

# THE WORLD OF FINE WINE



**ISSUE 39 2013** **SIGNIFYING NOTHING?** Terry Theise asks what we talk about when we talk about wine

**CÔTE D'OR CLIMATS** Terroir and uniqueness in Burgundy ■ **RIBERA DEL DUERO** The key players reflect  
**FERMENT** Eric Asimov on wonderful ordinary wines ■ **LAYING DOWN** 2011 Burgundy ■ **THEN AND NOW** Krug  
**SAVOR** North American Chardonnay ■ **IN MEMORIAM** Frank Prial ■ **WINE AND WORDS** *The Compleat Imbiber*  
**LAYING DOWN** 2008 Barolo ■ **BORDEAUX PORTRAIT** Château Clarisse renaissance ■ **PREVIEW** 2010 DRC  
**GOÛT DE TERROIR** Southern Rhône ■ **MYTHS AND REALITIES** Bordeaux second wines ■ **ON THE VINE** Salon  
**REVIEW** Clonakilla ■ **SINE QUA NON** Plant scientist José Vouillamoz ■ **VIRTUAL SIGNS** Modernist cuisine





WINES THAT ARE MOSTLY APPROACHABLE WITH ENJOYMENT NOW

# NORTH AMERICAN CHARDONNAY ANYTHING BEYOND CALI?

The Golden State is no longer synonymous with American wine, so for this Chardonnay tasting, Stephen Brook looked beyond it and asked Tim Atkin MW and Alex Hunt MW to join him.

They cast their net across the USA and into Canada to explore the current quality and stylistic range of this ever-popular variety

With California hogging all the attention in North America, it seemed a good idea to spread the net wider and consider Chardonnays from other sections of the great continent. It could be argued that this made no more sense than looking at "Chardonnays of Europe," with a version from Planeta in Sicily bearing very little resemblance to a Chassagne-Montrachet. But then we do lump Australian wines together, and the major wine shows there won't hesitate to compare a Chardonnay from, say, Mornington Peninsula to one from Margaret River.

Nonetheless, with thousands of miles separating Texas from Washington, and California from Ontario, there wasn't, perhaps, complete clarity about what we were trying to achieve. Probably in the back of the tasters' minds was a hope that the wines might divide themselves into sets, with fleshier, riper styles from California being clearly different from cooler, leaner wines from Canada or Washington.

The waters were further muddied by the distinction between cool-climate and "green." I suspect all three tasters would claim an affection for elegant, understated styles, rather than hefty, almost blowsy wines of the kind fashionable 20-plus years ago. But for each taster, as for each wine drinker,



the boundary between refreshing and acidic, between lean and tart, has to be drawn differently.

Nor would it be fair to California to consider its wines uniformly less "cool-climate" than Oregon. For many years, growers have moved on from planting Chardonnay in obviously warm areas such as the Napa Valley floor or Paso Robles. Instead, the ridges of the Sonoma Coast and Russian River Valley, and areas such as Santa Maria Valley in Santa Barbara County, have long been favored, thanks to the good acid retention by Chardonnay grapes.

But origin is just the beginning of the story. I have had, with little pleasure, blowsy Chardonnays with close to 16%

ABV made from grapes grown at quite high elevations along the Sonoma Coast. The problem wasn't the site or microclimate but was the human decision (admittedly not an easy one) about when to pick. The same would be true of the other North American regions, though it would be much harder to produce an alcoholic monster in, say, Niagara.

There was reasonable accord among the tasters, with Woodward Canyon from Washington winning the same score from each. Of course, there were discrepancies, and I must have been in a grudging mood, scoring modestly some wines I would have expected to enjoy. There was no unanimity, for example, in assessing Hirsch (Sonoma Coast), Dutton



Ranch and Paul Hobbs (both Russian River), Hanzell (Sonoma Valley), and Trump (Virginia). It was clear, though, that some regions with little international reputation for Chardonnay did rather well. Three of Tim Atkin's top wines were from Oregon, while four of Alex Hunt's were from Canada. I selected three Canadian offerings among my top wines.

Indeed, the top two wines in the tasting were from Canada. Norm Hardie—South African-born but with experience in California, Burgundy, and Central Otago—won the highest score; quite a feat considering his vineyards lie mostly in the relatively untried Prince Edward County. His first vintage was as recent as 2004. His success also demonstrated that, as with Riesling, you don't need alcohol to deliver intensity of flavor. Murray Tawse took second place with a wine from his organic vineyards in Ontario. Tawse also co-owns a négociant business in Burgundy so shares an international perspective.

It was disappointing that there was considerable unanimity in rejecting wines that all the tasters found undistinguished or worse. Llano Estacado in northern Texas has been producing wine for three decades, but its Chardonnay won no praise. Clos Pepe, where Wes Hagen deliberately seeks to produce the antithesis of stereotypical California Chardonnay, gave no pleasure, though this Santa Rita Hills property has always shown great vintage variation. At the other end of the stylistic spectrum, the Carneros bottling from négociants Patz & Hall struck all tasters as a leap back into the past. Sawtooth River Valley failed to fly the flag for Idaho. Chehalem's two wines from Willamette Valley didn't impress, but winemaker Harry Peterson-Nedry always seems more at home with Riesling. Nor were all the Canadian wines successful: Ravine's Reserve Chardonnay seemed too lean, while Southbrook's top Poetica bottling

Although there were some very good wines from coastal California, they were often matched or surpassed by wines from Ontario, Washington, or Oregon. Quite hard to find outside the United States, and probably not easy to find outside their home states, these are wines worth seeking out

From California, Littorai and Flowers, both from vineyards along the Sonoma Coast, took the highest honors, followed by Chateau Ste Michelle's impressive Ethos Chardonnay from Columbia Valley in Washington. Bergström's Sigrid Reserve Chardonnay led the field for Oregon, though none of the wines from here won unanimous approval. Oregon is, of course, better known for Pinot Gris than for Chardonnay as its leading white wine, but this has irritated some of the state's producers, who feel it is almost a fluke that the earliest white wines from Oregon to enjoy success happened to be Pinot Gris and believe the region is capable of producing a wider spectrum of white wines of quality. David Adelsheim has built up a niche reputation for his Auxerrois and Pinot Blanc, as well as for his Chardonnay, and other producers are seeking to make Chardonnay in a restrained style. Bergström produces two Chardonnays: As well as the Sigrid, there is a more Chablisien, but in my view equally successful, wine called Old Stones.

struck out in the opposite direction and came across as heavy-handed and plump (though Alex Hunt defended the wine).

