

Wine Spectator Insider

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FIRST LOOK AT OUR EDITORS' MOST EXCITING NEW WINES

This week, the *Insider* presents a look at Burgundy's lighter side, or, more accurately, its whiter side. Burgundy's Chardonnays are the standard by which all other versions are measured, but as with Pinot Noir, California has proven itself equally as fertile for the noble grapes of Burgundy. As the summer months approach, "I'll have a glass of Chardonnay" is an increasingly common refrain, and in the spirit of keeping our readers prepared for the long months of leisure ahead, this edition of the *Insider* covers 19 Chardonnays—James Laube reviews 13 from California and Bruce Sanderson rates six from Burgundy's Corton-Charlemagne, a *grand cru* vineyard in the Côte de Beaune.

And there's plenty for lovers of Cabernet as well. Harvey Steiman reviews 11 reds from Washington, many of them outstanding values, and no one will want to miss the two classic-rated Cabernet Sauvignons, one each from California and Washington, among the Hot wines, on page 4.

California

Flora Springs

Chardonnay Napa Valley Barrel Fermented 2004
93 points | \$25 | 3,800 cases made | White

Smooth, rich and vibrant, with layers of ripe pear, fig, melon, vanilla and hazelnut, finishing long and lively. Elegant and sophisticated, this ends with a clean, refreshing aftertaste.—*J.L.*

Marcassin

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Marcassin Vineyard 2002
93 points | \$90 | 325 cases made | White

A rich, smoky, exotic style that serves up layers of ripe pineapple, mineral, citrus, tangerine and fig. For all its intensity and concentration, this is elegantly styled with a creamy aftertaste.—*J.L.*

Marcassin

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Three Sisters Vineyard 2002
93 points | \$75 | 500 cases made | White

Packs in loads of complex flavors, with concentrated apple, pear, fig and honeysuckle fruit and hints of mineral, sage, citrus and light hazelnut turning to marshmallow and spice. Very stylish.—*J.L.*

Peter Michael

Chardonnay Sonoma County Mon Plaisir 2004
93 points | \$NA | 1,250 cases made | White

Profoundly rich and concentrated, yet elegant and svelte, with hazelnut, ripe fig, pear, anise and citrus, focused and complex on the long finish, ending with a glimpse of bubble gum.—*J.L.*

Paul Hobbs

Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2004
92 points | \$45 | 3,119 cases made | White

A rich, unctuous style, with smooth, concentrated pear, smoke, citrus and hazelnut flavors that turn silky, finishing with an engaging smoked nut edge.—*J.L.*

Lewis

Chardonnay Napa Valley Reserve 2004
92 points | \$60 | 100 cases made | White

The nose offers smoky hazelnut, ripe pear, floral and fig flavors, intense yet elegant on the palate, turning creamy. Vibrant personality. Cellar short-term.—*J.L.*

Truchard

Chardonnay Napa Valley Carneros 2004
92 points | \$30 | 1,728 cases made | White

Complex and sophisticated, with layers of hazelnut, pear, apple and spice, turning supple and polished on the finish, where the flavors are sleek and juicy.—*J.L.*

Beringer

Chardonnay Napa Valley Private Reserve 2004
91 points | \$35 | 22,300 cases made | White

Rich and unctuous, with ripe, intense smoked pineapple, toasted cumin, hazelnut and nutmeg. Finishes with a solid dose of oak.—*J.L.*

Grgich Hills

Chardonnay Napa Valley Carneros Paris Tasting Commemorative 2003
91 points | \$73 | 867 cases made | White

Shows richness with restraint, with a nice mineral quality to the Granny Smith apple, hazelnut, spice and pebbles, finishing with a delicate edge and a hint of lemon twist.—*J.L.*

Kistler

Chardonnay Carneros Hudson Vineyard 2003
91 points | \$90 | 522 cases made | White

Exotic and smoky, with fig, honeysuckle, citrus and marshmallow flavors that are full-blown and mouth-coating, ending with a smoky campfire aroma.—*J.L.*

L'Angevin

Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2004
91 points | \$36 | 600 cases made | White

Delicious and distinct for its floral and tangerine flavors that are rich and vibrant. The initial burst of fruit is riveting, finishing with a long, creamy aftertaste.—*J.L.*

France / Burgundy

The hill of Corton stands majestic, an imperial outcropping crowned by forest in the otherwise continuous north-south escarpment of Pernand-Vergelesses and Savigny-lès-Beaune. Its marly soils on the western side retain moisture and acidity, an advantage in the heat of 2003. And because they face west, the vines are bathed in light yet aren't subject to the imposing heat of the south- and southeast-facing sites.

