



California Chardonnay - To Be or Not To Burgundy?

Tuesday, April 17, 2012

Reception Wine: 6:00 PM, Formal Tasting: 6:20 PM

Faculty Club, Univ of Toronto, 41 Willcocks Street, Toronto

Members' Fee: \$65; Guests'/Non-Members' Fee: \$80 (includes light appetizers)

Chardonnay originated in and gained its reputation in Burgundy; however it has since spread across both the Old World and New World wine-producing regions. Chardonnay is one of the easiest grapes for vineyards to grow, which is why it is cultivated around the world. The diversity of flavours can range from fresh and fruity with hints of apple, pear, citrus and melon to buttery and oak. The grape itself is fairly neutral, however, with many of the flavours commonly associated with the grape derived from such influences as *terroir* and barrel-aging. It is vinified in many different styles, from champagne and sparkling wines to the lean, crisply mineral wines of Burgundy to New World wines with rich tropical fruit flavors and oak. Cooler climate Chardonnays tend to be lighter than those from warmer climates. In the US, Chardonnay was first planted in the late 1800s, however most vineyards were uprooted during Prohibition when growers replaced them with thick-skinned varieties that could be shipped cross country. Only a few small plantings in the Livermore Valley and Santa Cruz Mountains survived Prohibition. It was not until the 1970s and thereafter that Chardonnay plantings in the US boomed as the wine became increasingly popular. (Source: Wine Institute website). Given that Chardonnay is the number one selling white wine in the United States, it is not surprising that winemakers turned their attention to producing this popular variety. Today, Chardonnay is the most purchased wine in the US and also the most widely planted grape variety.

Burgundy- and California-style Chardonnays have characteristically been very different. A typical California-style wine usually has a lot of oak, butter and tropical fruit flavors to it while a Burgundian Chardonnay will be more crisp, fresh, with mineral and steely overtones. These days, however, the best producers in the US are pulling back now and focusing on a more restrained style for their Chardonnays, producing what many refer to as a more Burgundian-style wine, the ultimate in compliments.

For this event, TVC assembled seven Chardonnays from California and one from Oregon, specifically selected because of their reputation as being made as more Old World (Burgundian) in style than New World. Starting in Napa Valley, our taste buds will sample **Signorello Estates**, which devotes 50% of its 100 acres to growing Chardonnay grapes, and whose 2008 Vieilles Vignes Chardonnay has won countless accolades, scoring 90+ points and 4 stars consistently by reviewers. We have one of the top California Chardonnays from **Pahlmeyer**, where grapes are hand-sorted and gently whole-cluster-pressed and the wine aged in 90% new French oak barrels for eleven months on the lees. His Chardonnay is not to be missed, scoring 95 points from the Wine Advocate and 93 points from Wine Spectator Insider. Next we will travel to Sonoma County to sample two **Kistler Vineyards** Chardonnays. Kistler Vineyards is a small family-owned winery located in the Russian River Valley specializing in Burgundian-style Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Robert Parker said of Kistler: "If the Kistler Winery could be magically transported to the middle of Burgundy's Cote d'Or, it would quickly gain a reputation as glorious as any producer of Burgundy grand crus." Also from Sonoma County, we have the Réserve Spéciale from **Arrowood Vineyards**, whose 2008 Chardonnay is definitely one of their standouts. While still in California, we will try a Chardonnay from the Red Shoulder Ranch at **Shafer Vineyards**, which has been planted with a blend of five Chardonnay clones that give small clusters, low yields and abundant flavors, as well as **Ridge Vineyards** in the Santa Cruz Mountains, which still hand harvests its grapes based on a philosophy of minimal intervention. For those familiar with the famous (or infamous?) 1976 Judgment of Paris, Ridge Vineyard's 1971 Cabernet was ranked 5th overall while in the 2006 re-enactment, Ridge's '71 came out #1. Although we will be drinking their Chardonnay, not their Cab, you can expect a stunning wine from Ridge. Finally, we head north to **Eola Hills** in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Harvey Steiman from the *Wine Spectator* says, "At Evening Land, whence have come some of Oregon's best Chardonnays since its first vintage in 2007...If you want minerality, there may be no better examples than Evening Land's estate bottlings from Oregon." This is another American Chardonnay made in the Burgundian-style.

REGISTER/ BUY TICKETS

Register/buy tickets online at <http://www.onlineregistrations.ca/tvcevent4>. You must register online and then can pay by credit card or by cheque. **ALL ticket sales/reservations are final.** Cheques must be received by Friday, April 13th. The cheque-payment option will be disabled at midnight Tuesday, April 10th after which only credit card sales will be accepted until midnight Sunday, April 15th or earlier if the event sells out. You will be sent an email confirmation after completing your registration. If you tried to register but did not receive your confirmation, please contact torontovintners@onlineregistrations.ca before trying to register again.

