



2015 Sonoma Coast Chardonnay, Michael Mara Vineyard

This is a wine borne from blood, sweat, and tears. The dream of planting our own vineyard from scratch verged on nightmare as we struggled with the rockiest soil we've experienced in 20 years of working in vineyards. It almost put us out of business. The rocks were finally surmounted and the vineyard produced a crop, one that we ended up having to mostly sell to other wineries to cover the unanticipated expense of planting. We were able to hold a small amount of fruit back for ourselves. The effort of planting was consummated by making the wine. It was clearly worth it.

The wine is 100 percent Chardonnay, clone 4 (the clone highest in natural acidity that we are aware of).

It has the white peach, toasted almond or marshmallow, and ripe pear nose that is expected with Chardonnay, as well as plenty of weight, length, and richness. It is not showy, however — its incredible opulence is natural, not created in the cellar. It has a distinct core of rock dust, or ground oyster shell, which is the distinguishing characteristic of the vineyard.

The fruit is picked in two batches. The first batch, 80% of the wine, is harvested very early, to capture the high natural acidity and maintain a moderate alcohol level. The second harvest, 20% of the wine, is harvested a little bit later, to capture the richness and power of the vineyard site. The fruit from each harvest is lightly whole-cluster-pressed, settled for 24 hours, then barrel fermented. The wine goes through 100% malolactic fermentation in older neutral barrels and a few new French oak barrels. It is given 18 months of barrel aging, with no topping or sulfur added until bottling. There is also no battonage — the wine rests on the gross lees undisturbed.

The pH is 3.37, the acidity is 6.7 g/l, and the alcohol is 13.3%. 193 cases were made.

The Vineyard

The Michael Mara Vineyard is west of the town of Sonoma, at the base of the Sonoma Mountain range. The property is owned by Richard and Susan Idell, our partners in the operation of the vineyard, who also produce delicious wine from the vineyard under their own Idell Family Vineyards label (www.idellfamilyvineyards.com).

The soil is the result of a cataclysmic landslide that cascaded rocks and volcanic soil down onto one spot of the valley below. Surrounded by normal valley floor loam, the Michael Mara Vineyard is situated on a unique lobe of rocks and red soil. Besides the fruit that we and the Idells each keep for ourselves, we also sell fruit for single vineyard wines made by Ultramarine, Maitre de Chai, Broc Cellars, and Iconic. Though completely different winemaking styles, the wines all taste of the same unmistakable rock dust.