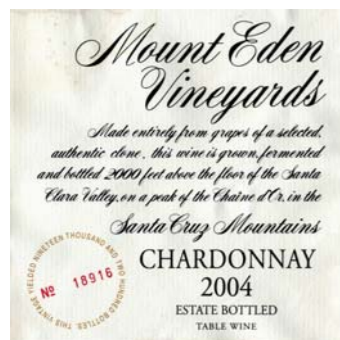


**Grgich Hills Napa Valley - 17**

**AB:** Pristine yellow-gold, this has a lovely nose—a delicious and appetizing blend of citrus fruit, biscuit, and delicate spice. There is a really lovely steely purity to the nose—stunning. The palate reflects the nose in its focus and precision—vibrant, full, ripe, and yet always extremely poised. Lovely. **17.5**

**SB:** A lot of oak on the nose, and a distinct appley tone. Reasonably fresh, succulent, ripe; underpinned generously by the oak, apples, and pears. Quite good acidity gives it some verve. This seems an excellent example of Carneros Chardonnay—not complex, but satisfying and balanced, with considerable length and elegance. **16.5**

**OC:** Good, full, traditional, viscous nose. Pretty good *sauvage* style. Full, oatmeal and sausage meat (honest—it's good!) and nice acid balance. Very Burgundian style: Acid is nicely integrated, oak and lees are in harmony. The whole thing is a very attractive package: savory, soft, refreshing, just hinting at a few days spent walking on the wild side. **17**



**Mount Eden Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountains - 16.5**

**AB:** Deep yellow-gold/pale amber, this is a beautiful-looking wine. The nose delivers the familiar hot brioche component, lifted by citrus zest and spice. The palate is unctuous and very ripe but fresh, clean, and zesty. This will work with food. **16**

**SB:** Muted buttery nose, ripe stone fruits, and a slight but restrained exoticism. Rich, full-bodied, concentrated; has weight and density; fine texture, with some pronounced yet not excessive oakiness. Has spice and vigor and some complexity, too. There's power, but there's nothing ungainly or forced here. A fine Chardonnay with a strong personality. Long and sustained. **18**

**OC:** Deep gold. Big, rich, old-style but quite attractive. Touch of rubbery cream but pretty good, full, rich, old-style nut syrup. It's a little bit like a basic steak-and-kidney pie set among an array of Magret de Canard, but it's pretty decent old-timer stuff. **15**



**Au Bon Climat Santa Barbara County - 16**

**AB:** Deep green-gold, this has a rather interesting, herbaceous nose, fresh and appetizing—steely and focused. The palate reflects the nose, with elegance and precision that continues through a long, poised finish. **16.5**

**SB:** Muted nose, hint of pineapple. Medium-bodied but has some intensity and purity of flavor. Lean, citric aftertaste, with a good thread of acidity. Not a complex wine, but focused and reasonably long. **15**

**OC:** Fair green-gold. Very attractive, easy mix of leesy yeast and acidity, and very nice, rather buxom fruit. Good apple and peach flesh, attractive acid and a little wax—very nice, direct, tarty stuff, just enough *sauvage* character and just a hint of



**La Crema Sonoma Coast - 16**

**AB:** Rich gold in color, this has an appetizing nose, controlled and poised with light spice and white flowers vying with honeyed fruit. The palate mirrors the complexity of the nose—all controlled and with no imbalance. There is a refreshing lift that complements and offsets the toasted character. Well handled and long. **15**

**SB:** Rich, broad, buttery nose, ripe apricots. Rich, opulent, but not too heavy—there's a vein of acidity streaking through the wine, giving a bright and even fresh aftertaste. This has good length and even some minerality. Stylish, not overblown, and well balanced, if no great depth of flavor. **16.5**

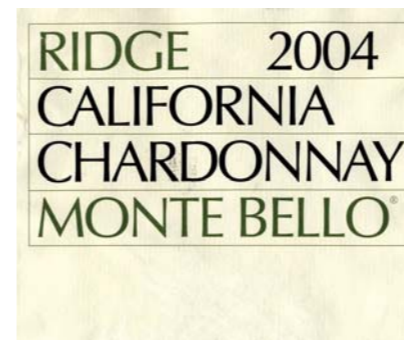
**OC:** Quite bright gold. Pleasant style. Restrained but tasty. A little spice, some nutty lees contact, and a spine of minerality that stays right through, even when the flavor fattens out to peach and a hint of quince at the end. **16.5**

**Dutton Goldfield Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley - 16**

**AB:** Deep old gold in color. Very honeyed, warm brioche nose, with an attractive citrus refreshment. Palate is precise, fresh, and focused, while offering an opulence and ripeness that will go beautifully with food. Lovely balance. **17**

**SB:** Shows a lot of color for a young Chardonnay. Big, voluptuous nose, with ripe peach and exotic fruit such as mango. Broad, lush, creamy—definitely the riper end of the Russian River spectrum, with perhaps too much weight given the modest acidity. A generous and baggy crowd-pleasing style at the expense of finesse, but reasonably successful within its own terms. **14.5**

**OC:** Fairly bright green-gold. Fairly full, mellow style. A little cream and fresh apple fruit. Some slightly green cobnut flesh. Good, quite lean, refreshing, fairly lemony acidity; crisp and cleansing, and it does soften and broaden out at the end. Pretty good, cool, mainstream style, balanced and easy to enjoy. **16.5**