Tasting Notes and Information

2008 Signorello Vieilles Vignes Chardonnay \$51.95

"The 2008 Chardonnay Vieilles Vignes Estate is one of those rare California Chardonnays that come from vines nearly 30 years of age. Exotic, restrained but authoritative scents of nectarines, tangerines and orange blossoms emerge from this light straw/gold-colored wine. Full-bodied with zesty acidity, lots of minerality and a rare intensity in the mid-palate, this impressive, structured Chardonnay's framework is reminiscent of a red wine. It should drink nicely for at least 3-4 years, possibly a decade given its singular style. The wood is completely hidden by the wealth of fruit intensity." 92 pts. Robert Parker Jr., erobertparker.com, Dec/10. Winemaker, Pierre Birebent, a fifth generation winegrower who studied viticulture and enology in Macon, Burgundy, has been with Signorello since 1998. Signorello Estate began to develop a style of winemaking based on the idea of "winegrowing" described by a French word "Vigneron", meaning everything done in the vineyards is intimately connected to the winemaking, a style used in Burgundy.

2009 Kistler Sonoma Mountain Chardonnay \$72.95

"Richly sensual, harmonious and beautifully structured. The 09 Kistler boasts great complexity but the flavours are so wonderfully interwound and matched that the seamless outcome is incredibly approachable. Well-integrated oak plays up the perfectly ripened stone fruit and very apparent minerality." 93pts. Sara d'Amato, Oct/11. Steve Kistler, winemaker, was an assistant at Ridge Vineyards for two years before founding Kistler Vineyards. Made from some of the oldest Chardonnay vineyards in Sonoma County.

2009 Kistler Les Noisetiers Sonoma Coast Chardonnay \$64.95

"Rich, nutty, elegantly oaked nose with vibrant minerality. Following in the footsteps of previous vintages, this class act Chardonnay delivers a relentless progression of flavours and a seemingly interminable finish. Firm and age-worthy with exceptional complexity." 92pts. Sara D'Amato, Aug/11. Les Noisetiers gets its name from the consistent toasted hazelnut characteristic this wine displays vintage after vintage. The purposely crafted cuvée illustrates the regional nature of their efforts. Les Noisetiers is a combination of specific lots from within some of those same vineyards located in far western Sonoma County. An austere, low pH, high acid wine, Les Noisetiers is driven by mineral characters as opposed to fruit.

2008 Arrowood Vineyards Réserve Spéciale Chardonnay \$49.95

"The 2008 Chardonnay Reserve Speciale, which comes from five vineyards, was 100% barrel-fermented and put through 100% malolactic. Always one of California's top Chardonnays, it is a blend of 51% Russian River and 49% Carneros fruit. This light straw/gold-colored Chardonnay offers up notes of peach, honeysuckle, popcorn and brioche in a rich, concentrated, pure format with good underlying acidity as well as a generous mouth-feel. This 2008 should continue to drink well for 5-6 years." 93pts. Robert Parker Jr., erobertparker.com, Feb/11. Recently certified organic, the winery follows the organic principal

of farming. Their Réserve Spéciale is the highest designation, used sparingly in superb vintages only for wines that stand out. It represents the pinnacle of winemaking at Arrowood.

2009 Shafer Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay \$59.95

"Shafer consistently produces one of the biggest, fruitiest Chardonnays in California, and yet the wine remains balanced and interesting. The 2009 Red Shoulder Ranch is gigantic in pineapples, pears, mangoes, tangerines and honey, yet so minerally and crisp that somehow it finishes dry." 96 pts. Steve Heimoff, Wine Enthusiast, Oct/11.

2009 Ridge Santa Cruz Mountains Estate Chardonnay \$49

"Translucent gold color. Fresh tropical fruits layered with apple, pear, melon. Honeysuckle nectar, wet limestone. Cool-climate firm acid. Barrel toast and caramelized apple in finish." Eric Baugher, Winemaker's website, Feb/11. "The 2009 Chardonnay Estate is an impeccable, classy wine layered with bright citrus, flowers and just a touch of sweetness from the oak. Crushed rocks and lime peel add complexity on the textured, long finish. In 2009 none of the blocks were designated for the Monte Bello bottling, all of the fruit went into the Estate. This is a stunningly pure wine from Ridge. Anticipated maturity: 2011-2019." 95 pts Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: (08/11)

2009 Pahlmeyer Chardonnay \$79.95

"Consistently one of the top Chardonnays in California, Pahlmeyer's 2009 exhibits an impressive, thick-looking, light gold color with green hues. Loads of peach, creme brulee, honeysuckle, and subtle oak are present in this full-bodied, well-endowed, pedal-to-the-metal style of Chardonnay that will appeal to those who like white Burgundy, but with additional richness. Given its track record, expect this wine to age nicely for 5-6 years." 95 pts. Robert Parker Jr., erobertparker.com, Dec/10. Pahlmeyer started over 20 years ago when former trial attorney Jayson Pahlmeyer decided to turn his passion for wine into a career in Napa Valley. After studying viticulture and oenology at the University of Bordeaux, Pahlmeyer returned to the United States and produced his first wine (a Bordeaux blend) in '86.

2008 Evening Land La Source Seven Springs Vineyard Chardonnay, Eola-Amity Hills \$79

"Bright, agile and light on its feet, delivering mouthwatering, mineral-drenched green apple and grapefruit flavors. Lingers impressively, suggesting this will only flesh out and get deeper with age. Drink now through 2018." 94pts. Harvey Steiman, winespectator.com, Dec/10. Made by winemaker Isabelle Meunier with Dominique Lafon consulting, this Bugundian-style 2008 is brimming with elegance, restraint, minerals and a myriad of stone fruits.