

Retrospective

CHARDONNAY



VINTAGES 1973 – 2010

CHARDONNAY RETROSPECTIVE TASTING NOTES

1973 – Drink Now or Forever Hold Your Peach

Our maiden vintage of Chardonnay enjoyed balmy spring days, a warm summer and excellent growing conditions. Still lively today but its tropical, peachy beauty has faded, replaced by intriguing café au lait and crème caramel tones. Definitely one to drink now.

1974 – Faded Beauty

A great vintage that benefited from warm spring and summer weather and ideal growing conditions. Hints remain of its once lovely floral, white peach and oak aromas, but it is now decidedly oxidized and past its prime.

1975 – Ready to Go

A very cool vintage in which budbreak, bloom, grape set and harvest were all pushed back. This wine still shows some attractive floral, melon, citrus and spice notes, but it's on the tired side and best enjoyed now before it loses its remaining zip.

1976 – High and Dry

Named "Best Chardonnay in the World" at the World Wine Olympics in Paris in 1979, our 1976 Chardonnay originated from the first of two consecutive drought years, which served to concentrate fruit flavors. Perhaps as a result, the wine is alive and kicking with complex citrus, Asian pear, golden raisin, spice and walnut tones enlivened by still-vibrant acidity. Drink now.

1977 – Star of the Decade?

Here's another drought year wine that retains remarkable appeal after all these years. Bright and crisp, with lemon curd, honey and pine flavors and plenty of acidity to give it some verve, the wine has an attractive mouthfeel enriched by evident oak. No need to age it further, though, as it's delightful now.

1978 – And the Rains Came

After two drought years, the heavens opened, dumping 50 inches of rain on Napa Valley prior to a scorching September that ripened everything simultaneously. The refreshed vines responded by giving us a lovely Chardonnay that still boasts plentiful apple, citrus and stone fruit coupled with hints of marzipan, buttercream, honey and caramel. Delicious now.

1979 – A Blessedly 'Normal' Vintage

After the weather extremes of the previous three years, 1979 brought ideal growing conditions prior to a ten-day heat wave in early-mid September. The wine offers pleasing red delicious apple, lemon and peach/nectarine flavors with notes of buttercream, honey, savory herbs and caramelized sugar. Quite tasty and ready to drink.

1980 – Fruitcake Wine

A cool growing season followed by a late, intense warm spell led to one of the quickest harvests on record. The result was a big-bodied Chardonnay that today reveals melon and honey flavors with a sherry-like edge. Rich and intense, yet fairly well-balanced, the wine also carries hints of raisins and candied orange peel. Drink now.

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1981 – Hot and Early

One of the warmest growing seasons ever recorded in Napa Valley resulted in early budbreak and an early harvest. While displaying intriguing oatmeal raisin, cinnamon apple, almond and light lemon tones, the well-balanced flavors are oxidized and, frankly, there's not much left here to crow about.

1982 – Washout

Following record rains in the winter of 1981/82, a cool, foggy June and July delayed ripening, leading many growers to thin their crops. Heavy rains in September fostered rot, and a fine October could not save the day. True to the vintage, the Chardonnay is watery and oxidized, with some vaguely pleasing caramel apple and crème brûlée tones, but not enough to redeem it.

1983 – Out of Time

An exceptionally wet winter gave way to a cool spring, followed by record-breaking heat. Both rain and heat challenged vintners at harvest. Those crushing at optimum maturity produced wines with concentrated, full flavors. Although the wine has some pleasant pear and apple fruit left, complemented by toasted oak tones, its drink-by date has passed.

1984 – Good Vintage for Cabernet

As a result of a hot growing season tempered by adequate soil moisture, our vines produced fine fruit and the grapes were harvested in excellent condition. However, the year was better for Cabernet than Chardonnay and this wine displays a mix of Granny Smith apple, forest-floor spice, butterscotch and honey flavors that have seen better days.

1985 – Vintage of the Decade

1985 was one of the finest growing seasons ever at Trefethen. A warm spring enabled the vines to bloom perfectly and set a balanced crop. After a long, temperate summer, our Chardonnay grapes were harvested with excellent acidity and deep, bold flavors. Not surprisingly, the 1985 Chardonnay is among our better efforts of the 1980s, showing lively citrus and caramel apple flavors.