**Ridge Montebello Santa Cruz Mountains - 16**

**AB:** Not immediately attractive on the nose, which is rather subdued. The palate is fulsome and ripe, sweet and honeyed, but it rather lacks focus. **14.5**

**SB:** Powerful nose with a lot of oak, very toasty, almost charred. Rich, full-bodied; juicy, bruised apple; some spice. This has weight of fruit but lacks a little acidity to balance it. Still, there's admirable presence and personality, with ample oaky bite on the finish. Has swagger rather than finesse. Moderate length. **17**

**OC:** Quite full, bright green-gold. Quite rich fruit. Definite rocks in here. Acid plus rocks, and good sturdy fruit. This is interesting, not mainstream—a suggestion of moss and nuts, and sweet, green sap. It's full and deep and proud, with a rocky, turbulent quality that makes it a challenging drink. Later, there's more wood, more brooding fruit, and more rough-hewn pleasure. **17**

**Simi Sonoma County - 16**

**AB:** Shimmering gold in color, this presents honeyed citrus and stone fruit on the nose, with floral and pastry notes adding to the complexity. The palate is ripe and creamy, with some mineral contrast. Something of a contradiction, though there are rich and lean characters in layers. **14.5**

**SB:** Bright exotic nose, with a whiff of pineapple; has aromatic charm. Fresh, clean, lively, with welcome acidity and lift. Quite concentrated and oaky, but has plenty of drive and a dash of minerality. Plenty of ripe fruit, but it's balanced and stylish and would be a pleasure to drink. Perhaps a hint of sweetness on the finish, but not enough to throw the wine off balance. Quite good length. **17**

**OC:** Quite bright green-gold. Attractive style. Reasonably full, pleasantly balanced, and nutty. Some attractive porridge-oat dustiness and a little smoky spice. Good texture, good balance. This isn't the most ambitious of Chardonnays, but so what? It's a very attractive, balanced style. **16.5**

**Chalk Hill Russian River Valley - 15.5**

**AB:** Pale yellow-gold—we are back in vanilla-custard land with this wine. Unctuous, full, and ripe, it evokes warm pastry notes, *pain au raisin*, and grilled, buttered citrus fruit. Opulent certainly, it

does have acidity to balance—sustained, toasted finish. **14.5**

**SB:** Muted oaky nose, with some lurking tropical-fruit aromas. Rich, full-bodied, quite tight and powerful; has some grip and concentration, as well as spice and vigor. The oak is quite pronounced, but this has more energy and pizzazz than most of these Sonoma wines. Acidity balances the ripeness nicely, so that there's no excess anywhere. A sumptuous yet bracing and stylish wine. Doesn't have huge length, so best drunk within 3 years. **17.5**

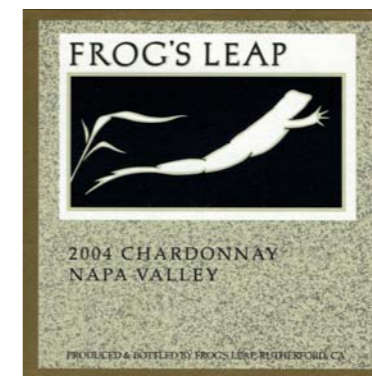
**OC:** A pale green-gold. Attractive puffed-wheat nose. Pretty good. A little more acid than I expected, but there's a good, nutty, toasty character, too, and some viscosity. It isn't thrilling, but it's a pretty nice, direct Chardie, though the acid is a little intrusive. Pity, since the finish is toasty and attractive. **14.5**

**Dutton Goldfield Dutton Ranch Rued Vineyard Russian River Valley - 15.5**

**AB:** Pale, glittering gold, this has little to offer on the nose—very restrained with vague hints of stone and orchard fruit and crushed stone minerality. Rich, full, clean, and ripe. Luscious fruit, Well made but could use a little more focus—but not through added acidity, since its freshness is already rather marked. **16**

**SB:** Discreet oaky nose, with a touch of stewed apricot. Fresh attack, ample concentration, lively acidity, giving a brightness that one hopes to find from Russian River. Oak kept in check. There's some elegance and flair here, but it does lack persistence and depth. **15.5**

**OC:** Nice green-gold. Full, fresh, modern, apple, lemon-curd, and yeast-lees nose. Pleasant, balanced, easy. This is attractive, gently satisfying. Some mildly toffeed oak, some decent gentle apple-sauce fruit and lemony acid. But I expected a brighter, zestier style from the nose. **14.5**

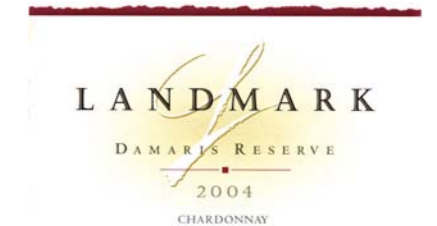


**Frog's Leap Napa Valley - 15.5**

**AB:** Lemon-gold in color, this has the nose of biscuit and citrus fruit. The palate is rather taut and lively, fresh and bright—a far cry from many of the rather more obese samples, and probably less of a crowd pleaser, but it will be good with food. A bit of a thoroughbred. **15**

