



WINEMAKER: Ken Brown

VINEYARD SOURCE: Bien Nacido Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley. Bien Nacido produces some of California's most sought-after cool climate wine grapes. The block sourced for this wine is a low-vigor site found at a higher elevation of about 700 feet above the valley floor, where the microclimate is especially cool and windy. Soils are rocky and shallow, consisting of well-drained clay loam underlain with sandstone and shale. These harsh conditions naturally restrict yields and produce small, concentrated berries.

VINTAGE: Harvest 2003 was Santa Maria Valley's warmest vintage on record and one of our earliest harvests ever. The growing season began with unseasonably warm winter temperatures that triggered budbreak in late January, nearly a month ahead of normal. Rain, wind and cool weather experienced during the May bloom period caused poor fruit set in some clusters and lightened yields. Summer temperatures were above average, giving Syrah the heat units necessary to fully ripen with ideal flavor, skin and seed development.

WINEMAKER'S COMMENTS: After many years of working with the remarkably diverse Syrah grape, I have found that a fusion of Australian and French winemaking techniques brings out the best expression of this grape. The goal is to maximize extraction prior to the midpoint of fermentation to preserve the unique fruit character and avoid the possibility of harsh tannins. The grapes were crushed into tanks and given a 4 to 5 day cold soak. During this time, a saignée was drawn off to further enhance concentration. During the most active days of fermentation, we performed 'rack and returns' for additional extraction. The wine aged nine months in 60-gallon French oak barrels with 40% new oak in the mix.

This wine is an honest expression of the Bien Nacido fruit, combining aromas of dark plum, blueberry and black pepper with a background of smoked meat and French oak instilled spice. The flavors are remarkably extracted with dark fruit components and hints of leather and spice. Firm tannins are softened by a rich, lush mid-palate texture that leads to a round, lingering finish.

TECHNICAL DATA

T.A.: 5.87 g/l

pH: 3.78

Alcohol: 14.9%

Sugg. Retail Price: \$40.00

Production: 245 cases