

CHRIS KNAP'S
WINE of the WEEK



Rich Frank's new show business

RATING: ★★★★★

2004 Frank Family Vineyards Napa Valley Chardonnay

Former Disney Studios executive Rich Frank bought the 110-year-old Larkmead Winery in 1992 after receiving a midnight phone call from Napa winemaker Koerner Rombauer, who proceeded to reverse his earlier advice – that Frank should stay out of the wine business. At the time, Kornell Champagne Cellars, then owner of the historic sandstone building, was offering it for sale, and Rombauer suggested that if Frank really wanted in, now was the time. Today Frank and Rombauer are partners in Frank Family Vineyards, as well as in Napa Cellars in Oakville, a second label that makes more affordable wines.

The sumptuous winemaking style showcased in Rombauer's eponymous brand carries over to this week's wine, Frank Family's 2004 Napa Valley Chardonnay. It's a big, rich wine clocking in at 14.4 percent alcohol, perhaps too big for some tastes, but I thought it was nicely balanced. Baked apple and lemon meringue dominate, with hints of butterscotch and cinnamon on the finish. There's nicely integrated oak on the finish with a slight note of bitter almond.

This is not a wine to pour with shellfish – a big wine will run roughshod over delicate fish – but it's perfect with meatier meals like roast turkey and stuffing, mahi-mahi or swordfish. In the summer I might even try it with steak tacos. Lots of folks carry Frank Family's Cabernets, but this wine was just released this fall and is a little harder to find. I unearthed it at the Wine Room in Irvine. The winery says some Beverages & More stores have it as well, although it's not on the bevmo Web site.

Region: Napa Valley

Varietal: Chardonnay

Price: \$32.50 at www.frankfamilyvineyards.com