**SB:** Dumb nose. Fresh, crisp attack, with good fruit concentration and a refreshing sherbety quality. Stone fruits rather than citrus, but without any overripeness. Well balanced and stylish, even if far from complex. Moderate length. **16**

**OC:** Pale gold. Pleasant, slightly macaroon nose. Good, rich, rather overripe style, but it is quite good. Full; a bit fat, but good, nutty weight and some acid balance. Not that focused, but it's good, somewhat solid stuff. **15**

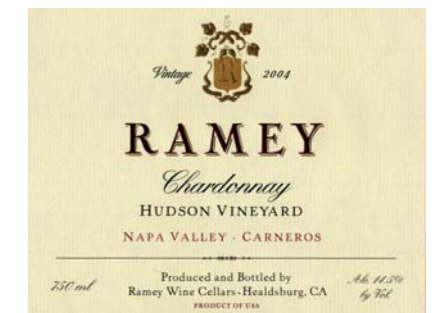


**Landmark Overlook - 15.5**

**AB:** Lovely yellow-gold in color, this is immediately appealing. The nose presents stone fruits, honey, and white flowers, with a warm biscuit, vanilla richness—rather classical, really. Richly textured and creamy, with a buttered backdrop, this has style and balance, poise and elegance, despite its obvious opulence. **16.5**

**SB:** A no-holds-barred nose with plenty of oak and tropical fruit. Big, lush, creamy, full-bodied, and concentrated, with a Californian radiance in place of European finesse. A crowd-pleaser with masses of up-front fruit and modest acidity—a good example of this style. Lacks length, and not for long aging. **15.5**

**OC:** Quite full green-gold. Fairly wild yeast/nut nose. Fairly acid and yet rather *sauvage*. This funky style really needs slightly ripe fruit. It finishes nutty and fresh, but the whole package doesn't quite work. The funk seems to dominate the fruit. **14**

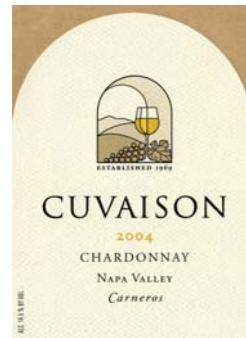


**Ramey Hudson Vineyard Napa Valley/Carneros - 15.5**

**AB:** Rich gold/pale amber in color; steely, mineral nose—rather intriguing. The palate is full, ripe, and rather classical, but with toasted notes and vanilla in the background. There is a richness of fruit, largely apples and pears, blended with vanilla cream and caramel—good balance, however, overall. **15**

**SB:** Very ripe nose—apricot and mango. Ample apricot fruit and oak, and quite a strong vein of acidity running through the wine, giving it an unusually assertive character that's far from unwelcome. But it's also one-dimensional and lacks layers. Medium length. **14.5**

**OC:** Quite green still. Savory and lovage herbs nose: fresh, herb-scented, then good, dry and toasty new oak. Good style and good acid. This is a cool style with a surprising herb scent, but it's good—original, refreshing acidity, beguiling nutty texture, and a satisfying mix of apple and peach fruit, with weight and acid zip. **17**

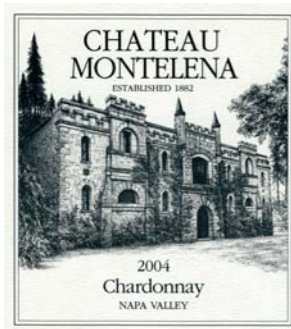


**Cuvaison Napa Valley (Carneros) - 15**

**AB:** Green-gold in color, this looks effusive but has a surprisingly restrained nose. The palate presents a mass of perfumed fruit on attack, really floral: violets and roses and white flowers more than identifiable fruit. The aromatics continue throughout a long honeyed finish. Interesting wine. **15**

**SB:** Lime-cordial nose, rather confected. Fairly rich, juicy; plenty of fruit here if little vibrancy; a good deal of oak dominating the mid-palate, and fair acidity gives some persistence. Straightforward and balanced if oaky. Sound, but far from exciting. **14.5**

**OC:** Quite full gold-green. Full, waxy, honeyed nose. Quite good, waxy, soft-edged; a little menthol and stylishly polished oak. Good, full, and broad, yet balanced. No massive personality, some fat apple flesh, and soft, nutty, yeasty weight. Nice, not great. **15**



**Chateau Montelena Napa Valley - 15**

**AB:** Yellow-gold in color, this has rather unexpected herbaceous character on the nose. This opens up to reveal more

characteristic toasted notes. The palate has a lovely texture and good varietal fruit. Well made and rather fine. **16**

**SB:** Evolved nose, toasty, honeyed, all the stops pulled out. Soft attack, broad and peachy, voluptuous but heavy-handed, with oak marking the finish. Bruised-apple flavors and an overall flabbiness I could do without. **13**

**OC:** Quite full yet fresh straw gold. Not bad. Full yet restrained. Fair mix of dry, full apple and wild nutty weight—and fair acid. Good wine that hasn't attempted to push the envelope very far. **15.5**

**Ramey Hyde Vineyard Napa Valley/Carneros - 15**

**AB:** Rich yellow-gold, this has an assertive nose, rich in honeyed orchard fruit and flowers, with some understated caramel notes. On the palate, warm apples and pears come through, combined with vanilla cream. A big wine, this shows decent balance but is probably a one- or a half-glasser. **14.5**

