

# Real Sommeliers Drink California Chardonnay Instead Of French Burgundy

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/katiebell/2012/07/11/real-sommeliers-drink-california-chardonnay-instead-of-french-burgundy/>

July 17, 2012

It's  
accepted

Talley Vineyards Poster



knowledge that anyone with wine drinking credentials, sommeliers and wine educators you know who you are, openly sniff at most California Chardonnay. If you put a bunch of experts in a room with California Chardonnays on one side and French white Burgundy (also made from Chardonnay) on the other side, they'd all make a beeline for the French wines. I'm guilty of this blatant wine discrimination as well, I'd be right there with them. My perceptions have been skewed by too many over-ripe, buttery, oaky relatively boring Chardonnay wines, mainly from California. At the same time, I have been seduced by the more refreshing, crisp and mineral charms of French Chardonnay.

So it was with great curiosity that I accepted an opportunity to taste a vertical (meaning the same wine from several different vintages) of [Talley Chardonnay](#) from California's Arroyo Grande and Edna Valleys. Owner Brian Talley, and his talented winemaker, Eric Johnson, have been fighting Chardonnay's negative image for years, "I tell people Chardonnay doesn't have to be oaky and fat, we can get refreshing minerality from areas in California that are cool enough."

Talley insists that the fruit growing in his cooler-climate vineyards produces wines that are quite similar to French Burgundies—with a few exceptions: his wines are far less costly (his most expensive single-vineyard Chardonnay is \$46, whereas a Brocard Les Clos Grand Cru Chablis 2009 Chardonnay starts at around \$67) and they tend to be a nudge richer. Talley notes, "We are located in a very special area, the south central coast of California, right on the ocean. It's very cool which means our wines retain a lot of natural acidity. Good acidity is the key to balance and age-worthiness." It's also the key to a more classical, French style of wine.

The vertical tasting was a revealing and rewarding experience. Talley's current release wines (2010) gave off racy, fresh minerality and mouth-watering acidity, clementine and lemon-lime notes (insert your favorite citrus here). The wines were lively, young and energetic. The wines from '06, '05, '04, and '01 offered more spiciness, with nutmeg, some tropical notes and softer edges on the palate; we even tasted a hint of toasted marshmallow.

But it was the series from the 1990's (1997, 1995, 1994, 1992) that captured our imagination. The difference in taste, color and weight was remarkable. The more mature wines just called for food: chicken with lemon cream sauce, lobster, creamy risotto. The color over time softened into a rich gold, and the wines showed their maturity with mature aromas such as apricot, lemon cream, brioche and toasted nuts complimented by peach and honey. I would confidently put any of the Talley wines toe to toe with Grand Cru French Burgundy.

Talley made his statement; not all California Chardonnays are equal, and California Chardonnays crafted in a classical style and grown in cooler climates deserve respect. They also merit a place in your cellar, to be savored today and twenty years from now.

### **What we tasted:**

[2010, 1994, 1992 Estate Chardonnay, \\$26](#)

[2010, 2001, 1995 Rosemary's Vineyard Chardonnay, \\$46](#)

[2010, 2006, 1997 Rincon Vineyard Chardonnay, \\$42](#)

[2010 Oliver's Vineyard Chardonnay, \\$32](#)

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### **Other Cool Climate Chardonnays**

[Laetitia Arroyo Grande Valley Chardonnay, 2010](#)

[Foley Chardonnay, Bar Lazy S Ranch 2009](#)

[Brewer-Clifton 2010 Mount Carmel Chardonnay](#)

[Sandhi Rita's Crown Chardonnay, 2010](#)

### **And a French wine for comparison:**

[William Fevre Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 2009](#)

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