With just a handful of wines from each area, even though many came from highly regarded properties, it is hard to draw any firm conclusions. One thing was clear, however: Although there were some very good wines from coastal California, they were often matched or surpassed by wines from Ontario, Washington, or Oregon. Quite hard to find outside the United States, and probably not easy to find outside their home states, these are wines worth seeking out. The best of them have clarity of fruit, finesse, and structure—and that is what good Chardonnay should be about.

#### Average and range of scores

	Average	Range
Tim Atkin MW	14.5	10-18
Stephen Brook	14.5	11.5-17
Alex Hunt MW	14	7-16.5
All wines	14.5	10-18.5

#### Stephen Brook's top wines

Hanzell Sonoma Valley Chardonnay California 2009 17
Chateau Ste Michelle Ethos Reserve Chardonnay Columbia Valley Washington 2009 17
Tawse Chardonnay Quarry Road Vineyard Vinemount Ridge VQA Ontario 2010 17
Dutton Ranch Chardonnay Russian River Valley California 2010 16.5
Paul Hobbs Chardonnay Russian River Valley California 2010 16.5
Norman Hardie County Chardonnay Prince Edwards County VQA Ontario 2010 16
Bachelder Wilmer Vineyard Chardonnay Niagara Ontario 2010 15.5
Bergström Wines Sigrid Reserve Chardonnay Willamette Valley Oregon 2010 15.5
Trump Chardonnay Monticello Virginia 2010 15.5



SC = screwcap

**Norman Hardie County Chardonnay  
Prince Edwards County VQA Ontario 2010  
(12.2% ABV; SC) - 17**

**TA:** Pale straw. Struck match and grilled hazelnuts on the nose. This is a Puligny wannabe that succeeds rather well: It's refined, nutty, and complex, with attractive leesy notes, well-integrated vanilla oak, some citrus and cinnamon, and impressive length and definition. Fresh, nuanced, and well-made wine. **18**

**SB:** Grassy, oaky nose; it resembles an oaked Chablis. Rich and quite full-bodied, this has some weight and plumpness on the palate but is sustained by attractive acidity. This is quite an imperious wine, with a good deal of personality and persistence. It has both tang and force. Quite good length. **16**

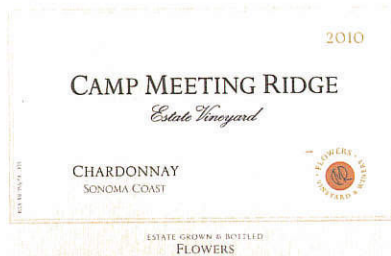
**AH:** Fairly deep gold for its age, and with a smoky/grilled-vegetable aroma. There is certainly some interesting, edgy winemaking here. Tautly powerful, savory, and flirting with VA, this is a refreshingly different take on the genre, and it has enough cohesion and unity of purpose to succeed. **16.5**

**Tawse Chardonnay Quarry Road Vineyard  
Vinemount Ridge VQA Ontario 2010  
(13.5% ABV; SC) - 16.5**

**TA:** Very pale, almost water white. Light, smoky, struck-match nose. Subtle and understated aromas. Palate a little too light? Fresh and taut, but a tad dilute. Early picked? Decent citrus fruit, with some complexity. **15.5**

**SB:** Ripe heady nose, with a hint of botrytis. Good attack, with assertive acidity cutting through the apple fruit. This has zest and an appealing tanginess that refreshes the palate. There's also a welcome tightness and thus an absence of flab. Balanced and vigorous, with a convincing finish and some elegance. **17**

**AH:** Taut, engaging nose of melon, strawberry, and a bit of struck match. Lovely aroma! This is structured and focused in the mouth, but it has curves in all the right places. Pretty, deftly made Chardonnay. **16.5**



**Flowers Camp Meeting Ridge Chardonnay  
Sonoma Coast California 2010  
(13.5% ABV) - 16**

**TA:** Mid-straw, with some gold highlights. Rich, honeyed, and quite developed nose, but with good intensity. Quite a worked style, but with impressive freshness and lift. Made in a Meursault-like style, with spice and acidity and some cinnamon oak. Complex, long wine. My only concern is evolution. **16.5**

**SB:** Lively apple nose, with little if any oak influence; there's also some tropical fruit such as pineapple. Brisk and fresh; fine acidity and an appealing texture. It's striving for a cool-climate style but doesn't quite get there as a consequence of this tropical element. The acidity is also quite edgy and close to green. Not sure what to make of this, and it smacks of the winemaker's magic more than the expression of a vineyard. But it's zesty, quaffable, and quite long. **14.5**

**AH:** Delicate yet bright, citrusy, almost smoky aroma. This is taut and grippy, bordering on austere, but with plenty of interest. Acid is marked but well melded to the fruit. Impressive stuff. **16.5**

**Littorai BA Thierot Vineyard Chardonnay  
Sonoma Coast California 2010  
(13.6% ABV) - 16**

**TA:** Mid-lemon straw. Mealy, candle-wax nose, suggesting lees stirring, with subtle oak. Fresh pear and tangerine flavors, bright acidity, a touch of oak, and real freshness, bite, and tang. A subtle wine that shows nuance and skillful winemaking. Mealy and fresh, with lovely use of oak. **18**

