

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Wine Guys / By Tom Marquardt and Patrick Darr

Chardonnay: A distinct taste

Updated: 07/27/08 8:29 AM

We often hear people ordering a glass of chardonnay without much concern for its origin or producer. Chardonnay to many people has become the generic white wine that restaurants are always sure to have.

Too bad. There is actually a huge distinction between a Chablis and a Macon-Villages — both made with chardonnay — and only those willing to experiment will realize what style each of these growing regions can deliver. Taste an aged Montrachet and you'll understand why chardonnays do not all taste alike.

For our palates, we like lean chardonnays with a refreshing mouth-feel because they do much better with food than creamy chardonnays with little acidity. That could be the reason we fell in love with two Carneros chardonnays we tasted recently from MacRostie.

Winemaker and owner Steve MacRostie focuses on keeping his chardonnays fresh, even though they get a heavy dose of malolactic fermentation — the process a winemaker uses to turn strong acids, like those found in apples, to softer acids, like those found in milk. ML, as it is known, can lead to creamy, overly extracted wine in the wrong hands. You might find it helpful to compare his wines with some of the fatter, more unctuous chardonnays from Australia to see what we mean.

Chardonnay is a good choice to match with seafood, so now is the time to experiment. Here are some favorite chardonnays we recently tried:

- MacRostie Carneros Chardonnay 2006 (\$23). Using grapes from both the Napa and Sonoma parts of Carneros, MacRostie gets good acidity, apple and spice notes. Well balanced.
- MacRostie Wildcat Mountains 2006 Chardonnay 2006 (\$45). Tropical fruit, citrus and baked-apple notes

with a long finish. Very appealing now but will age well for another several years.

- Talbott Vineyards Diamond T Estate Chardonnay 2004 (\$65). This burgundianlike chardonnay can compete with the best in France. Golden in color, it has a tantalizing hazelnut and pineapple nose with complex tropical fruit and mineral flavors dashed with a bit of vanilla and lemon on the finish. It's an astounding chardonnay.
- Joseph Phelps Ovation 2004 (\$60). The flagship chardonnay from Phelps is made most from Carneros grapes, but additional vineyards add a lot of complexity to the wine. It was indisputably our favorite. With a burgundian feel, the Ovation has intense melon and mineral aromas followed by tropical fruit and a very rich texture.
- Franciscan Cuvee Sauvage Chardonnay 2006 (\$40). Taking a chance using wild yeasts, winemaker Janet Myers has created a hit with this rich, honey-toned chardonnay from Carneros. Full bodied with soft, creamy texture and loads of pear and peach flavors with a dash of oak.
- Patz & Hall Napa Valley Chardonnay 2006 (\$36). Known for its chardonnay, Patz & Hall has more expensive wines than this. But for the money, the Napa Valley version is a good buy. Rich pear and peach notes with citrus aromas and crisp finish.
- Murphy-Goode Chardonnay 2006 (\$15). This has been one of our best chardonnay discoveries this year. Loaded with apple and pear flavors, its major attraction is a creamy mouth-feel and elegant streak. This style of wine represents the opposite extreme of a lean, minerally chardonnay with crisp acidity. The softness of this wine would do well with smoked chicken or a pasta with a white sauce.
- Raymond Napa Valley Reserve Chardonnay 2006 (\$15). Aromas of orange blossom and apples with pear, apple and citrus flavors. Very nice.
- Buena Vista Chardonnay Ramal Vineyard Carneros Estate 2005 (\$32). Released during the winery's 150th anniversary, this wine is terrific. Toasty oak and baked apple nose. Flavors of lemon and apple give way to a creamy and very satisfying finish.
- Beringer Single Vineyard Chardonnay Napa Valley Stanly Ranch Vineyard 2006 (\$20). The grapes are sourced from the cooler Carneros region of the Napa Valley. Exceptional ripe rich tropical fruit flavors with pineapple dominating. Medium bodied with good acidity, this wine is very food-friendly, especially with chicken dishes.
- Greg Norman Estates California Estates Chardonnay 2006 (\$13). Pineapple and citrus aromas followed by tropical fruit, oak and spice flavors. From Santa Barbara County, it is a great value.

The Wine Guys represent Relish Magazine, available in The Buffalo News the first Thursday of the month. Go to www.relishmag.com for more info.

Find this article at:

<http://www.buffalonews.com/opinioncolumns/columns/otherlife/story/400952.html>