

## Eats

### America's favorite wine: The Chardonnay Symposium celebrates best-selling wine varietal

BY WENDY THIES SELL

#### A PERSONAL POUR



*Mendocino County-based winemaker Neil Bernardi offered a taste of his cool-climate Migration chardonnay at The Chardonnay Symposium in Pismo Beach on May 17.*

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#### PHOTO BY WENDY THIES SELL

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Whether you like chardonnay that tastes and smells like creamy vanilla or you lean more toward crisp citrus, there are plenty of chardonnay styles for you and for every preference in between.

Last month I attended an annual weekend wine event, The Chardonnay Symposium, which celebrates America's best-selling wine varietal.

Producers from around the world gathered at Dolphin Bay Resort & Spa in Pismo Beach to pour their newly released chardonnays and, in some cases, older vintages.

Lucky for us, the Central Coast is producing outstanding chardonnays for every taste.

Rich buttery chardonnays with hints of vanilla likely go through malolactic fermentation and are aged in newer oak.

On the other hand, higher-acid chardonnays usually spend more time in cement or stainless steel tanks or neutral barrels than new oak barrels, letting the fruit shine.

Of course there are other factors that impact chardonnay: ripeness when picked, soil, and climate, just to name a few.

Personally, I appreciate almost the entire chardonnay spectrum, but I always seek out wines that are balanced.

## WINE, GLORIOUS WINE



*One of several Talley Vineyards chardonnays, Oliver's Vineyard, is lively and elegant with Talley's trademark lemon aromas and flavor (\$36).*

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## PHOTO BY WENDY THIES SELL

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During the grand tasting, I asked several local wine producers to describe their favorite styles of chardonnay, which in every case, also happens to be the kind of wine they make.

Brian Talley, owner of Talley Vineyards in the Arroyo Grande Valley, said, "My favorite chardonnay is one that emphasizes lemony freshness," like a Talley chardonnay.

"One of my favorite things is lemon meringue pie," he added enthusiastically.

Talley poured three lovely 2012 vineyard designated chardonnays at The Chardonnay Symposium: Oliver's Vineyard, Rincon Vineyard, and Rosemary's Vineyard, all with notes of—you guessed it—lemon.

Paula Dooley, co-owner of Stephen Ross Wine Cellars, said, "My favorite style of chardonnay is a bright, crisp, fruit-driven wine with a touch of French oak for structure, and a nice, long, clean finish."

## BALANCED BOTTLES



*Qupé Bien Nacido Reserve chardonnay successfully integrates oak while remaining fresh and crisp.*

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**PHOTO BY WENDY THIES SELL**

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description is not unlike the rich 2012 Stephen Ross Edna Valley Chardonnay that she was pouring for attendees of the symposium.

Chardonnay grapes grown in San Luis Obispo's Edna Valley typically have tropical flavors.

Louisa Lindquist of Qupé Wines told me, "I love chardonnay that's grown in a cooler climate—the way it's supposed to be made—aged on oak with malolactic fermentation. ... Not an oak bomb, not a fruit bomb—it's balanced."

Qupé has a three-decade history of producing chardonnay from the Bien Nacido Vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley. Lindquist poured impressive new releases and several library chardonnays; Qupé whites are known for aging remarkably well.

## FROM THE MILLER FAMILY



*Two impressive examples of differing chardonnay styles made under the same roof in the Santa Maria Valley: Solomon Hills and Bien Nacido chardonnays.*

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**PHOTO BY WENDY THIES SELL**

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Liquid Farm's personable winemaker James Sparks added that he likes different styles of chardonnay, but especially an approach "that allows grapes to express themselves in the best ways, finding balance and complexity."

The last chardonnay that I tasted was my favorite of the day; Migration's 2012 Santa Maria Valley Dierberg Vineyard chardonnay is a beautifully balanced bright wine with peach and white flower aromatics.

Migration Winery in Mendocino County is part of Duckhorn Wine Company.

Migration winemaker Neil Bernardi told me, "What I go for when I make chardonnay is I want to be on the nice edge between lean and fat. That's the beauty of chardonnay; you can make it on a fat style or a lean style, and it really responds well to what we do to it, whether it's barrels or fermentation or how ripe we pick it. So, I want fresh aromatics ... I want the oak to be judicious; I don't want it to be overblown. I want it to appeal to everybody, really."

Mark your calendar; the dates are already set for the next Chardonnay Symposium: June 5 through 7, 2015, again held at Dolphin Bay Resort & Spa.

*Sun wine and food columnist Wendy Thies Sell believes that balance is key in everything. Contact her at [wthies@santamariasun.com](mailto:wthies@santamariasun.com).*

## THIS WINE SOARS



*This sophisticated, lush chardonnay, sourced from Dierberg Vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley, is made by Migration Wines in Hopland (\$55).*

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PHOTO BY WENDY THIES SELL

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## Chillin' and grillin'

*Tickets are on sale for the annual **Sta. Rita Hills Wine & Fire Weekend** Aug. 15 through 17. The event kicks off with a Friday night barn party at the historic Sanford and Benedict barn, followed by Saturday seminars and a lunch, and the finale is the grand tasting in the beautiful courtyard at La Purisima Mission, Lompoc, featuring 40 wineries and local chefs grilling culinary delights for attendees. Go to [staritahills.com](http://staritahills.com) for details.*

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