**SB:** Fleshy, oaky, apricot nose. Crisp and lively on the palate, with more acidity than the nose suggests; a wine of charm rather than power. An early-drinking style, with little complexity, but it's very fresh and attractive if one-dimensional. Quite good length. **15**

**AH:** A warm-feeling nose of baked apples and fresh bread gives an expectation of a soft, cuddly palate—which it is, except for a noticeable and incongruous CO<sub>2</sub> prickle. There is fresh acidity, while the flavor spectrum is toward the sweeter end: butterscotch, peach, and pear. Enjoyable aspects here, though flavor and structure don't quite overlap. **15**

**Chateau Ste Michelle Ethos Reserve  
Chardonnay Columbia Valley Washington  
2009 (14.5% ABV) - 16**

**TA:** Pale lemon/straw. Subtle, lightly spicy, fresh, sweet vanilla oak, with some ginger and cinnamon and a citrus-fruit backbone. Light, elegant; good length and freshness. Not overblown. But a little short of real complexity. **16.5**

**SB:** Lush stone-fruits nose, with some stylish oak. Rich and succulent, with ample concentration of fruit and fine balancing acidity that enlivens the palate. This has a mouthwatering mineral quality without being excessive. Zesty and long. **17**

**AH:** An interesting aromatic combination of honeyed evolution and struck-match brightness. Good, bright, mealy notes on the palate, though a little more fruit and a little less toffee would make it altogether a more dynamic mouthful. **15**

**Bachelder Wilmer Vineyard  
Chardonnay Niagara Ontario 2010  
(13.9% ABV) - 15.5**

**TA:** Pale straw/lemon. Light, elegant, very balanced and nuanced. Sweet, spicy, vanilla oak; subtle citrus fruit; touch of malolactic/cream to bind the wine together. Well balanced, refreshing, and long. Spice; slight bitterness. **16.5**

**SB:** Delicately oaky nose, rich apple fruit. Rich yet fresh, quite rounded, it also has an attractive limpidity and some racy acidity. Not especially concentrated or complex, but juicy and up-front, with a good balance of texture, fruit, and acidity. Quite good length. **15.5**

**AH:** Not a lot of aroma here—a sort of soft mineral impression, with a bit of grilled citrus. The palate has nice structure and poise; it's fullish but refreshing. The flavor focus is lacking, which leads to alcohol appearing on the finish. **14.5**

“Pale straw. Struck match and grilled hazelnuts on the nose. It's refined, nutty, and complex, with attractive leesy notes, well-integrated vanilla oak, some citrus and cinnamon, and impressive length and definition. Fresh, nuanced, and well-made wine”—Tim Atkin MW on Norman Hardie County Chardonnay Prince Edwards County VQA Ontario 2010





**Bergström Wines Sigrid Reserve  
Chardonnay Willamette Valley Oregon  
2010 (14.1% ABV) - 15.5**

**TA:** Pale straw/lemon. Tangy, sweaty,

Graves-like notes; Chardonnay blended with some Sauvignon Blanc, perhaps? However, it is appealing, fresh, and mineral, with well-balanced oak, pink grapefruit, and pepper spice. Attractive and fresh, tangy and taut—this should age. Highly unusual wine. **16.5**

**SB:** Lively oaky nose; apple and apricot fruit. Lean attack, a bit tart and assertive, with not quite enough fruit to balance the acidity. It does have vigor and drive and some pep, so it's an attractive style that doesn't quite deliver the goods. Quite good length. **15.5**

**AH:** Very herbal, undergrowthy, almost foxy aromas. Leanly structured and quite powerful, but the hardness of flavor doesn't sufficiently round out the whole. Overall rather aggressive. **14**

**Hirsch Vineyards Chardonnay  
Sonoma Coast California 2010  
(13.6% ABV) - 15.5**

**TA:** Mid-lemon straw. Complex nose, with some spice and reduction. Bright, mineral acidity, subtle oak integration, good freshness, a touch of sweetness, and nuance and length. Well framed with refreshing acidity. Should develop further. Lovely, rich-textured Chardonnay, with a hint of orange peel. **17.5**

**SB:** Medium straw. Rich, stewed-apricot nose; lacks freshness and poise. Plump, rounded, fruity but heavy, with no nuances or vigor. There's a kiss of acidity, which may well be added, but no real persistence or precision. Fairly short. **13**

**AH:** Ripe yet quite subtle on the nose, with some peachy depth. Excellent density and harmony on the palate, with cleansing acidity balancing the generous but not overbearing fruit. **16**

### TIM ATKIN'S VERDICT

If the ABC movement (Anything But Chardonnay) movement began in California—and no one seems quite sure—it would surely be appropriate. After leading the New World's varietal charge in the 1980s and early 1990s, an example of much that was best about West Coast wines, Chardonnay was subsequently cheapened, sweetened, and commoditized, effectively becoming a generic wine style.

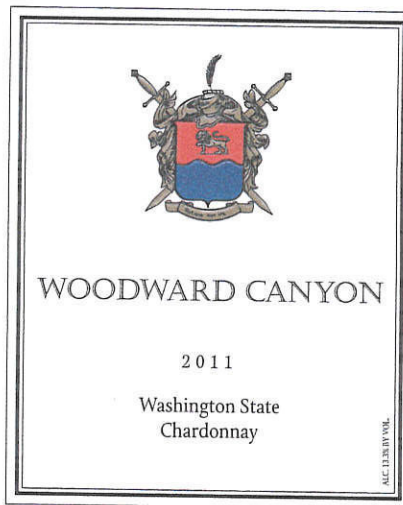
Of course, there are some good California Chardonnays, but even at the top end, they seem to be out of kilter with the rest of the fine-wine world. More often than not, the wines seem ponderous, oaky, alcoholic, and just too worked for European palates. The sticky fingerprints of the winemaker are far too apparent.

