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# Wine Spectator

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## Tasting Report

## California Chardonnay

By James Laube

California's Chardonnay growers say that ideal weather, precise vineyard work and crop management are the combined factors behind the success of the 2002 vintage, which, based on the results of our extensive tastings, is shaping up to be one of the state's best yet for America's favorite white wine. The year looks to be at least on par with greats such as 2001, 1997 and 1996, and continues a streak of outstanding Chardonnay vintages dating back to 1999.

This report covers all the California Chardonnays reviewed by *Wine Spectator* over the past year—more than 500 wines, including more than 200 2002s, almost as many 2001s, and a sprinkling of 2000s and 1999s. There will be more 2002s to come, but looking at key Chardonnay appellations in the vintage, it is clear that “shop Sonoma” would be sage advice, as would “consider Carneros.” These two appellations, along with Napa, were exceptional in 2002. (For a more detailed, comparative look at the vintage, see our new vintage chart, page 44.)

Chardonnay is about as close to a sure thing as you get in the wine world; it consistently produces the most outstanding wines of any variety in California, irrespective of vintage. Moreover, there are plenty of different styles from which to choose, from austere, flinty, non-malolactic versions reminiscent of French Chablis to rich, buttery wines loaded with tropical fruit flavors. Consumers benefit because, with the grape excelling in so many areas throughout California year after year, the market is usually awash with grand wines. Further, the huge supply has led to great elasticity in pricing and, consequently, a remarkable number of values. (See our focus on values, page 46.)

An in-depth tasting report begins on page 38. The following chart lists, alphabetically by producer, all wines tasted for this report. For complete reviews, see this and previous Buying Guides or [www.winespectator.com](http://www.winespectator.com).

Chardonnay Carneros 2002	\$18	84
Chardonnay North Coast Signet Collection 2002	\$14	86
Chardonnay Sonoma County 2002	\$15	78
<b>BENNETT FAMILY</b>		
Chardonnay Russian River Valley Reserve 2001	\$15	84
<b>BENZIGER</b>		
Chardonnay Carneros 2002	\$16	88
Chardonnay Carneros 2001	\$16	87
Chardonnay Carneros Sangiacomo Vineyards Reserve 2001	\$27	85
<b>BERINGER</b>		
Chardonnay California Founders' Estate 2002	\$12	86
Chardonnay Napa Valley Appellation Collection 2002	\$16	87
Chardonnay Napa Valley Carneros Stanly Ranch 2002	\$20	91
<b>BYRON</b>		
Chardonnay Santa Maria Valley 2002	\$25	83
Chardonnay Santa Maria Valley 2001	\$25	90
Chardonnay Santa Maria Valley Nielson Vineyard 2001	\$30	86
Chardonnay Santa Maria Valley Nielson Vineyard 2000	\$30	88
<b>CAKEBREAD</b>		
Chardonnay Napa Valley 2002	\$34	87
Chardonnay Napa Valley 2001	\$33	89
Chardonnay Napa Valley Reserve 2000	\$44	89
<b>CALERA</b>		
Chardonnay Central Coast 2001	\$18	87
Chardonnay Mount Harlan 1999	\$34	88
<b>CALLAWAY</b>		
Chardonnay Santa Maria Valley Coastal Reserve 2000	\$16	84
<b>CAMBRIA</b>		
Chardonnay Santa Maria Valley	\$22	88
<b>CHARLES CREEK</b>		
Chardonnay Sonoma County Las Patolitas 2002	\$20	85
<b>CHARNEVILLE</b>		
Chardonnay California Cellar Selection 2002	\$9	84
Chardonnay Napa Valley 2002	\$20	87
<b>CARNEROS CREEK</b>		
Chardonnay Carneros Gavin Vineyard 2001	\$20	87
<b>CARPE DIEM</b>		
Chardonnay Edna Valley Firepeak Vineyard 2002	\$25	87
Chardonnay Edna Valley Firepeak Vineyard 2001	\$25	88
<b>CASTLE ROCK</b>		
Chardonnay Central Coast Barrel Fermented 2002	\$10	83
<b>CHALK HILL</b>		
Chardonnay Chalk Hill 2001	\$36	90
Chardonnay Chalk Hill 2000	\$42	82
Chardonnay Chalk Hill Estate Vineyard Selection 2001	\$67	91
<b>CHALONE</b>		
Chardonnay Chalone 2001	\$25	88
<b>CHAPPELLET</b>		
Chardonnay Napa Valley 2002	\$22	91
Chardonnay Napa Valley 2001	\$22	90
<b>CHARLES CREEK</b>		
Chardonnay Sonoma County Las Patolitas 2002	\$20	85
<b>CHASSEUR</b>		
Chardonnay Carneros 2000	\$30	91
Chardonnay Carneros Green Acres Hill 2001	\$35	90
Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2001	\$30	89
Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2000	\$30	88
<b>CHATEAU MONTELENA</b>		
Chardonnay Napa Valley 2001	\$33	83
<b>CHATEAU POTELLE</b>		
Chardonnay Mount Veeder VGS 2001	\$39	91
Chardonnay Mount Veeder VGS Celeste Vineyard Block 2001	\$39	91
<b>CHATEAU SOUVERAIN</b>		
Chardonnay Russian River Valley Winemaker's Reserve 2002	\$25	92
Chardonnay Sonoma County 2002	\$14	91
<b>CHATEAU ST. JEAN</b>		
Chardonnay Alexander Valley Belle Terre Vineyard 2001	\$22	88
Chardonnay Alexander Valley Robert Young Vineyard 2001	\$35	87
Chardonnay Alexander Valley Robert Young Vineyard Reserve 2001	\$35	92
Chardonnay Alexander Valley Robert Young Vineyard Reserve 2000	\$35	92
Chardonnay Sonoma County 2002	\$14	88
Chardonnay Sonoma County Reserve 2001	\$45	91
Chardonnay Sonoma County Reserve 2000	\$45	93
<b>CLOS DU VAL</b>		
Chardonnay Carneros 2002	\$21	86
Chardonnay Napa Valley Carneros Reserve 2001	\$46	87
<b>COOPER</b>		
Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2001	\$20	87