



Spotlight on: Chardonnay

February 15, 2010

Seven Super Chardonnays

Guaranteed not to break your budget

With all the blustery weather we've been having lately, and the usual array of cold weather food I've been using as a defense against it, it's not surprising that most of the wines I've tasted lately have been reds. I knew I had to do something about that so I sat down recently with a small selection of Chardonnay.

Now Chardonnay, of course, is the world's favorite white wine, no surprise there. It's a total chameleon of a grape, producing wines that reflect its climate, and winemaking, like no other. That leads to a ton of confusion in the marketplace, and the often-heard quip "I don't like Chardonnay". As I mentioned last year that probably just means you don't like crappy Chardonnay! I mean, with well-made Chardonnay, what's not to like?

Well there are the stylistic considerations to be taken into account. Do you like it crisp and minerally? Fat and buttery? Someplace in-between? Someplace else entirely? Well I'm not sure I can help you figure all that out, but I can give you my impression of these 7 wines.

First off, the clear winner was the 2008 Rustenberg Stellenbosch Chardonnay. Coming in at under \$20 it's a real value and delivers power in a perfectly ripe and balanced package. It's a sophisticated wine yet easy to understand, my kind of wine! It's a wine that plays with a touch of residual sugar, but it has the acidity to keep the wine vibrant, and excellent depth of flavor. It may not be for everyone, and may, in fact, prove tiring to drink after the third or fourth glass, but I'm willing to test out that hypothesis!

2008 Rustenberg Stellenbosch Chardonnay

Intense aromatics combine many layered citrus tones from pink grapefruit and orange to lime. This is frankly oaky but not sweet smelling, with a nice almond tone and plenty of smoky notes. On the palate this is lovely, rich, powerful yet fresh with good acidity helping to support bright flavors of apricot, peach, and apple with a vibrant mineral streak on the backend that runs through to the moderately long finish where it's joined by the smoky, grilled nutty tones of the nose. A really nice blend of wood influences and fruit flavors that remains fresh and in balance from start to the long finish. Pair this with a rich fish in butter sauce, lobster or veal. 92pts.