That, at least, was my somewhat biased impression before I sat down to do this tasting. Admittedly, it was made more interesting by the presence of wines from all over North America, including Orgeon and Ontario, but I still

expected to be disappointed. Australia and New Zealand are way ahead in the Chardonnay stakes these days, I told myself. And their prices are lower.

As it happened, I was forced to recalibrate my prejudices. There were a few flabby, overoaked, one-glass wines, but there was also a handful of stunning Chardonnays, particularly from the cooler Sonoma Coast (one of the most promising places in the world to grow Burgundian varieties, and the source of three of my top five wines), as well as Oregon and Ontario.

Has the local California market also caught up with these changes? I suspect not, or at least not yet. Some winemakers seem to feel forced to go on making the sweeter, oakier, less refined styles because that's what sells. But maybe not forever. America, California included, has the talent and the terroirs to make world-class Chardonnays. In time, the ABC movement may be forced to focus its attention elsewhere.



**Woodward Canyon Chardonnay  
Washington 2011 (13.3% ABV) - 15.5**

**TA:** Pale straw, floral, mid-weight Chardonnay, with no obvious oak on the nose. Pleasant, honeysuckle notes on the palate, with fresh acidity and a touch of cinnamon. Refreshing, dry finish. No great weight or concentration here, but this is a decent quaffing Chardonnay with a hint of cream. **15.5**

**SB:** Lean, bright, green-apple nose, fresh and aromatic. Good attack, assertive—indeed, there's a slight greenness, but it's invigorating, too. What it lacks is some depth and flesh, and there's little structure other than the prominent acidity. Nonetheless, an appealing wine at the apéritif end of the spectrum or with a bucket of oysters. **15.5**

**AH:** Taut, youthful aromas of orange peel and apple, with some banana richness for good measure. The palate offers a satisfying combination of fruit density and crisp acidity (presumably little or no malolactic here?). Mid-weight and engaging now, this will be better in a year. **15.5**

### Top wines

Norman Hardie County Chardonnay  
Prince Edwards County VQA  
Ontario 2010 18

Littorai BA Thierot Vineyard  
Chardonnay Sonoma Coast  
California 2010 18

Hirsch Vineyards Chardonnay Sonoma  
Coast California 2010 17.5

Antica Terra Chardonnay Aurata  
Eola-Amity Hills Oregon 2010 16.5

Bachelor Wilmer Vineyard Chardonnay  
Niagara Ontario 2010 16.5

Bergström Wines Sigrid Reserve  
Chardonnay Willamette Valley

Oregon 2010 16.5

Flowers Camp Meeting Ridge  
Chardonnay Sonoma Coast  
California 2010 16.5

Chateau Ste Michelle Ethos Reserve  
Chardonnay Columbia Valley  
Washington 2009 16.5

Abeja A Chardonnay Walla Walla  
Washington 2011 16

Bethel Heights Chardonnay Eola-Amity  
Hills Willamette Valley Oregon 2010  
16

Peay Estate Chardonnay Sonoma Coast  
Chardonnay California 2010 16



# (savor)

## **Abeja A Chardonnay Walla Walla Washington 2011 (13.5% ABV) - 15**

**TA:** Pale straw/lemon. Toasty oak and spice on the nose, with a hint of raw wood. The oak is prominent on the palate, too, but it's not as intrusive as the nose would suggest. Good minerality, sweet vanilla oak, fresh acidity. Medium length and a surprising amount of vivacity and crunch on the finish. **16**

**SB:** Breezy apple nose, quite saline and zesty. Lean and tart on the attack, just about over the ripeness hurdle. It has a Chablisian zest that's attractive, but there's little weight of fruit or persistence. But if you're after cool-climate Chardonnay, this definitely qualifies. Like [Woodward Canyon Chardonnay Washington 2011], a shellfish or apéritif wine, since it wouldn't stand up to weightier dishes. Crisp finish. **15**

**AH:** There's a fair bit of toasty oak here, and the aroma tends overall toward mealy/savory rather than fruit-driven, despite the wine's youth. The palate is a bit brutal and angular, with wood tannin coarsening the texture, although there is a nice seam of acidity and citrus fruit that could see this

resolving over the next year. The finish is just a little dusty. **14**

## **Antica Terra Chardonnay Aurata Eola-Amity Hills Oregon 2010 (12.9% ABV) - 15**

**TA:** Medium straw, with some golden highlights. Rich, oak, and tangerine-like nose, with some buttery notes. Medium- to full-bodied style, with fresh acidity and well-integrated oak. The finish is surprisingly perky, despite the high alcohol. Lots of flavor here, with notes of spice and quince. **16.5**

**SB:** Fairly rich apple-and-apricot nose with a touch of oak. Spicy and angular attack, and distinctly assertive. It has a greenness not apparent on the nose and an eye-watering acidity that many will find unacceptably strident. There simply isn't enough fruit and fat here to balance the wine. **13**

**AH:** First impression is of breadth and very ripe fruit, though not tropical—more the result of picking later in a cooler climate. There is some citrus core lending brightness, but also a slight acetone note. The palate is taut and linear given the ripeness involved,

but the acid does stick out, giving a hard edge at the expense of nuance. **15**

## **Apex Cellars Chardonnay Columbia Valley Washington 2010 (14% ABV) - 15**

**TA:** Pale straw/lemon, with a slight spritz. A hint of glue/resin on the nose; otherwise rather reticent. Palate rather better, though also on the shy-and-retiring side. Fresh, with hints of cinnamon and vanilla, but a little lacking in weight and persistence. Slight bitterness on the finish. **15**

