less than five acres each. We thought, "This Zinfandel is very different wine, but it is a wine with the intensity of the Monte Bello. There have to be more vineyards like this around California." Well, of course there were.

Our first outside Zinfandel connection came through the Trentadue family, who by this time were just moving up to Sonoma County from the Santa Clara Valley and from whom we bought remnants of the Monte Bello vineyard that we call the upper vineyard, and from whom we had bought the old Monte Bello winery. They had never operated it, and there were no grapes on the land when they owned it. But in buying the building and the land, which is just above the mature vineyard we worked with in '59, we got to know the family.

They had been prune and apricot ranchers in the San Jose-Mountain View areas. They moved on up to Sonoma as development took the Santa Clara Valley and they had very old Zinfandel vines on their ranch at Geyserville. In 1966 we made our first Zinfandel from Trentadue grapes. We went on every year thereafter to work with their fruit.

When I arrived on the scene three years later, reaching out to find more Zinfandel vineyards, I looked for old vines. We didn't want to have to fight with a grower to keep his yields down to get intensity. We discovered that if you had old vines, especially on sloped, nonirrigated and well-drained land, if you were a good farmer there was only a limited amount of fruit you could set and expect to fully ripen. If you over-cropped one year, the next year you would under-crop; the vine simply would not

produce more. Then it would swing back again the next year. That lack of balance was just what any good farmer did not want to see and worked to eliminate.

The oldest of the Trentadue vines are now about 115 years old, so they were 90 years old then. The Heart's Desire vineyard had been planted by a close friend of Luther Burbank, and that was a major part of the vineyard that we were taking. These vines regulated themselves. If the grower knew what he was doing, which all of the growers did who had owned old vineyards for some time, they were producing very intense, very interesting fruit.

So that was the first thing I looked for--old vines. I talked about head training, crop levels, irrigation, excessive fertilization; how were these vineyards managed, and did the growers have any wines that had been made from them before? Usually not, although I could talk to the wineries that they had sold to. The typical thing then was for me to say, "We'll take your grapes this year. If you are satisfied working with us, and we are satisfied working with you and with the quality of wine, then let's do it another year."

Those were those thirty wines that we went through, some of them for no more than two years, some of them ten years before we decided, "These are good wines, but we think we can find more intensity or more complexity or more interesting flavors elsewhere." For example, for ten years we made wines from two different vineyards in Amador County, one out in the Shenandoah Valley and another over in Fiddletown. In the Shenandoah Valley we made, though we didn't bottle them separately, wine from three different vineyards the first year. We settled on one large, vineyard that was eighty or ninety years old and was owned by Ernie and Lina Esola. In Fiddletown there were only two vineyards in the township, and we worked with the larger of the two which had recently been purchased by Chester Eschen.

We made some fine Zinfandels over those ten years from the two, but the style and quality varied considerably year to year. The very warm August and September temperatures in the Sierra foothills meant that if we started picking those vineyards at moderate ripeness, by the time we finished several days later the grapes would be overripe. It was difficult. I would say that only one year in three could we produce a rich but balanced Zinfandel in the 13.8 to the 14.2 percent alcohol range. The other years, very likely the wine would be anywhere from 14.7 to 16.5 percent alcohol. The grower, with the best will in the world couldn't help it; it was the climate of the region and the evenness of ripening within the vineyard.

In the meantime we had been making the Geyserville Zinfandel since 1966. In 1972, I was looking for old vineyards in Mendocino and northern Sonoma, and I stopped in Frank Nervo's tasting room on Highway 101. There was another couple standing at the counter. It was pouring rain outside, mid-winter. Frank went back into the winery to draw off a gallon jug out of the cask or tank he was currently bottling. As I recall, in those days he would bottle just what was needed. It wasn't as though you bottled all the wine at one point and then had it all in cases. As you know, to invest in a bottle and a cork (or screw-top in Frank's case) and a label is very expensive. It may cost someone as traditional as Frank Nervo more than it cost him to make the wine. That was a huge added investment, so you didn't bottle until you were going to sell. If you had an order or you had some people in the tasting room who needed a couple of cases of wine, you might well have to go back and bottle it while they waited. It wasn't always that way, but you did not keep a large bottled wine inventory; you couldn't afford to.

Anyway, standing there in the tasting room was this other couple. In the course of sipping wine, we got to talking. It turned out that this gentleman owned a vineyard that he had only bought a year before. It was virtually within two or three miles of where we were standing. I told him what I was doing at Ridge, and he had heard of Ridge. He said, "I'm selling the grapes to Robert Mondavi, and they're just putting it in their Zinfandel blend. Would you like to come over and see the vineyard? From what I know of Ridge, you guys put out a series of different labels and keep the vineyards separate, and I'd love to have that happen with my vineyard and see what it can produce."

So we went over in the rain and tromped around his vineyard, and they were indeed old vines. This was the Valley Vista Vineyard which we later named the Lytton Springs Vineyard, and the man was Dick Sherwin. We looked around for a while, and I said, "Okay, we'll take the grapes next year." This was probably in January of '72, and we agreed to take them for the '72 harvest.

Teiser: Did Sherwin know good wine?

Draper: Yes. He got into it because he loved wine and the whole idea of wine. In those early days, he founded the home winemaker magazine, *Purple Thumb*. Then he founded *Wine World*. So he was very interested in wine. It wasn't until a number of years later that we sat down and tasted other people's wines together. When we met we were sipping Frank Nervo's wine, not Chateau Latour.

