

In 1995 our "Reserve" section of the Sierra Madre Vineyard was sold to Fess Parker Winery (they call it Marcella's). We needed a new source for reserve quality chardonnay. The Miller family, who own Bien Nacido, agreed to plant a special block for us on the hillside directly opposite the winery, and this is the first vintage exclusively from this block. It has a west by northwest exposure with gravelly, clay-loam soil-a great spot for chardonnay.

The grapes were harvested in perfect condition on September 28 at 24.6 brix, 3.24 pH and 8.6 acidity...textbook! They were whole cluster pressed, then the juice chilled and settled overnight. The next day it was transferred "dirty" (with a fair amount of lees) into French oak for fermentation. I like to use a lot of new oak for our Reserve Chardonnay-this is 2/3 new Francois Freres and 1/3 once used Francois Freres. When you have this kind of balance and acidity the new oak doesn't overwhelm, instead it integrates seamlessly.

After fermentation the wine stayed in the new barrels, on the lees without racking, for one year. Malo finished in the Spring 2002. After a year the wine was racked, fined, and cold stabilized-then returned to older, neutral barrels for another 4 months. 1371 cases were bottled without filtration.

I think that this is the best Reserve Chardonnay we've produced. The quality of the vineyard site is a step up and 2001 was our best overall vintage yet. The aromas show earth, nutmeg, minerals and pear, along with a bit of toasty vanilla from the oak. Rich and creamy in the mouth with great acidity and a persistent mineral finish. This wine should benefit nicely with 5-10 years in the bottle, and with proper storage should go even longer.