**SB:** Sweet apricot nose. Big and rich on the palate without being heavy-handed. There's an attractive solidity to the wine, yet it doesn't lack acidity. It isn't very nuanced, so it's essentially simple, but there's ample fruit and sufficient depth and concentration to give it some staying power. **15**

**AH:** There's a nice red-apple note in here but masked by too much mealy-cardboard aroma. The palate texture is very appealing—bright, fluid, a sort of American take on the Chablis balance. But more diverse, precise aroma would help. **14.5**

## **Dutton Ranch Chardonnay Russian River Valley California 2010 (13.5% ABV) - 15**

**TA:** Mid-straw/lemon. Lemon-curd and vanilla nose. Palate on the sweet side, with marked, peachy residual sugar adding to the sweetness of the oak. Not unpleasant; just a little bland and commercial. **14**

**SB:** Lean citrus and apricot nose, with a light herbaceous tang. Fresh attack, zesty; has a light touch, with fine acidity and real clarity of fruit and subtle oak. There isn't great complexity here, but it's well made and balanced, with a perky finish. Good length. **16.5**

**AH:** Curious lavender and overripe peach notes here—some botrytis? Rather loose, lightweight palate; reasonably fresh and lively, but little depth, complexity, or focus. **14**

## **ALEX HUNT'S VERDICT**

Given the size of North America and the inherent potential of Chardonnay as a variety, the overall standard of this tasting was ho-hum. The best wines were very good, but they were not outstanding in a global context, and there were too many profoundly feeble examples.

A common theme for me was a lack of brilliance, of verve and focus. Chardonnay's great gift is the ability to combine mass and energy. It can be simultaneously full-bodied and dynamic, broad yet detailed, rich but defined. In this tasting, too many wines were dusty, flat, or flabby. The better examples did manage to present both brightness of

fruit and generosity of structure, but even they seemed to lack the tension, concentration, and complexity of which Chardonnay at its best is capable.

The variety's adaptability to location was evident in the flights, though there were some mild regional trends: Ontario averaged a convincing first place in my scores, while of the mainstream regions, Oregon put in a lackluster performance. Although it was interesting to have wines from three other US states, too, on this evidence there is some way to go.

Having said that, on the basis of this tasting, the whole continent needs to up its Chardonnay game before France and Australia start to worry.

## **Top wines**

Flowers Camp Meeting Ridge  
Chardonnay Sonoma Coast  
California 2010 16.5

Norman Hardie County Chardonnay  
Prince Edwards County VQA  
Ontario 2010 16.5

Tawse Chardonnay Quarry Road  
Vineyard Vinemount Ridge VQA  
Ontario 2010 16.5

Hidden Bench Chardonnay Beamsville  
Bench Ontario 2010 16

Hirsch Vineyards Chardonnay Sonoma  
Coast California 2010 16

Ramey Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay  
Carneros Napa Valley California  
2009 16

Southbrook Poetica Chardonnay  
Niagara Peninsula VQA Ontario  
2010 15.5

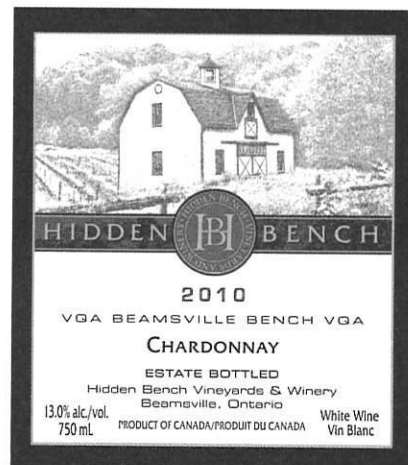
Woodward Canyon Chardonnay  
Washington 2011 15.5

Antica Terra Chardonnay Aurata  
Eola-Amity Hills Oregon 2010 15

Littorai BA Thierot Vineyard  
Chardonnay Sonoma Coast  
California 2010 15

Marimar Estate La Masía Don Miguel  
Vineyard Chardonnay Russian River  
Valley California 2008 15

Chateau Ste Michelle Ethos Reserve  
Chardonnay Columbia Valley  
Washington 2009 15



## **Hidden Bench Chardonnay Beamsville Bench Ontario 2010 (13.5% ABV) - 15**

**TA:** Mid-lemon straw. Pleasant, musky, honeysuckle notes. Palate rather sweet and oaky, possibly with a hint of botrytis, but this would appeal to many punters.



Very rich, soft, tinned-peach fruit, with sweet oak. **15.5**

**SB:** Weird nose, quite vegetal. Medium-bodied, supple, rounded, forward, and even evolved, with a soft core of fruit and some light acidity to refresh the finish. But it lacks complexity and energy, and the wine doesn't seem to have much future. Medium length, with a toasty finish. **14**

**AH:** On the closed side at present, you feel, but an impressive mixture of citrus, apricot, and savory notes. Youthful and energetic on the palate, despite the richness of the peach/apricot notes. The finish is a little short at present. Some more time in bottle should benefit this. **16**

**Paul Hobbs Chardonnay Russian River Valley California 2010 (14.4% ABV) - 15**

**TA:** Pale straw. Some reduction and struck match on the nose. Subtle, leesy, nuanced aromas. Palate less interesting, with too much sweetness and alcohol. Peachy and sweet, with marked alcohol. Rather one-dimensional. **14.5**

**SB:** Toasty nose, with pear aromas. Rich and forthright without being aggressive, with a good balance of fruit and oak. Concentrated and sumptuous, but not heavy or overworked, and there's some limpity on the finish. The texture is creamy, and the finish bright and persuasive. Quite long. **16.5**

**AH:** A soft nose, yet with decent focus. This is quite a butterscotchy, caramelly, baked-apple style, but the balance is there if you can handle the dominance of sweeter flavors. **14.5**



