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By Roger Morris, Special Contributor

Jun 11, 2012 @ 1:37 PM



Article Review

There are two ways in which American winemakers approach that most French of all French white wines – chardonnay.

On the East Coast, where there is less sunshine but great wine-growing soils, many winemakers approach chardonnay as if it were the "little black dress" that Parisian women are famous for wearing so well. These wines tend to be classic with great structure, modest fruit, lots of minerality and very little unnecessary flair.

On the West Coast, winemakers are more likely to emulate the famous Parisian couture houses, showing lots of originality and glitter. The wines tend to be bigger and bolder with exotic flavors and aromas and always a lot of oak - often served up with butter and toast.

Made well, both can be stunning. But on the wrong figure, the East Coast little black dress seems drab and mousy. And on the wrong figure, the West Coast couture gown may look great on the red carpet, but can result in wardrobe malfunctions when you sit down with it at dinner.

Here are five new chardonnay releases that just came on the runway:

The 2009 Macari North Fork of Long Island chardonnay (\$19) is this collection's little black dress – lovely floral nose, but a very structured wine with lots of classic tart apple flavors and a base of

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crisp minerality. It begs to be drunk with food, perhaps with chicken baked in its own [juices](#) and al dente root vegetables.

Our way west begins with the 2009 Waterstone Carneros chardonnay (\$18) with pleasant, light flavors of pears, mild toasty oak and pencil lead. A very nice light-bodied wine, it would do well with pasta with juicy shrimp and a medley of peppers.

Next, another denizen of the Carneros, the 2009 Clos Pegase "Mitsuko's Vineyard" chardonnay (\$24), has very floral aromas of [tropical](#) fruit. It's a big lush, nectary, juicy wine that has pronounced bitters notes at the edges which are somewhat distracting. In can also get a little tiring on the palate if food doesn't stroll by soon – try a roasted pheasant or other large game bird with a light fruit sauce.

The 2010 Raymond Napa Valley Reserve chardonnay (\$20), now part of the Burgundy-based Boisset stable, has lots of fresh corn-oil aromas that Napa chards often exhibit, with plenty of peach and tropic fruits flavors. It is fairly well structured and balanced with finishing acidity. I wanted to sip this while nibbling on aged cow's milk cheese, a handful of mixed nuts and some unfermented [grapes](#).

Since 1987, Franciscan has made a chardonnay fermented with natural yeasts, a practice now not as rare as it was then. The 2010 Franciscan Carneros "Cuvee Sauvage" chardonnay (\$40) is a very nice, complex wine whose flavors probably reflect the wine resting on its lees as much as the wild yeasts. It has two levels of tastes - the warm, vanilla, baking-spice ones and the tarter, citrus-like ones, including very ripe kiwi fruit. It seems a tad sweeter than necessary, but would go well with a lightly grilled salmon steak.

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