

THE UNDERGROUND WINELETTER

A Definitive Guide to Fine Wines

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1976-78 CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAYS

"The Vintages Have Been Widely Acclaimed and It's At Least Partially True"

The Chardonnay grape has found a home in California where it makes a rich, fruity wine. Comparisons are often made with White Burgundies, but the wines are usually easily distinguished. Chardonnays tend to be fruitier and/or less acidic and/or more heavily oaked than their French counterparts. The comparison of French wine deriving tastes from the soil and California wine deriving tastes from the grape seems particularly valid in the case of Chardonnay. "Montrachet-like" comparisons are trite and nearly always lacking validity. Nonetheless, there are a few California Chardonnays that can rank very high by any yardstick of comparison. Unfortunately, there are many more that are rather ordinary, and some really poor ones, being the result of poor grapes, poor winemaking, or both!

Chardonnay's popularity is attested to by the fact that prices and quantity produced have moved in tandem. Despite a sharp increase in production, prices continue to escalate upward. The best wines are often made in small quantities and disappear quickly. Numerous Chardonnays proliferate each year from a multitude of new wineries eager to produce the wine that has become an acknowledged leader of the white wine craze. Caveat emptor prevails—price has little relationship to quality.

Chardonnay grapes are grown in virtually every wine-growing region of the state, but many of the best seem to prefer slightly cooler climates—the Santa Cruz Mountains, Monterey County, and the Carneros Region of Napa Valley are typical examples. However, there are numerous exceptions (micro-climates), and it is difficult to generalize as to what is the very best area for Chardonnay. This is further evidenced by the fact that almost no matter what the climactic conditions of a particular year, some nice Chardonnays are made. Since 1969, when several wineries premiered with Chardonnay bottlings, some excellent Chardonnay has been produced in each year—1969 Freemark Abbey and Spring Mountain; 1970, Heitz Cellars and Spring Mountain; 1971, Mt. Eden (bottled under the Sutter Home label); 1972, Mayacamas and Mt. Eden; 1973, Stony Hill and Heitz Cellars; 1974, Chalone, Hanzell, and Mayacamas; 1975, Burgess "Winery Lake Vineyards." There are others as well. Beginning in 1976, the first of two drought years, many new wines began to appear—Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, Monterey, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, etc. The 1976s and 1977s were widely heralded. Now it's the 1978s. Yields were generally quite low in 1976 and 1977, but production from new vineyards made up the slack. Growing conditions were generally favorable in 1978, and yields and production increased. Thus, each of the past three vintages, like their predecessors, have been acclaimed outstanding for Chardonnay. It's at least partially true.

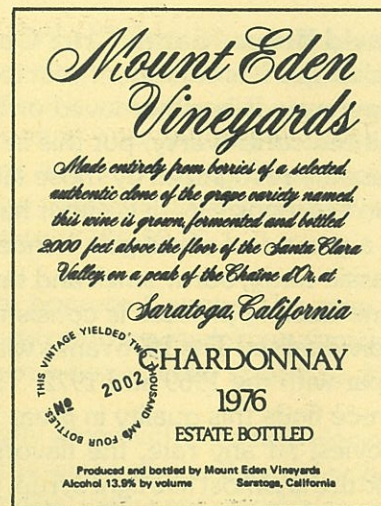
The best of the 1976s, 1977s, and 1978s have the same concentration and balance that makes it difficult to distinguish between vintage years. However, wines from the same producers that are made from the same grape source do show considerable differences. Most California Chardonnays mature within five years of the vintage date. Many are over the hill after seven or eight years. Most often, they are not long-lived wines, owing generally to a lack of acidity. Some such as Hanzell and Stony Hill do seem to be long-lived in certain vintages. Stony Hill, in particular, seems to age as a result of the use of a relatively large amount of free sulphur to stabilize the wine. Many young Chardonnays do exhibit this free sulphur, which usually goes away after 1-2 years. However, despite the exceptions, it is chancey to hold Chardonnay much beyond 5 years. Thus, most of the 1976s should be mature in 1980-81, the 1977s in 1981-82, and the 1978s in 1982-83.

The first of the drought years produced a number of really good wines. Chardonnays from the similar sounding Villa Mt. Eden and Mount Eden Vineyards are classics.

Outstanding

Mount Eden Vineyards. Similar in name and also of outstanding quality in 1976, Mount Eden's vines are located in the Santa Cruz mountains south of San Francisco. Originally planted by Martin Ray, the Mount Eden vineyards are situated just above the small plot of Chardonnay retained by Martin Ray Winery. The 1976 is the fifth Chardonnay produced under this label and one of the best. The color is light gold with a spicey/oaky nose that shows nuances of developing bouquet. It is a rich wine with great concentration and a silky style that, except for the oaky/vanilla flavor, is slightly reminiscent of great White Burgundy. Sure to take at least until 1981-82 to mature, it will probably keep well beyond that—the 1971 (bottled by Sutter Home) and 1972 are still beautiful wines after 7-8 years (18). \$16

Villa Mt. Eden. This easily ranks as the finest Chardonnay yet from this fine Napa Valley property. The wine has a gold color and a gorgeous, complex nose with hints of cinnamon and oranges. In the mouth, it is delicious—very elegant, great depth and balance with a lingering aftertaste. Unfortunately, the young vines and drought combined to restrict output to well under 200 cases. If you were fortunate enough to buy some, or know where you can beg, borrow, or steal it, keep it another 2-3 years to reach full maturity (18). \$9



Very Good

Burgess Napa "Winery Lake Vineyards." Here is another Napa Chardonnay that consistently is first rate. This 1976 is one of the best Burgess has produced from this fine property in the Carneros district. The wine has a gold color and an intense floral nose that is classic Napa Valley. There is a very rich, fruity quality which shows through and compliments the "big" style of the wine. Very well balanced, this Chardonnay should peak in about 1981 (17). \$9

Burgess Sonoma "Dutton Ranch." This Chardonnay is very different than the Napa "Winery Lake Vineyards" and will qualify as one of the most unusual California has produced. The grapes were affected by Botrytis at harvest, and the wine has a richness and texture that is really unique. Actually, it is not unlike a Meursault that has likewise been Botrytis affected. In fact, a 1975 Meursault Charmes (Michelot) is a similar wine (a style, by the way, that supposedly is not much appreciated in France—no doubt because it tastes too much like what some Frenchmen perceive as California Chardonnay!). At any rate, this wine has a dark gold color with an overwhelming bouquet of pineapple. It is very rich, concentrated, and buttery and has great depth with oaky flavors much in evidence. Probably not a keeper, but it is delicious to drink now for its unique qualities. Be sure to match this one with hearty food—sweetbreads for instance (17). \$8