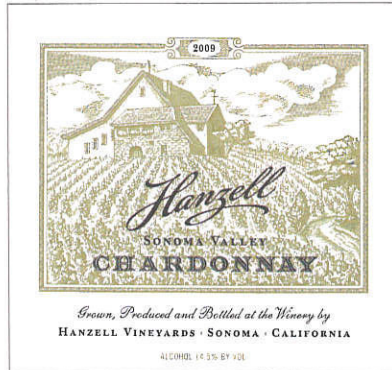
**Bethel Heights Chardonnay Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Oregon 2010 (13% ABV) - 14.5**

**TA:** Pale lemon/straw. Reductive, some struck match on the nose. Understated power. Sulfides just a touch too marked on the palate, but this is a complex wine, with fresh acidity, good balance, and some elegance. Medium length, quite

subtle. Possibly needs a little more time in bottle. **16**

**SB:** Muted nose, quite oaky. Good attack, assertive, a bit tart, and lacks weight and succulence. Zesty, citric, and quite mouth-watering but essentially one-dimensional and simple. Medium length. **14**

**AH:** Fairly ripe, with some vague hints of white peach. Decent structure on the palate, with a nice balance of acid to weight. The outline is there, but it needs to be filled in with some flavor! **14**



**Hanzell Sonoma Valley Chardonnay California 2009 (14.5% ABV) - 14.5**

**TA:** Mid-lemon straw. Aromatic, leesy, musky fruit notes. Ripe, slightly sweet, high alcohol, lots of oak, and a hint of peanut brittle. High acid finish. Unbalanced. Late- and early-picked combination? Or just a tad dilute? **13**

**SB:** Ripe citrus nose—fresh, too. Good attack, citric and precise, finely tuned and supported by excellent ripe acidity. Lemony and pert, but it doesn't lack ripe fruit, though in a distinctly cool-climate style. This has elegance and distinction and a long, bracing finish. **17**

**AH:** On both nose and palate, this is too dusty and honey-scented. It lacks citrus cut and fullness of fruit, despite a nicely balanced structure. **13**

**Hartford Court Chardonnay Russian River Valley California 2010 (14.2% ABV) - 14.5**

**TA:** Pale straw/lemon. Pleasant stone-fruit aromas, with some oak. Palate a little sweet and simple, with some reduction, but there's plenty of flavor here. Toffee, fudge, sweet oak, decent acid. A crowd-pleaser. **15.5**

**SB:** Oily waxy nose, with the oak too dominant alongside a light herbaceous tone. Rich, full-bodied, and creamy, with some depth of fruit, but it seems quite

evolved, and the acidity is fairly low. So it lacks persistence and finesse. Solid but unexciting. Medium length. **14**

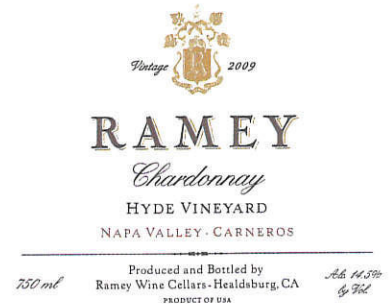
**AH:** Simple if appealing nose of overripe peach. Definite *surmaturité* on the palate, with a sense of sweetness, influence of skins, and high alcohol on the finish. Little structure or complexity. **13.5**

**Peay Estate Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Chardonnay California 2010 (12.7% ABV) - 14.5**

**TA:** Very pale straw, with a slight haze. Unfiltered? Also showing a touch of spritz. Toast and hazelnuts on the nose, with subtle fruit framing. Intense, yet well-balanced palate, with fresh acidity, subtle lees, some wood smoke, and a citrus backbone. A successful attempt at a Burgundian style but with just a little too much oak. **16**

**SB:** Cloudy, so clearly unfiltered. Sweet nose, stewed apricot, apple compote. Quite rich and juicy, a forthright style with plenty of fruit, though it does tail off on the finish. There's enough bright acidity to perk up the wine, even if the finish is a bit weak. I didn't discern much structure and would drink it young, when you have a better chance of avoiding the bacterial spoilage that will probably result from the lack of filtration. **13.5**

**AH:** Cloudy appearance—unfiltered wine. Good depth of aroma, with toasted hazelnuts over ripe peach: a nice balance of sweet and savory. The palate is both leaner and edgier than I was expecting, with a linear mouthfeel and a yeasty flavor that both seem at odds with the underlying fruit. There are interesting aspects to this, but it doesn't present as a unified whole. **14**



**Ramey Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay Carneros Napa Valley California 2009 (14.5% ABV) - 14.5**

**TA:** Mid-lemon straw. Mealy, vanilla oak nose, with some spice. Soft, gentle palate,

“Ripe citrus nose—fresh, too. Good attack, citric and precise, finely tuned and supported by excellent ripe acidity. This has elegance and distinction and a long, bracing finish”—Stephen Brook on Hanzell Sonoma Valley Chardonnay California 2009



# (savor)

slightly sweet, subtle oak, and some lees work. Alcohol a little too marked. Soft, and lacks a touch of acidity, but it is appealingly made. **15.5**

**SB:** Hefty, oaky nose, linseed, wax, shellac—none of which is particularly appealing. Thick and rather heavy, with edgy acidity that isn't integrated; oily and slack, lacking freshness and energy. Dull and fairly short. **12**

**AH:** Leafy, limey, lively nose, with a nice line in smoky sulfides. Round and engaging up-front, with a neat, grippy finish. Acid and alcohol fight a little at present; this still has some time to go. **16**

**Marimar Estate La Masía Don Miguel Vineyard Chardonnay Russian River Valley California 2008 (14.5% ABV) - 14**

**TA:** Mid-straw, with some gold. Rich, concentrated, honeyed, ripe, showing some age. Honeysuckle, and texture. Just starting to fade a little. Rich, sweet, dense, well balanced. Just about hanging on. **15.5**

