

The Michael Jackson
Case
Tribute to Nursing
Valley Living

Local News

Breaking News

Sports

Business

Barney Brantingham

Editorials

Life

Obituaries

Travel

Weather

Classified

Calendar

Celebrations

Community

City Services &
Government
Community Services &
Organizations
Education
Elected
Representatives
Inside Santa Barbara
News-Press in the
Community
Newspapers In
Education

News

Features/Series

Afghan Diary
Award Winning Travel
County Split
The Michael Jackson
Case
MIXTECS & MAIZE: An
American Odyssey
Ronald Reagan:
Through the Lens
Santa Barbara Surf
Through the Roof
Valley Living

Life

J. Wilkes: New name on labels, old hand at winemaking

5/12/05

By Dennis Schaefer
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Jeff Wilkes' winemaking experience comes through clearly in his pinots

Jeff Wilkes has probably done a lot of ersatz winemaking in his time, so it should come as no surprise that he's making wine for real under his own moniker.

This is not some Jeff-come-lately jumping on the "Sideways" pinot noir bandwagon. Beginning in 1984, Mr. Wilkes worked for the Bob and Steve Miller families, marketing and selling their grapes grown at Bien Nacido Vineyard near Santa Maria. He also had a hand in establishing the Millers' Central Coast Wine Services, a "winery" that dozens of prestigious local vintners call their wine production home.

So it seemed only natural, after all this time talking and tasting (as well as growing grapes) with other vintners and seeing how they do things, that he and his wife, Kimberly, would take the plunge.



SCHAEFER ON WINE

Dennis Schaefer
Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears every other week in the Food section.



Classified

Announcements
Automotive
AutoMall
Employment
Garage Sales
Legal Notices
Merchandise
Open Houses Directory
Personals
Real Estate
Rentals
Santa Barbara Homes Services

Special Sections 2005

Abode
Back to School
Business Outlook 2005
Careers Santa Barbara
Celebrate Nonprofits
Chefs of Santa Barbara
Home & Garden
Local Business Review
Reader's Choice
Santa Barbara News-Press Coupons
Seniority
Tribute to Nursing
Weddings 2005
Woman Magazine
Online
Youth Activity Guide

Entertainment
Scene Online

[Contact Us](#)
[Advertising Information](#)
[Subscriber Services](#)

[Site Index](#)
[7-Day Search](#)
[Archives](#)
[Reprint Permission Forms](#)

[Scene Online](#)
[Horoscope](#)
[Lottery](#)
[Santa Barbara County Wine Guide](#)
[TV Listings](#)
[USA Weekend Online](#)

Stylistically, Mr. Wilkes likes to pick pinot a little earlier to avoid higher alcohols, which he believes obliterates the terroir of the vineyard site. He wants the wines to have extraction but still retain the delicacy of the grape. I found the wines to be well balanced, refined and deliciously food-friendly. J. Wilkes is a name to remember.

- J. Wilkes Pinot Blanc, Bien Nacido 2004: Mr. Wilkes wanted to have a least one white wine on board, and pinot blanc from Bien Nacido was the obvious choice. Also quite obvious is that this is a flat-out fun wine, from the first sniff and swallow. The nose comes on strong with minerals and stone fruits. In the mouth, the fruit is very bright with a fine minerality and scintillating acidity. Though the ripe flavors of honeysuckle and apple blossom are apparent, the wine was fermented to dryness. It retains its freshness, fruitiness and clean cut of minerality all the way through to the persistent finish. Frankly, this pinot blanc is so refreshing that it should be a "go to" wine by the glass at restaurants all over town this summer.



- J. Wilkes Pinot Noir, Bien Nacido "Q" Block 2001: Cherry, black cherry fruit and cola on the nose and Smith Brothers/Ludens cherry cough drop flavors, with a measure of darker fruits like plum and blackberry in the background. The tannins have softened at this point, but without losing any of the fruit concentration. This wine was tightly wound early on but now it's really starting

to come around, and the aromatics and flavors really open up as you swirl it in the glass. Some undercurrents of spice and wood smoke also make an appearance. With good texture and palate feel, it's also showing some guts and grip, as well as good, firm acidity on the

extremely dry and satisfying finish.

- J. Wilkes Pinot Noir, Bien Nacido "Q" Block 2002: A fruitier (and obviously younger) nose, picked from the same vineyard block, in what generally is regarded as an excellent vintage for pinot noir in Santa Barbara County. The fruit flavors are more full bodied, almost syrupy and certainly concentrated. Dark cherry, cranberry and pomegranate hit a sweet spot on the mid-palate, then fan out to display its rich and mouth-coating aspects. Well-balanced at this point, it carries its rich fullness well with commensurate acidity. It also has a nice *al dente* chewiness to it that creates an even greater sense of depth beyond the sweet spot. The finish echoes the whole package of flavors and persists long after you swallow. It has everything the 2001 version has and then some. Very enjoyable right now, but it can easily deepen with aging over the next five years.
- J. Wilkes Pinot Noir, Vall-Foss Vineyard 2003: In an effort to produce only the best pinot noir, Mr. Wilkes has zeroed in on a particular parcel in the Napa Valley that offers a unique flavor profile. In contrast to the previous pinots, this one is all about earth. The nose has cherry for its fruit aspect, but then violet, lavender, mushroom and minerals all rush in. Cherry flavors deepen into black cherry and plum, complemented by spices/herbs, wood smoke, minerals, chocolate and freshly turned loamy earth. The latter character is not, however, overbearing; and with everything that's going on in this wine, it seems a little edgy, but the deep concentrated fruit helps to keep everything in control. It's J. Wilkes' most rich and dense pinot and, with a good tannic makeup, has great aging potential ahead of it.
- J. Wilkes Pinot Noir, Solomon Hills Vineyard 2003: This vineyard is a newer project (6-year-old vines) of the Miller family, and with their reputation for producing stellar grapes at Bien Nacido, many small wineries are wanting this fruit, seeing it as yet another source of top-quality pinot noir. The vineyard is composed of sandy, well-drained soil and planted to all the hot new pinot clones that everyone is talking about. "You can see the ocean from the top of the vineyard," notes Mr. Wilkes. "It's closer to the ocean than most of the Santa Rita Hills vineyards."

The J. Wilkes Solomon Hills version, which will be released next month, is not as spicy as the other J.

Wilkes pinots, even though it too sees all new oak. More pure and focused fruit gets the call here, with flavors of blackberry, black cherry, blueberry and plum that are very accessible. It's big and rich in the mouth and makes you take immediate notice. And at the risk of being misunderstood, I find it more syrah-like than the others and more masculine than delicate and feminine. But, without question, a very legitimate style of pinot and a very enjoyable one.

Winemaking veteran Jeff Wilkes offers a fruity and refreshing pinot blanc in addition to his food-friendly pinot noirs.