Ridge Monte Bello. The tiny plot of old Chardonnay vines at Ridge rarely ever produce more than a couple hundred cases of wine, nearly all of which is sold from the winery. This 1976 is one of the finest. The color is gold, and there is just a trace of cloudiness. As the wine is drunk, the flavors bring White Burgundy immediately to mind; yet, somehow, it is too rich, too powerful, and too oaky. No not French, but it is very good in a most appealing heavy style (17). \$12

Chateau St. Jean "Wildwood." This Chardonnay is a fine example of a big, fruity Sonoma style. It is so rich that it appears to have a trace of sweetness. The gold color and fruity nose add to the overall impression of fruitiness. The flavors are almost peach-like, and the silky texture makes this a very nice sipping wine, and one that needs to be very carefully matched to rich food. No mistaking this for French, it's California all the way (16½). \$12.50

David Bruce "Santa Cruz County." O.K. This is **THE** most controversial Chardonnay made in California. It is consistent year to year—made by the same Dr. Bruce, from the same vineyards, in the same way. It is either loved or hated. There is no middle ground. If you're in the mood for a good spirited controversy, put this in "blind" with other Chardonnays or White Burgundies. It should be instantly recognized by those familiar with the wine—they will hate it or love it. Ditto for those who don't recognize it—it is either hated or loved. Some believe this style is a result of subjecting the wine to a great deal of oxygen, hence the gold color. This is probably true, but other than the color, the classic nutty/burnt smell and taste of oxidation is not present. So why spoil it? The mystery of the wine making process is consistent with the controversy evoked by the wine. Hooray for the great individualists! The 1976 ranks with the most concentrated of the Bruce "Home" Chardonnays. It is on a par with the 1969 and 1972. The color is dark gold and the wine smells like buttered popcorn. Dr. Bruce finds this quality in great White Burgundy which he greatly admires, others only find it at the movies! At any rate, the flavors have a buttery quality and are very rich and concentrated. The texture is almost like light syrup, yet the wine is dry. The wine will undoubtedly keep several years; the 1972 is mature and not in decline, the 1969 is a tired old soldier. Again, this is a wine for rich food, perhaps game birds of some sort (16½). \$12

Freemark Abbey. This is one of the best Freemark Abbey Chardonnays of recent years. The color is light gold and the nose shows a nice apple-like perfume. It is a rich, fruity, straightforward wine with good flavor. Freemark Abbey Chardonnays seem to develop faster than other comparable Napa bottlings, and this wine should be consumed within the first five years of its life (16). \$9.75

Hanzell Vineyards. This was a particularly difficult year for the Chardonnay grapes grown on Hanzell's property, but the wine turned out quite well. The color is light gold with a fruity nose and good flavors. Just a bit of harshness and bitterness from the relatively high alcohol detract from the wine's overall quality. It should be kept two to three more years (16). \$9

Harbor Winery. For the past few years Harbor and Heitz Cellars have both made Chardonnays from the Zinfandel Associates Vineyard in Napa. The 1976 will be the last for a while since the vines became diseased and have been pulled up and the vineyard replanted. This wine has a dark yellow color and a nose that is very reminiscent of Sauternes. It is fruity, oaky, and very flavorful. Perhaps the grapes showed some incidence of Botrytis or at least over-ripeness. Nonetheless, the resulting wine seems more similar in style to Heitz Chardonnays than other Harbor vintages (16). \$8.50

Joseph Phelps Vineyards. This is a classic oaky style Chardonnay with a gold color, vanilla nose, and very rich, oaky flavors. The texture is buttery, and it finishes well (16). \$9

Mayacamas Vineyards. Mayacamas has produced some of the finest big, oaky style Napa Chardonnays. The 1972 and 1974 are classics with the 1972 beginning to fade and the 1974 now fully developed. This 1976 is not up to those standards, lacking the flavor, richness, and texture. It is a light gold color with a perfumed nose and very ripe, oaky flavors (16). \$11

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. The characteristic of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars is style and elegance. These two features are particularly evidenced in the Chardonnay. This 1976 has a light color, nice nose, and good fruit, in a graceful, harmonious style. It is eminently ready for current consumption (16). \$8

Stony Hill Vineyard. Stony Hill has been making small quantities of white wine for some 20 years. The Chardonnay typically requires 6-8 years to develop and many vintages keep much longer. Part of the aging, no doubt, has to do with a relatively large amount of free sulphur used to stabilize this wine.

Hence, when the wines are very young the sulphur can cause an almost burning sensation, both in smell and taste. The 1976 was made in a quantity of only a few hundred cases sold direct from the winery to California residents. Virtually all of the Stony Hill wine is sold in this manner, and there is a waiting list for new purchasers. The 1976 has a light yellow color and fruity nose with good intensity. There is only the slightest trace of sulphur in evidence at this stage. The wine is well structured with good fruit and flavor. There is a promise of great elegance with a few more years bottle age (16). \$9

Zaca Mesa Winery. As the first wines begin appearing from the Santa Barbara area, it is readily apparent that they bear little resemblance to those produced in the more northernmost regions of California. This is particularly true with Chardonnay. The Zaca Mesa is very attractive in a style vaguely resembling Chablis. The color is pale yellow with a vanilla/citric nose offering nuances of spice—very complex. The wine is very firm with a solid backbone and good acid. Clean, fresh, somewhat tart flavors make this a wine ideal for present consumption (particularly good well chilled with oysters on the half shell). The price makes it even easier to drink (16). \$5.75

Carneros Creek Winery. Grapes for this Chardonnay came from Sonoma County. The color is gold and the wine is cloudy. The nose is vanilla/cocanut and in the mouth the wine follows through with rich, oaky flavors and lots of glycerin. It is an attractive wine in a heavy, oaky style (15). \$12

Chappellet Winery. The Chardonnays of Chappellet tend to be fruity wines with considerable oak, but not as big and flavorful as other Napa Chardonnays. At times the wines can be thin and rather austere. This 1976 is one of the winery's better efforts with a yellow color, oaky nose, good fruit, and nice fruity/vanilla flavors that finish just a bit tart and citric. A few years more bottle age should round out the wine very well (15). \$10

Chateau St. Jean "McCrea Vineyards." Chateau St. Jean's Chardonnays from this vineyard do not have the richness or extreme fruitiness of the Robert Young or Wildwood bottlings, but the restrained style of McCrea may mean better bottle aging potential and, ultimately, more complexity. This wine has a gold color and a very underdeveloped nose that offers only hints of oak. It is a fruity wine with good acid and nice flavors, and a lingering palate impression. The wine needs 2-3 more years to develop (15). \$9