**SB:** Full straw. Heady stone-fruit-and-tropical-fruit nose, very evolved. Soft and flabby, a touch sweet, and has lost whatever freshness it may once have had. Heavy-handed, with what seems like a liberal hand with the added acidity on the finish. Medium length. **12**

**AH:** Intense, developed nose of malt loaf and coffee ice cream. Fruit has pretty much departed this wine already, but what's left still has plenty of vigor and balance. What's missing is complexity—the flavors are rather monotone and sweet, even though the structure is dry and refreshing, so overall this is one to drink by the glass rather than the bottle. **15**

**Chehalem Ian's Chardonnay Stoller Vineyards Dundee Hills Oregon 2010 (13.3% ABV) - 13.5**

**TA:** Very pale straw. Rather dilute, simple nose. Light, pseudo-Chablis palate. A little dilute and uninteresting, with a grassy, almost Sauvignon Blanc-like edge. High acid; lacks weight and seriousness. **12**

**SB:** Discreet but lifted nose, ripe lemon. Good attack, with bright acidity complementing the ripe citrus fruit. There's a slight green edge on the palate, but it's quite attractive and doesn't detract—though some purists might differ. Zesty if one-dimensional, but it lacks some drive on the finish. Moderate length. **15**

**AH:** Odd cabbagey aroma; no fruit to speak

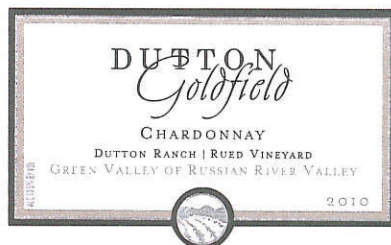
of. Some intensity of mouthfeel, but lean, austere, and lacking in any real flavor dimension. **13**

**Chehalem Ian's Reserve Chardonnay Stoller Vineyards Dundee Hills Oregon 2009 (14.2% ABV) - 13.5**

**TA:** Pale lemon straw, with a green tinge. Perhaps some botrytis on the nose? A little sweet on the palate. Sweet pears and spice; soft, slightly honeyed palate. Decent drinking here but not very exciting or vibrant. **14.5**

**SB:** Dumb nose, showing a light toastiness. Rather sweet and sappy, overripe, and may have some botrytis, with a tropical-fruit character that's a bit vulgar. This lacks elegance and lift but has enough acidity to give moderate length. **13.5**

**AH:** Flat, cardboardy nose. Harmonious palate structure, but dissipated, overly soft flavor. **12.5**



**Dutton Goldfield Dutton Ranch/Rued Vineyard Chardonnay Green Valley of Russian River Valley California 2010 (13.5% ABV) - 13.5**

**TA:** Mid-straw. Egregiously oaky nose. Raw, sawdusty, and bitter, with notes of orange marmalade underneath. Confectured and rather sweet. A one-glass wine. Heavy and rather ponderous. **13**

**SB:** Medium straw. The nose seems evolved and has an oily character that's probably derived from the oak. Broad, rounded, simple; a touch heavy. Inoffensive but lacks personality. Hard to see this evolving positively. Medium length. **13**

**AH:** Some power on the nose, but a lot of dusty oak overwhelming the rather delicate melon fruit. Not heavy, and with some concentration mid-palate, but the flavor tends toward flatness. I'd like both more depth and more brightness. **14**

**Ravine Vineyard Estate Reserve Chardonnay Unfiltered St David's Bench Ontario 2009 (13.5% ABV) - 13.5**

**TA:** Pale straw/lemon. Reduced, with some

sulfides. Oatmeal, high acidity; a little thin, perhaps, but with underlying complexity. Fresh acid. A little lean. Tart. **15**

**SB:** Apple-compote nose. Fresh attack, quite lively, with rather fierce acidity, and a lack of flesh and complexity. It's one-dimensional, with the appeal immediate but not sustained on the palate, which ends up as rather green. Medium length. **13**

**AH:** Vaguely toasty, butterscotchy nose. Not a lot of aromatic punch. The palate shows signs of oxidation, with flavors of nuts and old honey. Despite the promising color, this seems past its best. **13**

## SOUTHBROOK

Oh I lay down in  
a meadow in the sky  
and I held my breath as  
I fell into your eyes

I love your hair, smells sweet  
like pure Rocky Mountain air  
like the big sky shining  
on a Winnipege night  
dust in the air  
and the Northern Lights

All in your country wide soul  
I love your country wide soul

POETICA\*

2010 CHARDONNAY

VQA NIAGARA PENINSULA VQA  
ORGANIC & BIODYNAMIC

JIM CUDDY, 2006

**Southbrook Poetica Chardonnay Niagara Peninsula VQA Ontario 2010 (13.9% ABV) - 13.5**

**TA:** Rich straw/gold. Oxidative, ripe style. Fat, broad, and honeyed. Prematurely developed. Nutty and sweet, with some honey. Bitter finish. Lacks acid. High alcohol; fat and sweet and fading. **12**

**SB:** Medium straw. Hefty, oaky stone-fruit nose, a bit stewed and overpowering. Broad, plump, full-bodied, and a bit heavy and obvious. There's no lack of ripe fruit here, but there's not much else, other than overt oak, going on, and it lacks finesse and precision. Juicy but slack on the finish. Fairly short. **13.5**

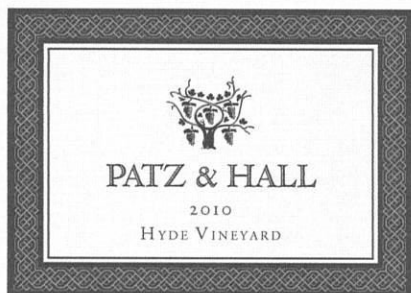
**AH:** Moderately intense and quite beguiling blend of peachy fruit and toffee oak on the nose. This is a ripe style for sure, but with lovely balanced acidity to temper it. The palate texture is complete and delicate, and the finish has both tenderness and

