



## Chatting With: Nicholas Miller of Bien Nacido

By Marisa D'Vari | August 10th, 2010



... So I just had a fabulous lunch at Avra in NYC with Nicholas Miller, whose family owns the Bien Nacido brand (Pinot Noir and Syrah) and Solomon Hills brand (Chardonnay) in Santa Maria, California. “Bien Nacido means ‘born with a silver spoon’ – or some such in Spanish,” says Nicholas. As the scion of a family whose vineyard fruit is sourced to such legendary companies as Au Bon Climat, Bonny Doon and other stellar companies, Nicholas has every right to act that role, yet in person he is earnest and hard working.

I am here to taste the Bien Nacido brand of Pinot Noir and Syrah, as well as their new 2008 Solomon Hills Chardonnay. All three are excellent, and are indeed “showpiece” wines that represent the family’s top choice plot in the appellation (bought in 1973) and their commitment to quality. “I’ve very particular about Syrah,” says Nicholas, as we launch into a discussion of “cool climate” and “warm climate” Syrah and why both the Bien Nacido red wines are lower in alcohol than many of their West Coast cousins (Santa Maria is one of the cooler regions in the entire state).

The total production is under 500 cases, with the brands getting rave reviews on Internet sites such as WineBerserkers yet really available only in top restaurants or through the winery’s web site. In the end, Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills are the flagship for the family’s excellent vineyards and custom crushing facility.

I learned a great deal about the family’s vineyard holdings in Santa Maria during the lunch, which sounded like a spectacular AVA with early morning fog “trapped” by two mountains on either side, which serve to cool the grapes until mid-afternoon, when that brief interlude of sunshine helps them ripen slowly and evenly.

The crowd on the WineBerserkes forum went wild for the Chardonnay, yet I found both the Syrah and Pinot Noir spectacular!

Salute!