Chateau St. Jean "Robert Young Vineyards." This Alexander Valley Vineyard has established quite a reputation for quality. The Chardonnays made by Chateau St. Jean have an intense, fruity character which sometimes leave an impression of sweetness. This 1976 has a gold color and a perfumed, floral nose. It is a fat wine that probably should be consumed now for its freshness (15). \$8

Cuvaison. This Chardonnay was made from Napa Valley grapes. It has a light gold color and a spicely nose. The wine has nice fruit and balance and finishes clean. There are no particular faults, but it also is lacking in distinction (15). \$8

The Firestone Vineyard. Just a hint of steeliness or flintiness in the taste might suggest the Santa Barbara origin of the grapes used to produce this wine. The color is light gold and the nose has a buttery quality. There is good fruit and considerable oak (15). \$7.50

Heitz Wine Cellars "Lot Z-61." The disease-affected vines of the Zinfandel Associates vineyards produced a small quantity of grapes in 1976. The few hundred cases of this wine were sold direct from the winery. It has a yellow color, with a trace of sulphur in the nose. There is good fruit and a nice flavor that is just a bit harsh. Lacking the richness, flavor, and balance of the great Heitz Chardonnays such as the 1973 Z-32, this bottle should, nonetheless, improve for another 2 years or so (15). \$9

Hills Cellars. Hills Cellars became Grgich Hills in 1977. This wine has a yellow color and the green apple nose of many Napa Chardonnays. It is crisp with good fruit and flavors—a clean wine that finishes a bit short (15). \$8.50

Roudon-Smith Vineyards. The grapes for this wine came from Sonoma County. It displays a strong oak character with a gold color and good fruit. There is a bit of tartness and the oakiness gives a vanilla flavor (15). \$9.50

St. Clement Vineyards. This relatively new winery up on Spring Mountain in Napa has been producing fine wine. This 1976 has a light gold color, perfumed floral nose, good fruit and flavor, but one-dimensional and a bit unbalanced. Time should help; give it 2-3 more years (15). \$9

Spring Mountain Vineyards. The best Spring Mountain Chardonnays seem to have been the 1969 and 1970. The 1969 is now very chancey, the 1970 is fully developed and a gorgeous complex wine. The 1976 vintage is representative of recent vintages—light gold color, oaky, slightly volatile nose, good fruit, and just a trace of hotness in the finish. It should mature in a year or two (15). \$8.50

Sterling Vineyards. Sterling seems to make consistently good Chardonnay. This wine has a light gold color, an oaky nose with just a hint of sulphur. It has good fruit and body with a vanilla-like richness (15). \$9

Good

MEV "California." MEV is the second label of Mount Eden Vineyards. The 1976 California Chardonnay has a gold color and a pear-like nose. The wine has good fruit, but is spritzy, and a bit tart with high acid. It should keep for several more years (14½). \$9

MEV "Ventana Vineyards." The Monterey County bottling from Ventana Vineyards has a gold color and more richness, but a slight vegetative quality that is detracting (14½). \$9

Sonoma Vineyards "Windsor Vineyards." This wine has a yellow color and a citric-like nose with good fruit and a nice vanilla tinged taste. It lacks depth and complexity, but is clean and straightforward. It is not likely to improve further with age (14½). \$7.50

Chalone Vineyard. This was not a successful year for Chalone, and this Chardonnay is one of the least attractive of recent memory. The color is gold and the nose is oaky with off smells. It is a heavy wine that is flavorful, but awkward and a bit bitter on the finish (14). \$10.50

Chateau St. Jean "Riverview Vineyards." This Chardonnay has a yellow color and a slight mustiness in the nose. It has clean apple-like flavors and is slightly spritzy with good acid balance. It is a wine for current consumption that is probably at its best (14). \$9.50

Robert Mondavi "Reserve." Mondavi Chardonnays are most often pleasant wines with good varietal character. They tend to be clean and fresh, but lacking depth and distinctive quality. The 1976 "Reserve" is a typical example—medium yellow color, oaky/vanilla nose, clean and fruity, but a bit austere and weak on the palate (14). \$12

Page Mill Winery. This Chardonnay has a good medium yellow color, a fruity, slightly oaky nose, medium body, good flavors and a trace of bitterness in the finish (13½). \$6.50

Cakebread Cellars. This Napa bottling has a gold color and an interesting pineapple-like nose. In the mouth it is dry, oaky, austere and lacking fruit. Still, it is clean and straightforward and ready for current consumption (13). \$9

Chateau St. Jean "Beltane Ranch." This Sonoma Chardonnay has a gold color and an oaky nose with good fruit. It is slightly spritzy and rather sharp on the palate (13). \$7.75

Husch Vineyards. This estate bottled wine from Mendocino shows the light, fruity style that is characteristic of the area. It has a light color and an almost apple-like flavor with high acid—quite unusual (13). \$8

Sherrill Cellars. Made from Monterey County grapes, this Chardonnay has a gold, slightly cloudy color. The wine has a fruity, buttery quality that is quite attractive, but an unpleasant, chemical nose is detracting (13). \$6

Sonoma Vineyards "Estate Bottled." This wine has a gold color and an oaky nose. It is clean, but the flavors are thin and austere (13). \$8

Trefethen Vineyards. This Napa Chardonnay has a light gold color, an oaky nose with good fruit, but it lacks intensity and is very flat (13). \$6.75

Chateau Chevalier. Another Napa Chardonnay with a light gold color and a perfumed nose, this wine has good flavors, but is harsh and unbalanced (12). \$9

Chateau Montelena "California." This wine has a light gold color, and a light perfumed nose with a restrained flavor that is a bit bitter (12). \$8

The Monterey Vineyard. This Monterey Chardonnay has a light gold color and an oaky/grassy nose. It is fruity, but very citric and very short on the finish (12). \$6

Below Average

Fenton Acres. This Sonoma Chardonnay doesn't taste like Chardonnay. It has a gold color and an oaky nose, but is flabby and sweet, more like Chenin Blanc (11). \$8

Martin Ray Vineyards "Saratoga." This bottle at least tastes like it used to be Chardonnay—amber gold color, oxidized coffee bean nose, rich, sherry-like, stemmy flavors. The price is ludicrous (11). \$15

Sebastiani Vineyards "Proprietors Reserve." The great Chardonnay pricing escalation gets a big boost from this large Sonoma producer. Considering what's in the bottle, it's hard to understand how this could possibly be priced at \$10.00. It has an amber yellow color, oxidized nose and fruity spicy flavors that also are oxidized. The wine is tired and past its prime (11).

