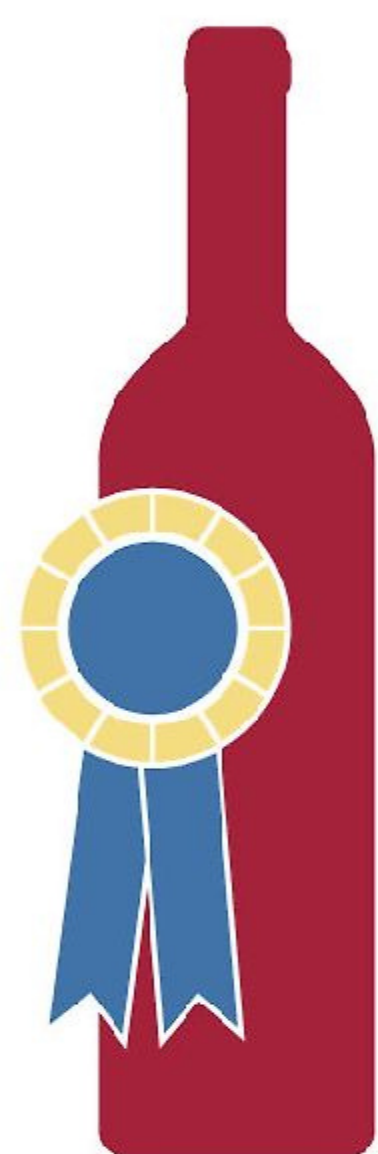


Wine Spectator

WineSpectator.com



Wine Value of the Year

Red, white or sparkling...
Who will take the No. 1 spot in
our annual list of Top 10 Values?



Smart Buys Editors' Picks for \$40 or Less



Vintage Port Tasting Report

Focus on California Whites



New York Wine Experience Highlights

141 GREAT WINES



EVERYDAY MOMENTS

**SMART BUYS FOR
WEEKNIGHT DINNERS,
MOVIES AT HOME,
SUNDAY BRUNCHES
AND ALL THE DAILY
OCCASIONS IN BETWEEN**

Illustrations by Till Lukat

You've just gotten home from work, and you want a glass of something crisp and refreshing while you cook a simple pasta for your family. You and your partner finally have time after a long day, and you want something rich and complex while you catch up on your favorite show. You're out for a Sunday ride, and you need a food-friendly bubbly for your picnic. Your friends are gathering for game night, and you need a fruity, zesty red that

goes well with pizza.

The affordably priced recommendations in this package, from an array of regions across the globe, are all wines that meet the moment, pairing perfectly with those everyday occasions that seem ordinary at the time but that truly make the days feel special. These aren't big celebrations or holidays; these are events that don't take much planning, but they are the moments you look forward to—and that you remember.

CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAY

LOOK FOR DEALS AMONG REGIONAL BLENDS AND WITHIN UNDER-THE-RADAR APPELLATIONS | *By MaryAnn Worobiec*

Recommending that wine lovers seek out Chardonnay is a bit of a no-brainer, given that Chardonnay is America's favorite white wine. But the strategy of looking for the best, most affordable bottlings from high-end producers takes a little more planning.

When seeking out value wines, you should skip the single-vineyard options and look instead at a winery's regional blend. Site-specific wines are fascinating for how they show the transparency of place that Chardonnay achieves so successfully, yet a wider appellation blend is more likely to showcase a house style, as well as consistency from vintage to vintage, while offering more bang for your buck.

One terrific example is MacRostie's Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2021, whose grapes come from several prime vineyards in Sonoma, including Sangiacomo, Ricci, Dutton and Martinelli. Winemaker Heidi Bridenhagen coaxes plenty of flavor from this fruit; following gentle whole-cluster pressing, the majority of the grapes were fermented in French oak barrels: 14% new and 15% used

HOT TIP

Although retail shelves still carry a wide range of styles when it comes to California Chardonnay, examples above the \$20 price tag rarely display the caricature qualities (oaky and buttery) that used to be popular among consumers. Today, the majority of Chardonnay bottlings are made in a more modern style, balancing their fruit flavors with fresh acidity and only a light kiss of oak.



J. Lohr winemaker Kristen Barnhisel

once, with the rest in neutral barrels. Nearly a quarter of the wine was fermented in stainless steel to preserve the fresh fruit notes, with only partial malolactic conversion (also to preserve freshness).

The Diatom Chardonnay Santa Barbara County 2021 is another regional blend, in this case showcasing the cool climate of Santa Barbara. The winery is the second label of Greg Brewer, the minimalist winemaker for Brewer-Clifton, who lets the grapes take center stage. With Diatom, he strives for an even purer expression of Chardonnay; the wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks, with malolactic conversion blocked. The result is a concentrated and mouthwatering laser beam of fruit flavors and minerality.

Another strategy is to look to regions beyond Sonoma and Santa Barbara.

MaryAnn Worobiec's Smart Buys in California Chardonnay

- 93 \$25 Diatom** Chardonnay Santa Barbara County 2021
- 93 \$32 Domaine Eden** Chardonnay Santa Cruz Mountains 2019
- 92 \$18 Reata** Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2021
- 92 \$25 Chalk Hill** Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2021
- 92 \$28 MacRostie** Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2021
- 92 \$35 Neyers** Chardonnay Sonoma County 304 2022
- 92 \$40 Frank Family** Chardonnay Carneros 2021
- 92 \$40 Rombauer** Chardonnay Carneros 2021
- 91 \$22 Wente** Chardonnay Arroyo Seco Riva Ranch Vineyard 2021
- 91 \$25 J. Lohr** Chardonnay Arroyo Seco October Night 2021

ACAGIA PRODUCTIONS