

DIERBERG

Chardonnay

SANTA MARIA VALLEY

“Steel”

2008



ALC 14.1% VOL

2008 DIERBERG VINEYARD CHARDONNAY “STEEL” SANTA MARIA VALLEY

THE VINEYARD

Dierberg Vineyard is situated atop a sandy loam mesa above the South Bank of the Santa Maria River. The ranch features a series gently rolling hills and soils that are uncharacteristic of the growing area. All fruit for this special stainless steel bottling comes from the far eastern edge of Block 4, featuring a particularly cold microclimate and red clay soils that are unique to this section. Two donal selections—clone 95 and the California heritage clone, “Robert Young”—are used exclusively in the production of this wine.

Wines from the Dierberg Vineyard—both our own and those from producers who purchase our fruit—take a long time to evolve and unwind, making them rewarding candidates for a sojourn in the wine cellar.

THE VINTAGE

The 2008 vintage will be remembered as one of the most schizophrenic in recent California history. The second in a series of drought years, 2008 saw the growing season start with relatively low vigor and early irrigation was mandatory. In spite of the tentative growth, the vines put out an enormous number of flowers and the prospect of a very heavy crop load seemed certain.

Then came the heat—record, 95+ degree temperatures prior to bloom. As a protective measure, a judicious amount of water was applied to the vines. But almost as suddenly as the heat began, it vanished and the well-watered plants went berserk, luxuriating in their excess hydration.

And then came the frosts. Five nights of devastating frosts that reduced crop loads by as much as 70%—and in some cases wiped out entire vineyards. We were relatively fortunate, only seeing 30% of our Santa Maria vineyard damaged.

Next: the wind. 10 days of 40+ mile per hour gusts blew during bloom, interrupting proper pollination of the nascent flowers and further limiting the crop load. Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay were particularly hard hit.

So, with all that excess water from early irrigation and frost protection (sprin-

klers are used for frost protection) and hardly any crop to counteract vigor, vines went extremely berserk. A lot of hand work was required to manage excessively vigorous canopies.

Just to keep things interesting, the season ended with a solid late-October downpour followed by 3 nights of freezing temperatures. Amazingly, the wines from this wild ride of a vintage have turned out to be absolutely deliciousness and structure to our final Dierberg Chardonnay blend.

WINEMAKING

Our “Steel” Chardonnay program was born of a common love we share at the winery for the flinty, austere wines of Chablis, many of which are fermented and aged entirely in stainless steel to preserve the freshness and purity that naturally come from the vineyard. When the decision was made to try our hand at such a wine, I immediately set out to choose a particularly fine parcel in our vineyard that would offer the type of concentration and breeding needed for this style. Two blocks on a reddish clay soil were chosen and were pruned severely to limit crop load and intensify flavors.

The winemaking process was, by design, as bare bones as possible. Grapes were harvest at 23.2 and immediately whole-cluster pressed to extract roughly 155 gallons of juice per ton of fruit (an extremely low juice yield by any standard) and lightly sulfured. Juice was settled at 60 degrees F for two nights and then raked moderately clean to three small, temperature controlled stainless steel tanks. One tank was inoculated with a neutral selected yeast culture and the other two were allowed to ferment with their own native yeasts. Fermentations lasted for a little over ten days, reaching a peak temperature of 82 degrees F. At dryness, the wines were blended, chilled to prevent malolactic fermentation from taking off, and left on their fine lees for 7 months with occasional stirring. Thirteen percent of the blend was aged in 10 year old oak barrels. Prior to bottling the wine was fined with bentonite for stability and was lightly filtered.

THE WINE

Our 2008 “Steel” Chardonnay has proven to be a breakthrough effort for us. What started out as idle lunchtime conversation has been transformed into a fully realized wine that melds the exuberant fruit character of Santa Barbara County with the austerity typical of Chablis. Aromas of spring blossoms and guava are balanced by a unique saline note that brings a sense of freshness to both the nose and the palate. At once richly concentrated with a creaminess from lees ageing, and tightly wound and backwards, this Chardonnay finishes with brilliant acidity and a cleansing, relaxing feel. Delicious now, I have a hunch this one will age for many, many years to come.

By the Numbers

Alcohol: 14.1%

pH: 3.18

TA 10.9 g/L

Malolactic Fermentation: none

Production: 225 cases

DIERBERG

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