

Nine of Our Top Chardonnays from France and California

BY WINE ENTHUSIAST



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Chardonnay is the darling of prestige wine regions. The famous grape can create crisp bottlings when aged in stainless steel, or rich complex wines after aging in oak. It is also one of the best varieties for expressing a region's terroir, whether it's the stony minerality of Chablis or the salinity of the Sonoma Coast.

Even though it's grown around the world, Chardonnay is best known for wines from its home in Burgundy and the iconic California vineyards. Burgundian Chardonnay can vary from the northerly Chablis to Pouilly-Fuissé. Chablis offers yellow citrus, green apple and pear, and the flavors ripen as you head south, into yellow plum, peach and melon.

In California, Chardonnay from Napa and Sonoma differs from Central Coast bottlings. Winemakers in the Napa and Sonoma have begun to experiment with leaner, more elegant styles than before. This trend is also felt down on the Central Coast, where more stone fruit, Meyer lemon and Asian pear are allowed to shine through. We searched out database to help you decide which version is more to your taste. Here are nine of our top-rated Chardonnays from France and California.

Joseph Phelps 2018 Freestone Vineyards Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast); \$60, 95 points. From estate-grown grapes, this impressively layered, complex and cool-climate characteristic white is layered in gravelly texture and crushed rock. Briny ocean influence coats a crisp core of green apple and Meyer lemon, leading to a complete finish. —*Virginie Boone*

Gary Farrell 2017 Olivet Lane Vineyard Chardonnay (Russian River Valley); \$45, 94 points. Bright, focused and fresh, this wine is defined by its lifted acidity and elongated texture. Apple, pear and nutmeg go along for the ride, punctuating the concentrated fruit core while honeysuckle lingers on the finish. –V.B.

Foxen 2018 Block UU Bien Nacido Vineyard Chardonnay (Santa Maria Valley); \$35, 93 points. Tightly woven aromas of lime pith, acacia and crushed chalk make for an enticing nose in this single-block expression. There's a great sizzle on the sip, where vibrant flavors of yuzu, sea salt and lemon juice meet with chipped wood in a complex while fresh display. –Matt Kettmann

Albert Bichot 2018 Domaine Long-Depaquit Vaillons Premier Cru (Chablis); \$48, 92 points. The slightest flinty reditton accompanies ripe Mirabelle plum fruit on the nose of this wine. The palate is expressive in its juiciness, concentration and fresh core. It conveys cool freshness and a zesty texture along with a slightly creamy touch. Textured and vivid, the wine offers ripeness, generous structure and a dry finish. Albert Bichot USA. –Anne Kreibheil MW

Domaine Chanson 2018 Clos des Mouches Premier Cru (Beaune); \$130, 92 points. Lifted freshness, as from herb-scented lemons, rises from the glass. The concentrated palate of this wine has a gentle texture that lets fruit speak, edged with pithiness that lends even more mouthfeel. The drive and energy of 2018 are captured well. It finishes dry and poised. Vintus LLC. –A.K.

Roux Père et Fils 2017 Les Cortons Premier Cru (Saint-Aubin); \$90, 92 points. A hint of oatmeal and a creamy, slightly floral edge make for an appetizing nose on this wine. More slender than the nose suggests, the palate still carries hints of reduction. Rich creaminess at the core lends a bit of sumptuousness to this lemony brightness. Opici Wines. –A.K.

Walt 2017 Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast); \$40, 92 points. Showcasing the myriad of diversities of the appellation, this wine presents a richness of butterscotch and vanilla cream on entry, as well as toasted oak and pineapple. It finds complementary freshness and backbone on the back palate, offering focused acidity that brightens the day. –V.B.

Daou 2018 Reserve Chardonnay (Paso Robles Willow Creek District); \$46, 91 points. Strong aromas of toasty oak, lemon cream, white peach, sea salt and sandalwood are comforting on the nose of this bottling. The boldly flavored palate blends pineapple and Meyer lemon flavors on a plush mouthfeel. –M.K.

Famille Paquet 2018 Saint-Véran; \$48, 90 points. This tightly wrought, mineral-textured wine has a full-bodied future. It is rich, with touches of apricot as well as apple behind the youthful texture. The wine needs to age, so drink from 2020. DNS Wines. –Roger Voss



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