

MaryAnn Worobiec
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Wine Spectator

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12 California Chardonnays

New reviews of outstanding whites from the Russian River Valley and elsewhere in the Golden State

Chardonnays impressed this week in the California office's blind tastings, with plenty of wines to recommend. At the top of the list is Athair, a Sonoma-based brand that makes terrific Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. Captûre, which had already earned praise for its vibrant Sauvignon Blancs, impressed again with a classy, rich Chardonnay.

A trio of Chardonnays from Chasseur showcase winemaker Bill Hunter's knack for sourcing grapes from some of the best vineyards in west Sonoma. Eric Kent founder Kent Humphries continues to make an impression not only with great wine, but also with imaginative and beautiful labels that feature the work of talented artists.

For fans of wine made in an unoaked style, check out the Morgan Metallico Un-Oaked and the Marimar Estate Acero Unoaked. Both of these wines showcase Chardonnays's pure fruit flavors with vibrant acidity.

ATHAIR Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2009 Score: 92 / \$32

A rich, creamy style that serves up lots of flavor, offering ripe pear and apple flavors, with a toasty graham cracker pie crust edge. This lingers, with butterscotch, honeysuckle and smoky wood notes that show a hint of roasted marshmallow. Drink now through 2018. 772 cases made. —J.L.

CAPTÛRE Chardonnay Sonoma County Ma Vie Carol 2010 Score: 92 / \$48

Classy for its rich core of flavors, this touches on citrus, ripe pear, honeydew melon, smoke and wet rock, firming and ending with excellent density and concentration. Drink now through 2018. 372 cases made. —J.L.

CHASSEUR Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Durell 2009 Score: 92 / \$55

Builds on subtle, rich, layers of ripe fig, honeydew melon and light toasty oak. Impressive for its creamy texture and layered finish. Drink now through 2017. 176 cases made. —J.L.

CHASSEUR Chardonnay Russian River Valley Lorenzo 2009 Score: 91 / \$55

Tight and intense, this is marked by green fig, white peach, wet rock and spicy herbal notes. Full-bodied and slow to unwind, but expansive on the finish. Best from 2012 through 2019. 110 cases made. —J.L.

CHASSEUR Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Sangiacomo Green Acres Hill 2009 Score: 91 / \$50

A rich, full-bodied style, with plenty of depth and flavor built around tiers of fig, honeydew melon, green apple and roasted marshmallow. Shows a trace of rawness in the texture, but otherwise very complete. Drink now through 2018. 176 cases made. —J.L.

DEHLINGER Chardonnay Russian River Valley Un-Filtered 2008 Score: 91 / \$37

Fresh and floral, with white peach and honeydew melon flavors that show hints of honey and honeysuckle. Medium- to full-bodied and creamy-textured, ending with a subtle, graceful finish. Drink now through 2017. 1,540 cases made. —J.L.

ERIC KENT Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2009 Score: 91 / \$40

Clean and vibrant, with a refreshing mix of tangy nectarine, white peach, honeysuckle and citrus flavors. Medium- to full-bodied, ending with mouthwatering acidity that sustains the flavors. Drink now through 2016. 162 cases made. —*J.L.*

FOLEY Chardonnay Sta. Rita Hills JA Ranch 2008 Score: 91 / \$45

Deliciously complex and layered, with tiers of ripe peach, pear, fig and honeysuckle that are supple and graceful, holding its focus and gaining depth on the finish. Drink now through 2018. 335 cases made. —*J.L.*

MORGAN Chardonnay Monterey Metallico Un-Oaked 2010 Score: 91 / \$20

Fresh and lively, with attractive floral, honeydew and honeysuckle scents that are pure, ripe and refreshing on the palate, with a mix of white peach and nectarine. Drink now through 2017. 5,325 cases made. —*J.L.*

CUVAISON Chardonnay Napa Valley ATS Selection 2009 Score: 90 / \$54

Young, tight and concentrated, this is slow to show its creamy vanilla-laced oak, ripe pear, apricot, fig and melon flavors. Full-bodied, ending with an enticing aftertaste of smoky oak and roasted marshmallow. Drink now through 2017. 371 cases made. —*J.L.*

MACROSTIE Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Wildcat Mountain Vineyard 2008 Score: 90 / \$35

Rich and creamy, well-oaked and complex, with a mix of peach, tangerine and nectarine flavors that are pure and silky, ending with a dash of cedar. Drink now through 2016. 1,013 cases made. —*J.L.*

MARIMAR ESTATE Chardonnay Russian River Valley Don Miguel Vineyard Acero Unoaked 2009 Score: 90 / \$29

Clean and sleek, with a trim beam of fresh apple, honeydew melon, citrus and Key lime flavors. Medium-bodied, ending with a lovely mouthwatering finish. Drink now through 2016. 2,129 cases made. —*J.L.*