



2011 Sonoma Coast Michael Mara Vineyard Chardonnay

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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 I'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—it's opulence is natural, not contrived. It has a distinct core of rock dust, or ground oyster shell, which is the distinguishing characteristic of the vineyard.

The fruit was picked in two batches. The first batch, 80% of the wine, was harvested very early, to capture the high natural acidity and maintain a moderate alcohol level. The second harvest, 20% of the wine, was done quite late, to capture the richness and power of the vineyard site. The fruit from each harvest was lightly whole-cluster-pressed, settled for 24 hours, then barrel fermented. The juice from the second harvest was added to the first fermentation, prolonging it and allowing the two harvests to marry into one wine. The wine went through 100% malolactic fermentation in two neutral barrels. After 18 months of barrel aging, with no topping or sulfur for the first 14 months, the wine was bottled. The pH is 3.43, the TA is 6.4, and the alcohol is 14.2%. 65 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 Idell's each keep for ourselves, there are wines made by Arnot-Roberts, Kesner, Broc Cellars, Iconic, Rowland Tebbs, and the Scholium Project. Though completely different winemaking styles, the wines all taste of the same unmistakable rock dust.