

Bien Nacido Redux

Last summer the Crew spent a day at Bien Nacido Vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley as part of a Pinot Camp that I organized. Several attendees were so impressed by the wines that they decided to organize a dinner and tasting of Bien Nacido wines at Mr Stox Restaurant in Anaheim, California, Nicholas Miller, who conducts marketing and public relations for Bien Nacido Vineyard, attended and offered considerable insight into the wines presented that night. Many of the wines were from a “Bien Nacido Vineyards Collector’s Case” that was offered in 2006. Each year, a Collector’s Case with different selections will be offered from the Bien Nacido Vineyard. Bien Nacido crew pictured below includes winemakers Jeff Wilkes (blue hat, J. Wilkes), Greg Linn (wineglass in hand, Ambullneo), and Jeff White (red hat, Ovene); James Ontiveros (gray hat, Director of Marketing) and Nicholas Miller (white Stetson)



Bien Nacido (Spanish for “Born Well”) Vineyard of Rancho Tepusquet is one of the Central Coast’s premier sources for Chardonnay (over 300 acres) and Pinot Noir (over 250 acres). A number of other promising varietals are planted as well including Viognier, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Rousanne, Merlot, Barbera and Nebbiolo. The total acreage is fluid as old vines dating to the 1970s are removed and replanted. Maximum vineyard size is 800 acres. The vineyard is a few miles east of the town of Santa Maria and lies in a valley that is open to the Pacific Ocean to the west. There are regular summertime afternoon cool breezes from the ocean. Since the vineyard lies at 34 degrees latitude, it receives considerable intense sunlight from a directly overhead sun. There is no Bien Nacido wine per se, as all of the vineyard is allocated to small producers whose blocks are farmed according to their standards. The grape production is sold to customers by charging a flat rate for the block or rows, so the winemakers can crop their vines to the volume they prefer. Some Bien Nacido customers have sourced the same rows of grapes for over 20 years and designate their particular block on the bottle. The entire Bien Nacido Vineyard client list is on the website at www.biennacidovineyards.com.

2005 J. Wilkes Bien Nacido Vineyards Pinot Blanc 14.1% alc., 600 cases, \$18. The grapes were machine harvested at night and pressed without de-stemming. Cold fermentation ensued and the wine was aged *sur lies*. *An excellent wine which is notable for its tropical flavors. Clean and crisp, this would make a perfect aperitif.*

2004 Trou de Bonde Bien Nacido Vineyards Pinot Blanc 14.2% alc., 605 cases, \$17. Cooperage included a mix of 70% stainless steel, 15% new French oak, and 15% neutral French oak. *A more Alsatian interpretation of Pinot Blanc than the California styled Wilkes bottling. More body and viscosity, with notes of green apple and petrol. It paired perfectly with King Salmon, heirloom tomatoes and a fennel horseradish vinaigrette.*

It is difficult to make any generalizations about specific aromatic and flavor characteristics of Pinot Noir from Bien Nacido Vineyard because of the many different clones, sites, and winemaking styles. Some have talked of a pepper note that often runs through, black or white, which I have noted on occasion.

2002 Nicolaysen Family Vineyards Bien Nacido Vineyards Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 275 cases. This wine is from plantings over 30 years old in the "T" Block of Bien Nacido Vineyard. The unusual clone is 22 (from Beaujolais). The 2002 is the latest release. *Dark in color, rich, ripe, generous and jammy, with potent octane, this is not a wine for the faint of heart. Several tasters loved this wine which I thought smelled a lot better than it tasted.*

2003 Stephen Ross Bien Nacido Vineyards Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., \$40. *This wine is restrained in style with notable vegetal flavors on the finish.*

2003 Foxen Bien Nacido Vineyards Block Eight Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 425 cases, \$48. This block was planted in 1996 with clones 2A, Sanford & Benedict (Mt. Eden), 113, 115, and Pommard. *A very darkly-colored wine of great intensity. Plenty of sweet, fresh, vivid fruit with power to thrill. A bit of heat peaks out on the finish.*

2004 Lane Tanner Bien Nacido Vineyards Pinot Noir 12.8%, \$26. As you can tell by the alcohol level, Lane picks her grapes usually before anyone else, but an alcohol below 13% is a rarity, even for her. The wine is pure N Block (Martini clone planted in 1973 on its own rootstock). 35% new oak. *Lane warns that this wine tastes leaner than other years, but feels it will be long-lived. Her comment is right on as this wine is more austere and tart than the more showy 2005 release.*

2004 Steele Bien Nacido Vineyards Block N Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$26. *Noticeable chocolate in the nose, perfectly fine red fruit flavors, a soft texture and a good food wine. A little shallow on the back end.*

2005 Bernardus Bien Nacido Vineyards Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 99 cases, \$25. Sourced from two different blocks containing Pommard and 2A clone. Aged in 60% new oak. *Very nice garnet color. Heady aromatics of cherries, cola and spice. Nicely balanced with racy red fruits, supple tannins and palate-cleaning acidity. My favorite wine in this Pinot Noir lineup.*

I am certainly no expert on Syrah, but among the four that were presented, the **2003 Ojai Vineyard Bien Nacido Vineyards Syrah** and the **2004 Ambullneo Santa Maria Howling Syrah** (85% Bien Nacido Vineyards) were clearly my favorites. We finished off the evening with an outrageous dessert wine, the **2003 Sine Qua Non Mr. K The Nobleman Late-Harvest Bien Nacido Vineyards Chardonnay** (12.3% alc., \$100).