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Where to find Bien Nacido wines

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Even if you haven't splurged on a vineyard-designate Bien Nacido wine, you might have tasted the vineyard's influence. Many wines labeled "Santa Maria Valley" - especially chardonnays and pinot noirs - include some Bien Nacido fruit in the blend. To get the true essence of the vineyard, however, try to find a single-vineyard Bien Nacido wine.

Other wineries producing noteworthy Bien Nacido wines that might be available in this area (in small quantities or by mail order) include J. Wilkes, Testarossa, Twomey and of course the brand-new Bien Nacido Vineyards.

Note: Prices are suggested retail.

Here are a few current releases available.

Au Bon Climat makes several pinot noirs exclusively from Bien Nacido fruit, including "La Bauge Au-dessus" (\$36), "Bien Nacido Vineyard" (\$45) and "Knox Alexander" (\$55), the last made from fruit on the vineyard's highest elevations. The 2006 vintage of each of these is available. Winemaker Jim Clendenen's chardonnays and his chardonnay-pinot blanc blend are also worth seeking out.

Country Vintner: Available in the District at Pearson's, Potomac Wine & Spirits; on the list at Agraria, Bourbon Steak, Restaurant Nora, Ris. On the list in Maryland at Redwood in Bethesda.

Ojai Vineyard makes excellent chardonnay from the Miller family's Solomon Hills Vineyard, not far from Bien Nacido, as well as a stylish syrah (\$42 for the 2005) from Bien Nacido that successfully blends California fruit flavors with a European styling that avoids thick, syrupy, high-alcohol wines.

Country Vintner: On the list in the District at the Source and Veritas. On the list in Virginia at 2941 and the Inn at Little Washington.

Qupe makes some terrific block-designated Bien Nacido chardonnays, including the racy 2009 "Y Block" (\$24, and a great value). But winemaker Bob Lindquist's specialty is Rhone varieties such as syrah (\$30 for 2007 Bien Nacido, \$50 for the 2005 "Hillside Estate") and Roussanne (\$45 for 2007), a lush white that combines modest alcohol with impressive structure.

Country Vintner: Available in the District at Dean & DeLuca, Whole Foods Market Tenleytown; on the list at Bourbon Steak and Sonoma. Available in Maryland at the Tasting Room Wine Bar & Shop in Chevy Chase. Available in Virginia at Unwined in Alexandria.

Foxen Vineyard produces an opulent, stylish "Block UU" chardonnay from Bien Nacido (\$35 to \$40 for the 2008).

Nice Legs: Available in the District at Wine Specialist; on the list at Corduroy, Hook, Oval Room. Available in Maryland at Cork & Fork in Bethesda. Available in Virginia at Aldie Peddler, Unwined in Alexandria, Wine Seller in Herndon, Leesburg Vintner, Vienna Vintner; on the list at Bazin's in Vienna, Brabo in Alexandria, Willow in Arlington.

- D.M.

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