Bonneau du Martray

Corton-Charlemagne 2003
92 points | \$120 | 500 cases made | White

Bonneau du Martray, with its holdings on the west-facing slopes of Corton-Charlemagne, is one of the appellation's largest estates. Restrained for the vintage, this is elegant, grounded in lemon, mineral and hazelnut aromas and flavors accented by spicy oak. There's a little alcohol showing, but overall, this is well-balanced and long. Best from 2008 through 2018.—*B.S.*

Louis Jadot

Corton-Charlemagne 2003
92 points | \$140 | 175 cases imported | White

An opulent, extroverted white, full of peach, lemon, vanilla and smoke flavors. It has a subtle structure that keeps it balanced and the finish is long, with a touch of heat that will integrate as this evolves. Jadot's 5-acre parcel sits near the top of the slope, adjacent to Les Pougets. Best from 2007 through 2018.—*B.S.*

Chandon de Briailles

Corton White 2003
91 points | \$125 | NA cases made | White

From three different parcels—Les Bressandes, Les Chaumes and Les Renardes—this is like liquid candy. Fresh and reminiscent of lemon and apple, yet also complemented by butter and vanilla, it has body and a creamy texture, but remains balanced. Terrific cleansing finish. A baby that needs time. Best from 2008 through 2018.—*B.S.*

Bouchard Père & Fils

Corton-Charlemagne 2003
90 points | \$130 | 200 cases imported | White

Bouchard's parcel comes from a southeast-facing section of Le Corton near the top of the slope. Focused and concentrated, with lemon, mineral, peach and butterscotch flavors revolving around a firm structure. This is both elegant and intense, with persistence from start to finish. Drink now through 2015.—*B.S.*

Lucien Le Moine

Corton-Charlemagne 2003
90 points | \$150 | 75 cases made | White

The only wine in the cellar that négociants Mounir Saouma and Rotem Brakin feel benefits from early malolactic fermentation because of its strong acidity. Powerful and open knit, this combines vanilla, roasted almonds, butterscotch and mineral in a creamy texture. It all comes together on the long finish. A bit roughly hewn, yet impressive. Drink now through 2015.—*B.S.*

Tollot-Beaut

Corton-Charlemagne 2003
90 points | \$110 | 60 cases imported | White

Broad-shouldered, brimming with citrus, hazelnut and spicy oak notes. Has a sense of grace and, though enjoyable now, should mature nicely over the short term. Drink now through 2015.—*B.S.*

Washington

Feather

Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2003
92 points | \$55 | 437 cases made | Red

Supple, velvety style stacks pepper and coffee notes on top of a vivid core of blackberry, raspberry and currant fruit that just doesn't quit. Attractive now, but should develop additional depth with time in the bottle. New from winemaker Randy Dunn. Best from 2008 through 2014.—*H.S.*

Fort Walla Walla

Merlot Walla Walla 2003
92 points | \$28 | 605 cases made | Red

Deep, rich and aromatic, generous with its black pepper-accented cherry, currant and licorice flavors, lingering beautifully on the plush finish. Tannins are well-integrated already. Drink now through 2013.—*H.S.*

L'Ecole No. 41

Apogee Pepper Bridge Vineyard Walla Walla Valley 2003
92 points | \$45 | 1,857 cases made | Red

Lithe, restrained style downplays the display of fruit and oak up front in favor of length and impressive refinement on the long, lingering finish. It has red berry and dusky spice notes that morph into sweet leather, licorice and coffee character in the end. Aging can only add depth. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec and Cabernet Franc. Best from 2007 through 2015.—*H.S.*

Leonetti

Reserve Walla Walla Valley 2003
92 points | \$100 | 755 cases made | Red

Smoky, toasty overtones add interest to the dark berry and balsamic aromas and flavors that glide smoothly over the fine-grained tannins. The persistent, distinctive finish performs a long diminuendo. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Drink now through 2013.—*H.S.*

Novelty Hill

Merlot Columbia Valley Stillwater Creek Vineyard 2003
92 points | \$25 | 200 cases made | Red

