



2002 Nuits-Blanches au Bouge Chardonnay

This wine was constructed to show-off the Chardonnay of the Santa Maria Valley. In this cool area the Chardonnay will accumulate enough sugar to be technically ripe but the pH will still be too low and the acid level too high to make balanced wine. In the past at Au Bon Climat, by using extended lees contact and Malo-lactic fermentation, we could make a balanced wine from these high acid grapes. Our Chardonnays were always brighter and higher in acid than most in California, this made the wines more food friendly and helped them age.

Our first picking from K block showed good acidity with a pH of 3.30 and a TA of 8.7 at harvest, sugar was 23.0 brix, Two weeks later after a heat wave the last of K block was picked at a sugar of 26 brix, the pH had actually gone down to 3.26 and the TA was 6.9.

The chardonnay planted at Le Bon Climat are two newer clones 96 and 76. The advantage of these 3 clones is their ripening curve is well suited to the cool Santa Maria Valley. The sugar-acid balance is reached at a lower sugar, and therefore riper flavors at a lower sugar level. This is advantageous to a winemaker and wine consumer. Higher sugar sometimes results in difficult fermentations due to yeast and malo-lactic bacteria suffering from alcohol toxicity. Wine with less alcohol is better with food and doesn't burn in the finish. The Le Bon Climat Chardonnay was harvested at 22.0 brix, a pH of 3.47 and a TA of 6.8.

All the lots were hand harvested and whole cluster pressed. Many wineries cold settle the juice to remove the solids from the fermentation. Solids found in grapes juice are grape skins, vineyard dirt and insect bits. Not insect pests from the vineyards but usually beneficial insects or the yellowjacket wasps which are always hovering in a cloud around the ripe grapes. High solid fermentations are prone to H₂S production. Our method of pressing yields such low solid juice we actually don't settle the juice. The small amount solids from our press adds to the complexity of our wines with no H₂S production.

The juice goes right into barrel and is inoculated in the barrel, this is total barrel fermentation. For the 2002 Nuits-Blanche we fermented the juice in 75% new Francois Freres barrels. After the yeast and malo-lactic fermentation are complete, we add SO₂ and the wine is kept surlee in barrel. After one year the wine is raked and fined and returned to barrel for another 6 months.

We only filter if necessary. None of our Nuits-Blanches Chardonnays have ever been filtered. The wine is kept about one year in bottle prior to release.

Even though this is a riper style for us, it still works well with many foods. Roast chicken or pork or even shellfish could work with this wine. The food does need to be full-flavored to stand-up to this wine. This is not a timid wine. The wine show a lot of oak, fruit and leesy components. The extended barrel and bottle age allow this to develop secondary and tertiary aromas and flavors. The ripe fruit is still there, but now anise is added to the flavor profile and a floral note of lavender is added to the aromas. It is balanced with all these flavors combining in a big mouthful of flavor and texture. This is a large wine, with big flavors, big aromas and a big bottle