**SB:** Lean, appley nose, quite fresh and bracing. Ripe and juicy with a hint of sweetness; has some concentration if not much intensity of flavor. One-dimensional but lively, with an appealing toastiness. For me it's marred by a confected quality that undermines is purity of fruit. **15**

**OC:** Fair green-gold. Nose of Kerrygold butter—yum! Still some nice melted butter, but good, acid apple flavor and nutty oak too. This is pretty good. Quite cool in style, the acid a little high, but pretty good yeast and nut depth. **16**

**Ramey Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley - 15**

**AB:** Lustrous gold in color, this presents a rather odd nose for Chardonnay—rather savory in character, with some mineral interest. The palate is richly textured, creamy, and full but, ultimately, rather tiring despite the acidity. Very toasted and buttery on the finish. **14**

**SB:** Attractive tangy nose, lime and pears, and a firm, oaky background. Fairly rich, sleek, intense, with some good acidity and that oaky undertow. But very much on the surface: brisk and well honed, but probably giving all it has to give. The finish is fresh and bracing, so this may best be drunk young to retain that immediate fruitiness and vigor. Quite good length. **16**

**OC:** Quite bright, fresh gold-green. Attractive nose, fresh and perfumed, yet some toffee, too. Fair acid and fair minerality. Good, full, fun—not thrilling, but it has more of the component parts, even if the nut, toast, and full, dry apple fruit don't quite fit together. **15**

**Arrowood Alary Vineyards Russian River Valley Unfined - 14.5**

**AB:** Pale yellow/green-gold in color, this offers hints of hints of biscuit, warm pastry and spice on the nose, allied to some dilute

mineral character. The palate is slightly diffuse, lacking precision, with a vanilla-ice-cream character. Finish is long and rich in toasted oak accompanied by vibrant acidity. **14**

**SB:** Delicate, elegant nose, with discreet oakiness and a pronounced citrus character: lemon and lime. Fresh, delicate, indeed light, with some intensity of flavor rather than breadth of flavor. The oak is a bit overevident for my taste. No hidden depths here and, given the attractive attack, a disappointing lack of length. **14.5**

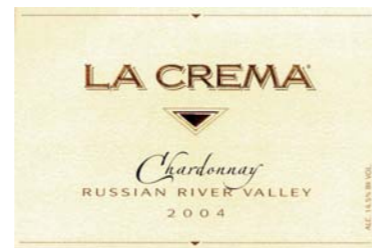
**OC:** Fairly pale. Full, soft, round, mellow style, a little spice, and fair, full, but dry glycerine texture. Just a hint of cedarwood. I sort of expect a little more flavor from this style. It's good, but it promises more than it delivers. Attractive, full toast and spice, but all in a minor key. **15**

**Cakebread Cellars Napa Valley - 14.5**

**AB:** Rich gold in color, clinging to the glass, this is relatively restrained on the nose, just hinting at apple skins and mineral notes. The palate is ripe and full, richly textured and attractively balanced—rather classical in style—trim, poised, and elegant. **15**

**SB:** Delicate nose of apricot and pears. Medium-bodied, reasonably fresh, straightforward, supple. Pleasant but lacks some vigor and personality. Strolling along, singing a song—but without much purpose or interest. Modest length. **13**

**OC:** Quite full green-gold. Nose good, fresh, attractive. Palate good, fresh, full—a welcome streak of mineral and quite direct lemon acid and apple flesh. But pretty nice lightly toasted hazelnut, too, and a touch of cedar. This is good, easy to enjoy, but not really special. **16**



**La Crema Russian River Valley - 14.5**

**AB:** Lustrous yellow-gold with green lights, this is rather dull on the nose, revealing little, and a trifle dilute. The palate, similarly, fails to excite, though some gentle floral aromatics appear mid-palate and remain throughout a sustained honeyed finish. **14.5**

**SB:** Sweet, oaky nose, quite toasty. Fresh attack, evidently ripe, apricot and peach, with some oaky bite on the mid-palate. Well balanced, though little depth here. Straightforward but satisfying, with only moderate length. **14.5**

**OC:** Quite attractive pale straw. Spicy, slightly gingery nose. Pretty good. A little fat and a touch of phenolics, but it

manages to get away with it. The cream and spice are evident enough to cope with the slightly extracted oak, and it finishes mellow, if a little-old fashioned. **14.5**

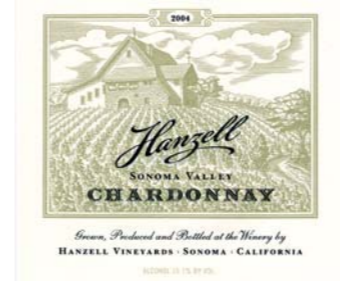


**Ferrari-Carano Reserve Napa/Sonoma - 14.5**

**AB:** Rich yellow-gold, this shows some restraint on the nose yet evokes the idea of a sun-blushed apple harvest. Richly textured, it coats the palate, yet there is a clear layer of acidity. This has richness and freshness but not, at this juncture, in the right order. This may change with time. **13.5**

