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The
LA
ISSUE



taste test California's golden grape is making the most of its second act.

Going Back to Cali

California Chardonnay's meteoric rise to popularity in the 1980s was perhaps its undoing. Starting in the late '70s, a few large wineries carved out a niche built around Burgundy's most famous white-wine grape, and they successfully sold American wine drinkers on a lifestyle that involved lots of buttery Chardonnay. For nearly a decade, our thirst was insatiable, and wineries were happy to release bottle after heavily-oaked bottle. But as trends shift, so do tastes, and by the early 2000s, Chardonnay had experienced a sharp fall from grace. Today, however, a growing number of winemakers are creating expressive, complex (and, in some cases, unoaked) Chardonnays that are giving the grape's tarnished reputation a glossy new sheen. Here are seven of our favorites.

2013 Matthiasson Linda Vista Chardonnay

\$29, astorwines.com

In 2011, Steve and Jill Matthiasson leased Linda Vista vineyard—a small vineyard behind their 1905 Napa Valley farmhouse—and began making this spicy, woody wine. The Matthiasson label has gained a lot of caché since then, but we love that they're committed to keeping their wines (at least some of them) affordable and accessible.



2013 Hanzell Sebella Chardonnay

\$36, hanzell.com

Legendary Sonoma winery Hanzell creates their "Sebella" Chardonnay using fruit from young vines, the fruit from which will one day make their way into their much more expensive flagship Chardonnay. Fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral oak, the wine offers a floral, honeyed bouquet that carries over to the palate.



2012 Sandhi Sanford & Benedict Chardonnay

\$55, sandhiwines.com

Founded by sommelier Rajat Parr, along with Charles Banks (formerly of Screaming Eagle) and winemaker Sashi Moorman, this small-production winery has serious pedigree and wines to match, like this easy-drinking Chardonnay. Grapes from Santa Barbara's storied Sanford & Benedict vineyard yield a splurge-worthy bottle.



2013 Chanin Los Alamos Vineyard Chardonnay

\$35, chaninwine.com

By the age of 21, winemaker Gavin Chanin, having already worked four harvest seasons at California's well-known Au Bon Climat, set out to found his own wine label. Known for harvesting his grapes on the early side to keep the alcohol down and the acidity up, Chanin's wines deliver a pleasant rose petal-infused balance of acid and oak on the palate.



2013 Le P'tit Paysan Jack's Hill Chardonnay

\$22, lppwines.com

Ian Brand has logged many hours seeking out—and finding—forgotten, hidden vineyards in misty-cool Monterey, where he makes his delicious (and affordable) mineral-forward wines. Picked early and fermented in a combination of stainless steel and neutral oak, his Jack's Hill Chardonnay is the least classic of the bunch, delivering a bright, light, lemony punch.



2013 Pence Ranch Chardonnay

\$36, penceranch.com

Nestled within a 200-acre working ranch in western Santa Barbara County lies Blair Pence's passion project—his vineyards. Born out of a lifelong love affair with the wines of Burgundy, Pence partnered with Sashi Moorman (also of Sandhi) to make wines that express California terrior. In his 2013 Pence Ranch Chardonnay, fruit permeates, especially on the finish, with a tangy perfume of ripe nectarines.



2011 Albatross Ridge Bowlus Estate Chardonnay

\$55, albatrossridge.com

Farming Pinot Noir and Chardonnay on a steep ridge in Carmel, winemaker Garrett Bowlus set out to create low-intervention wines that speak to their ocean-kissed location and to the clay-rich soil in which the grapes grow. This bottling opens with a whiff of sweet, tropical papaya and unfolds into a soft, mellow wine that has an addictive coastal lightness and just a touch of creaminess.

