



2002 Syrah “Bien Nacido Hillside Estate”

This wine is 100% syrah from the Z block at Bien Nacido vineyard. Z block is the original custom hillside block at Bien Nacido, planted exclusively for growing cool climate syrah – southwest facing slope to get plenty of sun and poor soil that drains well and stresses the vines.

The grapes for this wine were harvested in three different picks and, looking back at our harvest book, I realized why this wine is so “textbook” in its balance and flavor profile. We started harvesting on October 24th at 23.5° brix, 3.29 Ph and 6.7 grams acidity. The next pick was eight days later, on November 1st, at 24.2° brix, 3.32 pH and 6.6 grams acid. The last pick was on November 6th at 25.6° brix, 3.35 pH and 5.7 grams acid. I love “stats” like these, maybe that’s one of the reasons I’m such a big baseball fan... but those are pretty perfect numbers!

All the grapes were destemmed into small open top fermenters. With each lot, we drew off two barrels of saignée after about five days and barrel fermented this portion. The BF portion ends up being about 12% of the final blend and adds a nice toasty mocha character. We aged the wine for nineteen months in François Frères French oak barrels of which about two-thirds were new. 1,060 cases were bottled without fining or filtration in June, 2004.

This is a pretty, showy Hillside syrah. It reminds me a little of the ‘97 with its forward fruit, but this one’s more restrained. It also reminds me a bit of the ‘98 with its “cola-spice” aromatics. It’s a much more drinkable now wine than the 2001 is, but it has a lot of the ‘01’s complexity. In ranking this vintage against the other Hillside syrahs going back to the first in ‘94, this one would be at or near the top.