

# Forbes

The Best Surefire Chardonnays From California

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Even though it is by far America's most popular white wine, among some wine snoots Chardonnay will never get a nod. In large part because of the flood of mediocre, over-oaked, acid-poor California bottlings in the 1990, there arose an unofficial group called the "Anything But Chardonnay Club" because the wine seemed to be inundating American dinner tables.

To be sure, there were a lot of dreadful Chards brimming over both small and large wineries at a time when the American preference was for Chards that tasted by burnt oak slathered in caramel. The problem is that Chardonnay, unlike Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc, does not have a distinctive flavor all of its own and is therefore easily manipulated to taste like whatever is the prevailing style. For that reason sunny California vintners made unbalanced, taffy-like wines with unconscionable alcohol levels.

Fortunately, although such wines are still out there in abundance, California and Pacific Northwest estates aim for more balance and nuance, emphasizing the fruit, not the oak, and making fresher wines with more acid. Here is Part One of a good number of these well-made and delicious Chardonnays.

**ALMA ROSA EL JABALI 2021. Located in the southern sector of the Sta, Rita Hills, with clay-rich soils, whose weather was ideal in 2021. The El Jabali vineyards date to 1983 when planted by Richard Sanford, so maturity, as well as experience, is on its side. I like the minerals here but also the sea salt in this fine example from a fine vintage.**