Chateau Montelena "Napa-Alexander Valley." How this Chardonnay can be acclaimed is nearly beyond comprehension. Bottle after bottle shows the same sulphur quality in the nose and taste that has become more pronounced with age. It is unattractive wine, with a creosote flavor. It is absurdly priced (10). \$15

Hoffman Mountain Ranch Vineyards. Again, something went wrong with this estate bottled Chardonnay from San Luis Obispo. It has a light gold color, but is oxidized with an unusual chemical nose, a slight spritz and burnt flavors (10). \$8.50

Edmeades. This Mendocino Chardonnay tastes more like cooked apple cider than wine—much less Chardonnay! It is stale, flat, and watery as well (9). \$5.50

Souverain of Alexander Valley. A light yellow color is about all this wine has to offer. A skunky, foul nose and moldy flavors are not attractive (9). \$7

1977

Despite the drought, which reduced yields in many areas, new plantings resulted in the appearance of a record number of Chardonnays. Generally the wines are quite attractive with Hanzell Vineyards, Long Vineyards, and Monterey Peninsula Winery "Arroyo Seco Vineyards" being real standouts. Nearly all the 1977 Chardonnays have now been released, but the 1977 Mayacamas will be released next spring. Tasted from cask last year, it promises to be one of the winery's best.

Outstanding

*Monterey Peninsula
Winery
1977
Monterey Chardonnay
Arroyo Seco Vineyards*

Produced & Bottled by Monterey Peninsula Winery
Monterey, Calif. — Alcohol 13.5% by Vol.

100% Monterey Chardonnay

The Chardonnay grape and the Monterey Peninsula Winery seem to be happily matched. Chardonnay responds well to our philosophy of wine handling that less is best. These grapes have produced a formidable white wine. Our method of vinification calls upon the Montrachet traditions. In addition, we hold the juice in contact with the skins for twenty-four hours, between crushing and pressing. From the point of pressing the wine spends its life in French oak barrels. The oak barrels are an extremely important part of our winemaking style, not only for the flavor they contribute, but for the voluptuous body they impart. In 1976 I traveled to Bordeaux and Burgundy in search of cooperage appropriate for our Chardonnay. I was most impressed with the firm of Yves Sirugue in Nuits St. George, and it is their barrels that we use. Another contributing craftsman is Terrel West who saw the grapes through an ideal, long and cool growing season, and picked them with careful attention to their ripeness. With all of these winemaking details attended to, we have made a wine that is exceptionally full bodied and flavor intense. It has all of the warm, rounded flavors imparted by Burgundian cooperage as well as the enigmatic flavor of ultra ripe, green pears. The wine should be only slightly chilled, and I recommend it with anything on the half shell.

BMR

Monterey Peninsula Winery produces hand-tended wines of character. We as winemakers believe that wine is grown in the vineyard and that we are the stewards of nature while the wine is in our cellar. We rarely treat and never centrifuge wines. We also rarely filter wine, and if so it will be stated on the label. Our chief tool of cellaring is natural settling. Therefore, the wines may have a sediment or tartrate crystals adhering to the cork; this is natural, and is an indication the wine has received minimal handling. The wine may be decanted to retain clarity. Our wines are made to be enjoyed in the healthful setting of meals. Let our hospitality be conveyed by this wine, or by your visit to the winery and tasting room.

**2999 Monterey-Salinas Highway • Monterey, California 93940
(408) 372-4949**

Hanzell Vineyards. This wine is the best Hanzell Chardonnay of the decade, narrowly surpassing the marvelous 1974. It has a light gold color and an intense coconut/tropical fruit nose. The flavor is rich and fruity with a certain spiciness. Incredibly complex for such a youthful wine, the balance is perhaps even more astounding. The harmonious blend of acid and glycerin provides a structure of elegance that is rarely found in California Chardonnay. A very long, flavorful finish provides a perfect compliment to the other components. It is a great wine that should be ambrosia with a few more years bottle age. Don't miss this one! The wine is available by mail order from the winery in October and will be available in retail stores in November. Hanzell's production is only a few hundred cases so you will need to act fast (18½). \$12

Long Vineyards. This is a new Napa Valley Winery making Riesling and Chardonnay from hillside vineyards. Previously, the grapes had gone to other wineries and Mt. Veeder made several Chardonnays with the Long Vineyards designation. The 1977 Chardonnay is a masterpiece. The crop was greatly reduced and only 140 cases of wine were produced, but what a wine it is! The color is dark yellow and nose is very complex, offering hints of peaches and spice. Actually, it is reminiscent of Sauternes. The wine is very rich and flavorful in the mouth with a buttery texture—the great Heitz Cellars Chardonnays come immediately to mind. A lingering aftertaste completes the palate impression—classic Napa Valley Chardonnay (18). \$12

Monterey Peninsula Winery "Arroyo Seco Vineyards." This Chardonnay is an outstanding example of what can be done with Monterey County grapes. The wine has a gold color and a beautiful pear/apple nose. The wine has good body and depth of flavor. It is very rich with considerable oak in evidence, yet nicely balanced with the fruit which also has a slight taste of pears and apples. This is a very classy, complex Chardonnay. Under 200 cases were produced and what is left (if any) is being sold direct from the winery (18). \$15

Very Good

Burgess "Winery Lake Vineyards." This is one of the best Burgess Chardonnays yet produced and very similar to the 1976. The wine has a gold color and an intense floral nose with a hint of cinnamon. It is very complex and very rich and has a long aftertaste. About 800 cases were produced and the wine is a good value (17). \$9.75

Chalone Vineyards. This is another of the really good Chardonnays from this small producer. The 1977 has a light gold color and is a bit cloudy. The nose is unbelievable with a cinnamon/candy-like quality. It is very rich and flavorful with some spritz and a definite earthy flavor. Very complex, this wine is a Chardonnay essence. The key word here is **FLAVOR** and this overcomes the minor detractors of cloudiness and spritziness. Still, at the present, the wine is not stable and Chalone will wait until next year to release it (17). \$12

Martin Ray Vineyards "Dutton Ranch." Martin Ray's Chardonnay from this fine Sonoma vineyard is one of the few produced from this winery that does not show immediate signs of severe oxidation. It has a light gold color and an oaky/fruity nose. There is considerable fruit and a nutty, almond-like quality adds flavor complexity. The wine is firmly structured and dry with good acid. In this respect, it has the quality of fine White Burgundy—a notable success (17). \$17

Mount Eden Vineyards. The 1977 Mount Eden lacks the same intensity, flavor, and balance of the 1976, yet is similar and will age well. It has a dark yellow color, and an oaky/vanilla nose that shows just a trace of free sulphur. The wine has good fruit, and structure with complex flavors, but is just a bit thin. Only 150 cases were produced (17). \$16

Burgess "Preston Vineyards." This is the first Burgess Chardonnay from this Napa vineyard. The wine has a gold color and a nice fruity/oaky nose. It is very rich with good flavors and balance (16). \$9

Chateau St. Jean "McCrea Vineyards." This style of wine has particular appeal as compared with the rich, very fruity style of so many California Chardonnays. The color is medium yellow and the nose offers only hints of the apple-like bouquet which will surely develop. It is a very crisp, firm wine. At first it might seem austere, but there is good fruit and an early hint of flavor complexity. It should develop very well with 4-5 years of bottle age. Not yet released, it is expected to be about \$10.50 (16).

