

The Best Chardonnay's

by Karen MacNeil | Jan 23, 2026 | karenmacneil.com

California Chardonnay has never been better. I don't say that casually. It's easy to make B- level Chardonnay that's creamy, oaky, and boring. Making A+++ Chardonnay is infinitely harder.

I remember the early days of the 1980s and 90s when hundreds of wineries began making Chardonnay, much of which tasted like St. Joseph's Aspirin for Children. So many Chardonnays back then were saccharin, heavy, oleaginous, and so acidified that they buzzed like Crystal Light. In fact, those wines initiated an era-long backlash known as ABC (Anything But Chardonnay).

Today's Chardonnays are lightyears better in every possible way. In northern California, most of them are from Sonoma, and many of the very best are from the cold, rugged Sonoma Coast famous for Chardonnays with a vivid sense of elegance and delicate richness.

After extensive tastings, the ten (actually eleven) wines below are my top Chardonnays from northern California. They're sensational. I've put them into two general groups, although there's some flavor overlap: Pure & Elegant and Rich & Plush. Please try some of these!



CATTLEYA 2022
CUVÉE NUMBER FIVE
SONOMA COAST
CHARDONNAY

Delicious apple Danish and white pepper flavors open up to notes of meadows, citrus, white flowers, and the sea. There's a lovely creamy crispness here. Long and vibrant.

95
POINTS



reviewed Karen MacNeil / Winespeed

JANUARY 2026