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SEPTEMBER 2016

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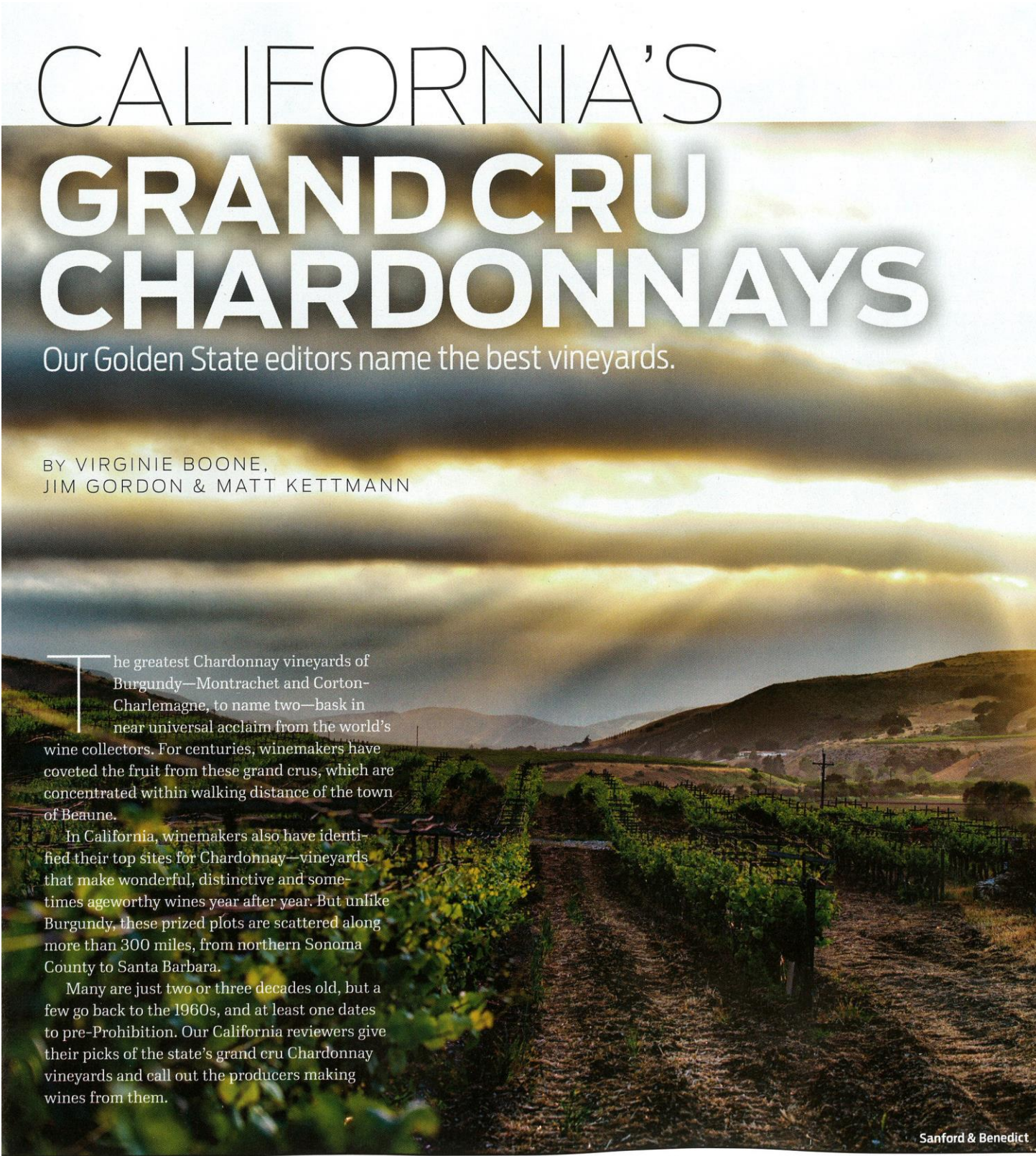
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CALIFORNIA'S GRAND CRU CHARDONNAYS

Our Golden State editors name the best vineyards.

BY VIRGINIE BOONE,
JIM GORDON & MATT KETTMANN

The greatest Chardonnay vineyards of Burgundy—Montrachet and Corton-Charlemagne, to name two—bask in near universal acclaim from the world's wine collectors. For centuries, winemakers have coveted the fruit from these grand crus, which are concentrated within walking distance of the town of Beaune.

In California, winemakers also have identified their top sites for Chardonnay—vineyards that make wonderful, distinctive and sometimes ageworthy wines year after year. But unlike Burgundy, these prized plots are scattered along more than 300 miles, from northern Sonoma County to Santa Barbara.

Many are just two or three decades old, but a few go back to the 1960s, and at least one dates to pre-Prohibition. Our California reviewers give their picks of the state's grand cru Chardonnay vineyards and call out the producers making wines from them.

Sanford & Benedict



RITCHIE VINEYARD, RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

Farmed since 1972 by Kent Ritchie, a Detroit transplant and former semipro hockey player, the vineyard is a place that winemakers revere as a site of rare intensity and complexity, located along Eastside Road near Forestville.

"Smack dab in the middle of the Russian River Valley appellation, its climate is a great balance of cooling ocean fog and slightly warmer inland temperatures," says winemaker David Ramey, who has worked with the site for 15 years. "There's always great acidity, but...the slightly inland location provides an extra richness that adds to the deliciousness."

Next in terms of importance, Ramey says, is the soil, which is Goldridge loam speckled with gravel. It provides great drainage while limiting vine vigor and yield. Third, the clone, the majority of which is Old Wente, provides what he believes to be a classic Chardonnay profile, without tropical fruit notes.

"Next, vine age," Ramey says. "It's rare to have access to 45-year-old Chardonnay. This, I think, is where the depth and length on the palate comes from. And lastly, the careful attention of Kent Ritchie, who oversees the farming with a detailed eye." —V.B.

WINES: Arista, Aubert, De Loach, Flanagan, Joseph Swan, Paul Hobbs, Ramey, Red Car, Ten Acre

Ritchie

CHARLES HEINTZ VINEYARD, SONOMA COAST

Family-owned since 1912, Heintz is set along the second ridge in from the Pacific Ocean at 900 feet above sea level. Half of third-generation farmer Charlie Heintz's 100 Goldridge-rich (sandy loam) acres are planted to vines. Chardonnay makes up 25 of the acres, with the original plantings dating to 1982. Cool yet protected from the extremes of the Pacific, the grapes mature in a relaxed state, marked by balanced acidity. —V.B.

WINES: Banshee, Ceritas, De Loach, DuMol, Heintz, Landmark, Littorai, Migration, Radio-Coteau, Von Holt, Williams Selyem, Zepaltas