So we made the wine in '72. It was a difficult year for California. For the North Coast in particular it was one of the more difficult years. I would say that there are very few if any

Cabernets where the wineries who were making high quality wine in those days would say, "Oh, we had a fine vintage. The '72 is one of our best wines." Most of them would say, "This was one of the most difficult vintages of the decade--'71 and '72--and we had a rough time." People added Petite Sirah to their Cabernet in '72, and it was hard to get it ripe. We had a beautiful growing season, but then just as the grapes were ripening we had some foggy weather and some light rains in September. It stopped everything in its tracks. Then the fogs hung in through September, and the grapes didn't move.

Luckily, at Monte Bello we were above the fog, above the inversion. So rather than picking a month later than everyone else, we started picking right on time. We had just finished, I remember, when it started to rain. People realized within a couple of days that it wasn't going to stop soon, and they went out in the mud and harvested. It was nothing like a disastrous French vintage, but for California it was pretty difficult. People really had to stretch to make as good wines as they did.

So '72 was our first Lytton Springs.

Teiser: Do you call the shots on harvesting in vineyards from which you buy?

Draper: Yes, we always have. For many years at Geyserville, to go back to that one, Leo Trentadue would decide it for us--that is, he would call us and say, "I think they're ripe. I think it's time to go," and we would say, "Okay, you've been right every year--you know your vineyard." That had worked consistently from '66 on, so Leo was one of the exceptions. We simply said, "Leo, you tell us." Later the Trentadue's brought in a winemaker of their own who got involved in the decisions, as did Victor, their son. With that first change, we stepped in and started monitoring the grapes ourselves to be sure we had full ripeness. By that time we were already making the decisions in the other vineyards and realized we had to do it at Geyserville as well. Today we lease thirty-six acres of the main vineyard at Geyserville. We have a thirty-two-year lease (*trenta due anni* in Italian) to coincide with the family name, and we make those decisions with Victor, Leo's son, who farms the vineyard for us.

We have had a very fine vineyard manager for the last five years, named David Gates. He travels around duringthe growing season, visiting our growers. Luckily, Monte Bello isn't ready to be picked until October, whereas Zinfandel is coming in usually from the first or second week of September on. Most of our Zinfandels are picked between the tenth and the thirtieth of September. During that period, he is continually on the move, taking the famous eighty-berry samples, criss-crossing the

vineyards himself, bringing them back to Ridge, crushing them, and running the sample. We also have the owners or vineyard managers at each place doing the same thing. Now, with a fax machine, we can stay in even closer touch on the sugars that the individual managers got that day. As it gets close, David goes up and starts doing his own, side-by-side with the vineyard manager, looking at the fruit and tasting it.

I go up to almost every one of the vineyards during that period once, maybe twice, whereas David goes up ten times at least. I say twice; but that's an ideal. At least once in that critical period I want to be there myself, mainly because I enjoy it so much. Am I any real input? No. But do I want to be there? Yes. [laughter] We work that way with our growers. We think it's essential.

Harvesting

Teiser: Do you or David Gates give instructions on harvesting?

Draper: Once you have determined that it is time to pick, then once again the experience of the foreman or manager, whoever is handling that vineyard, or the owner himself, is essential. We know them all from working with them in previous years. We understand each other on what has to be done as far as the quality of the picking and the selection the pickers make for such obvious things as not getting leaves and canes in with the grapes. Of course, if there is any danger--which is rare for us in California--of rot, that has to be carefully selected out--picked around. Second crop, unripe grapes--the pickers have to be on top of that. If we see the second crop as a danger, then the foreman and David Gates are standing in the vineyard with the pickers, watching each bucket being dumped into the gondolas. Whatever special requirements we have set are based on our experience with that particular grower--does he need help in managing his crew? Does he have a qualified crew? Is it a pick-up crew, or is it an experienced crew? All of those things come into it.

So, yes, we work all this out and agree in advance. That's part of a good grower-winery relationship, for each to agree on what is required. We truck our own grapes because we are so remote from these North Coast vineyards that nobody in the early seventies would truck to us. They just said, "You want our grapes, come up here and get them. We're not driving across the Golden Gate Bridge and down to Ridge." We got in the habit of that being part of the added expense for us in getting the grapes we wanted.

As Ridge became well known, and people came to us and offered us their grapes, many of them who had the equipment would offer to truck them to us. Almost without exception we refused. We had realized, in all the intervening years, that by trucking them ourselves, one of our full-time employees--usually a vineyard employee or one from the winery--was there in the vineyard while they were picking, with our truck and our extra-narrow Valley gondolas and trailers--the small trailers that take the gondolas down the vineyard rows. We would take all that equipment up there and have them fill our gondolas. By having a knowledgeable person on the spot, we were watching the picking, and we were looking at the grapes.

What that meant was that we were avoiding something which can happen, especially at the height of harvest when the temperatures are warm and there is so much demand for pickers. On a Monday, say, in the old days your whole crew might not show up, or half or a quarter of your crew might show up.

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Draper: Maybe they had too big a Sunday relaxing from the long week or working extra or whatever reason. In the days before the amnesty you often could lose part of your crew to immigration. You would still pick with the few guys you had, but your own gondola--say, a large gondola on your truck--would only get a quarter filled, and the winery didn't want to see that. So you would park it in the shade, and the next morning your full crew would be in, and you would complete picking and truck it into the winery.

We discovered that by our truck being there, if their crew didn't show up we would take whatever was picked back to the winery that night. We would say, "Listen, if this happens again, we're not going to be able to work with you. Do you realize what it costs to have our driver drive up there at four in the morning and be there at six when you guys start picking? And you didn't have a full load of grapes." By having our truck and our driver there, nothing was picked the day before unless we had actually said, "Let's start picking the afternoon before, because we're not going to finish otherwise." So we had a further degree of control in the vineyard that we grew to appreciate.

