

Mount Eden Vineyards

Santa Cruz Mountains

Mount Eden's estate vineyards began to be developed in 1945 by the legendary vintner Martin Ray on a rugged mountaintop in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Today, the site consists of 40 acres of low-yielding Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc vines. The Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were propagated from selections brought to California by French winemaker Paul Masson, while the Cabernet Sauvignon came from Emmett Rixford's historic *La Questa Vineyard* in Woodside, California. Mount Eden is considered to have the longest lineage of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in North America.

Planted in infertile Franciscan shale, the vineyards are 15 miles from the Pacific Ocean and enjoy a cool, but sunny climate above the fog line. Harvest normally begins in the first weeks of September and finishes around the end of October, occasionally going into early November. The combination of a long growing season and naturally low yields allows slow, steady maturation of the grapes and the concomitant intensification of their flavors. This process is enhanced by vertically training the vines to maximize the exposure of the grape clusters to sunlight and by thinning the crop, when necessary, to ensure yields do not exceed two tons per acre.

Chardonnay Estate, Santa Cruz Mountains

In the late 1940s and early 1960s, Martin Ray planted six acres of Chardonnay vines propagated from a Burgundian selection grown in the original Paul Masson vineyard. 20 acres of Estate Chardonnay are now farmed at Mount Eden from which 1,200 to 2,000 cases per year are produced. Yields average one to two tons per acre, far below the average for Chardonnay in California.

The Estate Chardonnay grapes are harvested when slightly yellow to yellow-green and are pressed without crushing. All of the juice is barrel-fermented in new and one-year-old French Burgundy barrels, where the wine undergoes full malolactic fermentation and is ages on the *lees* for ten months before being lightly filtered prior to bottling. The Chardonnay is then cellared for two years before being released for sale.

The full-bodied Estate Chardonnay displays fine underlying acidity and a long finish. Hints of cardamom, anise and hazelnut add interest to the core lemon mineral flavors. Of all of Mount Eden's estate-grown wines, the Chardonnay is most in need of further bottle aging at release, requiring an additional two to four years to fully reveal its true character. Many vintages are still fresh and enjoyable after fifteen years, explaining why Mount Eden Estate Chardonnay is considered one of California's longest-lived white wines.