**SB:** Pretty nose, quite tropical, apricot and pineapple. Fresh attack, but there seems to be some unwelcome sweetness here. Has acidity that gives it some zest, but the fruit quality seems overripe. Still, it has more vigor than most and a brisk, clean finish. **15.5**

**OC:** Fairly green. Fresh apple and pear, and a little leather, on the nose. Palate fresh, bright—lemon and apple peel. Attractive, balanced, not exciting, but some cream and toast and acid fruit. Good, not great. Crisp, direct, attractive. **15**



**Hanzell Sonoma Valley - 14.5**

**AB:** Pretty, lustrous green-gold. An attractive, rather subtle nose, offering pure stone fruit and attractive mineral focus. The palate is sweet and ripe with no excesses. There is acidity, but it is well integrated and fits the bill so that, overall, there is decent balance. **14**

**SB:** Dumb nose. Fresh, crisp, fairly simple, but it's clean and brisk, with attractive apple and apricot fruit. There's no complexity here, but also no sense that the winemaking is striving to impress. The acidity is bright and carries through on to the finish. Very well made and enjoyable. **16.5**

**OC:** Curious, rather syrupy and phenolic, and a strange mix of fat yet neutral stewed fruit and pepper. It's more like an overripe

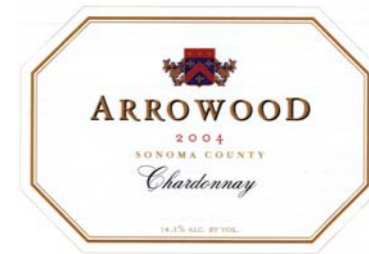
Trebbiano than Sonoma Chardonnay—low-yield Trebbiano di Soave!—so it's a fair drink, but its flavor is of maxed-out neutrality rather than inherent personality. **12.5**

**Rutherford Hill Napa Valley - 14.5**

**AB:** Golden in color and exuding honeyed orchard fruit on the nose, this is initially appealing. The palate, however, lacks precision and ends with a rather woolly, butter character. **14**

**SB:** Smoky, oaky nose, but elegant nonetheless. A rich, succulent style, with ample apricot-and-pear character and a sleek texture. Not a wine with much finesse, but has generosity and opulence and some depth of flavor. Quite a big style for Carneros and far from refreshing, yet it remains impressive. **17**

**OC:** Fair green-gold. Quite fresh, toast and apple nose, slight rubber. Palate fairly full and rich, baked apple and lemon peel, quite weighty but not really exciting—full baked fruit plus acid and a little glycerine thickness. **13**



**Arrowood Sonoma County - 14**

**AB:** Lustrous green-gold in color. Taut and mineral on the nose, with a background of honeyed, floral fruit. Rich pastry-shop/warm brioche notes are echoed on the palate, which is full and ripe with decent acidity to balance. Long, toasted finish. **13**

**SB:** Tropical fruit on the nose: mango, ripe peach, with a strong oaky presence, too. Rich, rounded, creamy, voluptuous. A touch heavy-handed, but there is some welcome spice on the finish. Lacks some concentration and essentially bland, but a big mouthful of wine. Moderate length. **13**

**OC:** First bottle corked. Second bottle better. Oatmeal and hazelnut nose. Palate mineral, though the oak shows through strongly. It is a little more oaky than I expected, and the oatmeal doesn't quite leave the Meursault suppleness it promised, but it's still a good, full, flashy style, well balanced with a little oak perfume and fair acid balance. **15.5**

**Arrowood Sonoma County Unfined - 14**

**AB:** Rich yellow-gold/very pale amber, with flashes of green. Rather closed on the nose, taut and mineral. This is rather intriguing, since it is beautifully restrained, surprising, even elegant, with toasted buttered character only coming through on a long finish, refreshed by citrus zest. **12**

**SB:** Discreet nose, apple and apricot; oak well integrated. Medium-bodied, sleek, attractive texture, moderately concentrated with some elegance. Restrained but perhaps a touch too restrained, lacking some oomph on the finish. Medium length, and fades away to blankness. **14.5**

**OC:** Pleasant pale gold. Fairly full-on oak, verging on the spicy caramel, but it manages to stay dry and therefore works. Good mellow acidity, a lick of finely polished oak, and an attractive, full, dry flavor of nuts and peach balanced by lemon and softened with caramel. **16**

**Beringer Private Reserve Napa Valley - 14**

**AB:** Yellow-gold in color, this is rather subdued on the nose, with understated, somewhat green fruit, herbaceous, with a citrus vitality. The palate reflects the nose, with attractive richness allied to pretty freshness. **15**

**SB:** Delicate bruised-apple nose. Soft attack, lacks concentration and bite, easy-going and bland. Soon fades. Modest fruit, modest winemaking. Not bad—just dull and short. **12**

**OC:** Slightly old-style cream and nuts, and phenolic weight. There's also just a little volatile lift and a streak of metal (okay). It's a slightly baked style, some rice pudding and overprocessed peach nuts, so you have a couple of mouthfuls and then move on. **14.5**

**Iron Horse Rued Clone Sonoma County Green Valley 2005 - 14**

**AB:** Shimmering green-gold in color, this is very closed on the nose, revealing very little. Not too cold, either. The palate presents rather restrained orchard and stone-fruit character complemented by warm pastry notes. Rather classical in style, this does not scream California. It is just a well-made wine. **15.5**

