

Food

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Cinnabar chardonnay comes with pedigree

Cinnabar Vineyards & Winery, Estate Chardonnay, 1997, \$20-23. Cinnabar, located in the Santa Cruz Mountains just south of San Francisco, makes great chardonnay. This one, from their own vineyards, is elegant and refined. Owners Tom Mudd and his wife, Melissa Frank, attribute its quality to their mountain vineyards and their clone of chardonnay grapevine.

Mountain vineyards are prized because the cooler temperatures slow the ripening process, allowing the grapes to develop more flavors.

Clonal selection, or planting a specific clone of a grapevine, is a hot topic among California winemakers. The term "clone" may be misleading here; it means not an exact replica, but rather a slightly different strain of vine that produces grapes with unique characteristics.

Cinnabar traces its chardon-

nay clone to one of the world's most renowned chardonnay vineyards, Corton-Charlemagne in Burgundy. Charles le Franc, an early California winemaker, brought cuttings of vines from Corton-Charlemagne to California in the 1880s. He propagated them and sold cuttings to other winemakers, who passed them down through the generations. Until recently few winemakers cared about the origin of their vines and many are still skeptical about its importance.

Cinnabar's Estate Chardonnay is not Corton-Charlemagne either in taste or, thankfully, price, but it is an excellent wine for steamed clams or grilled swordfish.

Cinnabar's Estate Chardonnay is distributed in Massachusetts by Arborway Imports, 781-863-1753.

MICHAEL APSTEIN