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EWS Tastings

California Chardonnay vs. White Burgundy

EWS Blind Tasting - April 10, 2007

Some EWS tastings are not meant to be taken *too* seriously. This was one of them. *California Chardonnay vs. White Burgundy* was conceived to be pure hedonistic fun, a fair, competitive blind tasting pitting the best French and American Chardonnays against each other. The EWS team selected seven potentially wonderful Chardonnay-based wines from each region for a head-to-head blind tasting competition to make a Chardonnay lover salivate. For diversity and interest we tried to select wines from a wide range of appellations.

In the final analysis, we'd have to declare the tasting a draw as attendees showed no clear favorite. Perhaps symbolically, we had a tie for first place, one from each region. While this was a good tasting for sure, we were disappointed by two bad bottles of Henri Boillot's 2001 Chevalier-Montrachet, plus too many wines in the lower 90s when we were hoping for mid to upper 90s performances. Still, everyone found it least a few wines to fall in love with.

The following are consensus tasting notes, written to share commentary, descriptors, and convey the overall impression the group had for each wine. Wines were poured in three flights from numbered bags (1 - 14) and are listed below in the order they were poured.

Participants were asked to vote by number (1 - 14) for their three favorite wines. We award three points for every first place vote, two for every second place vote, and one point for every third, allowing for ties. Numerical rating reflects both voting tallies and the general level of enthusiasm (or lack thereof) displayed by the group when we discussed the wine in depth (referring to its number). Voting tallies: 1st/2nd/3rd

#	Wine (32 voters)	1st Place	2nd Place	3rd Place	Total Points
9	2003 Ramey Chardonnay "Hyde Vineyard" (Carneros)	5	9	1	34
13	2002 Beaune 1er Cru "Clos des Mouches" Blanc (Drouhin)	7	5	3	34
12	2002 Chasseur Chardonnay "Lorenzo" (Russian River Valley)	6	5	2	30
4	2002 Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru "Les Combettes" (Etienne Sauzet)	5	0	6	21
8	2004 Varner Chardonnay "Home Vineyard" (Santa Cruz Mountains)	2	5	3	19

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6	2004 Pouilly-Fuissé "La Roche" (Guffens-Heynen)	2	3	1	13
3	2003 Aubert Chardonnay "Ritchie Vineyard" (Sonoma Coast)	2	1	2	10
10	2004 Meursault-Charmes 1er Cru (Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey)	1	0	7	10
5	2002 Newton Chardonnay "Unfiltered" (Napa)	1	1	0	5
7	2002 Marcassin Chardonnay "Marcassin Vineyard" (Sonoma Coast)	1	0	2	5
14	2002 Chablis Grand Cru "Bougros" (William Fevre)	0	2	1	5
1	2001 Marcassin Chardonnay "Three Sisters Vineyard" (Sonoma Coast)	0	0	4	4
2	2002 Corton-Charlemagne (Bonneau du Martray)	0	1	0	2
11	2001 Chevalier-Montrachet (Henri Boillot)	0	0	0	0

1) 2001 Marcassin Chardonnay "Three Sisters Vineyard" (Sonoma Coast) - 4 points (0/0/4) - 91 rating Very bright yellow, although slightly cloudy. Attractive, fragrant, sweet nose offers scents of honey, grapefruit zest, and caramel. Rich, spicy, and powerful in the mouth with decent acidity and intense, juicy pineapple and green apple extract. We also get licorice and a medicinal note with a lot of alcohol, which combine to pull the rating down. There's an intense cider note in the "heavy handed" finish. While this wine was generally well liked, some complained that the "in your face" style was off-putting.

2) 2002 Corton-Charlemagne (Bonneau du Martray) - 2 points (0/1/0) - 89 rating Crystalline shimmering almost clear color with a slight greenish hue. Bouquet features notes of butterscotch, toffee, minerals, with a noticeable presence of oak. A strong flavor of Sherry dominates on the palate, with secondary notes of minerality, oak, and earthiness. The fruit seems buried in the structure. However, the acidity gives the wine "attack," right through the long finish. This is a youthful wine which offers little charm right now, although cellaring should enhance the wine's attributes. A few people liked it a lot.

3) 2003 Aubert Chardonnay "Ritchie Vineyard" (Sonoma Coast) - 10 points (2/1/2) - 92 rating Darker, more yellow-golden color. There's some cloudiness in the glass, especially compared to wine #2. The aromatics are dominated by notes of green pepper, toasty oak, and wet leaves. Buttery rich, big, juicy, complex, bold, and full-bodied in the mouth. Everyone enjoys the nice flavor profile and harmony of the components. There's a nice tart flavor to counter balance the ripeness of fruit. The acidity is fine and we also pick up minerals. The guess is California. The best part: an extremely long lemon custard finish. This is a delicious wine drinking very nicely this evening.

4) 2002 Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru "Les Combettes" (Etienne Sauzet) - 21 points (5/0/6) - 93 rating Medium saturated yellow color. Very tight nose; restrained almost to the point of absence. With aeration, it opens aromatically to become refined and ultimately attractive. We get hints of white pepper, hazelnuts, pear, and minerals. A stony note evolves and gets us thinking Chablis. Much better on the palate, although restraint continues; this powerful wine is nicely concentrated and still quite young. We no longer think Chablis! The chalky, lemon, spicy, white peach flavors here are yummy, carried along by excellent acidity. This wine has lots of fat and glycerin. The guess is Burgundy. Moderately long finish. This was the preferred wine in the first flight. It should be stunning when fully mature.