Joseph Phelps Vineyards. This 1977 Chardonnay is another very good wine from this Napa Valley winery. Not as oaky as the 1976, it has a yellow color and an apple-like nose with good fruit and a nice oak balance (16). \$9.75

Lambert Bridge. This is a very good heavy style Sonoma Chardonnay from a relatively new winery. The wine has a gold color and a big fruity/oaky/spicey nose. The wine is very rich and buttery with lots of oak. It is a big, oaky wine with good flavor (16). \$7.50

Robert Keenan Winery. This 1977 Chardonnay is an outstanding effort from one of the Napa Valley's newest wineries. The color is light gold and the nose is very perfumed. The wine has good fruit and nice balance (16). \$9

Robert Mondavi Winery "Reserve." This is the best Mondavi Chardonnay produced to date. The wine has a gold color and an oaky/floral nose. It has good richness and fruit with nice balance (16). \$14

Villa Mt. Eden Winery. The young Chardonnay vines at Villa Mt. Eden yielded over 900 cases of wine in 1977—about five times as much as 1976. Not up to the outstanding quality of the 1976, it has a gold color and a fruity nose with good fruit and considerable oak. The wine is just a bit spritzy and slightly bitter, but is flavorful and rich (16). \$9

Harbor Winery "Napa Valley." This is an unusual Chardonnay with a spicey nose that is very intense. It has good fruit and very rich, buttery/spicey flavors. It is a big wine that requires 1-2 years more bottle age to round out the rough edges (15½). \$7.50

Burgess "Sonoma." This wine is quite different from the two other 1977 Burgess Chardonnays. It has a gold color, an oaky nose, and good flavors that are strongly influenced by the oak (15). \$8

Chappellet Winery. This Napa Valley Chardonnay is similar to the 1976 bottling. It displays a light yellow color and an apple-like nose with good fruit and nice oak balance (15). \$12

Chateau Montelena "Napa Valley." This wine is similar to the overpraised 1973. It has a light gold color, a nice fruity nose and good flavors with a slight spritz. It is a nice wine in a straightforward fruity style (15). \$10

Chateau St. Jean "Robert Young Vineyards." This is another very rich, ripe Chardonnay. It has a gold color and a very fruity nose with clean flavors. It finishes almost sweet in an intense, fruity style (15). \$10.50

Chateau St. Jean "Wildwood Vineyards." Ditto for this bottling, except it is not quite as fruity and perhaps a bit more oaky (15). \$10

Cuvaison. This Napa Valley Chardonnay has a light yellow color and an apple-like nose. It has good fruit, with very ripe flavors that give the wine the impression of sweetness, yet the balance is good and the wine has the necessary acid for 3-4 years of bottle age (15). \$9

David Bruce Winery "Santa Cruz County." This is another of the infamous Bruce Chardonnays from his own vineyards. It is not as rich as the 1976, but everything else is nearly identical—gold color, buttered popcorn nose, fruity, rich, oaky. The controversy continues—don't buy this unless you are prepared for a totally different Chardonnay (15). \$15

Dehlinger Winery. This Sonoma winery produces a heavy, oaky style Chardonnay. The 1977 has a gold color and vanilla nose, with good fruit and richness dominated by the oaky flavors. The wine is a good value (15). \$6.50

The Firestone Vineyard. The 1977 Firestone Chardonnay is another attractive wine. The nose is rather unusual with a curious, almost soapy smell, but the wine has good fruit and a very nice clean pineapple-like flavor (15). \$7.50

Grgich Hills Cellar. The first Chardonnay from this new Napa Valley winery was eagerly received. It suffers from the youthful sulphur in the nose. In 2-3 years it could show better, but for now the sulphur leaves a slight burning sensation on the palate. Beyond this, the wine is very fruity, very rich, and high in glycerin (15). \$12

Rutherford Hill Winery. This Napa Chardonnay has a light gold color, a slightly floral nose, and good fruit. Not an intense wine, but good style and nice flavors with a slightly hot finish (15). \$9

St. Clement Vineyards. The 1977 St. Clement Chardonnay is very similar to the 1976. The wine has a yellow color and a bit of spiciness in the nose. It has good fruit and depth of flavor with just a trace of bitterness in the finish. Keep it 3-4 more years (15). \$9

Sonoma Vineyards "Riverwest." This is an attractive, lighter style Chardonnay that is ideal for current consumption. It has a medium gold color, a floral nose, good fruit, and a nice acid balance. It is a little short on the palate, but good value (15). \$7

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. This Napa Valley Chardonnay is similar to the Haynes Vineyard bottling. It has a light yellow color and a ginger-like nose. Clean with good fruit, it is made in an appealing easy to drink style. Further bottle aging doesn't seem necessary (15). \$8

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Haynes Vineyard." This ready-to-drink Chardonnay is a nice style with good flavors and complexity, but a bit short on the finish (15). \$9

Sterling Vineyards. This 1977 Chardonnay is not as rich as the 1976. It has a light yellow color and a fruity, vanilla nose. It has good fruit and flavor with considerable oak in evidence. It is a bit short on the finish, but still very good (15). \$10.50

Good

Cakebread Cellars. This 1977 Chardonnay is perhaps the winery's best with a light gold color and a nice spicy/oaky nose. It is tart and clean with good flavor (14½). \$9

David Bruce Winery "Edna Valley, San Luis Obispo County, Lot 2." This Chardonnay is very oaky with a gold color and buttery nose. It is rich and fruity with slightly stemmy flavors (14½). \$12.50

Dry Creek Vineyard. This is a nice Sonoma Chardonnay with a medium yellow color and a spicy nose. It has good fruit and a nice flavor—perhaps a bit austere with a touch too much oak (14½). \$8