**SB:** Muted nose, quite oaky; apricot, banana. Medium-bodied, silky and fresh, well balanced, but marred by a slight cloying tone on the finish. An attractive mouthful, but it does lack complexity. Seems to have some added acidity on the finish. A sound and palatable wine but with little personality. **14**

**OC:** Fairly pale straw. Very mild style. A little minerality, but also lifted volatility that needs more body weight to work. It also slowly warms up in the mouth and shows a little more richness, but it isn't particularly interesting. The acetic edge doesn't really grab me. Well, it does grab me, but not where I want it to. **12.5**

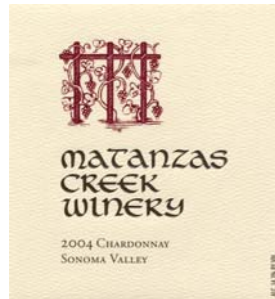
**Kendall-Jackson Grand Reserve Monterey/Santa Barbara - 14**

**AB:** Cripes! Someone has harvested butter. On the nose there can be no other tasting note... and then some orchard fruit sneaks in stage left to offset the richness. Palate is surprisingly fresh and gregarious

after the nose, with good acidity and a fresh lift. Well handled. **16**

**SB:** Shy nose: apricot, peach, mango. Soft, sagging, plump, with little acidity or zest. **10**

**OC:** Melted-butter nose and a hint of perfume. Palate full and fat. Lots of fluffy apple and pear flesh. Good, full, quite fatty, buttery style—but in balance. Not a turgid malo style but a ripe round style. Good, typically attractive, southern style. **16.5**



#### Matanzas Creek Winery Sonoma Valley - 14

**AB:** Rich gold in color, this has the air of custard made with a plethora of fresh vanilla. It is hard to know what you could serve with it, except that there is a fashion for fish with vanilla. It is massive on the nose. The palate is actually slightly more subdued and reveals some warm orchard-fruit tones—apples and pears warmed with butter and cream. Big, though, and a tad tiring. **14.5**

**SB:** Somewhat overripe nose, peachy, orangey, with a syrupy tone. Rounded, juicy, with a fruit-juice character rather than vinosity. Rather obvious, with a hint of alcohol on the finish. One-dimensional, with a slightly metallic finish. A forced, arm-twisting wine with no luminosity. **13**

**OC:** Fair body and decent acidity. Good, full flavor but no massive character. Good apple flesh, some lemon, and some pleasant nut-syrupy softness. Quite a pleasant, acid-balanced wine, without any great excitement. **15**

#### Sanford Santa Barbara County - 14

**AB:** Pale gold, this was extremely buttery on the nose initially but then became more mineral. Orchard fruit and vanilla cream prevail on the palate. Warm pastry and citrus notes make for a very good balance. **16**

**SB:** Muted nose, quite waxy, peachy. Medium-bodied, slack, rather sweet, a blunt oakiness on the mid-palate—all adds up to a wine with little energy and personality. Low acidity, so drink soon. **11**

**OC:** A little fuller and more honeyed; attractive, quite rich, and round; a bit stony but still attractive. Good, stony, quite full; hint of toasted nuts; attractive, leaner, southern style. **15.5**

#### Sonoma-Cutrer Russian River Ranches Sonoma Coast - 14

**AB:** Pale gold in color, this is rather restrained on the nose, taut and mineral. Not remotely what I would automatically associate with California Chardonnay, it is pure, taut, and yet ripe, with a classical framework and a refreshing lift. A finely boned thoroughbred of a wine—though probably does not get the scores. **16.5**

**SB:** Muted aromas, rather dominated by oak. Good attack, with some acidity and zest. Stone-fruit flavors and a sweet-and-sour tang that suggests this comes from a fairly cool area. This bracing character is welcome, though it's not a wine with huge complexity or depth. Moderate length, with a perky, refreshing finish. **15.5**

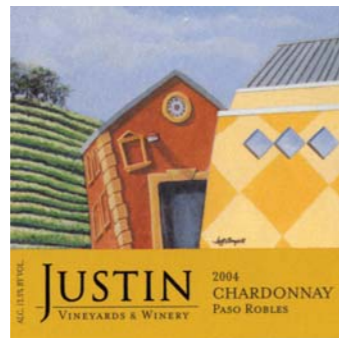
**OC:** Big, old-style, nut-husk smell. Big, phenolic, high acid, high extract, rough oak, and a basically anachronistic hollow whale of a wine. I'm trying to think of what might make this enjoyable—which dish, perhaps—but I can think of none that are easily available in a wine region. **10**

#### Robert Mondavi Winery Chardonnay Reserve Carneros/Napa Valley - 13.5

**AB:** Back here to the land of butter. Hugely rich and caramelized on the nose. Cream, grilled bananas, and toffee come to the fore. While the nose begs the question whether to use it as a sauce for ice cream, the palate is much more balanced, with obvious ripeness and toasted character married to acidity. **16**

**SB:** Rich and rather thick, peachy, syrupy nose. Broad, slightly sweet, unusually blowsy for Carneros, with a dash of added acidity. This is all over the place and seems inexpertly cobbled together. Fairly short and blunt. **11**

**OC:** Full green-gold. A big fat nose. Pretty fat palate-wise, too. Yet there is some quality still in these old-timer styles. It's fair, it's full, it's smoky, but it's well enough balanced, though I still find the effort put into extraction and oak not matched by the pleasure on the palate. **14**



