

What To Drink Now: Aged Chardonnay from Talley Vineyards

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Drinking an aged Chardonnay is not the norm, especially one that doesn't come from Meursault or Montrachet in Burgundy. Most Chardonnay drinkers prefer to enjoy this white while it is still fresh and crisp, shortly after bottling when the wine matches its fruit flavors with vibrant acidity.

However, when made from high quality grapes with balanced acidity, smart use of oak, a hands-off terroir driven wine making approach and, perhaps the most important requirement, proper storage, a nicely aged Chardonnay from anywhere in the world has the ability to age upwards of 20 years. Brian Talley of [Talley Vineyards](#), just south of San Luis Obispo in California's Central Coast, is out to prove this by traveling to select cities to let restaurateurs and journalists taste his well aged wine, including Dallas last week.

Brian and I had dinner the other evening to see if his theory is correct. Over cold melon soup, a salad of grilled stone fruit and arugula, and roasted halibut with sweet Texas corn and shitakes we tasted through three flights of Chardonnay ranging from the current release of 2010 back to 1994 from three of Talley's vineyards in Arroyo Grande and Edna Valley, both heavily influenced by the maritime climate coming off the Pacific Ocean.

Brian is a part of the third generation of Talley's to farm land in the Arroyo Grande Valley, starting in the 1940's with Brian's grandfather, Oliver, growing vegetables like peppers, broccoli and cauliflower in the sandy loam and clay filled soils. Talley Farms continues today, shipping produce like avocados, cilantro, squash, spinach and arugula, all over the country.

Oliver's son and Brian's father, Don, began working in the family farming business in the 1960's and throughout the 1970's tested their soils to see if they were suitable for growing wine grapes. The tests said yes and the first vineyards were planted in the early 1980's, with the first vintage of Talley wines produced and bottled in 1986.

Today Talley has over 190 acres planted with grape vines throughout Southern San Luis Obispo County, farmed with quality and long-term sustainability in mind.





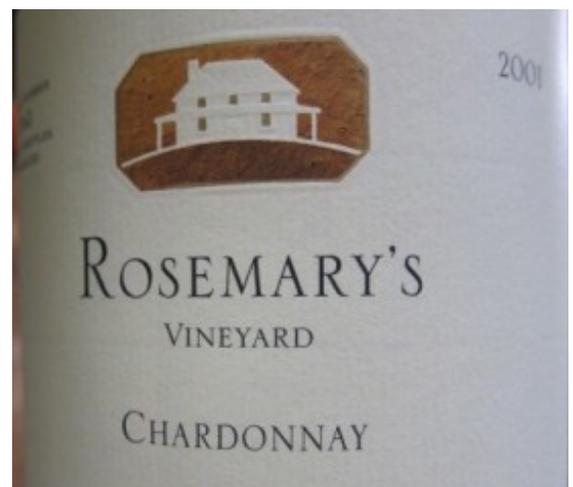
Though made in California, a Burgundian, terroir driven style defines Talley Chardonnay with the wine reflecting the character and finesse of each vineyard site. The hand-harvested grapes are barrel fermented in partially new French oak, aged sur lie (on the lees or yeast) and undergoes full malolactic fermentation to soften the natural acidity in the wine and add texture and richness. The wine is bottled after 11 months – 16 months in the barrel. Pleasantly, however, even with that much time in the barrel and full malolactic fermentation, the wines have incredible balance and bright, racy acidity with sublime elegance, even those that had been in the bottle for almost 20 years.

Talley makes four basic Chardonnay wines each year from three different vineyards, their Rincon from Arroyo Grande with high minerality and stone fruit characteristics; Rosemary's, also from Arroyo Grande and aptly named after Brian's mom with gorgeous elegance, structure and finesse; and Oliver's in Edna Valley, named after Brian's grandfather, with hotter summer days and colder winter nights than that of Arroyo Grande creating wine with more pear and apple flavors and a creamy, balanced texture.

The three vineyards come together in the Talley Chardonnay, balancing the characteristics of each to create the signature Chardonnay for the winery filled with just the right amount of fruit, like ripe melon, pear and apricot, with subtle mineral and herbal notes, touches of vanilla cream and spice, and lively acidity.

Tasting through the older vintages showed the same characteristics of each vineyard, just with a rounder, richer flavor profile filled with honey, toasted nuts, toffee and stone fruit. Served just barely chilled to allow the full flavor profile of the wine to show instead of just oak and alcohol that can exude from an overly refrigerated wine revealed the delicate touch of the winemaker, along with the quality of the grapes of these vineyards. The two best surprises came from the oldest bottle we tasted, the 1994 Talley's Vineyard, as well as the 2001 Rosemary's Vineyard which both maintained their consistency in structure, balance and acidity, proving that these wines could easily continue to age an additional number of years.

Though some of the oldest vintages we tasted aren't available, the new ones are and as noted, if properly stored have shown they



have the ability to age well into the future.

