

The Grapevine: Talley a good source for well-crafted chardonnay

by Laurie Daniel

It's been popular in recent years to bash chardonnay. The "anything but chardonnay" crowd sniffs at this country's most popular white wine as boring, overly manipulated — the criticisms go on and on.

It's true there's a lot of insipid chardonnay out there, but Brian Talley of Talley Vineyards has a message for wine drinkers: "There's a place in the market for well-crafted, classical chardonnay."

Which is what they make at Talley. The winery is probably best known for its rich pinot noirs, but Talley has always produced more chardonnay from its vineyards in the Arroyo Grande and Edna valleys. With the currently available 2010 vintage, Talley Vineyards celebrated 25 years of estate bottlings of both chardonnay and pinot noir, an occasion the winery marked with some retrospective tastings.

"When we started out, my dad really believed in chardonnay," says Brian Talley, the winery's president. Don Talley started planting wine grapes in the early 1980s and, according to his son, he had seen how successful chardonnay was in neighboring Edna Valley. (Pinot noir hadn't taken off yet in the area.)

"The kind of chardonnay that I love is very expressive of place," Talley says. The key, he adds, is to grow it in the right place, and "treat it with respect."

Talley recently poured for me a selection of older vintages of the winery's estate and single-vineyard chardonnays, and they were indeed expressive of place. (The single-vineyard wines were introduced in 1994 and are made in very small quantities.) We started with all of the current release (2010) chardonnays. The **2010 Estate Chardonnay (\$26)** is lean and racy, yet rich, with lemon cream, green apple, some minerality and a touch of wood. "I think it really captures the essence of what we're trying to do," Talley says. The estate chardonnay, at about 8,000 cases, is the biggest production item under the Talley label.

The **2010 Oliver's Vineyard Chardonnay (\$32)**, from a site in Edna Valley, is lively and lemony, with a drying finish, while the **2010 Rincon Chardonnay (\$42)**, from a vineyard next to the winery in the Arroyo Grande Valley, is fleshier, with racy citrus and green apple and some creaminess. The **2010 Rosemary's Vineyard Chardonnay (\$46)**, from vines that are even closer to the ocean in the Arroyo Grande Valley, offers taut lemon, green apple and mineral flavors.

The trick with the whites, Talley says, "is to make something with more balance and finesse. You can get away with more power in the reds." To that end, the Talley chardonnays aren't hammered with a lot of new oak.

Highlights from the older chardonnays included the **2006 Rincon Chardonnay**, which is still quite fresh, with a long finish; the extremely aromatic **2001 Rosemary's Chardonnay**; the **1995 Rosemary's Chardonnay**, which offers flavors of green apple,

mineral and hazelnut; and the **1994 Estate Chardonnay**, which is fresh and almost ethereal, with creamy shortbread flavors.

"I had always suspected that our wines would age well," Talley says. Suspicion confirmed.

Laurie Daniel's column is special to The Tribune. Email her at ladaniel@earthlink.net.