#### Justin Vineyards and Winery Paso Robles - 13.5

**AB:** Deep golden/pale amber color. Oxidized on the nose. Hot, earthy soil. We requested a second sample to be fair.

Second sample slightly better: rather menthol, sorrel character. Better than first but rather too minty. **12**

**SB:** Lightly smoky, tropical-fruit nose; peachy, too. Quite rich, supple, rounded; plenty of up-front fruit, underpinned by some toasty oak. Reasonably balanced, though the acidity is modest. No depth or complexity but satisfying. Would be better without that hint of sweetness on the finish. **14**

**OC:** Quite full, fat, rather harsh. Acid plus rather rich, strong, OTT dates and dried apple from a health-food store. Big, rather oxidized, hot country style. It is striving for a more subtle and elegant style, but it isn't achieving it. Second bottle: sage and savory nose, less OTT. Still a full and ripe style but more acid. Even so, it seems a bit hot really to get a lot of Chardie character. Some Brazil nut and lovage and baked apple. Quite good, not great. **15**

#### Landmark Damaris Reserve Sonoma Valley - 13.5

**AB:** Back to French pastry shops for this one: rich and buttery with vanilla in the air. The texture on the palate is opulent and seductive, complex and ripe, with orchard fruit layered with citrus freshness and vanilla cream. Although oak is not my thing, this is well balanced and shows skilled winemaking (how patronizing!). **16.5**

**SB:** Hefty, tropical-fruit nose—overblown. Big, swaggering, opulent, with a distinct overripeness as well as searing added acidity. Don't see this coming easily into balance. Essentially clumsy, going for exoticism at the expense of elegance. Despite the acidity, the finish is fairly short. **13**

**OC:** Rather full *Lactobacillus* nose. Full, rather rich, and fat. Flabby cream just beginning to sour and a slack-jawed texture. This may have been an ambitious attempt, but it wasn't well done. **10.5**

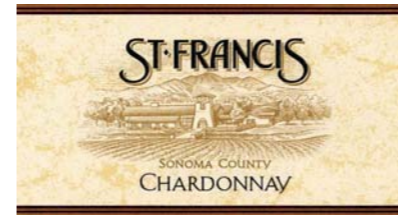
#### Marimar Estate Don Miguel Vineyard Dobles Lías Russian River Valley - 13.5

**AB:** Yellow-green gold, this is relatively subdued on the nose given its color: some stewed orchard fruit with apricot notes. The palate is rather more gregarious, seductively ripe, and honeyed, while retaining a certain freshness. The finish is long and rich, ripe and generous. An oak lover's crowd-pleaser. **16**

**SB:** Some overripeness evident on the nose, with pineapple aromas and a stewed-fruit character. Broad and lush, yet rather hollow, with a touch of residual sweetness alongside a bizarre tartness, as though a blend of overripe and slightly green fruit to add acidity. Not convinced by this. **12**

**OC:** Mid-gold. A bizarre, menthol and aftershave nose. Does this rather curious, scented, menthol character come from the wood, I wonder? On the palate, the wine that is both fairly full and acid, yet a

little dull, and the acid really is too insistent in the overall scheme of things. **12**

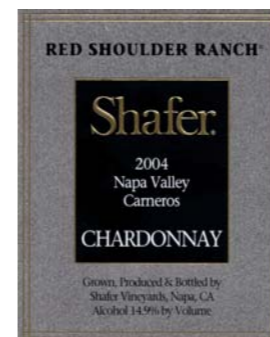


#### St Francis Sonoma County - 13.5

**AB:** Rich old gold in color, this is a trifle tiring on the nose—butterscotch, warm brioche, and vanilla cream to the fore. The palate echoes the nose, with a rich texture and seductively ripe fruit. Some refreshment but pretty hefty on the oak front. Winemaker's wine, perhaps—huge. **13**

**SB:** Dumb but evidently ripe nose; quite oaky. Medium-bodied and rather slack, lacking concentration and bite. A routine effort, with decent stone-fruit character and light acidity a pretty apricot finish, but without depth or personality. Fades fast. **13**

**OC:** Quite full gold. Pleasant but caramelly nose: hint of polished wood. Big, rich, hazelnutty, viscous—and yet it's fresh. I haven't had a Chardie like this for a while, and it isn't my favorite style, but this is a good example: It's well balanced in its lush-hipped way, though I can't see myself drinking more than a glass or so. It sort of reminds me of slightly burned rice pudding. **14**



#### Shafer Red Shoulder Ranch Napa Valley/Carneros - 13.5

**AB:** Rich old gold in color. This is, I suspect, what most people believe to be benchmark: oaky smoky and super-ripe, with lashings of butter and vanilla cream. Better balance than many here, and not as tiring, with good freshness and focus, though the acidity is rather high. **14.5**

**SB:** Oaky, peachy aromas. Medium-bodied, gently sweet, soft-textured, and a lot of alcohol on the finish. Coarse, unbalanced, flabby. **9**

**OC:** Quite intense gold-green. Strong apple and pear blossom—round, full, soft fruit. Fresh, attractive, rather waxy texture, and decent acid and bright fruit. Modern, bright, attractive; some mineral and some depth. Very subtly oaked but a good fresh, vibrant feel and texture. **16.5**