Estrella Rivery Winery. This 1977 San Luis Obispo Chardonnay is an attractive wine. It has a light gold color, a perfumed, fruity nose and good oaky flavors that finish just a bit short (14½). \$7.50

Raymond Vineyard. This Chardonnay is a very big, oaky style wine with a medium gold color, an oaky nose, and rich vanilla-like flavors. It is fat and seemingly low in acid (14½). \$9

Robert Mondavi Winery. This is one of Mondavi's better regular Chardonnay bottlings. It has a light gold color, a floral nose and good fruit and nice balance. It is a bit short on the finish and lacking complexity, otherwise quite nice (14½). \$10

ZD Winery "Tepusquet Vineyard." This Santa Barbara Chardonnay has a yellow color and a slight bit of sulphur in the nose. It is fruity, with a slight spritz, and clean, tart flavors. This wine needs 3-4 more years to develop (14½). \$9

Alexander Valley Vineyards. This estate bottled Sonoma Chardonnay has a yellow color and a nice apple-like nose. The wine has nice fruit in a clean, crisp style. It is a wine that drinks well now (14). \$6.75

Freemark Abbey Winery. This 1977 Chardonnay lacks the richness and depth of the 1976. It has a yellow color and a nice apple-like nose, but the fruit is a bit subdued and the wine is austere on the palate (14). \$10

Hoffman Mountain Ranch "San Luis Obispo, Edna Valley Vineyards." This evidently is available only on the East Coast. It has a gold color, an oaky/lemon nose and very full fruity flavors with a hint of spice—an attractive wine (14). \$9.99 (New York)

MEV "Ventana Vineyards, Lot 2." This bottling is a better wine than the Lot 1. It has a medium color, a fruity/oaky nose, and good fruit with clean flavors (14). \$9

Roudon-Smith Vineyards "Ventana Vineyard." This Chardonnay from Monterey grapes has a yellow color and a fruity/oaky nose. It is fruity and flavorful, but lacking acid and too oaky (14). \$7.50

Sonoma Vineyards "Chalk Hill." This Chardonnay has a light yellow color and a subdued nose. It is very clean and crisp with a nice delicate flavor. It is a wine for current consumption (14). \$7

Spring Mountain Vineyards. The 1977 Spring Mountain Chardonnay has a gold color, a floral-like nose and nice flavors, but is slightly spritzzy and a bit hot and unbalanced (14). \$10

Stonegate. This Napa Chardonnay has a gold color and a fruity/grassy nose with good fruit and acid (14). \$8.50

Trefethen Vineyards. This is a nice Napa Valley Chardonnay with a yellow color and a very fruity nose. It has clean, fruity flavors that are crisp and quite attractive (14). \$9

Zaca Mesa Winery. Again, the 1977 Chardonnay from this Santa Barbara winery has a Chablis-like character with a yellow color, oaky nose and clean, citric flavors. The wine is balanced to acid and finishes well—good value (14). \$5.75

Chalone Vineyard "Early Chardonnay." This Estate Bottled wine is made from the grapes of young vines. The "early" has nothing to do with the harvest date. It has a gold color and an oaky nose. It is fruity, but slightly austere and a little bitter with a short finish. The regular bottling is much better (13½). \$8.50

Conn Creek Vineyard "Dieux Rivières." This Napa Valley Chardonnay has a light yellow color and an oaky/floral nose. It is clean, but lacking flavor and style (13½). \$8.50

Hacienda Wine Cellars "Clair de Lune." This Sonoma Chardonnay has a light color and a nice, perfumed nose. It has nice fruit and delicate flavors with good balance in a light style (13½). \$8

Beaulieu Vineyards. This Chardonnay is one of BV's best. It has a yellow color and an unusual citric/floral nose. It is a bit austere in style, but is crisp and clean—ready to drink (13). \$6

Beringer Vineyards. This Napa Chardonnay has a light yellow color, an oaky/fruity nose and good flavor. It is a bit flat and short on the finish, but pleasant (13). \$6.50

Chaparral Chardonnay (Made by Chalone from Edna Valley Vineyard, San Luis Obispo). This wine has a yellow color and has good fruit with oaky flavors. It is developing well, but the sulphur in the nose is a major detraction (13). \$7.50

Clos de Bois, Second Release. This Sonoma Chardonnay has a yellow color and an oaky/vanilla nose. It has a fruity flavor, but is a bit light with a bitter finish (13). \$7.50

J. Lohr Winery "Junction and Greenfield Vineyards." This Monterey Chardonnay has a yellow color and an unusual nose reminiscent of bananas. It has crisp flavors with a hint of grassiness (13). \$8

Landmark Vineyards. This Sonoma Chardonnay has a light gold color, a floral nose and a citric-like flavor that is tart and clean (13). \$6.75

La Zaca Vineyard. This Santa Barbara Chardonnay has a light gold color and an unusual, slightly oxidized nose. It has good fruit, acid, and flavor. It is a clean wine that is a good value (13). \$4.95

Martin Ray Vineyards "Winery Lake Vineyards." Again, the oxidized character of most Martin Ray wines detracts from the overall quality. This bottle has a yellow color and an oxidized nose. In the mouth it is fruity, but tart and somewhat oxidized. It is no bargain (13). \$17

MEV Monterey County "Ventana Vineyards, Lot 1." This wine has a yellow color and good fruit, but it is a bit bitter and finishes short (13). \$9

Monterey Peninsula Winery "Vanderpan Vineyards." This big, oaky Monterey Chardonnay has a strong vegetative character. The color is gold and it has a spicy/bell pepper nose. It is a fat, buttery, rich wine with a taste of green beans and a slightly bitter finish (13). \$10

Baxter Hills. This is another Sonoma Chardonnay that is apparently cellared and bottled for sale out of state. It has a light gold color, a citric nose and thin, fruity flavors that suggest a lot of chemically adjusted acidity (12½). \$7.49 (New York)

David Bruce Winery "Edna Valley." This wine is not as good as the second bottling. It has a gold color and a fruity nose, but the flavors are citric, almost like grapefruit, with a tinge of sweetness creating a sweet/sour sensation on the palate (12½). \$10

David Bruce Winery "Monterey." This is another big style wine from David Bruce. This one has a gold color, a big buttery/spicy nose, a huge wine with lots of fruit, a slight vegetative flavor, and a hot finish (12½). \$10

Edmeades "Mann Ranch." If you like apples, you'll really like this wine. It has a yellow color, clean, apple-like nose, and a light fruity, almost apple juice flavor (12½). \$7.50

