



THE RED SHOULDER RANCH CHARDONNAY STORY

It began with the land: 70 acres of virgin pastureland in the rolling hills of Carneros purchased in 1988, developed over the next few years for vineyard planting, and named for the red-shouldered hawks which soar overhead. Cooled by the marine breezes off nearby San Pablo Bay, the region has a long, moderate growing season well-suited to growing superior quality Chardonnay and Merlot.

And the grapes: five separate small-clustered clones of Chardonnay selected after considerable research on the parts of Doug Shafer and Winemaker Elias Fernandez. Small in cluster size, these clones deliver big, concentrated Chardonnay flavors.

The quality of the first two vintages from the new vineyard prompted the decision to bottle a Carneros designation Chardonnay with the 1994 vintage, utilizing Red Shoulder Ranch grapes blended with a small percentage of mid-Napa Valley fruit. Tasting the 1994 Chardonnay barrel lots in the spring of 1995,

Doug and Elias were amazed at the depth of fruit in the wine — so much fruit that the Chardonnay called for further barrel aging beyond the typical eight months.



With repeated barrel tastings, it became apparent that the Red Shoulder lots were superior to the non-Carneros Chardonnay, which was subsequently sold off in bulk. This quality decision reduced the quantity of Shafer's Chardonnay, leaving the '94 vintage smaller than those of previous years. It was this remaining "cream of the crop" that became the vineyard-designated Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay.

Shaped by climate and clone, Shafer Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay is crafted to showcase the superb fruit from this vineyard. The grapes are 100% whole cluster pressed, and the juice is fermented entirely on wild yeast in half new and half one-year-old barrels. The use of 30% American oak in addition to French adds intriguing spicy nuances to the wine. The Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay is kept on the lees a full 15 months, the lees stirred weekly to add a creamy richness to the wine. The crisp, natural acidity of this Chardonnay speaks to the fact that the wine was not put through malolactic fermentation.

Like Shafer Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon, the Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay is a wine of a place, named for its resident raptors. Encouraged to take up residence by the tall perches Shafer has erected to afford an unimpeded view of the vineyards, the hawks play an important role in Shafer's natural farming practices by keeping the populations of vine-damaging rodents under control.