



## 2003 CHARDONNAY “Grand Cuvée”

*Santa Rita Hills*

### **Winemaker's Notes:**

While we have been fine tuning almost every aspect of our farming over the past twenty years, it is perhaps the way we manage our vine's shoots and leaves (the canopy) that has undergone the greatest transformation. In the old days, we simply let the vines grow however they wanted. It was a laid-back style called the “California Sprawl”. It was the ‘water it and let it be’ system of farming. It sure was easy.

Well, yesterday's entropy has turned into today's highly organized system of “canopy attack”. We now make as many as six passes each year through the vineyard to direct the vine's shoots up into a vertical trellis. Once the shoots are trained, we strategically remove some of the lower leaves, increasing the exposure of the fruit to sun and air. Initially I thought this would lead to riper fruit and better wines. After twenty years I can confidently say, indeed, it does. But ripeness aside, there is another huge bonus which really applies to our Grand Cuvée Chardonnay, as the new farming is finally allowing us to pursue a purely “Burgundian” style.

While each winemaker seems to define the term Burgundian differently, for me a true Chardonnay in this respect is one that is made from as much of the grape's intact juice as possible. Our problem a few years ago was that we used a great deal of elemental sulfur as a fungicide in our battle against mildew. After pressing the juice out of our best Chardonnay grapes, we were forced to settle it out at least overnight in order to eliminate the sulfur residue. While this residue was harmless from a health standpoint, if not eliminated from the juice, it would encourage the yeast to produce a horrible hydrogen sulfide (rotten egg) stink during fermentation. Thus, the clear settled juice always had to be siphoned off of its gross sediment (lees) and fermented without it. My problem was that in my mind a Burgundian Chardonnay comes from the fermentation of the whole juice, and I felt like I was breaking the rules on day one. Today, however, with our fruit being exposed to the sun and air, the mildew and rot infections are held in check. Consequently, we have been able to use much less fungicide. In fact, even though most growers still use elemental sulfur as their main weapon against mildew, we have been able to eliminate the use of it altogether!

With this 2003 Grand Cuvée Chardonnay, our farming practices allowed us to incorporate all of the juice lees into the fermentation, and subsequently in the wine's barrel aging. Thus, the grapes have had a chance to fully impact the wine's character. The French have a term that describes the *ripening* effect on the wine when all of its constituents are held together and allowed to age for an extended period of time in the barrels. It is called the “*elevage*”. In the Burgundian mind, it is not just the Chardonnay that counts. Rather it is the soil, the fermentation, the lees, the barrels, and the marriage of all the elements that takes place in the *elevage*. In a grand old sense, through the *elevage*, the product does not become a great Chardonnay, it becomes a great *wine*.

This 2003 offering is very complex. While it is chock-full of the creaminess that you would normally associate with the style of our Grand Cuvée, this bottling really ventures into the realm of a sublime pudding. The wine starts out with a deep gold color, the result of all the sunshine on the grapes, and the hefty dose of new French Oak. The nose is like a ripe lemony pineapple Brie cheese with a toasty marzipan crust. In the mouth, it starts off with a luxurious texture. The fat is then whisked away by the wine's strong acidity, ultimately leaving your pallet with a Burgundian sensation of minerality.

### **Technical Notes:**

VARIETAL: 100% Chardonnay (Estate Grown), Santa Rita Hills  
VINIFICATION: 100 % barrel fermented; 100% malolactic fermentation  
TIME IN BARRELS: 9 months on lees; 35% new French oak barrels, medium toast  
TA: 7.2 g/L                      pH: 3.32                      ALCOHOL: 13.6%  
BOTTLING DATE: July 3, 2004      CASES PRODUCED: 328 cases 750 ml  
RELEASE DATE: August 2005