Le Fleuron. This Napa Valley Chardonnay is the second label of Joseph Phelps Vineyards. It has a medium color and a very oaky nose, but has off flavors and is bitter on the finish (12½). \$5.75

Mill Creek Vineyards. This Sonoma Chardonnay has a light yellow color, an oaky nose and very tart, thin flavors that are over-powered by oak (12½). \$7

Parducci Winery. This Mendocino Chardonnay lacks style. It has a medium yellow color and a floral/sulphur nose with spritziness, and slightly sweet floral flavors (12½). \$6

Chateau St. Jean "Les Pierres Vineyards." This is not one of this wineries better efforts. The wine has a yellow color, a grassy/oxidized nose, and sharp, fruity flavors that are magnified by the spritziness (12). \$10

Davis Bynum Winery. This Sonoma Chardonnay is spoiled by a skunky, sulphur nose. Otherwise, it has good fruit and varietal character (12). \$7.50

Franciscan Vineyards. This Napa Valley Chardonnay has a light yellow color, fruity/vanilla nose, but lacks fruit and depth (12). \$7

Mark West Vineyards "Russian River Valley." This Chardonnay has a medium color, an intense oaky/earthy nose and tart, citric flavors (12). \$8

The Monterey Vineyard. This 1977 Chardonnay is not much different from the 1976. It has a yellow color, an oaky/vegetative nose, clean, tart, slightly grassy flavors and a short finish (12). \$6

River Road Vineyards. This Sonoma Chardonnay has a yellow color and a citric nose, but is flat and lacking in flavor (12). \$7.50

San Martin Winery. This Chardonnay has a pale yellow color and a floral nose. It is fruity, but lacks style and complexity. The wine finishes short with a slight bitterness (12). \$5.50

Stony Ridge Winery. This is an estate bottled wine from the Livermore Valley. It has a yellow color and an oaky nose. It is fruity and slightly herbaceous with lots of oak, but lacks style and complexity and finishes bitter (12). \$7

Wente Bros. Except for a skunky nose, this is fairly typical Wente Chardonnay—light color, crisp, clean, not much varietal character, but pleasant (12). \$5.50

Willow Creek Vineyards. This North Coast Chardonnay doesn't taste much like Chardonnay. It has a gold color and a perfumey, sweetpea-like nose. It is a bit sweet and flabby (12). \$5.79

Below Average

Chateau Montelena "California." This wine is made from Santa Barbara and Alexander Valley grapes. It has a light gold color, a perfumed nose with a strong floral character. In the mouth it is flowery and almost sweet, with a flabby, insipid character (11). \$8

Robert Stemmler Winery. This Sonoma Chardonnay is most unusual. It has a gold color and a cinnamon-like nose, but it is oaky, flabby, and flat with little flavor interest—a dull, over-oaked wine (11). \$7

Sunrise Winery. This Chardonnay has a light yellow color, a grassy slightly oxidized nose, a gaseous quality, and fruity/vegetative flavors (11). \$7.50

Arroyo "Ventana Vineyards." Another mistake with a cloudy gold color, it is spritzy with a sour apple taste. This poorly made wine is undergoing a malo-lactic fermentation that renders it most unattractive (10). \$8.50

Charles Krug Winery. Designated "Napa Valley Pinot Chardonnay" the label is as archaic as the wine. The wine is flabby, slightly sweet and devoid of varietal character (10). \$6.50

Geyser Peak Winery. Designated "California Chardonnay," the label tells the story. It smells and tastes like central valley grapes and has no varietal character. A herbaceous nose and flabby, stemmy character make the wine unpleasant (10). \$5

Gundlach-Bundschu Winery. This Sonoma Chardonnay lacks varietal character. It has a medium color and a perfumed Riesling-like nose. It is slightly sweet with bitter flavors (10). \$7.50

Martin Ray Vineyards "Saratoga." This Martin Ray Chardonnay is true to form—gold color, caramel/coffee bean nose, baked, nutty sherry-like flavors. The price is hard to believe (10). \$17

Pope Valley Winery "Napa/Sonoma, Lot 2." This Chardonnay has a yellow color and an oak nose with a hint of sulphur. It is spritzy, a bit oxidized and tart (10). \$8

Toyon Vineyards. This Sonoma Chardonnay is a light gold color with a slight musty/sulphur-like nose. It has an unusual metallic-like flavor that is not attractive (10). \$6

Napa Wine Cellars. If the \$4.25 price looks attractive, it isn't! The wine has a medium color, grassy nose and is sharp, tart, and unpleasant without varietal character (9).

Stonegate "Alexander Valley, Vail Vista Vineyard." Don't confuse this with the much better "Napa" bottling. This wine has a light gold color and an oxidized nose. It is spritzy with citric, oxidized flavors that are not attractive (9). \$8

Sebastiani Vineyards. This wine bears little resemblance to Chardonnay, much less a good one. It has a yellow color and a vegetable grassy nose. In the mouth it is very thin with a vegetable-like flavor—swampwater (8)! \$5

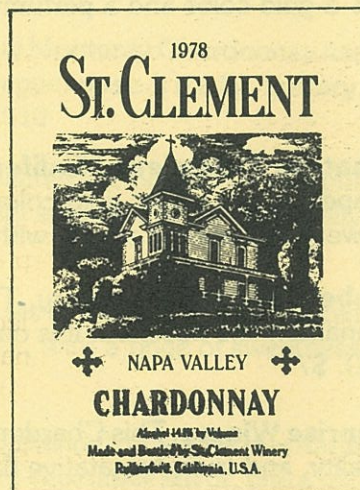
Grand Pacific Vineyard. This is another Chardonnay that evidently is only available on the East Coast. The \$10.59 price is an unbelievable rip-off for such a poor wine. Made from Sonoma grapes, it gets points only for a light gold color and some vinous character. Otherwise, it has a foul grassy nose and is cloudy, spritzy and sharp as a result of the on-going malo-lactic fermentation (6).

1978

The 1978 Chardonnays are not likely to be as rich and concentrated as their 1976-77 counterparts. Yet some will be elegant and beautiful. The St. Clement is a classic.

