

Tasting Monterey

A WINE ENTHUSIAST'S MONTHLY JOURNEY THROUGH MONTEREY'S WINE COUNTRY



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The Wide Reach of CHARDONNAY

Chardonnay...What are your first thoughts when you hear the varietal's name? White, golden, buttery, creamy, oaky, tropical fruit flavors - all easily come to mind. The varietal is an intriguing subject as it is grown and produced by wine rookies and veterans alike around the globe. Chardonnay produces menial, mass-produced wines and highly specialized wines alike.

Everyone has heard of Chardonnay, but where did it originate? You've perhaps noticed that Chardonnay appears to be from pretty much every wine region out there, and you see it from places you didn't even know produce wine. Chardonnay's original home is Burgundy in eastern France, which also happens to be Pinot Noir's motherland (interesting to note that Monterey County shares the distinction of producing world renowned Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines).

Some of the finest Chardonnays are from Burgundy, although the history of the grape there is ironic. Historically, the grape was so widely planted and used for wine it was generically referred to as "White Burgundy." Today is quite a different story as Chardonnay is revered and held to great esteem. Due to French labeling traditions, you'll not often see "Chardonnay" on a French wine bottle, but popular growing areas you may recognize include Montrachet, Côte de Beaune, Mersault, and Mâconnais. These Chards tend to present butteriness, but not oakiness.

In France, Chardonnay is also grown outside of Burgundy, notably in the Chablis and Champagne regions, and in Chablis, Chardonnay is often quite the opposite of both buttery and oaky. Yes, "Chablis" is actually Chardonnay, despite the fact that it became used as a general term for any mass-produced white wine. And you may be surprised that, as in France, the majority of sparkling wines in the world are made from Chardonnay grapes.

Why are Chardonnay wines seemingly produced everywhere? To explain, we need to jump into the vineyards and dive into the barrels. However, the quick answer is that it's reputed as one of the easier varietals to grow and coax into wine - don't think this indicates though that it is only a mediocre varietal unable to display greatness.



In the vineyards, Chardonnay is the typical make or break varietal. It's the varietal most often planted by a new winery in a new area....the thought being that if one can produce a good wine with it, they will have graduated and can move on to other varietals.

That is not to say that it's a carefree endeavor at all. The varietal is early budding, making it susceptible to spring frost damage. The vine is also prone to a host of other vineyard complications, including being highly vigorous and requiring intensive pruning and canopy management. Harvest time is also very critical as the grapes quickly lose their acidity just after ripening, and if they are not harvested promptly, the juice produced from the grapes will suffer for it.

The grape is famous for its ability to adapt to conditions it is exposed to. Chardonnay is considered to be "malleable" by growers and winemakers. This means that it is very eager to embrace its terroir conditions and also a vintner's particular style.

In winemaking, Chardonnay is made in all forms from still to sparkling to late harvests. After considering terroir conditions that may influence the grape, the two most important factors impacting Chardonnay wines are oak and malolactic fermentation, both of which result in two characteristics most often associated with Chardonnay wines: oakiness and butteriness. The wine would not have these characteristics otherwise, explaining why you see new world Chardonnays which have neither oak or butter and are instead lighter and fruitier in style. These wines tend to exhibit tangy flavors such as green apples and tropical fruits. If malolactic fermentation (sometimes referred to as secondary fermentation) is not introduced by a winemaker, butteriness will not be present. Also, if the wine is not oaked during fermentation and later barreling, there will be no oakiness. Other winemaking influences include temperature during fermentation and time spent aging "on the lees" (i.e. the wine's contact with dead yeast cells after fermentation - called sur lie aging).



Continued Inside

MONTHLY WINE SELECTIONS

ROBERT MONDAVI - 2015 *Barrel-Aged Cabernet Sauvignon*



Robert Mondavi Private Selection Cabernet Sauvignon is made from predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon grapes harvested from Monterey County. The grapes are picked at the peak of ripeness, after which the wine is aged and blended to deliver fruit flavors and complexity. A portion of the blend is aged for an additional three months using a combination of new and used Kentucky Bourbon barrels, creating one of the first Bourbon barrel aged wines produced in the United States. Bourbon barrels are 100% American oak barrels that have been charred to help impart deep toasty flavors and hints of vanilla and brown sugar. Cabernet Sauvignon is particularly suited for Bourbon barrel aging, Mondavi says, because its rich fruit character isn't overwhelmed by the flavors of the charred casks.

Deep ruby red in color, it opens with concentrated aromas of black cherries, blackberries, vanilla, mocha, and toasty oak, with notes of coffee and smoke. Intense flavors follow; a blend of blackberries, sweet vanilla, caramel, and mocha, with hints of coffee and smoke. Ripe, soft tannins and toasted oak round the wine out, with a long, lush finish. A superb accompaniment to bourbon glazed grilled ribs, a charcuterie board, hearty pasta dishes, and strong cheeses.

Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Malbec, Petit Verdot

14.5% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2022

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

JOULLIAN - 2015 *Chardonnay*



2015 marked another California drought year, but the deep roots in their growers' 20-40 year old Santa Lucia Highlands and Arroyo Seco Chardonnay vines helped set a balanced crop and develop a verdant canopy that insured even ripening during a blast of very hot early September heat. The vintage's hallmark is the juicy tropical fruit and mineral nose and flavor profile, which was amplified by the addition of the Joe Panziera vineyard's Dijon "musquet" clone vineyard.

Brilliant, pale green straw-gold color. Perfumy mango, white peach, pineapple and citrus rind aromas jump out of the glass. These same tropical characteristics are reflected in a rich, fruit driven flavor profile that finishes with refreshing acidity and hints of minerality and roasted grain.

100% Chardonnay

14.1% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2019

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

JOULLIAN - 2013 *Sias Cuvée Zinfandel* (Club Red)



Dick Sias, co-founder of Joullian Vineyards, is considered the father of Zinfandel in Carmel Valley. In 1984, he supervised the planting of Carmel Valley's first Zinfandel vines at Joullian. They began with a non-heat-treated Amador County clone selected by Dr. Bioletti in 1917, and have since added pre-prohibition vineyard selections from Lytton Springs, Brandlin (Mt. Veeder), St. Peter's Church (Cloverdale) and Primitivo-3 (Puglia, Italy). For complexity, they also have small amounts of Petite Sirah (Lytton Springs), plus their Italian field crush varieties: Aleatico, Alicante Bouschet, Carignane and Black Grenache. Joullian's multi-clonal approach in the vineyard continues to reap multidimensional benefits in the wine

Dark cherry color, with a light garnet rim. Aromatic rose petal, raspberry, cola, and licorice scents are enhanced by a touch of cedar and black peppercorn. Ripe, fruity, black raspberry, plum, and rhubarb flavors are complexed by notes of anise seed, black truffle, and toasty oak. Expect perfumed forward fruit thru 2016, then a deeper, almost Gigondas-like wine in the decade to follow.

79% Zinfandel, 8% Primitivo, 8% Petite Sirah, 1% Aleatico, 1% Alicante Bouschet,
1% Carignane, 1% Granache, 1% Merlot

14.2% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2023

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

ROBERT MONDAVI - 2015 *Barrel-Aged Chardonnay* (Club Blanc)



This Chardonnay is the first and only Chardonnay that blends the craftsmanship of California winemaking with the Southern tradition of Bourbon Whiskey aging, resulting in an incredibly bold sensory expression. They start their unique process with Chardonnay grapes carefully picked at the peak of ripeness from Monterey County vineyards. The wine is then aged and blended to deliver exceptional fruit flavors and complexity. Next, a portion of the blend is selected to be aged for an additional two months in a combination of new and used Bourbon Whiskey barrels. Their new barrels give the wine a deep, rich, toasty flavor. The used barrels, from a world-renowned Kentucky distillery, add vanilla aromas and baking spice notes.

Rich, golden in color, it opens with intense aromas of ripe pineapple and toasted coconut with hints of toasted marshmallow and vanilla bean custard. Flavors of grilled pineapple, lemon custard, graham cracker, toffee, and vanilla bean follow with baking spices and toasty oak. Rich, creamy, and concentrated with balanced acidity and a lingering finish.

100% Chardonnay

14.5% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2019

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

Cover Article Continued



Let's talk food pairing for a moment. Chardonnay is actually considered difficult to match with food, especially heavily oaked and buttery Chards. Although if you think about it, match oak to oak/toasty flavors, and match butter to butter as much as possible. Heavily-oaked Chards can pair well with smoke-flavored and spicy cuisine. And buttery cream sauces are a great fit for buttery Chardonnays.

In the U.S., one can find Chardonnay vines planted in more than 30 states. Although, let's be honest ... Chardonnays from Iowa or New Jersey really don't compare with those from California. Chardonnay was first planted for commercial production by Wente Vineyards in the Livermore Valley in the 1940s. Monterey, Santa Barbara, Napa and Sonoma Counties produce the most prominent Californian Chards. California's Chardonnay first reached acclaim and world-recognition when Napa's Chateau Montelena beat out French competitors in the 1976 blind tasting event known as the Judgment of Paris (Monterey's own Chalone Vineyards came in third place at the event).

These days in Monterey, we still find a wide variety of Chardonnay wines produced and offer some of the finest, not only in California, but in the world. The coastal influenced Santa Lucia Highlands AVA, in particular, is a spectacular setting for Chardonnay vines, which is reflected in its numerous outstanding Chardonnay wines.

In recent years, there has been a trend for winemakers to move away from the oaky or buttery style Chardonnays in favor of producing "clean" and crisp wines, often highlighting muted pineapple or apple undertones. Although these stainless steel aged and/or no malolactic fermentation Chards are interesting and savored by some, it's clear that there will always be a significant group who love the big oaky/buttery Chardonnay. Here at A Taste of Monterey, we're honored to showcase some of the best Chardonnays found anywhere.

