



2020 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 had experienced in an entire career of working in vineyards. The rocks were what caused us to fall in love with the site, but extra work caused by the rocks almost put us out of business. We have still never encountered soil that rocky — even during all the subsequent years of consulting. The rocks were finally overcome and the vineyard produced its first crop, but we ended up having to mostly sell that fruit to other wineries to cover the unanticipated expense of planting in the rocks. We were able to hold a small amount of fruit back for ourselves. The effort of planting in the rocks was all justified by the wine. It was clearly worth it. The rocky soil defines the wine, there is nothing else like it.

The wine is 100 percent Chardonnay, the Olmo clone, also called clone 4 in California or 108 in Oregon (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 manufactured to be showy, however — its opulence is natural, endemic to the fruit, not created in the cellar. It has a distinct mineral core of rock dust, which is the distinguishing characteristic of the vineyard.

The grapes are harvested very early, to capture the high natural acidity and maintain wine balance and a moderate alcohol level, there is no worry that we will miss out on the richness and power of the vineyard site, so we can prioritize freshness and ageability. The fruit 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 sulfur at all added until bottling. There is also no battonage — the wine rests on the lees to age undisturbed.

The pH is 3.38, the acidity is 6.8 g/l, and the alcohol is 13.0%. Only 48 cases produced.

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 from the vineyard to Cruse Wine Company, Maître de Chai, Broc Cellars, and Iconic. Though completely different winemaking styles, the wines all taste of the same unmistakable rock dust.