Outstanding

St. Clement Vineyards. Without question, this is the finest Chardonnay yet from this winery. It has a light yellow color and a beautiful vanilla/spice nose—very perfumed and intense. There are very elegant flavors that are just a bit tart with an intriguing hint of orange. A beautifully balanced wine with a kiss of oak marrying beautifully with the fruit. This will surely be one of the very best 1978s (18). \$10



Very Good

Chalone Vineyards. This is Chalone's estate bottled Chardonnay made from young vines. The regular bottling is expected to be one of the best Chalone Chardonnays ever, but make no mistake about it, this wine is also a winner! It has a gold color, a very perfumed nose and rich, almost sweet flavors. It is oaky, but very rich and buttery with a lingering finish. The wine should round out nicely in 2-3 years (16½). \$9

Caymus Vineyards. This Chardonnay is produced in limited quantity and sold only at the winery. It has a light yellow color, a vanilla nose, and good fruit and acid. There is considerable oak which blends nicely with the apple-like flavors (15½). \$7.50

Chateau St. Jean "Sonoma." This Chardonnay speaks well for the vintage at this winery. It has a yellow color, a fruity nose, and very fruity flavors with a slight spritz. It is a nice wine in a fruity, uncomplicated style that is ready to drink and should age well for 2-3 years (15). \$7.75

Estrella River Winery. This San Luis Obispo Chardonnay has a gold color, an intense/perfumed nose and is very rich with good fruit. It is oaky and a bit bitter, but still attractive and a good value (15) \$6.75

Martin Ray Vineyards "Dutton/Winery Lakes." This Chardonnay tastes like Chardonnay and has some complexity. It is surprisingly not oxidized with a nice oaky nose, good fruit and rich flavors. Still the price can hardly be considered a bargain (15). \$17

Ventana Vineyards. This new winery was launched with the 1978 vintage. The Chardonnay is a very good example of a fat, rich style. It has a gold color and a grassy/vegetative nose. It is very rich and buttery, and a bit flabby, but with tremendous fruit and a touch of bitterness in the finish (15). \$9.25

Good

Gundlach-Bundschu Winery "Sonoma County." This wine has a gold color, a spicy/cinnamon nose and a nice, fruity flavor. It isn't complex, but tasty with a short finish (14½). \$10

Cakebread Cellars. This Napa Valley Chardonnay has a light gold color and an oaky/fruity nose. It is crisp with good flavor, but is a bit sharp and needs several more years bottle age (14). \$10

Dry Creek Vineyard. This Sonoma Chardonnay has a light yellow color, an apple-like nose, and good fruit with a hint of vanilla and spice. The flavors are light and fruity, but the wine finishes short on the palate (14). \$8.75

Sonoma Vineyards "River West." This Chardonnay is perhaps not as intense as the 1977, but is attractive as a fruity wine which does not require extensive bottle age. It has a light yellow color and a very floral nose with good fruit in a light style. It should be released soon (14).

Mirassou Vineyards "Monterey." This is one of the better Mirassou Chardonnays of recent years. It has a light gold color, a fruity/slightly grassy nose, nice fruit and clean, tart flavors with a touch of bitterness (13½). \$6.50

Vines of Nepenthe Winery. This Chardonnay with a California appellation is ideal for perfect consumption. It has a yellow color, a perfumed, floral nose and apple-like flavors that are fresh, clean, and tart. The finish is sharp and slightly bitter. Drink it now for its youthful charm (13½). \$6.50

Chaparral. Made and bottled by Chalone Vineyards from grapes grown in the Edna Valley of San Luis Obispo, this Chardonnay has a light yellow color, an oaky nose with free sulphur, but is very oaky, coarse and citric (12½). \$8.50

River Oaks Vineyards. This Chardonnay has a light yellow color, an oaky/fruity nose and is crisp with nice flavors. It finishes a bit bitter and short on the palate, but for \$5.49 it's at least fairly priced (12½).

Boeger Winery. This Chardonnay comes from Placerville, near Sacramento. This wine has a light yellow color and an unusual, almost green oak nose. It is fruity, but lacks balance and distinction and finishes very hot (12). \$6

Franciscan Vineyards "Temecula." This is Chardonnay, made by a Napa Valley Winery from Southern California grapes, is not so unusual. It's just unusual to see "Temecula" designated on the label of a Napa Winery! The wine has a yellow color and a very floral nose, but it is very oaky with a slight sweetness and bitter flavors (12). \$7

Papagni Vineyards "Madera." Madera? Yes, Madera. From San Joaquin Valley, this Chardonnay at least has varietal character, albeit quite unusual. The wine has a gold color, fruity, almost creosote-like nose. It is fruity and rich with a slight burnt caramel flavor (12). \$6

Thomas Kruse Winery. This Chardonnay has a yellow color and a pungent nose. It is fruity, but with a stemmy, bitter quality (12). \$7.50

Below Average

Husch Vineyards "Mendocino." This is a fruity wine with apple-like flavors that is spoiled by a really skunky, heavily sulphured nose. Perhaps it will dissipate somewhat with time, but at the price who needs it (10). \$8.75

Martin Ray Vineyards "Saratoga." This is an almost identical wine to the previous two vintages with a dark yellow color, oxidized nose, and old nutty/sherry-like flavors. Again, it is an overpriced wine that bears little resemblance to Chardonnay (10). \$17

1978 Veedercrest "Sonoma County." The label says 64% Frank Woods Vineyards and 36% Mirabelle Vineyard—a very precise measurement, indeed! No matter, the wine has little appeal with a light yellow color, sulphur nose, and thin, musty flavors (10). \$8.75

WINE BARGAINS

"California Jug Wines are Mostly Junk"

Inflation is taking its toll in the wine market like everywhere else. It is getting difficult to find good wine under \$5 per bottle. California jug wines are mostly junk. San Martin is probably the best, both red and white; but some new entries, such as the James Arthur Field jugs, are terribly mediocre. Hopefully as California grape production increases the situation will improve. If the new Gallo varietals are good, they will be a blessing indeed.

For now, try **1978 River Oaks Vineyards White Table Wine** (\$4.99 for 1.5 liters). It is made from 55% French Colombard and 45% Sauvignon Vert grapes grown in the winery's own vineyards. The wine is clean, fresh, and fruity. If you're looking for a red wine, try **1976 BV "Beautour" Cabernet Sauvignon**. It's the best "Beautour" by far and a great bargain at \$4. The wine is ready to drink, but will keep for a few years as well. It is a good, fruity, slightly weedy Cabernet with cedary flavors. Also, at \$4.95 the **Liberty School Cabernet Sauvignon, Lot 5 (Selected and bottled by Caymus Vineyards)**, is a good value. It is a bit richer with more flavor interest than the BV.

About Our Rating Scale & Quoted Prices

18-20 Outstanding 15-17 Very Good 12-14 Good Under 12 Below Average

Wines are ranked on a 20 point system on the basis of relative merit. Wines with identical rankings are listed in alphabetical order. Rankings are usually made only after several tastings of any particular wine. Unless otherwise noted, prices quoted are the approximate California suggested retail prices.

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