-Bryce Ternet, Contributing editor and author of three books. See www.mbryceter.net.

VISITING Varietals



PRIMITIVO

Pronunciation: pri-meh-TEE-voH

Primitivo is a dark-skinned grape known for producing inky, tannic wines, particularly Primitivo di Manduria and its naturally sweet Dolce Naturale variant. A classic Primitivo wine is high in both alcohol and tannins, intensely flavored and deeply colored. In Manduria, the fortified liquoroso variants often reach an ABV of 18%, which is dulled to 14% in the table wines. A certain bitterness is often found in Primitivo which, combined with its mouth-puckering tannins, means that it needs a few years in either bottle or barrel.

Although there have been contentious and long-running debates about the variety's geographical origins, there is little question that Primitivo's modern-day home is in southern Italy, particularly Puglia. It probably arrived there from the coastal vineyards of Croatia (just across the Adriatic Sea), where it is still grown today, under various tongue-twisting names including Tribidrag and Crljenak Kasteljanski. In the early 19th Century, the variety was introduced to the United States, under the name Zinfandel. It proved extremely successful there, earning a reputation as the American 'national grape'. It caused significant consternation on both sides of the Atlantic when DNA analysis proved that Zinfandel and Primitivo were the same variety.

Primitivo has endured something of a rollercoaster ride in the past few decades. In the 1990s, the variety was at its lowest ebb for a long time. The EU's vine pull schemes had seen thousands of acres of Primitivo vines ripped out of the ground. Being relatively difficult to manage in the vineyard, Primitivo suffered worse than many other varieties. But across the Atlantic Zinfandel was booming, which doubtless contributed to Primitivo's new lease of life. The new-look Primitivo that soon began to emerge was no longer just a blending variety, it was now the historic grape behind southern Italy's flagship wines.

RECIPE

Marbled Pumpkin Cheesecake

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cups	crushed gingersnap cookies
1/2 cup	finely chopped pecans
1/3 cup	butter, melted
2	(8 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened
3/4 cup	white sugar, divided
1 teaspoon	vanilla extract
3	eggs
1 cup	canned pumpkin
3/4 teaspoon	ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon	ground nutmeg



Method:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). In a medium bowl, mix together the crushed gingersnap cookies, pecans, and butter. Press into the bottom, and about 1 inch up the sides of a 9 inch springform pan. Bake crust 10 minutes in the preheated oven. Set aside to cool.

In a medium bowl, mix together the cream cheese, 1/2 cup sugar, and vanilla just until smooth. Mix in eggs one at a time, blending well after each. Set aside 1 cup of the mixture. Blend 1/4 cup sugar, pumpkin, cinnamon, and nutmeg into the remaining mixture.

Spread the pumpkin flavored batter into the crust, and drop the plain batter by spoonfuls onto the top. Swirl with a knife to create a marbled effect.

Bake 55 minutes in the preheated oven, or until filling is set. Run a knife around the edge of the pan. Allow to cool before removing pan rim. Chill for at least 4 hours before serving.

CHEESE

Varietals



PARMIGIANO-REGGIANO

This great cheese is worthy of all that praise it receives: it is very natural, very healthy, very delicious and very consistent. It is wonderful by itself in chunks, shaved over or grated into foods, cooked or uncooked. It has been so good at doing so many things for so long - over 800 years - that it has earned the nickname in the dairy industry, "The King of Cheeses."

Parmigiano-Reggiano is a hard, dry cheese made from skimmed or partially skimmed cow's milk. It has a hard pale-golden rind and a straw-colored interior with a rich, sharp flavor. Parmigiano-Reggianos are aged at least two years. Those labeled stravecchio have been aged three years, while stravecchiones are four or more years old. Their complex flavor and extremely granular texture are a result of the long aging.

But there is one big problem. As good as the cheese is, and as famous as it is, you rarely actually get to eat it - even when you think you are. The English translation of the cheese is Parmesan, and when you buy it in England you get Parmigiano-Reggiano. It's the law. The American translation is also Parmesan, but when you buy it here, you could be getting almost anything - except usually Parmigiano-Reggiano.

By law, Parmigiano-Reggiano is allowed to contain only three very simple ingredients: milk (produced in the Parma/Reggio region and less than 20 hours from cow to cheese), salt, and rennet (a natural enzyme from calf intestine). Three other ingredients, Cellulose Powder, Potassium Sorbate, and Cheese Cultures are not found in Parmigiano-Reggiano - they are completely illegal in its production. Yet all three are in Kraft 100% Grated Parmesan Cheese (I'm not sure if that means it is supposed to be 100% "parmesan" or simply 100% grated, which it certainly is). It's far enough from the real thing that Kraft was legally forced to stop selling its cheese labeled Parmesan in Europe.

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