

## Napa Valley's Chenin Blanc Is Ready for the Spotlight

By Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jensen - November 30, 2025



While [Napa Valley](#) is most often associated with top-tier [Cabernet Sauvignon](#), buttery [Chardonnay](#), and now crisp Sauvignon Blanc, it is home to more than 40 different varieties, including about 21 acres of [Chenin Blanc](#). Compare that to Cabernet Sauvignon, which thrives on more than 25,000 acres here, or even Sauvignon Blanc, whose acreage in the valley totals around 2,500. Although some Chenin vineyards here are mature enough to merit “old vine” status, one winery has a recently planted research block of the variety on its estate, proving it is more than just a relic of the past. Riding a style somewhere between those made in the Loire Valley and South Africa, Napa [Chenin Blanc](#)—which is by no means a cheap pour—is an incredible alternative with a pleasing profile of its very own. As tastes have trended toward more lightly oaked, refreshing whites in the past couple of years, Sauvignon Blanc has basked in much of the glory, so it’s nice to see another Loire Valley native begin to get its due.

“Chenin Blanc from Napa Valley is bright, textured, and subtle; it tastes and smells like orchard fruit and gentle florals and has that little waxy charm we talk about in the wines from the Loire Valley that sneaks up on you,” says Tyler Potts, beverage director at Michelin-starred [Press](#) and Under Study in St. Helena. “It’s a super inviting style of white that people are surprised to find here.” With a northern California-focused wine list offering around 6,500 different wines, Press features between 25 and 50 different versions of Napa Chenin Blanc at any given time depending on availability. Potts can’t be more specific than that because many of these small-production gems sell out fast, and when they’re gone, they’re gone. He says clients are often surprised to see Chenin Blanc or other aromatic whites such as Gewürztraminer from Napa on the list, but they soon learn that “the white wines being made here are equally compelling as the reds.”

Just about a quarter of the Chenin acreage in Napa Valley, a little more than five acres, belongs to Ballentine Vineyards in St. Helena. Winemaker and general manager Bruce Devlin tells Robb Report that prior to 2002, the Ballentines, who focused on red wine, had been selling off the Chenin Blanc from their Pocaï vineyard for a very low price. Having worked in Germany and [South Africa](#) before landing at Ballentine in 1999, Devlin had an appreciation for white wines. “I asked the owners if we could bring the fruit in and make a little. I knew we could make a great white wine from it,” he says. Although the Pocaï vineyard was transplanted over to reds, Devlin and the Ballentine family, who were in a generational transition at the time, recognized that Betty’s Vineyard had the potential to be an outstanding spot for white varieties. “We could have replanted it to red and brought in considerably more income for the winery on a fruit sales basis,” Devlin says. However, the winery already had a small following for its Chenin Blanc, and they “made the push to be the champions” of the variety.



It seems that much of the credit for keeping Chenin Blanc alive goes to individual families who made a commitment to the grape despite the growing demand for Cabernet Sauvignon. “Molly Chappellet’s personal insistence on keeping the Chenin program at Chappellet alive in 2007 is responsible for keeping one of Napa Valley’s reference Chenin Blancs alive and has influenced many others that continue that tradition today,” says Ry Richards, winemaker at Chappellet. “Chappellet’s Pritchard Hill estate vineyard was already producing Chenin Blanc when Donn and Molly purchased the property in the late 1960s, and it was later replanted in 2007.” Richards ferments half of his Chenin in stainless steel and the other half in neutral oak barrels to keep the style fresh and fruit driven, which is why wine directors such as Master Sommelier Vincent Morrow of [Union Square Hospitality Group](#) has it on his list.

The wine director at Press before relocating to the East Coast, Morrow is extremely familiar with Napa Valley Chenin Blanc in all its forms and flavors. “Napa Valley’s Chenin Blancs today are nothing like what

used to be produced here 40 plus years ago,” he says. “Back then, Charles Krug was producing about 100,000 cases of a sweeter-style Chenin Blanc until 1995 or 1996, and no one anticipated that would ever go away, but palates change.” Because many people are familiar with the sweet style of Chenin Blanc produced in the Loire Valley as well as bottlings such as Charles Krug’s, Devlin says when Ballentine first began making its own version of the variety, people asked if it was going to be sweet. “We intentionally went very dry to ensure we were doing something new and taking it very seriously,” he explains, pointing out that the question doesn’t come up anymore. “People seem way more open to Chenin and understand that it is a world-class varietal.”



The Solari family, owners of Larkmead Vineyards in Calistoga, planted Chenin Blanc in their Research Block, a three-acre, organically farmed vineyard established in 2020 to study climate-resilient varieties in Napa Valley. The site was designed for experimentation, with eight diverse varieties planted to evaluate how non-traditional Napa grapes might thrive under changing climate conditions. “Chenin Blanc immediately distinguished itself by delivering vibrant acidity, freshness, and aromatic lift, even in our warm Calistoga climate,” says winemaker [Avery Heelan](#), who produced her first small-batch vintage in 2023. “This bottling, Larkmead’s first white wine outside Sauvignon Blanc in decades, embodies the estate’s philosophy to study, adapt, innovate, and safeguard Napa Valley for generations to come.”

These three winemakers are not alone; other Napa wineries making excellent examples of Chenin Blanc include Aloft, Frog’s Leap, Palisades Canyon, Newfound Wines, Lang & Reed, and Coil. “I wish more people understood that Napa Valley, despite its reputation for Cabernet Sauvignon, can produce exceptional, acid-driven, age-worthy Chenin Blanc,” says Heelan. We couldn’t agree more.