



Introducing Ridgeline Vineyards

Codorníu's new Alexander Valley project offers superb, upper-end reds.

QRW STAFF

If you hadn't noticed, Codorníu is still on a roll. After creating several important wineries in Spain, they've recently turned their attention to Alexander Valley, California, creating two delicious wines — **2002 Ridgeline Cabernet Sauvignon** and **2002 Merlot**. With prices for serious California wines going stratospheric these days, the Ridgeline "ultra-premium" offerings almost look like bargains.

The initial Ridgeline case production is modest — 3,900 for the Cabernet Sauvignon and 3,000 for Merlot — placing it squarely in the boutique category. The Cabernet is clearly the star of the two. The fruit comes principally from **Oak Mountain Ranch Estate** in **Alexander Valley**, an area developed in the late 1990s. The area has historical interest: it was once the sight of Preston, another American utopia which dotted the country in the 19th-century. Preston, a religious community started in England, devoted itself to salvation and to the soil. Ridgeline Vineyards, in short, has inherited superb terroir, all 80 acres of it, and is ideal for red grapes, especially Cabernet Sauvignon. The vineyard view is majestic, overlooking northern Sonoma County by more than 1,000 feet, with generous limestone soil, drainage, and sun exposure.

Wines of this quality must have what all fine wines have: serious viticulture. Invariably, all the success is in the vineyards: hence, low yields, hand pruning, and what general manager Quinton Jay calls "environmental integrity." Jay's aim is "to offer collectors handcrafted, singular expressions of mountain grown Cabernet Sauvignon." Ultimately, he wants to produce Oak Mountain Ranch "Estate" Cabs, from six, small, "site-specific" block lots at his disposal. Codorníu



doesn't fool around, making serious investments wherever they go, as they did with their Carneros/Napa winery, Artesa, spending more than \$10 million on that estate. At Ridgeline, each of these six blocks employ state-of-the-art trellising techniques and solar/wind (exposure determined by the height of the particular block), individual rootstock, cloning, and the like.

As a consequence, winemaker Dave Dobson, who also makes wine for Artesa, has lots to work with. The Alexander Valley **2002 Ridgeline Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$40), as noted earlier, is the star, the "ultra-premium" wine. It has rich attractive aromas of spice, anise, oak and berry, followed by flavors of rich plum, chocolate, anise, tea tones and more easy oak. Always judge a wine by its finish. This does not disappoint and lasts for a full

30 seconds. This is important because many experts believe that Alexander Valley wines are soft and often without sufficient complexity and substance, which has some truth. However, Ridgeline Vineyards is mountain wine: it has more gusto and structure, more depth, more complexity, more tannin, and more aging potential. Add to this the fact that the 2002 California Cabernet vintage is Five-Star wine, and you have a very collectable wine.

2002 Ridgeline Merlot (Sonoma County, \$30) is soft, quite approachable, rich, with oak, spice and blueberry pie notes, all of which were about to round nicely when we tasted it last September. Nice firm texture on the palate, lots of backbone (nothing flabby here). More blueberry, soft tannins, cinnamon spice and oak in the finish. Drink it now or cellar for a year or two. ☺