

Chardonnay still the king of the white wine market



WINE, ETC.

By Tom Marquardt and
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Many years ago we toured Oregon wine country and were entertained by a large assembly of respected winemakers who wanted to make a statement about their chardonnays. The group was embarking on a campaign to get wine writers to recognize something other than Oregon's famous pinot noir. We were indeed impressed and even aged some of those wines to see if the winemakers were right about their lasting appeal. They were — an Adelsheim chardonnay we savored six years later was outstanding.

More recently we had the opportunity to taste Ponzi Vineyards' reserve chardonnays from their Aurora and Avellena vineyards. Wow, these chardonnays will rival most chardonnays from Burgundy — and they have aging potential. Even though they cost \$60 a bottle, they are well worth the price. They had the finesse and elegance we find lacking in overly ripe and butterscotchy chardonnays.

We have always enjoyed the pinot noir from Ponzi Vineyards, an Oregon gem we visited several years ago. Winemaker Luisa Ponzi has crafted some of the best wines the Willamette Valley has to offer and she's done it year after year.

The **2010 Ponzi Vineyards Aurora Chardonnay (\$60)** is exquisite and perfectly balanced. A honeysuckle and lime aroma

gives way to a rich pear flavor with a thread of minerality to keep it interesting. This wine will marvel the best of Burgundy.

Chardonnay is an often maligned grape variety, but it is still the top seller in white wines. Made in Burgundy, it is exalted. Made in Australia, it is often condemned. The truth is that the styles vary to follow fickle palates. Oregon chardonnay is more like Burgundy.

Here are some other chardonnays we recently tasted:

Sonoma-Loeb Private Reserve Chardonnay 2010 (\$32). Beautiful tropical fruit, peach and citrus flavors highlight this complex chardonnay made from Carneros fruit. Balanced acidity makes it a nice match to fish or fowl dishes.

Rodney Strong Reserve Chardonnay 2009 (\$35). Apple and citrus aromas give way to rich, creamy fruit and a dash of mineral to make it a delicious drink.

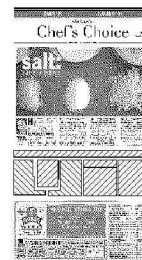
St. Supery Napa Valley Oak Free Chardonnay 2011 (\$20). We've long enjoyed the sauvignon blanc from this Napa Valley producer, but the unoaked chardonnay is worth a look. Good value and lots of tropical fruit flavors.

Kendall-Jackson Reserve Chardonnay 2010 (\$22). If you like your chardonnay with butterscotch flavors, this is a winner. Loaded with rich tropical fruit flavors and a touch of lemon, it has a generous mouthfeel from the barrel aging.

(See WINE, Page B2)

Stoller Family Estate Reserve Chardonnay 2010 (\$28). Like Stoller's pinot noir, this chardonnay is broad in scope with opulent citrus and melon aromas followed by citrus and pear flavors with a hint of caramel on the finish.

Byron Nielson Vineyard



Chardonnay 2010 (\$32). Drawing grapes from a special vineyard in Santa Barbara County, Byron offers an unctuous, creamy chardonnay with citrus and pear notes, a touch of honey and a soft mouthfeel.

Buena Vista

Buena Vista wines have been around forever, but at times we were surprised the company has survived. Founded in 1857 as California's first premium winery, it made some of the best wines Sonoma could offer for decades. Recently, however, it has gone through a number of owners who struggled to keep the brand profitable. It became known more for its visitor's center than its wine.

The company is now in the able hands of Jean-Charles Boisset, a respected Burgundy producer who has had his eye on Buena Vista for some time. He recently purchased DeLoach and Raymond wineries.



The new labels for Buena Vista are an atrocious mix of typeface that isn't going to attract many buyers. If you can get past the label, though, you find decent wine at value prices. It hopefully is a wine on the heal.

Buena Vista produces four tiers of wines. We reviewed the recently introduced Sonoma series.

We liked the bright, pure fruit of the **2010 Buena Vista Sonoma Pinot Noir (\$15)** and the balance in the **2011 Buena Vista Sonoma Chardonnay (\$15)**.

Some of the wines recommended in our column may have been provided for review by their producers. The authors can be reached at tmarquardt@capgaznews.com.