



The Steven Kent Winery

2004 Merrillie Chardonnay
DeMayo Vineyard
Livermore Valley

Alc: 14.9%, Retail: \$27

Named for Steven Mirrasou's great grandmother, this Chardonnay is a beauty, just like the original Merrillie. A Classic beauty at that, this wine wears gloves, a fabulous hat complete with vintage hat pins, and in a gracious manner, asks politely if

you'd like to join her for something a little stronger than tea. Indeed, this wine is seductive, and has nothing to do with tea, although its biscuity nature reminds one of those lovely little scones typically served with a proper High Tea. The picture of Merrillie in the tasting room brings back waves of memories of fabulous portraits of beautiful high society women in the finer museums of Boston. She's radiant and lovely, and her skin looks as perfect and creamy as this wine that bears her name.

The fruit comes from the De Mayo Vineyard in the historic Livermore Valley, a gently rolling 14-acre site planted with the Wente clone. Its 6' x 6' spacing means it is densely planted with 1200 vines per acre, and the open canopy helps maximize sun exposure. Imperfect clusters are dropped several times prior to harvest, and leaf and shoot thinning takes place to encourage even ripening. Everything is done to ensure small quantities of perfect fruit, which is then whole-cluster pressed. The wine is barrel-aged for 18 months in a combination of French and American oak and is not fined or filtered.

2004 was a fairly warm and consistent growing year and the wine reflects that with its sunny disposition. The aromas of ripe peaches, creamy pear, figs and Meyer lemon zest are very inviting. You can detect a hint of the 70% new oak, and you just know the mouthfeel is going to be rich. The wine starts out crisp and slightly citrusy, then really comes on with all the flavors of a pear custard tart with a slightly nutty crust and topped with lemon zest. The big, round middle just keeps expanding on your palate, finally turning to lovely peaches and cream, and then, at the very end, just a hint of grapefruit, lime and Meyer lemon. The acidity is perfect and the balance of the oak, just right: like a perfectly fitted bodice over a perfectly asphyxiating corset. I'll bet Merrillie would have enjoyed this a lot more than tea.