“Leafy, limey, lively nose, with a nice line in smoky sulfides. Round and engaging up-front, with a neat, grippy finish. Acid and alcohol fight a little at present; this still has some time to go”—Alex Hunt on Ramey Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay Carneros Napa Valley California 2009



“The intensity of fruit makes up for the slight lack of ripeness and succulence. It seems unlikely to develop much complexity but should settle down. A good shellfish wine but not for long cellaring”—  
Stephen Brook on Trump Chardonnay Monticello Virginia 2010

poise. A classy, understated wine with its individual style. **15.5**



**Patz & Hall Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay  
Carneros Napa Valley California 2010  
(14.2% ABV) - 13**

**TA:** Mid-straw gold. Old-fashioned, rather developed aromas of honey and spice. Rich, powerful, quite oaky palate, with notes of toffee and butterscotch and raw acidity on the finish. Something of a dinosaur. **12**

**SB:** Medium straw; darker than most. Broad, waxy, oaky nose, with some tropical-fruit aromas. Rich and juicy but also a touch heavy and lacking in freshness. Some acidity does cut through the palate and give some length, but it's still a one-dimensional wine with a foursquare character. Fruity but dogged, and lacking in finesse. Medium length. **14.5**

**AH:** On the nose, some ripe stone fruit but a bit flat and mealy, too. Diffuse and pappy in the mouth, like an overripe pear, but then with severe acidity at the end. Hard to love. **12.5**

**Sawtooth River Valley Chardonnay Idaho  
2010 (14% ABV) - 13**

**TA:** Mid-lemon straw. Leesy, very worked nose, with hints of toffee and popcorn. Rich, in-your-face style, with lots of sweet, coconutty oak and high acidity. A wine that doesn't quite hang together. The impression on the finish is one of oak and raw acid, with insufficient fruit to pad it out. **14**

**SB:** Some tropical fruit on the nose: bananas. Broad, rather soft; a heavier style that's close to flabby, since there's a distinct lack of acidity. Overall, this is a dull wine, with little zest or length. **12**

**AH:** Step back in time, and savor the unbridled tropical fruit salad—this is the nose of the '90s! Some smart oak on the palate simultaneously demonstrates ambition and shatters the illusion. The fruit

and structure struggle to marry, and sour acidity dominates the finish. **13**

**Clos Pepe Chardonnay Santa Rita Hills  
California 2010 (14.4% ABV) - 12.5**

**TA:** Very pale straw; slight spritz. Closed aromas, with some evidence of sulfur. Faintly cabbagey palate, with high acid. Not much texture or concentration here. Inoffensive, but this is a rather conservative wine. **13**

**SB:** Slightly vegetal nose, implying a lack of ripeness. Lean and tart, rather hard-edged, less vegetal than the palate but still suffers from a lack of ripeness, flesh, and depth. It does have some zest, but that's not enough to sustain the wine. Medium length. **13**

**AH:** Sharp, simple, bilious nose. Lean, green palate. This is a sort of basic Petit Chablis style. **11.5**

**Trump Chardonnay Monticello Virginia  
2010 (12% ABV) - 12.5**

**TA:** Very pale, almost water white. Light, boiled-sweets aromas. Very simple. Scant varietal character. What a dull wine. Dilute, too. **11**

**SB:** Fresh, delicate nose, with clarity and purity of fruit; has lift and charm. Good attack, assertive, with high acidity, yet it just about gets away with it. The intensity of fruit makes up for the slight lack of ripeness and succulence. It seems unlikely to develop much complexity but should settle down with a bit more bottle age. A good shellfish wine, but this is not for long cellaring. **15.5**

**AH:** Simple, dusty-leesy, neutral-bilious nose. So light and thin, with a little spritz; it's not even Petit Chablis style—more like basic Muscadet. **11**

**Waterbrook Reserve Chardonnay  
Columbia Valley Washington 2010  
(14% ABV) - 11.5**

**TA:** Mid-straw/lemon. Fat, smoky-bacon nose, with rather intrusive oak. The palate tastes like an oak stave: raw and smoky, with what seems like a combination of bitterness, wood smoke, and slight sweetness. The fruit beneath is too thin for the weight of oak. **10**

**SB:** Some richness and a light toastiness on the nose. Medium-bodied, broad, and soft; but it sags on the mid-palate and lacks some energy. There's insufficient fruit concentration and acidity. Perfectly

pleasant, but not a wine to dig deep into one's pockets for. Fairly short. **11.5**

**AH:** This has a fairly neutral aroma, with almonds and a touch of peach; quite an Italian feel, in a way. The palate is very soft, fuzzy like a peach skin, and then ends with marked alcohol and a sort of pappy, bready flavor. This lacks some drive and focus. **13.5**

**LLANO**  
ESTACADO

2010

TEXAS

CHARDONNAY

MONT SEC VINEYARD

*Unfiltered*



**Llano Estacado Mont Sec Vineyard  
Chardonnay Texas 2010 (12.9% ABV) - 9.5**

**TA:** Pale lemon/straw. Strange, grapey, almost Gewürz-like nose of rose petal. Is this pure Chardonnay, or has it been blended with something else? Nasty, bitter, light. Lacks weight and concentration. Possibly some gray rot. **10**

**SB:** Decidedly sweet nose and probably has a fair amount of botrytis. Has a soft attack, and a surprisingly neutral fruit quality. There is some acidity, but I suspect it's added, since it fades on the mid-palate. The wine lacks focus and the finish is edgy, with a touch of grapefruit that's at odds with the riper impression of the nose and attack. Fairly short. **11.5**

**AH:** An odd, mossy nose, with seemingly a high incidence of rot. Palate is green and sour, with a dirty peach finish. Poor. **7** ■