1986 – 86xed

The city of Napa flooded in February, but spring was warm, followed by a cooler-than-normal summer and a harvest bearing healthy yields of high-quality fruit. Unfortunately, this wine has not held up well in the bottle, displaying musty marzipan and mushroom-y aromas and flavors.

1987 – Light and Lovely

Above-normal spring and summer temperatures led to one of Napa Valley's earliest-ever harvests, with atypically low yields, but excellent quality. Accordingly, our 1987 Chardonnay displays fine color, structure and acid balance, with youthful pink grapefruit and lemon curd flavors coupled with bright mineral and wet rock tones. Drink now or hold for a few more years.

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1988 – A Taste of the Tropics

Due to erratic weather during spring bloom, crop size was relatively small, although grape quality was high. An early harvest produced excellent fruit with concentrated flavors. The 1988 Chardonnay displays fresh citrus and tropical fruit notes with vanillin oak tones and a slightly tart, astringent finish. Enjoy it now and over the next couple years.

1989 – Ixnay on the Chardonnay

Rain disrupted the Chardonnay harvest to the degree that we never released the vintage commercially. Tasting the wine now reveals the wisdom of that decision, as it's redolent of cooked apple juice and sherry, not a pleasant combination. As Orson Welles once said, "We will sell no wine before it's time," and this is one wine whose time is never coming.

1990 – Earthy and Gallic

1990 was a drought year in Napa Valley, but May storms rescued the vintage. Summer weather was fairly cool, warming up just in time for harvest, which was earlier than usual and yielded an excellent crop. Somewhat French in style, the wine offers pear, lemon-lime, mineral and tea-leaf notes with hints of oak and a pronounced earthiness. Decant and drink now.

1991 – One Cool Customer

A cool summer delayed the start of harvest until late September, nearly a month later than usual. We feared spending Thanksgiving crushing grapes, but completed harvest on October 29. Reflecting the cool season, the wine displays bright green apple, pear and citrus fruit mingled with crème brûlée and mineral notes. Still kickin'; it's ready to enjoy now.

1992 – Generous

Mother Nature sent us nearly a year's worth of rain in February, but warm summer days with cool nights provided ideal growing conditions. The 1992 is a generous wine with plenty of texture and complexity. Displaying baked pear, apple pie, honey and nutmeg aromas, its rich, full, slightly oxidized flavors finish with warm lime and pineapple tones. Drink now.

1993 – Chablis in Napa?

A wet first quarter brought over 46 inches of rain to Napa Valley and a cool summer further delayed maturation of the grapes. Warm temperatures in August accelerated ripening and a hot September resulted in a hectic harvest. This is another faux-Frenchie, with steely mineral, wet rock and earth tones suggesting a wine from France's Chablis region. Decant and drink now.

1994 – Yum!

A cool August and mild September ushered in a relaxed harvest of clean, mature grapes possessing ideal sugar-acid balances. The 1994 Chardonnay boasts tropical, floral, citrus, pear and light herb aromas with full, rich flavors and a bracing, lemony finish. It's a fine wine at its peak, so drink away.

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1995 – Let's Drop Some Acid

Heavy winter and spring rains led to late flowering of the vines, and a hot summer resulted in reduced yields of small berries with soft acidity. Perhaps as a result of its low acid, the wine is clearly past its prime, although it still shows some peach, honey and bread dough notes amidst its more prominent oxidized tones.

1996 – Talented, but a Little Crazy

A warm, wet winter, early budbreak and topsy-turvy summer weather produced an early, bountiful harvest of grapes with surprisingly concentrated flavors. The 1996 Chardonnay offers perfumed apple, citrus and honeydew melon aromas, with notes of marshmallow, mineral, stone and orange peel. Rich and smooth, yet somewhat oxidized and volatile, it's best consumed soon.

1997 – Young at Heart

A mild winter followed by an early, dry spring and ideal summer weather resulted in the earliest harvest in Trefethen's 30-year history. In the classic Trefethen style, the wine boasts bright floral, melon, citrus and tropical scents and round, balanced flavors nicely matured by bottle age. Still youthful, but probably best consumed in the near term.

1998 – Blame it on El Niño

A strong El Niño year, 1998 will long be remembered for its extreme and challenging weather, with endless spring rains and cool temperatures reducing yields and causing poor cluster development. As a result, our 1998 Chardonnay is one for the (dark) ages. Oxidized, sherry-like and bitter, it will not be getting better any time soon.

