

# Wine Spectator

Home > News & Features > Tasting Highlights

## 12 Outstanding California Chardonnays

New reviews of highly rated 2012 bottlings from the Golden State

Aaron Romano

Posted: October 20, 2014

*Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.*

This selection of new-release California Chardonnays shows how well the grape performed in 2012. Vintners enjoyed ideal weather and a leisurely harvest, which allowed them to pick the grape at its own pace. At their best, these wines are intense and pure, with ripe, vibrant flavors, and may reward short-term cellaring.

Here are a few standouts from top Chardonnay regions across California.

Ram's Gate leads the way with a trio of Chardonnays, all from different North Bay AVAs. The two single-vineyard wines are rich and full-bodied styles, while the Carneros bottling is fresh and snappy.

There are reliable standbys here as well, such as DuMol, Chasseur, Auteur and Pali Wine Co. Several of the wineries buy grapes from the Durell Vineyard, which lies at the intersection of Sonoma Valley, Sonoma Coast and Carneros. Durell owner Bill Price has his own label, Three Sticks, with Don Van Staaveren making the wines. The 2012 Origin is fermented in concrete eggs and aged entirely in stainless steel.

For something a little different, try Dolin Malibu Estate's Chardonnay from the newly minted—and controversial—Malibu Coast AVA. In 2006, Elliot Dolin and his wife, Lynn, planted a single acre of Chardonnay in the backyard of their house just above the Pacific Coast Highway. The vines grow in a mix of Zuma volcanic soil and sandy loam on a southern-facing slope. Winemaker Kirby Anderson used estate grapes for the 2011.

### **RAM'S GATE Chardonnay Russian River Valley Ulises Valdez-Diablo Vineyard 2012** Score: 93 | \$64

Deliciously rich and layered, with tiers of white peach, green apple, pear and subtle oaky butterscotch notes. Offers a supple texture that extends the range of flavors. Drink now through 2020. 418 cases made. —J.L.

### **AUTEUR Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2012** Score: 92 | \$42

Offers pure, ripe, juicy white peach, nectarine and floral-honeysuckle touches, gaining weight, depth and richness, and ending with a long, persistent finish. Drink now through 2020. 225 cases made. —J.L.

### **CHASSEUR Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2012** Score: 92 | \$40

Distinctive, offering rich layers of roasted fig, honeydew melon, citrus and smoky oak. Citrus-backed acidity keeps the flavors fresh and lively. Drink now through 2023. 274 cases made. —J.L.

### **RAM'S GATE Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2012**



Rocco Ceselin

*The Ram's Gate winery offers outstanding Chardonnay from several Sonoma County vineyards.*

## See Also:

Friday, October 17, 2014  
**17 Affordable Italian Reds**

Monday, October 13, 2014  
**15 Bold California Reds**

Friday, October 10, 2014  
**20 Intriguing Wines from Italy**

Monday, October 6, 2014  
**13 Enticing California Sparkling Wines**

Friday, October 3, 2014  
**15 Festive Champagnes**

[More from Tasting Highlights](#)

## More from California:

Saturday, November 15, 2014  
**California Cabernet Alphabetical Listing**

Saturday, November 15, 2014  
**High on Pritchard Hill, Brand Stakes Its Claim**

**Score: 92 | \$74**

Full-blown, with rich tiers of tropical fruit, pineapple, green apple, honeysuckle and spice. Slowly gains focus and depth, ending with a long, full, sustained finish. Drink now through 2020. 270 cases made. —J.L.

Saturday, November 15, 2014

The Winemakers of Peter Michael Winery

**THREE STICKS Chardonnay Sonoma Mountain One Skk 2012**

**Score: 92 | \$50**

Presents a rich, creamy mix of vanilla, ripe pear, honeydew melon and spicy-cedary notes. Young and still edgy. Needs time. Drink now through 2019. 222 cases made. —J.L.

Saturday, November 15, 2014

Peter Michael's Quest

Saturday, November 15, 2014

California Crucible

**THREE STICKS Chardonnay Sonoma Valley Origin Durell Vineyard 2012**

**Score: 92 | \$48**

Firm, fresh and vibrant, with a tasty core of citrus-infused white peach, nectarine, Key lime and honeysuckle notes. Maintains a zesty core of fresh fruit on the juicy finish. Drink now through 2020. 266 cases made. —J.L.

More from topic California

**RAM'S GATE Chardonnay Carneros 2012 Score: 91 | \$36**

Fresh and vibrant, with snappy tangerine, nectarine, lime and subtle creamy-smoky oak notes. The intensity and depth of the flavors remain persistent through the finish. Drink now through 2022. 2,951 cases made. —J.L.

**AUTEUR Chardonnay Carneros Green Acres Vineyard 2012 Score: 90 | \$42**

This fresh and juicy version shows off trim notes of peach and nectarine, with touches of citrus and honeysuckle. Gains richness and depth, presenting vibrant acidity and purity of flavor. Drink now through 2019. 70 cases made. —J.L.

**AUTEUR Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2012 Score: 90 | \$35**

Pure, ripe and juicy, with peach, nectarine, green apple and citrus notes, eschewing oak and focusing on the grape. Presents a lovely, lingering finish. Drink now through 2019. 330 cases made. —J.L.

**DOLIN MALIBU ESTATE VINEYARDS Chardonnay Los Angeles County 2011 Score: 90 | \$39**

Offers a ripe, juicy and creamy mix of tropical fruit, with guava, pineapple and vanilla notes, turning delicate and spicy on the finish. Ends with a dash of anise and cedar. Drink now through 2020. 230 cases made. —J.L.

**DUMOL Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2012 Score: 90 | \$50**

Delivers a ripe beam of juicy pear, nectarine and white peach, shaded by light spicy oak. Gains depth while maintaining elegance. Drink now through 2020. 4,360 cases made. —J.L.

**PALI WINE CO. Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2012 Score: 90 | \$50**

A delicate, detailed style, with subtle peach, nectarine and green fig notes. Complex and deep, this ends with a long, elegant finish. Drink now through 2020. 113 cases made. —J.L.