Lytton Springs--we first made those wines for five years in the early and mid-seventies. As I mentioned, the name Dick had used for the vineyard was the name of the street he had lived on in Southern California, Valley Vista. I said, "That's a lovely name; those "v's" are very interesting. But we're going to call it something else." I got out the topo maps and old historical maps and looked at the area of the old Lytton station, the old springs at the spa and hotel Captain Lytton had built in the last century,

and at the name Lytton Springs Road. There was a spring or two on Dick's property, as well, so I said, "We're going to call it Lytton Springs." He said, "It will never sell. Why don't you call it Healdsburg?" We said, "No, no, no. Sorry."

Vineyard-Designated Labels

Hicke: I'd like to ask about vineyard-designated labels. Weren't you pretty early on with that?

Draper: Oh, yes. We started designating the vineyard in the early sixties, certainly with Monte Bello, and then the Zinfandel vineyards on our own ridge. Later we did the same with the Geyserville vineyard. In 1971 our petite sirah carried the York Creek designation. On our own mountain we put things like "the fourteen-hundred-foot vineyard." That was our name for the Jimsomare Ranch, and the "eleven-hundred-foot vineyard" was the Picchetti Ranch. In making these separate bottlings we developed our own designations for them.

As you probably know from our label, we say in equal size, quite large type on the label, "Ridge," and then "California," then the varietal in some cases, and then the name of the vineyard or the vineyard area. California plays a large part in our appellation. What it means, of course, technically is that we're only claiming that the grapes were grown in California. But by putting the vineyard name down, we are covered by the requirement that 95 percent must come from that vineyard, whereas for a county it's only 75 percent, and for a viticultural area smaller than a county it's 85 percent. When someone just says, "Napa Valley Cabernet," it only has to be 85 percent from Napa Valley. Sonoma County Zinfandel only has to be 75 percent from the County.

Hicke: Why did you decide to get so specific and name the vineyards?

Draper: I had come to winemaking through tasting wine and through enjoying it. I realized that some of the best wines I'd had were good because the vineyards were good. As I mentioned, a sorting out of the properties had happened over hundreds of years in Europe. If that were to ever happen in California, it would depend on us and on other winemakers keeping individual vineyards separate to establish their quality and character.

From the very beginning that was our philosophy at Ridge. Any vineyard we dealt with was kept separate unless it was clear early on that it was only just okay and was going to need a lot of help-

73 Cabernet Sauvignon, Monte Bello, bottled Oct 75 1973 gave us the first significant crop from our younger vines and, as they too were stressed, their quality matched that of the old vineyard. In its second year a part of the vintage lagged in its development and for the first time with Cabernet we lightly fined that portion using the traditional fresh egg whites. The resulting wine is an elegant balance of oak aging and fine varietal character. It will need at least four years to show full potential. PD (6/76)

RIDGE wine is made with an emphasis on quality and naturalness that is rarely attempted. Our grapes are grown in select vineyards (usually identified on the label), where they are left to ripen to peak maturity, often at some loss of quantity. We let the wine settle and age in small barrels, with only rare cellar treatment other than racking. Varieties are not blended unless so indicated on the label. Near Black Mountain on Monte Bello Ridge, our main vineyard is 10 miles south of Palo Alto, 15 miles inland from the ocean, and over 2000 feet in elevation. For requesting information on ordering wines or visiting the winery for tasting, please send us a note or call (408) 867-3233. DRB (1967)

RIDGE 1973
CALIFORNIA
CABERNET
SAUVIGNON
MONTE BELLO

ESTATE GROWN, **MONTE BELLO,** 2300–2600 FEET
BOTTLED OCT 1975 ALCOHOL 12.8% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS
17100 MONTE BELLO RD, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA

73 Zinfandel, Geyserville, bottled October 1975
The long Indian summer of '73 allowed the Geyserville vines to go well beyond full maturity. The Lytton Springs vineyard, located on the same hills, produced a small proportion of similar grapes. Together they avoided the raisin quality of many late-picked wines and achieved this clean, rich varietal fruit. Though enjoyable tasting in the spring, it should be laid down for at least three years. PD (10/75)

RIDGE wine is made with an emphasis on quality and naturalness that is rarely attempted. Our grapes are grown in select vineyards (usually identified on the label), where they are left to ripen to peak maturity, often at some loss of quantity. We let the wine settle and age in small barrels, with only rare cellar treatment other than racking. Varieties are not blended unless so indicated on the label. Near Black Mountain on Monte Bello Ridge, our main vineyard is 10 miles south of Palo Alto, 15 miles inland from the ocean, and over 2000 feet in elevation. For requesting information on ordering wines or visiting the winery for tasting, please send us a note or call (408) 867-3233. DRB (1967)

RIDGE
CALIFORNIA
ZINFANDEL
GEYSERVILLE
1973

LATE PICKED GRAPES FROM TWO HILL VINEYARDS
BOTTLED OCT 1975 ALCOHOL 14.3% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS
17100 MONTE BELLO RD, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA

GOVERNMENT WARNING:(1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IMPAIRS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY, AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS.

Vineyard Production:
53 tons from 48 acres
Selection: 25%

90 Monte Bello, bottled March 92
This ideal growing season produced lower-than-usual yields and a marked concentration of fruit, color and tannin. We made a separate wine from each of the ten different sections of the vineyard. In the assemblage, the softer, less intense wines—amounting to twenty-five percent of the total—were held out. The first press was included, and a portion of the wine was fined early in the aging process to moderate tannin. It is well-balanced, full, and quite lovely now, but will continue to develop for another twenty years. This may be the finest vintage since 1970. PD (2/92)

Founded in 1959, Ridge was one of the first of today's small, fine California wineries—limiting production to achieve the highest quality. From the beginning, close adherence to traditional winemaking techniques has set Ridge apart. This approach determines our style and includes extensive use of natural yeasts, submerged cap fermentations, racking for clarity, and filtering only when necessary for stability. Our winery and estate vineyards are located above 2,300 feet on Monte Bello Ridge in the Santa Cruz Mountains, overlooking San Francisco and the Bay Area. To order wines or visit, write or call (408) 867-3233.