#### Marimar Estate Don Miguel Vineyard Torres Family Vineyards Russian River Valley - 13

**AB:** Pale yellow-gold, this evokes the aromas of a French bakery: warm pastry, vanilla, and delicate spice, allied to a warm compote of orchard fruit. Rich and ripe, this has an attractive balance and good precision—well handled and rather elegant and poised. **16.5**

**SB:** Rather confectioned nose, peach syrup. Rich, opulent, lush, and veering toward blowsiness, despite a vein of acidity. Plenty of fruit but one-dimensional. Blunt finish, so little length or complexity. **12.5**

**OC:** Fairly full gold. Baked apples and raisin, Danish-pastry nose, and *Lactobacillus*. Big, full, overripe, acid and raisiny fruit, with malolactic cream and a whiff of frankincense. Yes, I wonder where that idea came from, too. **10**

#### Justin Vineyards and Winery Reserve Paso Robles - 12.5

**AB:** Yellow-gold and still feels oxidized with second sample. Butter—and butter that has been left out all night...The palate is better, buttery again certainly, and not my style, but I'm sure there are palates dedicated to this richness. Toasted, long finish. **13**

**SB:** Evolved golden color. Stewed peach nose, honeyed, very evolved for 2004. Broad, lush, soft, bosomy, with a whack of added acidity that doesn't prevent it from fading fast on the finish. Drink soon. **12**

**OC:** Big, full, marmalade style; rich, but rather OTT and oxidized. Wines 41 and 42 (both Justin Vineyards) seem to be from areas that are simply too hot. Big, marmalade, toffeeish, but pretty good in the hot-climate, old-style way. But, actually, I don't really want to drink it. **13**

#### Silverado Vineyards Vineburg Carneros - 12.5

**AB:** Rather strange, twisted nose here—rather chemical and plastic—that was reflected on the palate and made for a difficult tasting. Some fruit and interest on the finish. **10**

**SB:** Discreet appley nose, with a light toastiness. Plump, rounded, creamy, but soft—lacks verve and excitement; indeed, slightly blowsy. No energy or drive here, and only modest length. Drink soon. **13.5**

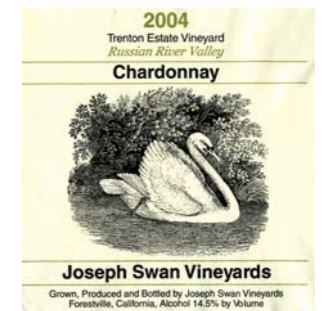
**OC:** Fair green-gold. Rather stony, raw apple-flesh nose. Palate not bad, fair acid, apple flesh, then some buttered Brazil nuts. Not exciting. Hint of meaty malolactic fat. Okay balance, but doesn't quite deliver. Sort of empty. **14**

#### Rochioli Russian River Valley - 12

**AB:** This golden beauty presents something intriguing, with a nose that could almost be ill-handled Sauvignon, with gooseberry and nettle and whitecurrants. Chardonnay makes its debut on the palate, which is rich and full, creamy and ripe, but rather short on lift and focus. **13.5**

**SB:** Lush, tropical-fruit nose with a lot of oak. Opulent, sweet, full-bodied, with a whack of added acidity. This is over the top and cloying. Fatiguing. May be okay as an apéritif, but I can't see this enhancing good food. Also lacks length. **11**

**OC:** Quite intense green-gold. Nose a little smoky and meaty but attractive. Palate full, quite rich, a touch of grilled pork chop. Some candied apple and a little unnecessary sweetness. I think there is a touch of sulfide or overbaked oak in this that spoils it. **11.5**



#### Joseph Swan Vineyards Trenton Estate Vineyard Russian River Valley - 11.5

**AB:** Rich old gold in color, this also appears old in style, with a beery, apple-skin nose. Seems old-fashioned and more cider than wine. Not my style. **10**

**SB:** Super-ripe nose, peach syrup, pineapple. Voluptuous, rounded, but not that concentrated, with some odd acidity on the aftertaste that seems added and forced. Hollow and lacking in drive, and soon fades away on the finish. **12**

**OC:** Rather deep, glowing gold. Full, peach-skin nose. Big, rather baked-apple acidity, and sort of stewed—rich plus skiny acidity and honey. It's a decent enough wine in a style that has largely been relegated to the dusty shelf of a country store (not the Jimtown or the Oakville!). **12**

#### Saintsbury Brown Ranch Carneros - 11

**AB:** Richly textured and golden colored, this was surprisingly restrained on the nose. Vague chemical notes did come through (unfortunately), but very little positive fruit character. Palate reflects nose, with rather chemical fruit and then an oaked finish. Not my style. **10**

**SB:** Firm, appley nose. Medium-bodied, not that concentrated, falls off on the aftertaste. Correct but dull, with a drizzle of added acidity on the finish. One-dimensional; frankly dull. **12**

**OC:** Quite pale green-gold. A bit creamy and malolactic. Rather fat and slovenly, smoky cream and a hint of cheese. Big, ungainly, malolactic style. **11**

*Talley Vineyards also dispatched wines, but these did not arrive in time for the tasting, due to courier difficulties.*

*Glasses kindly supplied by Riedel UK.*