



## 2005 CHARDONNAY

### “Grand Cuvee”

#### Santa Barbara County

*Winemaker's Notes:*

While we have been fine tuning almost every aspect of our farming over the past twenty five 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 integrated 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, cleaner fruit and better wines. After twenty five years I can confidently say, indeed, it does. But ripeness aside, there is another huge bonus which really applies to our Grand Cuvee Chardonnay, as the new farming is finally allowing us to pursue some of the more challenging aspects of a “Burgundian” style. When the grape clusters are clean and free of molds, and the juice they render is concentrated yet still full of natural acidity, you can take every drop of that juice, with all of its (lees) solids and sediments, and ferment it all together, just like in the old days. In the Burgundian mind this, along with the secondary “malolactic” fermentation, creates not just a good Chardonnay, but a great wine.

I also have a term describing the effect of this approach on the wine. I call it the pudding effect. When you are using Chardonnay from the right vineyards, and everything comes together stylistically as described above, the result is often a wine that, among other things, smells like pudding. It's an effect that I have found in a number of Chardonnays from the better vineyards in Mersault, Corton, and other parts of Burgundy, and in a few New World Chardonnays as well. It's not just the vanilla from the barrels. It's not just the cream from the lees. It's not just the butter from malolactic. It's the fusion of these things in a solvent that is a limey, cool climate fruit. In the end, you get this uncanny result that glorifies both the raw materials and the fermentation.

This 2005 offering is very complex. The wine starts out with a glossy 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, apply, Brie cheese with a toasty marzipan crust and a pinch of tapioca. In the mouth, it starts off with a luxurious texture, much of which is contributed by the fruit out of Gainey's Evans Ranch, and the Los Alamos Vineyard's 3 acre “Block Tea” section. The wine's opulent texture is chaperoned by its acidity, ultimately leaving your palate with a Burgundian sensation of mineral.

A final comment: notice that this wine is not a Santa Rita Hills bottling. Obviously, we are producing a bunch of really good Chardonnay these days from the Santa Rita Hills (Sta. Rita Hills), enough to make “reserve” wines from. The message here is that this is a Grand Cuvee. In other words, this is my best final cuvee, or blend. The wine from Block Tea, which we took all of last year, was very good. Using 50% of it took us out of a Sta. Rita Hills bottling, but made the best wine. If block Tea is any better next year, you will find it in the Terroir Exclusives program.

Enjoy, Bryan

*Technical Notes:*

VARIETAL: 100% Chardonnay

50% Los Alamos Vineyard, Los Alamos Valley 27% Babcock Estate, Sta. Rita Hills

21% Evans Ranch, Sta. Rita Hills 2% Sanford & Benedict Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills

VINIFICATION: 50 % barrel fermented; 50% malolactic fermentation

TIME IN BARRELS: 5 months on lees; 33% new French oak barrels, medium toast

TA: 6.9 g/L pH: 3.35 ALCOHOL: 14.5%

BOTTLING DATE: April 2006 CASES PRODUCED: 462 cases 750 ml

RELEASE DATE: May 2006