1999 – Come on Baby, Light My Fire

After a growing season characterized by modest temperatures and morning fog, grapegrowers were happy campers when the last weeks of September turned warm and sunny. While our 1999 Chardonnay boasts some nice citrus, apple and peach fruit, it also displays a somewhat off-putting burnt matchstick tone. So, if you like smoky, this could be your wine. Drink now.

2000 – Send in the Clones

A warm spring, with perfect budbreak and grape set, and a relatively cool summer led to a leisurely harvest with excellent yields and high-quality fruit. Our 2000 Chardonnay—the first we made from imported French Dijon clones—is a dandy, with generous pear, pineapple, grilled peach, nutmeg, buttercream and honey flavors. Drink now or hold for a few more years.

2001 – Warm Days

An early, warm spring, heat spikes in May and June, and a beautiful summer with warm days and cool mornings created ideal conditions for optimal flavor development in our grapes. The 2001 Chardonnay is redolent of lemon cream, pineapple, stone fruit, honey and cream soda, with rich, full flavors balanced by bright acidity and mineral tones in the long finish. Drink now.

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2002 – Crowd Pleaser

The 2002 growing season was a wild ride of heat spikes followed by cooler weather. Grape sugars increased dramatically as harvest neared, but temperatures leveled off and a welcome balance of acid and sugar was achieved. Offering pleasing lemon butter, honey and toasted oak tones with good acidity, it should be enjoyed soon.

2003 – Topsy-Turvy

The roller-coaster 2003 vintage featured a warm, late winter; cool, wet spring and temperate summer with several late-September heat spikes. Classic autumn weather extended harvest by several weeks, producing grapes with ripe flavors and healthy acidity. Our 2003 Chardonnay boasts pretty cantaloupe, grapefruit and pineapple aromas with enticing buttercream and honey notes. Drink now.

2004 – Savory Sipper

An unusually warm, dry spring led to early budbreak and an early harvest. Summer was warm, with early September bringing a memorable heat spell. The early-season heat stress produced small grape clusters and berries with intense aromas and flavors. The rich lemon meringue and oaky/buttery scents, have an edge of green onion. Decant and drink now.

2005 – Caramel Macchiato, You Say?

A warm, late winter instigated early budbreak, but persistent spring rains set back vine development. Mild summer temperatures resulted in slow, even ripening, with a classic Indian summer bringing the harvest to fruition. The wine is well-rounded and balanced with apple, citrus, butter and caramel macchiato tones. Slightly oxidized, it's ready to drink now.

2006 – Honey Pie

Among the longest growing seasons we've experienced at Trefethen resulted from an unusually cool, wet spring, mild summer weather, and a cool, prolonged harvest season. Honeyed tropical fruit aromas with full-bodied lemon cream pie flavors add to this pretty and well-structured wine. It's delightful now, but should age well for another few years.

2007 – Lucky Seven

After a relatively dry winter, budbreak and bloom came earlier than usual. With less vine foliage, the grapes enjoyed ample sunshine during a beautiful summer with ideal growing conditions. The 2007 Chardonnay displays bright, full-bodied, tropical fruit flavors complemented by vanilla, buttercream and baking spice tones and balanced by good acidity. Drink or hold.

2008 – Frost Worth the Cost

Severe spring frosts significantly reduced crop loads, but a splendid summer and fall resulted in grapes with wonderfully concentrated flavors. Complex aromas of spring flowers, lemon zest, peach, ginger, nutmeg and caramel, with youthful flavors are enriched by subtle oak, herb and butter tones. It will profit from a few more years of aging.

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2009 – Classic Trefethen

An excellent, even-keeled vintage in Napa Valley with consistently mild weather throughout the growing and harvest seasons resulted in stress-free vines, long grape hang times and finely developed flavors. The 2009 Chardonnay boasts gorgeously fresh aromas of jasmine, green banana, guava and tarragon, with exuberantly fruity flavors. Still developing, it will reward several more years' cellaring.

2010 – Great Chardonnay for a New Decade

A cool, wet spring and mild summer produced the coolest growing season since 1978. Fortunately, September and October brought enough warmth to provide a beautiful finish to the growing season. The 2010 Chardonnay boasts textured, juicy fruit—lemon-lime, orange blossom and white peach—coupled with floral, piecrust and thyme scents. Youthfully taut, it should develop beautifully in bottle.