

Chardonnay of the Michael Mara Vineyard

By **Hawk Wakawaka** - Apr 12, 2016

Michael Mara Chardonnay



*from left: Jill and Steve Klein Matthiasson, Richard and Susan Idell, Birk O'Halloran, Abe Schoener, Chris Brock
2016*

Last week Richard and Susan Idell hosted a producer tasting at their vineyard along with Steve Matthiasson. The Michael Mara Vineyard hosts six acres of Chardonnay, clone 4 grafted to de-vigorating rootstock in an already high drainage, not only keep vines from over-producing but minimize growth to such a degree as to consistently offer a glimpse of that stony character.

Planting the Michael Mara in 2006, Matthiasson helped design the vineyard, and continues to farm it, and its characteristics reveal themselves through the vines. Within a vintage or two of first fruit, Matthiasson's concentration of density through the palate and mineral expression, in his view, usually characteristic of older vine sites.

The concentrating power of the site can be glimpsed through surrounding foliage.

Michael Mara stands in the midst of a mini-plateau elevated by four feet when compared to surrounding trees reach almost half-size compared to those growing on lower grounds. Matthiasson believes the moisture retention of the soils, coupled with their mix of closely-packed rocks and volcanic earth.

Vines too grow smaller through Michael Mara, with not only less size increase year-to-year, but also the combination of reduced growth and lessened natural shade again lead to concentration of the fruit. At smaller clusters and smaller berries mean more skin to less pulp in the fruit. With the heightened pressure from the site carry a stimulating sapidity that washes the mouth with mineral freshness.

Flavors of the Vines

Growing up in Alaska, friends and I would sometimes spend an entire day just running through the mountains so down the road on the Seward Peninsula at the entrance to a high elevation valley, then we would travel through the belly of the Chugach mountains. Eventually we'd arrive near the edge of Anchorage, where the way, if we grew thirsty, we learned to throw a rock in our mouths. The pebble would stimulate our palate on a snow-soaked summer range. The experience always tasted just a touch earthy, not quite salty but almost like an upland valley. In portions the resin scent of pine or evergreen blended in with the fog.

The stoniness of Michael Mara wines across producers and vintages reminds me of those runs through the mouthwatering wash of stones through the midpalate with a bit of earth and a flavor that's almost salt-like density of fruit, the flavor of which varies by picking time and cellar technique, and hints of forest resin.

The Idell family's Michael Mara serves as source fruit for a range of producers making wine across a diverse wash remain consistent.

Following are tasting notes on the wines tasted at the event last week presented in the order tasted.

* **Broc Cellars 2011 Michael Mara Chardonnay** 12% \$42

With delicate aromatics and a stimulating texture, the broc 2014 showcases a midpalate burst of fresh stimulating rush of acidity, and a savory finish. Refreshing, a hint funky, delicious.

* **Matthiasson 2013 Michael Mara Chardonnay** 12.9% \$55

Offering a fresh fruit lift of pear and clementine touched by hints of honey and amber, the Matthiasson accents. Pleasing acidity carries almost lacy flavors married to a sense of lushness. Nice length and com-

Younginglewood 2013 Michael Mara Chardonnay 13.7% \$60

Floral spiced aromatics followed by a palate of spiced wax, pear, and citrus rind with hints of savory for Younginglewood 2013 carries through a long finish. I would prefer a little less oak spice and a little less expression of its style.

Idell Family Vineyard 2013 Michael Mara Chardonnay 13.2% \$35

Tight aromatics and a subtle flavor profile with accents of oak spice throughout, the Idell Family Vineyard 2013 carries the promise of more. Showing light notes of pear and orange rind with a savory finish and persimmon checking-in on again in a year or two.

*** Scholium Project 2014 Michael Faraday Michael Mara Chardonnay** 13.49% \$80

Savory aromatics and palate with a distinctive, animalistic energy brought into focus, the Michael Faraday 2014 carries the promise of more. Showing light notes of pear and orange rind with a savory finish and persimmon checking-in on again in a year or two. (Does that make it heathen wine? If it is, I don't want to be right.)

Scholium Project 2015 barrel sample Michael Faraday Michael Mara Chardonnay

Still in the fresh-wine phase, the 2015 Michael Faraday shows flavors still in evolution but carries nice complexity later in bottle.

Iconic 2014 Heroine Michael Mara Chardonnay 12.8% \$TBD

Subtle and savory aromatics with a fleshier mid palate and a softer finish (that is not to call it either sc examples, the 2014 Heroine appears to have a little more influence of malolactic fermentation than so palate of flavor with still good density and a punch of zestiness spun through the finish. Hints of verve,

Kesner 2013 Rockbreak Michael Mara Chardonnay 13.72% \$55

My favorite of the three Kesner vintages poured, the 2013 feels the most cohesive with potential to age. The flavors here are rich though nuanced with density and length carrying into a long savory finish. All

Kesner 2012 Rockbreak Michael Mara Chardonnay 14.3% \$55

With subtle aromatics and palate, the 2012 is currently showing less complexity than the 2013 or 2014

Kesner 2011 Rockbreak Michael Mara Chardonnay 14.2% \$55

While the 2011 feels more disjointed than the other vintages – simultaneously offering fresh fruit notes also carries a burst of fresh flavor at the front of the palate that is pleasing, before falling into a softer t

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