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Sip a glass of world-class Michaud

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A scant few weeks ago I wrote about some wineries and their owners and I had a lot of positive feedback on those two or three columns. So, with that in mind I feel there is another winery that I should touch on.

Buried deep in the Chalone Appellation in Monterey County is a small family-run business where the owner is the farmer, the grower, the picker, the crusher, the winemaker, the educator and the public relations man. Not many people that I know would be up to the task, but Michael Michaud is.

His history is fairly well documented and he is best known for taking Chalone vineyards Chardonnay and over 20 or so years making it a world-class wine. Not content with his accomplishments there, he dedicated most of his time to his family-owned vineyards and is now fully immersed in growing world-class wines on his estate. I first tasted his pinot noir about four years ago and since then I have become a huge fan. Not to be outdone by his pinot, he also produces an incredible chardonnay, a dreamy syrah, a wonderful minerally pinot blanc and a stunning Sangiovese.

He is starting to get some huge accolades from wine writers and all those guests of mine who over the past few years have tasted Michaud Wines and cannot stop raving about how they could close their eyes and believe they were in Burgundy. If there is no French accent in his speech, there most certainly is in his wines.

This week's picks:

2003 Michaud Vineyards Pinot Noir, Chalone Appellation. Tons of black and red cherry, black raspberry, and currants are evident in both the nose and on the palate. The terroir of the pinnacles, crushed rock and spicy minerality, show clearly in the mouth and if you have the patience to decant this wine for about an hour you will "get it" too. About \$39 and worth every penny.

2003 Michaud Vineyards Chardonnay, The Pinnacles, Monterey. This Wente Clones Chardonnay is just another tool for Michael to showcase his rare talent. Apple, peach, apricots and nectarines are the lively flavors most evident and there is once again that minerality that makes it all worthwhile. Don't rush to drink this wine. It will drink well now but give it five-plus years and watch it really shine. About \$38.

Last-minute pick:

For those of you who love rich, creamy California chardonnays loaded with tropical fruits and just a hint of acidity, stop by Old Town Wine Cellars in La Quinta and taste and buy a bottle or two of the **2005 Bighorn Cellars Carneros Chardonnay**. It is a small production wine that Dustin assures me is worth every penny of the \$18.99 you will spend for a bottle.

Mark Sontz, Sontz is sommelier at The Desert Sage Restaurant in La Quinta. Each week, he'll offer his expert picks for wine purchases.

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