CONTAINS SULFITES
PRODUCT OF CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

NET CONTENTS
750 ML

RIDGE 1990
SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS
MONTE BELLO

85% CABERNET SAUVIGNON, 10% MERLOT, 5% PETIT VERDOT
SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS ALCOHOL 13.5% BY VOLUME
GROWN, PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS BW 4488
17100 MONTE BELLO RD, BOX 1810, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA 95014

GOVERNMENT WARNING:(1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IMPAIRS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY, AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS.

90 Geyserville Vineyard, bottled February 92
We recently made a vine-by-vine count in the old plantings on the Geyserville Vineyard. From this accurate breakdown, we discovered that zinfandel rarely exceeds the seventy-five percent required for varietal labeling. Consequently, we are using our proprietary vineyard name, Geyserville, and listing each variety at the bottom of the front label. In 1990, ideal conditions produced ideal ripeness. We increased the new oak used in aging to give definition to the wine's rich berry fruit. It is sensuous and complex, even now. Six to eight years of bottle age will moderate the fruit and spice, fully maturing this excellent wine. PD (1/92)

Founded in 1959, Ridge was one of the first of today's small, fine California wineries. From the beginning, close adherence to traditional techniques has set Ridge apart, and includes racking for clarity, and filtering only when necessary for stability. Located above 2,300 feet on Monte Bello Ridge in the Santa Cruz Mountains, we overlook San Francisco Bay. For information on ordering wines or visiting us for tasting, please send a note or call (408) 867-3233.

® REGISTERED TRADEMARK

CONTAINS SULFITES
PRODUCT OF CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

NET CONTENTS
750 ML

RIDGE 1990
VINEYARDS
CALIFORNIA
GEYSERVILLE®

64% ZINFANDEL, 18% PETITE SIRAH, 18% CARIGNAN
SONOMA COUNTY ALCOHOL 13.9% BY VOLUME
PRODUCED AND BOTTLED BY RIDGE VINEYARDS BW 4488
17100 MONTE BELLO RD, CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA 95014

-in which case it became part of a blended wine. Usually everything is kept separate until we are convinced that it can't stand on its own. In that case we have come up with names like "coast range" (until somebody named their winery Coast Range, and we decided to drop it). We called the blended wine California Zinfandel for a while. We had a vintage of San Luis Zinfandel, because it came from all over that county. Today we make a Sonoma Zinfandel blend in any year that enough wines are selected out of the single vineyards. They are usually held out for not being typical or not intense enough. So from the beginning we did single vineyard labeling.

Hicke: It was part of your philosophy?

Draper: Yes. Of course, it horrified a lot of people, but we were so small it wasn't a problem in the marketplace. But it was funny, rather than buying just one case of our Zinfandel, a good retail store would buy one case of each of our Zinfandels. Suddenly, rather than moving one case to that customer, we had moved four or five. An old friend of my partners was Al Bronstein. When he set up Diamond Creek, one of his reasons for keeping all the vineyards separate was to find out what the different slopes and soils on his vineyard would produce, but he also knew from the start what he had learned from Ridge, that you could sell more wine by simply not putting it all in one pot. In his case, he had one piece of property and three vineyards on it--I mean three types of soil that he designated as vineyards. He commented to me way back in those days, "I certainly learned that lesson. I'm going to be able to sell three cases instead of one if I keep them separate."

So there turned out to be a method to our madness, but I'm afraid it came after the fact. The real motiviation was to find out how good each vineyard was.

Natural Yeasts and The Symbolism of Wine

Teiser: What do you do about yeasts?

Draper: You've got to remember I was a philosophy major. Also I was interested in the reasons behind things, their symbolism. I think there's no question but that one of the reasons I was attracted to wine was that it is and has been throughout western civilization such a powerful symbol. It has been a part of the ritual of the most important religions of the western world. It has been the central symbol for transformation, whether physical or spiritual for thousands of years.

Unlike any other nondistilled alcoholic beverage, wine is made from grapes; in the grape, fully mature, all the elements are present to naturally change it into wine.

That is not true of beer, where you must take the grain and extract the sugar, and in the dawn of civilization, masticate it so the yeasts in your mouth would be added, and it would ferment. That's how they think the earliest beer was made, and today you cook the grain and add a cultured yeast. Man is essential to beer-making for fermentation to take place. Distilled spirits, of course, depend entirely on man and his process of distillation.

With wine, you have the cluster of grapes growing in the vineyard. In the grape itself the balance of sugar and acid is such that there is sufficient sugar to form alcohol to a level that will make a stable, sound beverage in which pathogens cannot grow. Also there is enough natural acid to give that beverage livliness and interest.

On the outside is a dusty coating that, let's say, Mother Nature put there for a purpose. You can polish that coating off and make the grape nice and shiny. That coating is called the bloom. As the winds blow through the vineyard, stirring up the natural yeasts from wherever it is that they reproduce in nature--on wood, on the soil, on decomposed fruit--those yeasts stick to the bloom on the grapes. If picked and put into a receptacle and broken or allowed to just deteriorate enough so that they break themselves, the yeast on those skins then attack the sugar in the juice. Without any assistance from man, wine is made. How good a wine? That's where man comes in. He's got to begin to take care of it. In the grape are all the elements needed to make wine. That's the reason why it's the symbol of transformation. You have this simple but delicious fruit that, through a natural process, becomes something as exotic, stimulating, and incredible as a glass of wine. That is so amazing that the transformation it symbolizes has stayed with us through the history of western civilization.

