

Wine Spectator

10 Impressive California Chardonnays New reviews from Sonoma's outstanding 2012 vintage

Augustus Weed

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

2012 was an exceptional year for Napa and Sonoma Chardonnay. The ideal growing season yielded a bumper crop of intense wines, with pure, vibrant flavors. Here's a selection to consider, mainly from Russian River Valley.

Three Sticks produced several outstanding Chardonnays in 2012, and its latest release from Durell Vineyard continues that trend. The wine was aged in 54 percent new French oak, imparting touches of smoke and toast to the ripe, juicy flavors.

Sharing top honors is a rich, expressive Chardonnay from sparkling house J Vineyards & Winery, called Barrel 16, a blend of the winery's 16 best barrels. In 2012, two of J's estate vineyards, Bow Tie and River Road, both in Russian River, anchored the blend.

DE LOACH Chardonnay Russian River Valley Estate Vineyard Olivet Bench Vineyard Designate 2012 Score: 90 | \$50

Presents a complex overlay of creamy, vanilla-accented oak, joining ripe pear and honeydew flavors and gaining nuance and subtle accents of fig and almond. Drink now through 2018. 150 cases made.

—J.L.