5) 2002 Newton Chardonnay "Unfiltered" (Napa) - 5 points (1/1/0) - 86 rating Rich golden color. Sweet, ripe, expressive, candied, perfume, and coconut scents are attractive to some, but most people found the nose to be over-the-top. However, few ardent supporters were seduced by the aromatics. Very sweet in the mouth; this wine was referred to as "the

Auslese Chardonnay,” but it actually tasted more like a late harvest Alsatian Pinot Gris. Detractors complained that the wine had too much (almost grainy) sugar through the mid-palate and much too obvious oak. It was called a “bizarrely manufactured,” candied wine. Only a few attendees would disagree with this assessment.

6) 2004 Pouilly-Fuissé “La Roche” (Guffens-Heynen) - 13 points (2/3/1) - 92 rating Light color with a yellow and green tinge. Lovely aromatics fill the nostrils with scents of exotic fruits, toffee, sweet baked peaches, pineapple, burnt sugar, and maple syrup. Although rather light in the mouth and not nearly as concentrated as most others, this wine woos us with delicious white peach and nectarine flavors. It is a wine of freshness, grace, and balance, with fine acidity. Extremely long, consistent finish. Impressive wine, well-liked.

7) 2002 Marcassin Chardonnay “Marcassin Vineyard” (Sonoma Coast) - 5 points (1/0/2) - 91 rating Deep, leaning toward golden color with tell tale unfiltered cloudiness. Very nice oaky, peppery, green apple and spicy crab apple nose. This wine has lovely perfume and actually reminds us of Viognier. Youthful, pure, powerful, and quite concentrated on entry. This heavily extracted wine has intensity with nutmeg and mace flavors. We are attracted to the excellent mineral notes that add to the complex mix, which includes a heavy dose of oak. The guess was French! The finish is long and interesting. This wine was still too young to be fully enjoyed, but there is a bright future ahead. It handles its weight well.

8) 2004 Varner Chardonnay “Home Vineyard” (Santa Cruz Mountains) - 19 points (2/5/3) - 93 rating Medium-light yellow color. Attractive, fascinating nose recalls baked apple, egg custard, and black cod with miso. A few tasters found this wine “skunky” and “very New World.” Big, rich, dense, yet soft in the mouth with delicious tropical fruit and sweet mango flavor dominating. The guess is California. We wish it had a bit more acidic cut, but most participants were quite pleased. The finish was big, sweet, and fleshy. These Varner folks sure make Chardonnay to our liking as their wines always show well at EWS.

9) 2003 Ramey Chardonnay “Hyde Vineyard” (Carneros) - 34 points (5/9/1) - 95 rating Medium yellow color. Drop dead gorgeous bouquet features lots of smoke, coconut, spice, elegant tropical fruits, refreshing minerality, with fine custardy exotic white fruits. There was a slight sulfur problem in one of the bottles. Very youthful on entry with vitality and grip. The spicy apple and mineral flavors entice us as this wine uses the palate as a dance floor. Very long, consistent finish. We heard: “This *has* to be Burgundy,” but it was an easy mistake to make. Once again we say that dollar for dollar, nobody makes more delicious Chardonnay in California than David Ramey.

10) 2004 Meursault-Charmes 1er Cru (Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey) - 10 points (1/0/7) - 92 rating Very light, almost clear color. Attractive, fragrant, light, lemon-scented nose with some black pepper, vanilla, and bourbon in the background. Follows through with consistency on the palate; there’s a modern, lemon oil, furniture polish character. Full-bodied, youthful, and complex; this wine forces you to pay attention. We pick up a little tartness in the finish. This is an interesting wine, seemingly French, which would benefit from a bit more acidity and being paired with the right food.

11) 2001 Chevalier-Montrachet (Henri Boillot) - 0 points - no rating Medium-deep, golden color. Nose is stinky and very yeasty, like a big ball of rising bread dough. We also get a lot of alcohol. Once we taste it, we know that these are bad bottles as it is dead on arrival with almost Sauternes-like sweetness and a strong bitter Sherry note. Regrettably, this wine was impossible to evaluate properly based on these bottles.

12) 2002 Chasseur Chardonnay “Lorenzo” (Russian River Valley) - 30 points (6/5/2) - 94 rating Medium golden hue. Gorgeous aromatics offer a complex array of scents including mint, orange, and oily molasses. Simply beautiful in the mouth; sexy, clean, complex, multi-layered, balanced, and totally delicious. Everyone enjoys the peach pit and sweet ginger flavors plus a supporting note of minerality. This wine had just the right amount of sweetness. The guess is French. Above all, the noticeably long, luscious finish is driven by verve and vitality. This is yummy stuff!

13) 2002 Beaune 1er Cru “Clos des Mouches” Blanc (Drouhin) - 34 points (7/5/3) - 95 rating Medium yellow color. The nose is more classic white Burgundy than any other wine so far, with its funky terroir, toasty, mineral, spice, hazelnut, and chalky notes. Sweet, steely, elegant, and delicious on entry with a beautiful blend of stones and white fruit flavors. Again, we detect a note of minerality. Youthful and well-balanced; the excellent acidity drives this

wine for a long, long finish. Drouhin's Clos des Mouches Blanc has consistently been among our favorite 1er Crus, so this spectacular showing was not a surprise.

14) 2002 Chablis Grand Cru "Bougros" (William Fevre) - 5 points (0/2/1) - 92 rating
Medium yellow color. Complex nose offers perfume, white truffles, scrambled eggs, orange peel, ginger, spice, and minerals. Really fine cut on the palate. This is a beautifully balanced wine with a stony, citrus, mineral, white fruit character. The acidity was wonderful; several astute tasters nailed this wine as the Chablis. One negative note: a bit of heat in the finish. The lack of votes seems inevitable when Chablis is tasted blind against big, buttery, oaky Chardonnays. But make no mistake, this is a first class wine on its own terms.

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