So natural yeast; that's why we use it. Can we as men and women really improve on nature in this case? Why not tie into the symbolism of something that separates wine from all other alcoholic beverages, that shows why wine is special, not just another intoxicant, not just another drug. Why would I stick with natural yeasts? It gives meaning to what I'm doing. I'm not in the driver's seat; there is a natural process going on here that I can assist by choosing the vineyards, by watching over the wines, applying my experience and my team's experience to how we handle the wines. But the wines in a sense make themselves. That's far more interesting to me than simply producing another commodity.

Teiser: What happens if the yeasts that are there aren't very good ones?

Draper: I've never met a yeast that I didn't like. [laughter] No, that's not quite true. We have at least forty fermenters, some of them quite small, and we use those forty fermenters at least two and a half times over in each vintage. So let's say that's a hundred fermentations at least. As a matter of fact, now that I think of it, there are a lot more than that, so I guess we use them three times over. [laughs] Anyway, more than a hundred fermentations every vintage for my twenty-five years. More than 90 percent of those have gone on their natural yeast, and not one of the wines was injured or damaged by the natural primary yeast fermentation--by the yeast that carried out the alcoholic fermentation.

Now, you can say that from the beginning we were being careful. We knew what we had to do to promote fermentation, and we were watching it to make sure that it started fermenting. We were smelling it every morning first thing to make sure there was no off character. If it didn't start to ferment after seventy-two hours and began to develop some off odors, we would then start it with a selected yeast strain or a starter from another tank. But that was on average one tank in a hundred where that would happen, and because the fermentation did not begin, not because there was some off character.

There are now a lot of winemakers, some very technological winemakers, very competent people, who are working with natural yeast, who are beginning to champion the cause with, of all things, white wine, which I think is much more difficult to deal with. Then, of course, that carries over to red wine and what advantages there might be with natural yeast fermentations in terms of distinctive quality. What are they perceiving when they do parallel experiments of a natural yeast fermentation against what they had been doing earlier with selected yeast strains? I could cite someone like David Ramey, who is an excellent example. He's at Chalk Hill. Dave might show you two wines and say, once it has been revealed what they are, "Don't you find that the natural yeast fermentation is more complex, sweeter, more mouth-filling?"

Teiser: Another point at which the University of California went in another direction.

Draper: Oh, yes. In those early days, they insisted on the fact that so many wines were being spoiled that one of the things you had to do was use a selected yeast strain to carry out fermentation. There was such a lack of knowledge after Prohibition, and old fermenters were so rotten from being dried out that really draconian measures were needed. And they were right in terms of the bad wines that were being made. But it didn't even occur to them--did any of them

think about the fact that there was something basically different about wine and whiskey? Any number of the winemakers of that era, as far as I can see, seemed to have preferred bourbon or scotch to wine. That probably included many of the famous old names of the industry. Is that what wine's all about? Not for me.

So the idea was introduced that to make sound wine you had to use selected yeast strains. You've got to start somewhere, and if you're not making sound wine, that's one of the things you certainly would look at. But for us, natural yeast fermentations have worked.

Secondary fermentations, the malolactic--we didn't own a filter of any kind for my first ten years at Ridge, so that meant that we had to get a full malolactic in every wine, including the small amount of Chardonnay we made. Working with natural yeasts, we didn't think about buying a commercial maloactic starter, so we have gone with natural malolactics in the winery from the very beginning. This last year, for example--and this is really early--the natural malolactics were done by Thanksgiving in all the wines with the exception of Chardonnay, which is still slowly kicking through.

The Paso Robles Zinfandel in San Luis Obispo County comes from one of our old vineyards and is owned by Benito Dusi. He has a brother, Dante, next door, but we work with the grapes from Benny's ranch. We bought our first grapes there in '67, and we started taking them every year from '76 on. They are harvested fairly early in September because of the somewhat warmer climate. This last year three weeks after pressing the wine still had not started its maloactic fermentation. Our other wines were being pressed off, and Geyserville and Lytton Springs were starting through malolactic on their own. Here the Paso Robles was sitting in a tank at about 68^0 Fahrenheit, and I said, "Wait a minute. We can't afford to have those tanks tied up. I want that wine to finish and be barreled down so that we have the use of those tanks, and it's just not showing any signs of moving."

So for the first time in ten years I said to one of my assistants, "Okay, order up some malolactic bacteria. We have to start this tank. We can isolate the dregs, and dispose of them away from the winery, not on the ridge, and we'll do a very careful cleanup so that we won't inoculate with this commercial culture. We want to continue with our natural culture, whatever it is we have. But let's do it." So we bought the culture. I have two Ph.D.s in microbiology on the staff, one of them full time who did his Ph.D. work on yeast. He cultured up this bacteria and built up a starter slowly through doubling each time it finished and had it going very nicely. He built up enough to fill

a tank of about a thousand gallons. It stopped dead. By now another ten days had passed and we were desperate for the tanks.

I said, "Okay, take another thousand gallons, draw it off, and add a hundred gallons from one of the natural malolactics we have going." In ten days, five thousand gallons of Paso Robles on natural bacteria from Geyserville was finished, and our thousand gallons on the cultured bacteria was still sitting there, barely moving. So I understand when people complain that even using cultures they have a hard time getting the malolactic. I vastly prefer the natural approach.

1978 was a good lesson. It was a warm year and there was a lot of sugar. A lot of North Coast Chardonnays stuck; that is, the primary fermentation stuck. At Ridge we had virtually nothing stick; it was all on natural yeast. The yeast was apparently acclimatized to higher sugar levels and the higher alcohol as it built in those wines. So we use natural yeasts because it works, at least for us.