Smooth, round and beautifully polished to show off the opulent blueberry, currant and plum flavors, adding hints of spice and floral notes on the nose as the flavors gather themselves up for the plush, open finish. Drink now through 2011.—*H.S.*

Leonetti

Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla Valley 2003
91 points | \$70 | 2,198 cases made | Red

Lithe and open, with refined tannins and juicy currant and blueberry flavors. Hints at spicy oak on the long, fine-grained finish. A graceful, ageable red. Best from 2008 through 2015.—*H.S.*

Cougar Crest

Anniversary Cuvee Walla Walla Valley 2003
90 points | \$29 | 573 cases made | Red

Generous, oaky style has ripe currant and plum fruit on a polished textured in a big frame of barrel-influenced spice. Though the oak is intrusive, the fruit flavors are there and they persist on an open-textured finish. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Best from 2009 through 2013.—*H.S.*

Di Stefano

Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2002
90 points | \$30 | 472 cases made | Red

Has more finesse than power, with lovely currant and dusky spice flavors, hinting at fresh tomato as the flavors linger enticingly. The fruit remains prominent against very fine tannins on the harmonious finish. Drink now through 2013.—*H.S.*

Tamarack

Cabernet Franc Columbia Valley 2004
90 points | \$25 | 76 cases made | Red

Youthful, ebullient style has crisp texture and sings with cherry, black currant and floral aromas and flavors, lingering impressively on the fine-grained finish. Drink now through 2011.—*H.S.*

Walla Walla Vintners

Cabernet Franc Columbia Valley 2004
90 points | \$25 | 801 cases made | Red

Smooth and round, aromatic with floral plum and berry flavors, blossoming nicely as the wine streams over the tongue, finishing with the mocha notes of sweet oak. Drink now through 2011.—*H.S.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in Wine Spectator Insider. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

Carter

Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard 2002

95 points | \$70 | 225 cases made | Red

Dense, rich and powerful, with intense, pure Cabernet fruit, offering layers of currant, olive, herb, sage and wild berry, exquisitely balanced, with excellent structure, depth and length. Tightens up on the finish, but should reward cellaring. Best from 2007 through 2016. *From California.*—J.L.

Peter Michael

Chardonnay Knights Valley Ma Belle-Fille 2004

95 points | \$NA | 1,752 cases made | White

Wonderful expression and purity of Chardonnay fruit, accented by smoky oak. The core fig, apple, pear and earthy nuances take on a butterscotch note as the finish sails on, unveiling one layer of flavor after another. Remarkable. Drink now through 2008. *From California.*—J.L.

Quilceda Creek

Cabernet Sauvignon Washington 2003

95 points | \$85 | 3,400 cases made | Red

As this Cabernet specialist refines its style, the wines are becoming polished and seductive without losing their richly layered flavors. It has gorgeous, focused currant, plum and blackberry fruit, shaded with touches of dusky spice and smoky notes from oak, but it's almost subliminal to the harmonious, seamless fruit character. The wine glides over the palate, submerging its tannins to let the flavors soar. Best from 2008 through 2020. *From Washington.*—H.S.

L'Angevin

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Charles Heintz Vineyard 2004

94 points | \$50 | 300 cases made | White

A lively beam of acidity gives this wine a vibrancy and enlivens the complex mix of baked pear, fig, green apple and spicy, toasty hazelnut flavors. Rich without being heavy, the finish is amazingly complex and long. Drink now through 2009. *From California.*—J.L.

Wine Spectator's Tastings

Wine Spectator reviews more than 10,000 wines each year; our senior editors comprise the most experienced staff of professional wine tasters of any publication in the world. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed.

We always taste wines blind, in our offices in San Francisco, Napa, New York and Tuscany, and in the vineyard regions of Europe. This is your guarantee that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. We score wines using our 100-point scale, explained below.

James Laube Senior editor, Napa
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

Kim Marcus Managing editor, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: Southern France, Portugal

Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended

Thomas Matthews Executive editor, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: New York, Spain

James Molesworth Senior editor, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997. Tasting beat: Loire Valley, Rhône Valley, South Africa, South America

Bruce Sanderson Tasting director, New York
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1993. Tasting beat: Alsace, Austria, Burgundy, Champagne, Germany

Harvey Steiman Editor at large, San Francisco
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: Australia, New Zealand, Oregon, Washington

James Suckling European bureau chief, Italy
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1981. Tasting beat: Bordeaux, Italy, Port

Daniel Sogg Tasting staff