

CRITICS' CHOICE: CARNEROS CHARDONNAYS

Carneros is a cool region in southern Napa and Sonoma counties that produces aromatic Chardonnays, with ripe tropical fruit flavors balanced by crisp acidity. Our panel found nine savory Carneros Chardonnays.

Wine	Price	Rating	Body	Dryness	Comments and Food Suggestions
1995 Bouchaine Carneros Chardonnay	\$18	★★	Light-Medium	Dry	Light aroma, tropical fruit notes, smoky-toasty oak accents; ripe fruit flavors, good acidity, short finish. Try with macaroni and cheese, goat cheese pizza.
1996 Cale Carneros/Sangiaco Vyd Chardonnay	\$20	★★	Medium	Dry	Low intensity aroma of spicy oak, tropical fruit backnotes; tactile, medium fruit; crisp acidity, light finish. Try with grilled fish with citrus sauce, baked chicken.
1995 Clos du Val Carneros Chardonnay	\$16	★★	Medium	Dry	Up front butterscotch and high-toned perfume; big, oaky flavors with buttery, ripe fruit underneath, rounded and rich. Try with sea bass with fruit salsa, veal Normandy.
1996 Pine Ridge Napa Valley-Carneros Dijon Clones Chardonnay	\$20	★★½	Light-Medium	Dry	Toasty oak nose, spicy backnotes over-ripe pears; good acidity, lively citrus flavors, creamy touch; long finish. Perfect with sea bass with hazelnut crust, smoked turkey.
1995 Robert Mondavi Carneros Unfiltered Chardonnay	\$23	★★★	Medium	Dry	Apple aroma with spicy French oak; rich, smooth, supple flavors, with good oak integration; texture and length. Good with chicken with white wine sauce, pasta with clams.
1996 S. Anderson Napa Valley-Carneros Chardonnay	\$22	★★½	Light-Medium	Dry	Low intensity aroma, hints of tropical fruit; round, spicy flavors; buttery, oaky notes; long, balanced finish. Match with lemon pasta with mushrooms, sauteed scallops.
1995 Sterling Vineyards Carneros-Napa Valley Winery Lake Chardonnay	\$18	★★½	Medium	Dry	Apple and pear aromas, with vanilla and toasty oak backnotes; ripe fruit, rounded flavors; buttery texture; citrusy acidity. Good with fried chicken, oysters Rockefeller.
1995 Truchard Carneros Chardonnay	\$22	★★★	Medium	Dry	Aromatic, toasty, ripe tropical fruit and pears; excellent fruit and acidity; bright, rounded, rich mouthful of wine. Good with pasta grain, seared tuna with peppercorns.
1996 Truchard Carneros Chardonnay	\$22	★★★	Light-Medium	Dry	Floral aroma with Meyer lemon, tropical fruit and ripe pears; richly textured flavors; crisp acidity; long, fruity finish. Good with lemon chicken, pasta with shrimp and lemon.

ALTERNATIVE RED WINES: FRENCH REDS

These lively red wines from the south of France, described in an earlier tasting, are great with full-flavored foods.

1994 La Vielle Ferme Cotes de Ventoux	\$6.99	★★★	Medium-Full	Dry	Smoky berry aroma with hints of white pepper; richly textured, smooth and supple, lots of fresh berries; firm tannins. Value. Perfect with rosemary-crusted pork loin.
1994 Paul Jaboulet Aine Cotes du Rhone Parallele 45	\$8.99	★★★½	Full	Dry	Warm smoky-toasty nose, cloves and raspberries; bright fruit flavor, nicely crafted, rich texture, balanced tannins. Value. Perfect with hamburgers, lamb stew with barley.
1995 Vichon Mediterranean Vin de Pays d'Oc Syrah	\$9.99	★★½	Full	Dry	Raspberries, cloves and pepper over toasty oak; full tannins and fruit; peppery, crisp acidity; long, fruity finish. Good with roast chicken with olives, lamb with mustard.

Panelists for the Carneros Chardonnays were: Gerald D. Boyd, Chronicle staff wine writer; Maria Cianci, Chronicle staff writer; Rebecca Murphy, Vintage Productions, San Francisco; Susan Pey, consulting wine director, Il Fornaio restaurants; Debbie Zachareas, wine buyer, Ashbury Market and EOS restaurant, San Francisco.

RATING KEY

★★★★ Extraordinary ★★★ Excellent ★★ Good ★ Fair