

From James the Sommelier -All About Grapes

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours'

Chardonnay - the Queen of White

When talking about white wines, Chardonnay will, and always will remain, at the forefront of conversation- irrespective of whether you are a sommelier, wine connoisseur or novice. As Cabernet Sauvignon's brother from another mother, Chardonnay displays the same resilience to negative effects on vines resulting in it becoming another of the world's most renowned varietals. It also displays the same roguish characteristics by being considered a rite of passage for budding wine industries into the international market, while at the same time, the leading negative effect to the globalization of wine. Either way, Chardonnay has undoubtedly become a catalyst for a refreshing variety of wines.

Historically, the origin seems to be undecided. The most well established theory identifies it with Burgundy and surrounding areas. Less established but staunchly upheld theories, depending on your bias, has it originating from either Lebanon and Syria- brought over to Europe by conquering Crusader knights, or from Cyprus, Greece. The origin, however, pales into insignificance when considering the eclectic forms and tastes of Chardonnay produced in its vast diaspora.

Why, then, does it differ in taste so vastly depending on where it comes from? An important factor only known to wine growers themselves is that the grape is neutral; it has very little taste. Inevitably, the taste of Chardonnay is dictated by its human terroir. At what stage the grape is picked, decisions during the fermentation process and, most importantly, the degree of oaking all shape the final flavor and character of the wine. So, I implore you to seriously consider what *type* of Chardonnay you would like to drink rather than consider it as a choice between Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, Reisling or any other white wine.

Have no fear. I would not bait a line like that and then leave you none the wiser when delving into the mélange that is Chardonnay wines. If you want to drink the most terroir expressive of Chardonnays then go for one from eastern France. Burgundy is considered the benchmark region for expressing terroir through Chardonnay. Just north lays the smaller but equally reputable region of Chablis, which has taken on a semi-generic term for dry white wines; 'Chablis whites'. No prize for guessing what type is grown there then!

Outside of Europe, California has probably gained most fame as a quality Chardonnay producing region. Naturally, the taste is completely different taking on more buttery and oaken flavors and textures. Australia also deserves a mention as Chardonnay has been growing there for almost two centuries. As the wine world's mime, Australia has inevitably emulated the Burgundy and Chablis style Chardonnays in the Yarra Valley and the Margaret River. More original concoctions stem from Riverland- added oak chips- Victoria and Tasmania- crisp, less oaked and with lime notes- and Coonawarra- citrus notes.

TIPS: Base your choice of Chardonnay on the region it comes from.

**Pair it with white meats. If its from the Old World drink with earthy dishes or aged cheese.
If from the New World, drink it with tomato based dishes or spicy South East Asian cuisine.**

For more information about wine join our wine classes at That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road,
George Town, Penang

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