

Liquid Gold | 7 Splendid Napa Valley Chardonnays

BY FRAN MILLER March 16, 2022



**Cabernet Sauvignon may be king in Napa Valley,
but Chardonnay is the reigning queen.**

The majority of Napa Valley wine attention is directed toward Cabernet Sauvignon, but this world-class grape growing region is also well-regarded for its stellar Chardonnay, known to fans as liquid gold. And sure enough, there is plenty of gold to be found in Napa's vine-covered hills and dales.

Throw a grape nearly anywhere within this 30-mile-long valley and you're sure to strike any number of Chardonnay producers, their products of which range from fresh minerality to rich

buttery oak. The varied flavor profiles, styles and price points of these particular favorites illustrate that there is a Chardonnay for every taste preference. In Napa, Cabernet may be king, but Chardonnay is definitely queen.

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LA JOTA VINEYARD CO. 2019 W.S. KEYES CHARDONNAY

This former 'ghost' winery (those abandoned during prohibition) established in 1898 found a second life in 1982 when its label was revived. The original stone winery still stands in the hills east of Angwin, atop Howell Mountain, where 28 acres are planted across three distinct estate vineyards, producing small lots of mountain Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and this luscious Chardonnay.

This inaugural vintage of the **La Jota W.S. Keyes Vineyard Chardonnay** reflects a stunning sense of place. 2019 brought winter rain, frequent fog events in the spring, and a mild summer with just a few short heat spikes. Uneventful fall weather allowed for extended hang time, resulting in captured characters of stone fruit, apple/pear, and minerality. With this wine, every effort was made to minimize the effects of winemaking and highlight the vineyard itself.

2020 FAR NIENTE ESTATE BOTTLED CHARDONNAY, NAPA VALLEY

Far Niente Chardonnay is a blend of the winery's superlative Napa Valley vineyards located in the Coombsville AVA, a cool growing region nestled in the rolling countryside and protected by the hills east of the city of Napa.

Well-drained, gravelly loam and volcanic ash soils result in the subtle, tropical flavors, complex aromas, and uncommon richness that have long been associated with this richly aromatic wine with notes of white fig. Flavors slowly build on the palate, progressing from silky notes of honeydew, nectarine and lemon zest to a finish of elegant, toasted oak. This wine will continue to gain richness and complexity in the bottle and glass.

PALMAZ VINEYARDS 2018 AMALIA CHARDONNAY

With its combination of Argentinian roots, 19th century California history, a depth and breadth of fine wines, an ambitious culinary program, and show-stopping architecture and technology, Palmaz is one of Napa's most distinctive wineries.

The beautiful pale yellow color of the 2018 Amalia Chardonnay (named in honor of proprietor Amalia Palmaz) glimmers in the glass. Its aromatic notes of honeysuckle and tart green apple are enticing. Hints of mango and papaya dance across the palate and are perfectly balanced with a splash of white pepper and toasted honeycomb. The finish is everlasting. This one begs for shrimp quenelles or a pan seared squab.



TREFETHEN 2019 KATIE'S ACRE CHARDONNAY

One of Napa's pioneering wineries, Trefethen Family Vineyards was founded in 1968; its first commercial wine was released in 1973. Just three years later, its 1976 Chardonnay earned 'Best Chardonnay in the World' honors at the 1979 Gault Milau World Wine Olympics in Paris. More than five decades later, this Oak Knoll winery remains family-owned and committed to crafting 100% estate-grown wines, such as this Katie's Acre Chardonnay, an exceptional, single-vineyard expression named for winery co-founder Katie Tefethen.

Complex and round with concentrated citrus and tropical fruit flavors enhanced with just a touch of toast, it is bright and full-bodied with layered notes of almond, quince and a distinct salinity. This wine pairs beautifully with sushi, shellfish and flaky white fish.

DAVIS ESTATES 2019 CHARDONNAY

This Calistoga winery is owned and operated by the Davis family who purchased the century-old wine estate a decade ago. Their ambitious restoration project has resulted in a distinguished, world-class, sustainable facility, filled with art, artifacts and—of course—delicious small production wines.

A beautiful outdoor terrace is the perfect spot to sample, and affords sweeping panoramic views of the northern Napa Valley and the estate's grounds. This 2019 Davis Estates Chardonnay radiates a beautiful gold color in the glass. The nose opens with notes of lemon peel and slate minerality then transforms into subtle aromas of green apple and brown pear. A rich and creamy texture features flavors of caramelized brown sugar and baking spices. Lychee and butterscotch notes come through on the back palate, and it all comes home with a round silky finish.

CAKEBREAD CELLARS 2020 NAPA VALLEY CHARDONNAY

Cakebread was founded nearly 50 years ago by Jack and Dolores Cakebread whose first ever release was a 1973 Napa Valley Chardonnay. Sons Bruce and Dennis own and operate the winery today; the duo has admirably stewarded the iconic winery towards sustainability and conservation.

Throughout its history, Cakebread has built a reputation for gracious hospitality and exceptional wines, such as this 2020 Cakebread Chardonnay. Featuring aromas of ripe golden apple, white peach, and light oak, and notes of minerality, its finish is clean, with appealing hints of lemon. Try this one with grilled seafood and nearly any selection of cheeses, or check out the recipe portion of their [website](#) where they share a multitude of perfectly paired dishes.

FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS 2020 CARNEROS CHARDONNAY

Drawing on years of expertise and skill, Frank Family winemaker Todd Graff and his cellar team continually elevate the Frank Family portfolio, producing fan-favorite, critically acclaimed wines year after year. Graff has built a reputation for crafting wines that achieve the highest caliber each varietal can offer, sourced from 380-acres of prime Napa Valley estate vineyards and trusted grower-partners.

There is no better expression of Frank Family's classic California style than their well-executed, stylistically-true, and super popular Carneros Chardonnay. This wine is 100% Carneros-grown Chardonnay. Barrel fermented in 34% new, 33% once and 33% twice-filled French oak barrels for 9 months. While ageing on the lees, the wine was hand stirred regularly to promote depth and longevity.

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