There is an Italian named Martini who got his Ph.D. at Davis who has written on yeast, and I understand that his point of view is that winemakers think that the yeast comes in on the grapes, but in fact there are wine yeasts on the equipment in the winery because the wineries aren't sanitary enough. There's a famous story of a crusher up at Simi ten or fifteen years ago. All the wines were getting inoculated, and they finally tore this thing apart and found in the surge chamber, which they had never cleaned, that there was a very viable yeast culture, and everything that was pumped through was getting inoculated. I'm sure there have been other wineries with similar problems. They were then adding their selected strain in the tank, but the wines were already going "on their own."

So we started an in-house project, because of Hiro Oguri's expertise with yeasts, isolating yeast from the grape skins just prior to harvest and then growing them out and identifying them. Then we did the same thing as soon as the grapes had been crushed, and then twenty-four hours later, forty-eight hours later, and so on in the fermentation tanks from those same grapes. We found that we started with the *Kloeckera* yeast dominant as fermentation began, in roughly the same proportions as they had been dominant on the grape skins in the vineyard. There was *Saccharomyces*, but there was far more *Kloeckera* initially in the tank. Within a very few days the *Kloeckera* began to be dominated by the *Saccharomyces* which went on to finish the fermentation. This is the classic result one would expect on how the yeasts on the grapes inoculate the fermentation.

To look at the question of yeast inoculation from the equipment, we washed the receiving hopper, the crusher, the must pump, the must lines and fermenting tank with caustic soda followed by a citric acid rinse to clean the contact areas. Before this careful washing, we found that when it had received only a normal washing after the previous crush three days before, there were *Saccharomyces* yeast on the equipment. After the careful washing we could find virtually no wine yeast. We then crushed old vine Zinfandel grapes from Geyserville through this very clean equipment and within two and a half days had a vigorous uninoculated or "natural" fermentation going in the tank. For us it is clear. The wine yeasts come in from the vineyard on the grapes. They can build starter cultures on less than very clean equipment, but the yeasts originate in the vineyard, not in the winery. You never wanted to know so much about yeast as I am willing to expound. [laughs]

Economic Considerations

Teiser: You speak as if you are not aware of or there were no economic constraints on what you were doing--that you had time to do this and that and try that.

Draper: I'm aware of how incredibly fortunate we have been. One of the things I've said was that the circumstances at Ridge were ideal for me to be able to realize myself as a winemaker. When I was offered the opportunity to become an equal partner, after I had been at Ridge for about two or three years in the early seventies, I took that opportunity. Because of that generous, and I think, intelligent offer on the part of the other major shareholders, I've stayed at Ridge for twenty-five years, whereas many winemakers have moved around.

Economic constraints. We started very small. We bootstrapped our way up. We only grew as we saw a demand for our wine. As demand increased and we could not fill it, we would look for another vineyard and make more wine. We had not jumped in, planted vineyards whose ultimate quality was unknown, and built a multi-million-dollar, fifty-thousand-case winery and then gone out and tried to build a market. We had time on our side by starting back in 1962 with our first release. There were only seventy-seven cases of Monte Bello that first year. There are four thousand cases now with a total production between fifty and sixty thousand.

Our market was built word-of-mouth. We have never done advertising. I think once a year we do a full page ad in one of

the map books for wine touring in California, and on rare occasion we have put a small ad in some periodical to support a cause. We have never done a spot on radio, for example. We depend on the press to write about us and that has been important.

Because it was a bootstrap operation and because all of us as the major shareholders had to put up our homes as collateral for the corporation's bank loans, we were very well aware that we couldn't afford to lose money. This was not a "boutique," which is a casual designation I resent. In the mid-seventies, by the time I had been at Ridge for five or six years, we were breaking even and becoming just barely profitable. We're very lucky. We have been, here in the early nineties, in the midst of a very tough wine market, first with the recession and then with all the competition. Without increasing our production--and we don't expect to do this again-- we increased our gross income by 50 percent last year.

Quality Considerations##

Draper: We started small, but most important, from the beginning our focus was on quality. We did not try to make what somebody told us the market wanted but made what we knew to be quality and presented it to the market. If our customers agreed with us by buying it, then we could continue. That's really been our test: to take what we see as quality and put it out there.

Teiser: Have you had failures?

Draper: Oh, there's no question. In these thirty-one years or more we have bottled on average fifteen or twenty separate wines on average every year. That would be twenty times thirty; that's six hundred different wines as a minimum. Among those wines, there have been a couple of roaring failures. We have made up names for how awful they were. We have one (that I didn't make, thank God) that was labeled tawny rosé. It smelled like vermouth. It smelled like we had added herbs to it. It was the strangest thing in the world. We have produced wines that have gone through the typical *Brettanomyces* secondary yeast fermentation during aging. Some have ended up incredibly complex, others have lost their fruit and, for me, their quality.

We have a long history. We worked with a vineyard in Sonoma making Cabernets and Merlots. The soils and climate there produce some of the highest acidity that we have ever seen. We had wines that after malolactic had a Ph below 3.2. That is not wine that is going to be considered sensuous by the public. Can you imagine

Merlot at that Ph that has also extracted quite good deal of tannin? It's not going to be very pleasant wine and certainly not meet the expectations for that varietal.

It can still happen that a small--thank God small--lot of wine, out of all these two hundred and some lots that we start off with, may develop high volatile. Luckily we have a small vinegar program. We sell fine vinegar at our sales room. If we have a wine that is beyond the pale, we put it down in our vinegar barn a mile from the winery, and we produce a bit of in-house, barrel-aged vinegar--very good, we think.

So sure, we've had our failures, and I'm sure we will continue to have failures. The idea is that all the wines that we permit to carry our label will be the best that we can possibly produce from the grapes we harvest.

