





CHARDONNAY

 **ROBERT MUELLER** 1996 Russian River Valley Oak Meadow Vineyard. The compact nose hints of popcorn off the top, then reveals its sweet oak spice and ripe apple tones. Smooth, supple and balanced, the wine is underlain by a certain "snappy" mix of apples and lemons that enhances a good sense of vitality all the way through to the finish. Flavors of sweet oak and butter are apparent in the fairly lengthy finish. The wine should further improve over the next year or two.


   \$17.50




   **NEWTON VINEYARD** 1996 Napa/Sonoma Richly aromatic, the nose delivers expansive, well-ripened appley fruit aromas enriched by toasty oak. Bigger and richer than most Chardonnays currently on the market, it tastes of rich oak and outgoing, ripe fruit along with creamy, sweet spice highlights and its medium-full palate impression are wonderfully well-balanced without ever showing any heaviness. The wine maintains its richness in the finish and should serve well with flavorful chicken and loin of pork dishes.

   \$24.00

OLIVET LANE ESTATE 1996 Russian River Valley Pellegrini Vineyards. The light intensity, clean, slightly chalky aromas show modest vanillin oak scents but not much depth or range. Round at entry then crisply balanced on the palate, this cleanly made but somewhat understated wine turns a bit thin and narrow at the finish.


   \$14.00

 **PRIDE MOUNTAIN VYDS** 1996 Napa Valley Green apple and stony, minerally tones can be found in the youthful aromas along with hints of toast. Clean on entry and sweetly fruity in the mouth, the wine suggests the taste of Gala apples subtly enriched by soft, well-integrated oak. While never layered or particularly complex, it is medium-full bodied and well-balanced with pretty good length. Try it as a luncheon wine with breast of chicken and fruit-laced salads.

   \$20.00

THE PYRAMIDS 1995 Sonoma County Fairly bright aromas show some vibrancy along with lemon blossom and lightly toasty tones and hints of sweet herbs. Very frontal in the mouth with a viscous, glyceriny feel on the palate and early impressions of richness, the wine shows a far narrower finish than expected. Still, its frontal qualities are pleasing, and service with food should take care of the rough edges.

   \$18.00

 **ROCHIOLI VINEYARDS** 1996 Russian River Vly Apple-pear fruit tones are teamed with a fair dose of oak, hints of butter and rather obvious lees. Slightly complex and rounded at entry, this one has some of the oaky-buttery trappings of richness and is centered on varietal fruit. Well-balanced, firm and fairly taut, the wine will serve well with sauteed fish and seafood dishes.

   \$18.00

ROSENBLUM CELLARS 1996 Edna Valley Paragon Vineyard. Rather odd in its semi-tropical suggestions of green pineapples, the nose is driven further afield scents of coconut and pine resin mixed with vanilla and roasted woods. In the mouth, the fruit remains hidden and stiff while the overriding woody tones continue to assert themselves rendering the wine very much wide of the mark.

   \$24.00

ST FRANCIS Reserve 1996 Sonoma Valley The fairly open, generous aromas display a sweet, fairly rich mix of new oak and ripe apples. Accessible but not nearly as generous or appealing in the mouth, the wine seems a touch flat and flaccid with a dilute sense of oak and apples. It runs away to coarseness at the finish, and while certainly drinkable, it fails to live up to its aromatic beginnings..


   \$22.00

ST FRANCIS WINERY 1996 Sonoma County A momentary frontal sweetness highlights the otherwise low-key minerally scents in the nose. No better in the mouth than its aromas promise, this neutral white wine sweeps blithely past any pretense of varietal distinction.


   \$12.00

SANFORD Barrel Select 1995 Santa Barbara County We have nothing against the barrels here. They contribute toasty and slightly creamy pleasures, indeed. But, they are played heavily against ripe and somewhat lazy fruit underneath, and the wine's rich and oily beginnings on the palate quickly give way to a tangy, sour-edged, slightly hot finish that is all too bereft of fruit.

   \$30.00

 **STEELE WINES** 1996 Santa Barbara County Goodchild Vineyard. Sweet, citrusy fruit in the nose comes dressed up with attractive suggestions of fresh butter and a touch of cream, and the wine reiterates both butter and citrusy, slightly green-apple fruit qualities on the palate. Clean, sleek, nicely balanced and fairly light on its feet, this one finishes with a nice bite of cleansing acidity and should serve famously with the likes of roasted sea bass, halibut or lightly seasoned prawns.

   \$29.00

 **STEELE WINES** 1996 Mendocino Lolonis Vineyard. Colored indelibly by its very rich veneer of creamy oak, this youthful wine is underlain by a good degree of perky fruit that hints at a bit of succulence to come. Still showing more than a few ragged edges in the latter palate and finish, the wine sports a solid sense of middle

extract and hangs on gamely to its fruit. Things should look markedly better here after a year or two of age.

