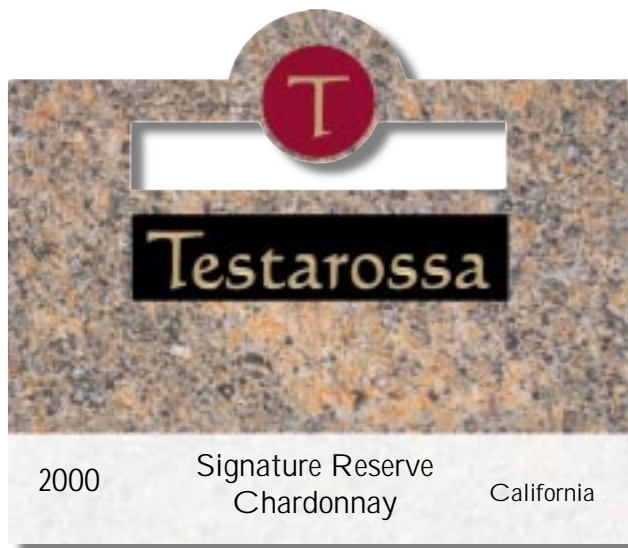


2000 Signature Reserve Chardonnay



1999 Vintage

91 points

A wonderful mix of complex fruit and pretty oak (as well as the best barrels of Testarossa Chardonnay from its multiple bottlings), so well crafted that it's the integration that impresses rather than one or two elements. Lots of creamy, buttery oak wrapped around spicy, toasty pear and hazelnut flavors that linger.

Wine Spectator - July 2002

91 points

True to winery style, this big, intense, abundantly oaked wine is strongly colored by toasty-buttery-leesy elements, but, where so many such attempts become heavy and cumbersome, this one is fit with lots of vibrant young fruit. It is full and fleshy in feel with plenty of weight in the bargain.

Connoisseurs' Guide - June 2002

1998 Vintage

91 points

This is a big, delicious mélange of pineapple, pears, buttered popcorn and coconut vying with mineral and toasty oak elements. Fat and friendly, it's got the goods to hold the taster's interest. The California Cuvée designation means that it's made of fruit from many places - more proof that good bottles are not all vineyard designated or single AVA wines.

The Wine Enthusiast - July 2001

1997 Vintage

92 points

Concentrated and oaky. Very intense and concentrated, with peach, pear and fig notes. Notable for its limpid, soft quality. Creamy and smooth. A very fine, elegant wine.

The Wine Enthusiast - May 2000

91 points

Serves up a wide range of spicy, fruity flavors, with pear, fig, apple, melon, citrus and apricot. Holds its focus, turning elegant and complex.

Wine Spectator - December 1999

1996 Vintage

93 points

Wonderful ripeness, richness and complexity, with layers of pear, hazelnut, fig, apricot and citrus notes. Full-bodied and concentrated.

The Wine Spectator - November 1999



California Central Coast

2000 SIGNATURE RESERVE CHARDONNAY

From the first vintage since 1996 that saw "normal" weather in California's vineyards, comes our latest Signature Reserve Chardonnay. 2000 was much warmer than 1998 and 1999, but still cooler and with a smaller crop than 1997. As has been the case since this wine's inception in 1995, the blend is a 50/50 split between our favorite Michaud Vineyard barrels and our favorite Bien Nacido Vineyard barrels. It takes hours and hours of tasting individual barrels to see the subtle differences among them, but the search for the best expressions from each vineyard is an important task that proprietors Rob and Diana Jensen, assistant winemaker Bill Brosseau, and I have gladly taken on.

It is interesting that two very different vineyard sites, which produce entirely different flavors, come together so nicely in this blend. The Michaud Vineyard sits high in the Gavilan Mountains, next to the Pinnacles National Monument in Monterey County. The soil is a shallow decomposed granite/clay, the vines are planted on steep slopes, and the climate is a mix of hot, dry days and cool, sometimes foggy nights. The daytime highs and nighttime lows swing so widely, it is not uncommon to see the temperature go from 100° down to 50° in a span of just twelve hours. This unique site in the Chalone Appellation produces some of California's longest-lived wines, always with a distinctive and Burgundian mineral quality.

The Bien Nacido Vineyard is in the Santa Maria Valley of northern Santa Barbara County. The vines there are planted on the valley floor with a very gentle slope, the soil is a shaley loam, and the climate is a very consistently cool marine-influenced mixture of sun and fog. The Chardonnay here tends to ripen very slowly, and is often some of the latest fruit we harvest each year. Bien Nacido produces some of the most intensely flavored Chardonnay in California.

After selecting which ten barrels would make up the 2000 Signature Reserve Chardonnay, we sent them to a small tank in January 2002. At this point each barrel had fermented and aged in oak for 15 months before racking. For two more months the wine married and settled in tank and was subsequently bottled on March 15, 2002. Because of the long barrel-aging and settling time, I expect this wine to drink well at a young age. At the same time, given its lineage, it should also age very well, possibly for seven or more years. (EK)

VINEYARDS:

Michaud Vineyard, Bien Nacido Vineyard

Appellation: California

First Testarossa vintage: 1995

HARVEST:

Average Sugar: 23.9° Brix

Average Total acidity: 6.6 g/L

Average pH: 3.34

Date harvested: Michaud - September 8-12, 2000

Bien Nacido - October 15, 2000

BOTTLE:

Alcohol: 14.3%

Total acidity: 6.0 g/L

pH: 3.49

Bottling date: March 15, 2002

Time in oak: 15 months

Percent new oak: 50%

Production: 220 cases, 750mL

Release date: September 1, 2002

Suggested retail price: \$44.00 bottle

Optimum time for consumption: 2002-2007