OTSUKA PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY BUYS RIDGE, 1986

Teiser: Tell me about the sale of Ridge to the Japanese pharmaceutical firm.

Draper: Starting in the early eighties a couple of the partners who had been involved for thirty years let us know they really wanted to step back. We looked at the possibility of going public. One of the partners who had come in in that era was Bill Hambrecht of Hambrecht & Quist, and he had taken Chalone public. He and Phil Woodward were the two major owners of Chalone stock at that time. We asked his opinion. Bill, who loves what he does and--what can I say? Excellence is the name of the game for him--said, "If you will take my advice, do not go public. You will be in a fish bowl, and you no longer will be able to do what you want to do. You may have an open market for your stock so that those who want to get back out can easily do so, but the nature of the business will change. It will never be the same again."

We took his advice. As the eighties progressed, two of the partners passed their seventieth birthdays. They wanted to be able to help their kids. They wanted to be able to step back. One partner, who had set up a foundation supporting excellence in the arts, wanted to be able to use the funds for his foundation. So there was pressure to look for people to step in and buy a major number of the shares. In 1986, when we were looking most seriously, there was very little market for wineries. We had Hambrecht & Quist evaluate the business, go over it with us, and come up with a price that we could agree on. Then we authorized them, not to go out and seek people, but if people approached them, then to discuss the possibility of a sale.

The only people who approached them looking for wineries in that year were two of the largest firms in the alcoholic beverage business, both foreign owned, and one of the major international firms in the food business, also foreign owned. Those were the three. They talked to the chief executives involved and briefed them on this on a basis of confidentiality, so that's why no one knew that Ridge was for sale.

You may recall that on January 1, 1987 there was a major change in the tax situation relating to capital gains. What that meant was that if we did not sell in '86, the price that we had fixed for the winery would have to go up several million dollars in order to have the same return for the partners. We had decided that was exactly what would happen. It was an incentive for the people interested to take some action. In early December, one of my partners, Carl Djerassi, a past president of Syntex, a professor at Stanford, and head of a high-tech business, asked if we would mind if he notified an acquaintance of his in Japan who headed a family-owned pharmaceutical firm, and was very interested in wine. For ten years or so, he had worked with this individual through licensing agreements or joint ventures in the pharmaceutical business, and he had shown interest in this partner's involvement with Ridge.

We said, "Not at all." The man was Mr. Akahiko Otsuka--A. Otsuka. The family-owned pharmaceutical business is called Otsuka. His father, who has since retired, was chairman. I think it was on the fourteenth of December that Mr. Otsuka was to be in this country to break ground for a pharmaceutical research center up in Seattle, so he brought the man who is head of the food division in the company to visit Ridge. This man was their top food taster and an expert wine taster.

We tasted young wines and then went out to dinner. We tried some old Monte Bellos; we tasted a '70 alongside a '70 Mouton Rothschild blind. Mr. Otsuka said, "I don't know my California wines, but the wine on the left is Bordeaux." He was correct. But the quality of the Monte Bello side by side with the Mouton was such that it was enough to convince him of the quality of what we were doing.

That was on the fourteenth of December, and on the thirtieth or thirty-first of December we closed escrow. For a Japanese company of their size to close escrow in two weeks on a purchase of this size is unheard of.

The reason that we agreed to go ahead with the sale after he expressed his interest was based on his philosophy and how he looked at Ridge. The large multinational corporations had all laid out plans for what I might call "Chateau Monte Bello" with the quantity of that expensive wine being seriously increased. Two of the presidents offered this identical comment, "We will find or build a little winery on the North Coast, and you can hire an assistant to make your Zinfandels for you. We will make a major investment at Monte Bello and re-structure the business." Fortunately for me they all said, "It is dependent on your agreement to stay on under as long a contract as possible to run the operation."

Mr. Otsuka had said, "I want nothing to change. Ridge has been pursuing quality for all these years, and I want that to continue. I do not intend to interfere in any way in the business. I would like to see more wine come to Japan, but I don't want it to come at the expense of any existing markets. If we increase production slightly in the future, say at Monte Bello through future plantings, I'd like to see part of that increase come to Japan. You will be the decisionmaker at Ridge. All I ask is that Ridge remain profitable."

It is Mr. Otsuka's interest in fine wine that led a company not in the wine business to get involved with Ridge. Here we are, almost eight years out, and it has been a marvelous relationship. Everything that we discussed has in fact taken place. As long as that continues, I will remain as chief executive officer, chairman of the board, and winemaker at Ridge.

Teiser: That's a wonderful story.

Draper: A lot of people initially were shocked that something that to them as American as apple pie would be sold to a foreign company, and especially a Japanese company. I had thought about it, of course, a great deal. One of the things that I liked was the comment from the owner of a top wine property in France, discussing this same issue. He said, "When somebody from a foreign country, Japan for example, buys a Matisse at auction, it goes to Japan, and that piece of art is no longer available to audiences in the west. When someone in another country buys, in this case, a famous French vineyard, its value is as a French vineyard. It does not move to Germany or to America or wherever just because that's the nationality or residence of the owner; it remains in France. Its excellence is based on the soil, the climate, and the quality of what it produces there."

In the same way, Ridge is a California vineyard and winery, and its value is that. It is no more English, German, or Japanese; it is simply Ridge.

IDEAS ABOUT THE FUTURE

Teiser: Do you want to talk about the future you have in mind for the winery?

Draper: [pauses] Sure.

Teiser: Should I ask you how long your contract goes?

Draper: I have a contract that renews every five years. If all goes well, I could be here into my seventies.