   \$28.00




STEELE WINES 1996 Mendocino

Du Pratt Vineyard. Slightly acrid sulfitey top-notes presently interfere with the expression of fruit in the nose, but the wine recovers nicely in the mouth with a good sense of weight, careful balance and a fine, slightly supple feel. Its flavors are far more revealing in fresh young fruit, and oak is employed as a deft sweetener rather than competing for the spotlight. At the finish, the wine is again burdened by the bothersome burn of sulfites, and it deserves a year or two in which to grow beyond its ragged youth.

   \$26.00




STEELE WINES 1996 Sonoma Valley


Parmalee-Hill Vineyards. If waylaid initially by an intrusive bit of aromatic dankness, this lean, dry, mineral-tinged wine delivers little in the way of underlying fruit, and it finishes coarsely with a noticeable streak of heat that easily makes it the least attractive of the Steele bottlings reviewed this outing.

   \$28.00

SWANSON VINEYARDS 1996 Carneros


Napa Valley. Despite its rich oak and leesy richness which fill out the youthful aromas handsomely, this wine comes up short on the palate where its fruit exhibits a lean, green streak and its finish falls off in the face of rising bitter and coarse notes. Service with broiled chicken seasoned with lemon and herbs with fit the bill as would similarly prepared swordfish or tuna.

   \$24.00




 **TALBOTT** 1995 Monterey

Sleepy Hollow Vineyard. Very much in the Talbott style with toasty and creamy oak enrichment leading the way, this moderately intense wine adds in notes of popcorn and ripe apples in its outgoing aromas. Oak is the recurring and dominant theme in the flavors as well, and the medium-depth fruit that follows on finds tougher sledding at the finish where oak seems to be wholly in control and noticeable heat makes its presence felt. Save this one for the tastiest of dishes that might go with white wine.

   \$30.00

 **TALLEY VINEYARDS** 1996 Edna Valley




Oliver's Vineyard. Here is a finely tuned Chardonnay that, while not among the biggest, boldest, most bombastic of the bunch, is an eminently likeable presentation of fat, appley fruit and creamy oak. It is medium-full in body with a rounded, very slightly oily feel on the palate and is finished with a just the right touch of crisping acids. Sure to be versatile at the table, it will shine with simple chicken recipes.


   \$18.00

 **TRUCHARD VINEYARDS** 1996 Carneros

Napa Valley. Very keenly focused aromas of apples, citrus, lees and creamy, slightly toasty oak show an extra measure of richness and range, and it is that special sense of reserve


and depth that raises and expands the wine's precise Chardonnay flavors. Never a wine of bombast, but trading instead on energy and nuance, this young, still developing wine will show even better with a year or two of bottle age.

   \$24.00

 **VENTANA Gold Stripe** 1996 Monterey


Nicely fruited aromas display creamy, toasty oak overlays and nuances of roasted grain. Round, viscous and somewhat palate-coating, the wine delivers ripe, slightly juicy appley fruit flavors seasoned by sweet, slightly spicy oak. It is fairly lengthy in aftertaste and will provide good service with roast chicken.

GOOD VALUE    \$12.00




 **VENTANA VINEYARDS Reserve** 1995 Monterey

Apples, peaches, toasty and distant caramel notes are joined by dried-herb qualities that also become evident with air. Firm yet fruity, crisp yet rich, toasty yet not woody, this slightly citrusy wine will drink well with fairly flavorful fish preparations.

   \$18.00

 **VINE CLIFF CELLARS** 1996 Napa Valley


Conveying both an inviting impression of richness and a keen sense of precision, this nicely filled, optimally ripened, brisk Chardonnay is redolent of apples, butter, blossom and sweet spice. It is medium-full-bodied and carefully balanced with a streak of bright finishing acidity as the perfect counter to its rounded, slightly oily feel. Long, crisp and insistently fruity, it will make a classy companion to shellfish recipes and promises to hold nicely for at least two or three years.

   \$25.00




WHITCRAFT WINERY 1996 Santa Maria Valley


Bien Nacido Vineyard. An intrusive pungency shows in the somewhat nutty aromas, and fruitiness comes only as a distant afterthought. Angular, sour and acidic in the mouth, the wine is ragged, harsh and thoroughly uninviting.

   \$22.50

 **ZACA MESA WINERY** 1996 Santa Barbara County

Zaca Vineyards. Favoring oak, butter and leesy spice as its essential themes, this outgoing effort cannot be faulted for any lack of richness, but its fundamental fruit tends to grape-fruity leanness and is never so compelling as the toasty, "winemaking" qualities that prevail. Perhaps worth cellar-ing for a few years yet, the wine will make a fine companion to richer chicken dishes or a well-seasoned paella.

GOOD VALUE    \$14.50

 **ZD WINES** 1996 California

Clean, sweetly oaked and lightly graced with a touch of leesy, roasted grain complexity in the nose, this weighty, somewhat mouthcoating wine consonantly comes up long on richness on the palate. It is, however, just a bit frontal presently, and its finish is limited by vaguely citric acids, but it has enough substance to stand it in good stead for a few years of keeping, and it might well find the latter-stage fullness to complement its very rich beginnings.

   \$25.00