As for the future, in one sense much of the same. But what the same is, I realize from some of my assistants who have worked elsewhere in the industry, is that we probably taste the individual wines more often and follow them more carefully than is typical in the fine wine business. Hopefully it's not obsessive. We've been able to continue our attempt to perfect the wines and understand what we're doing in terms of the structure of the wines, the color, the tannins, and so on. In the last four vintages, we have had very good weather. We've come close a couple of times. It was such a late start this last year in '93. Instead of setting at the end of May, we didn't set until July on Monte Bello Ridge. When we did set, we got a beautiful crop, and we had to do some serious thinning. But it was so cold up there in the spring. 1993 was the latest set in my twenty-five years.

What that meant was that the entire growing season was pushed back a month. You catch up. By vraison you've caught up a bit and by harvest you are not far behind a typical year. So you are gradually catching up right through the season. We normally would start picking on the first of October at Monte Bello, within a day or two. It's not traditional; it just happens that way. We have our first fully mature Merlot, say, and then right behind it some Cabernet.

This year we picked some Merlot on the second, but we didn't start Cabernet until the eighteenth. It wasn't this famous word "hang time;" it was simply that we needed that length of time, after such a late start, to get the grapes fully ripe. You may

remember that after a period of cold and even a little rain in the first or second week in October, we had the most incredible Indian summer. That fully matured the Monte Bello. All the Zinfandel, with the exception of one vineyard, had been picked in September, fully ripe, a lovely vintage.

We have had '90, '91, '92, and '93, four vintages where the weather has turned out to be optimum--cold nights, warm days, fully mature grapes at the end of the season, both in Zinfandel and in Cabernet. We have never before had four vintages of this quality in a row. We know more, and we are doing better, but we also have had great weather.

The future for us is gradually replanting some of the old Cabernet vineyards to what has really worked for intensity, and that is closer spacing using a vertical curtain. We hope to purchase or lease more of our old Zinfandel vineyards, controlling more and more of our source material. We've been moving that way all these years, and we will continue. We still do limited releases to see what different varieties are like. In 1990 we started making a little bit of Mataro, known in France as Mourvèdre.

We have always made the Petite Sirah from York Creek. I've convinced Fritz Maytag to plant more small blocks of Petite Sirah up there. That will be coming in over the years. To get him to do that, we had to guarantee him Napa Valley Cabernet prices; so we'll be paying Cabernet prices for Petite Sirah. We think it's worth it. On that soil and that climate, we think we can make wine, and have made wines from Petite Sirah, equal or superior to some of the greatest Rhones. I'm much more interested in working with a varietal like Petite Sirah that is uniquely Californian than something like Syrah that was virtually nonexistent here until recent years. It's a wonderful grape, but it's a French varietal. It produced its quality and it built its fame in France, not here. Whereas Zinfandel and Petite Sirah have done what they have done in the world, as far as quality, in California. So they interest me.

We have made Chardonnay since 1962, tiny quantities. Starting in '84, enough young Chardonnay vineyard on Monte Bello Ridge had reached to full maturity that we had to make a choice either to let those grapes go elsewhere or to really take Chardonnay more seriously. Since '84 we have, and it amounts to roughly 10 percent of our production.

All of those things will continue. My intent is not to grow, or if we do, to grow very, very slowly in size. It has always been more profitable for us to improve the quality and therefore be able to sell our wine at a higher price rather than to make

more of it. I think at some stage quantity--I wouldn't want to say where the cutoff lies--can interfere with the quality you are producing. I think that's something you want to avoid. As winemakers, as owners, your style of life and the nature of your involvement with wine changes if you get much bigger. Of course, if you're very large, you enter the commodity business. You can be in the commodity business at our size, too. There are all kinds of reasons for staying small.

Teiser: That's a wonderful description of a winery. I don't know how many interviews we've done, but I know we don't have a better description.

Is there anything you want to add?

Draper: I've alluded to it all the way through, but I would say that the dedication to quality of the partnership, the founders and the major shareholders who joined them, through all these years has given a great deal of satisfaction to everyone involved with Ridge and has led to our success. We were a public corporation, so we would have shareholder meetings every December, usually the first or second Saturday. First, Charlie Rosen would give all of the financial data--try to get all that out there. But that's not what our shareholders wanted to talk about. They wanted to talk about the vintage, the wines, what we were doing. They had long since become convinced that they would never get any major monetary dividends beyond the good wines they received, but to be a part of this search for quality was what they really wanted. It was an unusual group of people, and I don't mean just that core of major shareholders; I think we probably had two hundred or more small shareholders, including two or three Nobel Prize winners. It was an amazing group. The sale was very difficult for them. It wasn't a question of profit; it was just simply something they were a part of and was a part of them.

The way the partners worked together--my relationship with Hew Crane, Charles Rosen, and Dave Bennion over those years--was so close. All of them were strong individuals, and we all had our opinions, but we worked so well together. Nothing else would have done in terms of accomplishing what we were able to accomplish. I'm deeply grateful to all of them for the opportunity they provided me.

Teiser: That's a wonderful description of a winery and relating it to various other factors and to history. Thank you very much for giving so much thought to this.

Draper: Thank you both for doing what you are doing.

Transcriber: Judy Smith
Final Typist: Merrilee Proffitt

TAPE GUIDE--Paul Draper

INDEX--Paul Draper

WINES

GRAPES

Ruth Teiser

Born in Portland, Oregon; came to the Bay Area in 1932 and has lived here ever since.
Stanford University, B.A., M.A. in English; further graduate work in Western history.
Newspaper and magazine writer in San Francisco since 1943, writing on local history, business and social life of the Bay Area, and the wine industry of California and Italy.
Book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle, 1943-1974
Co-author of Winemaking in California, a history, 1982.
An interviewer-editor in the Regional Oral History Office since 1965.