

# Wine Spectator Insider

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A Members-Only, Weekly Publication

THIS week's edition of the *Wine Spectator Insider* features outstanding wines from California, Bordeaux, Champagne and South Africa. Starting things off, James Laube reviews 17 exciting new California Chardonnays. Most of them (including a classic-rated 2007, which you'll find among the Hot Wines, on page 4) come from Sonoma, one of the Golden State's top regions for the white grape. And from Bordeaux, James Suckling covers the latest releases from the 2006 vintage on the Right Bank, including Châteaux Lafleur and Pavie.

Bruce Sanderson's recent reviews of vintage Champagne are featured here as well. A late-disgorged 1975 brut tops the list, earning 97 points. Finally, James Molesworth's latest tasting notes on the wines of South Africa are included this week, highlighting seven outstanding reds and whites from the Cape.

## California

### AU BON CLIMAT

Chardonnay Santa Barbara County Los Alamos Vineyard Historic Vineyards Collection 2007

**93 points | \$25 | 325 cases made | White**

A shade more aromatic and complex than the Santa Barbara County bottling, this has a similar complex, subtle mix of ripe apple, pear and melon, but also a nice dimension from the light smoky, toasty oak, followed by a great finish. Drink now through 2013.—J.L.

### PEIRSON MEYER

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Charles Heintz Vineyard 2007

**93 points | \$55 | 300 cases made | White**

Ripe, with opulent, creamy pear, fig, spice and honeydew melon flavors that gain complexity and body, ending with a long, complex finish. Drink now through 2011.—J.L.

### CHALONE

Chardonnay Chalone 2007

**92 points | \$25 | 16,801 cases made | White**

Exhibits a complex mix of subtle pear, mineral, pleasant earthy notes and floral scents. Tight and full-bodied, ending with a long, persistent finish. Drink now through 2012.—J.L.

### FREEMAN

Chardonnay Russian River Valley Ryo-fu 2006

**92 points | \$44 | 418 cases made | White**

Ripe, intense, rich and layered, offering tiers of vibrant honeydew melon, green apple and pear, with spice and light toasty oak lingering in the background. Drink now through 2012.—J.L.

### ANABA

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2007

**91 points | \$32 | 938 cases made | White**

An elegant style, with ripe, creamy floral honeysuckle, pear and honeydew melon flavors that glide across the palate, followed by a long, full finish. Drink now through 2011.—J.L.

### ARMIDA

Chardonnay Russian River Valley Keefer Ranch 2007

**91 points | \$28 | 232 cases made | White**

Combines ripe, rich pear and fig flavors with crisp acidity and elegant balance, ending with a long, clean, focused finish. Drink now through 2011.—J.L.

## AU BON CLIMAT

Chardonnay Santa Barbara County 2007  
**91 points | \$20 | 12,000 cases made | White**

Crisp and tightly wound, with sleek pineapple, melon and green apple notes that are firm, focused and full-bodied. This is most impressive on the finish, where the flavors are juicy. Drink now through 2013.—J.L.

## CALERA

Chardonnay Mount Harlan 2007  
**91 points | \$25 | 663 cases made | White**

Ripe and fleshy without being heavy, this is built on a mix of green pear, mineral and citrus blossom scents that gain body, richness and complexity on the finish, where this turns subtle. Drink now through 2012.—J.L.

## DUTTON-GOLDFIELD

Chardonnay Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch 2007  
**91 points | \$35 | 3,981 cases made | White**

Well-structured, with rich layers of creamy fig, melon and apricot, gaining depth and complexity on the long finish. Drink now through 2011.—J.L.

## FERRARI-CARANO

Chardonnay Russian River Valley Emelia's Cuvée 2007  
**91 points | \$36 | 465 cases made | White**

Smooth, ripe and fleshy, with crisp green apple, green pear and spicy, toasty oak notes that gain body and depth on the finish. Drink now through 2012.—J.L.

## FOG DOG

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2006  
**91 points | \$40 | 1,300 cases made | White**

Delivers a beam of fresh, vibrant peach, nectarine and green apple fruit that's rich and full-bodied, ending with a touch of spice and a lingering finish. Drink now through 2012.—J.L.

## FREESTONE

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Ovation 2006  
**91 points | \$60 | 2,500 cases made | White**

Fresh and vibrant, with lively acidity and snappy pear, apple and citrus shadings. Still a touch crisp and flinty in a good way, this is full-bodied and ends with a long, clean finish. Drink now through 2013.—J.L.

## MARIMAR ESTATE

Chardonnay Russian River Valley Don Miguel Vineyard  
Dobles Lía Torres Family Vineyards 2006  
**91 points | \$49 | 355 cases made | White**

Shows off a ripe mix of snappy, peachy tangerine and nectarine flavors that are clean and snappy. Still very young and tight, but deep, focused and concentrated. Should only get better. Best from 2010 through 2015.—J.L.

## TALLEY

Chardonnay Arroyo Grande Valley 2007  
**91 points | \$26 | 4,603 cases made | White**

A shade trimmer than Talley's Edna Valley bottling, with a flinty mineral edge to the floral apple and pear fruit. Full-bodied, ending with a complex, lingering finish. Drink now through 2012.—J.L.

## TALLEY

Chardonnay Edna Valley 2007  
**91 points | \$26 | 445 cases made | White**

Elegant and stylish, with a subtle mix of ripe apple, pear and citrus, turning delicate despite its full body. Ends with a creamy finish. Drink now through 2011.—J.L.

## France Bordeaux

### CHÂTEAU BELLEVUE-MONDOTTE

St.-Emilion 2006  
**93 points | \$275 | NA cases made | Red**

Displays intense aromas of bright fruit and fresh flowers, with hints of just picked herbs. Full-bodied, with chewy tannins and lots of vanilla, berry and cherry character. A solid wine. Best after 2012.—J.S.

### CHÂTEAU LAFLEUR

Pomerol 2006  
**93 points | \$920 | NA cases made | Red**

This starts off very slow, then opens to violet and lilac, with crushed raspberry and strawberry. Full-bodied, with racy, intense acidity and tannins. Powerful and layered, with wonderful, subtle fruit and a long finish. Best after 2015.—J.S.

### CHÂTEAU PAVIE

St.-Emilion 2006  
**92 points | \$250 | NA cases made | Red**

Very pretty and precise on the nose, with vanilla, blackberry and floral aromas. Full-bodied, with firm tannins and a racy finish. A bit lean, but solid and well-structured. Best after 2012.—J.S.

### CHÂTEAU PAVIE-DECESSE

St.-Emilion 2006  
**91 points | \$185 | NA cases made | Red**

Shows very floral, almost exotic fruit on the nose and palate. Full-bodied, with racy tannins and a long, silky finish. Pretty and focused. Best after 2012.—J.S.

### CLOS FOURTET

St.-Emilion 2006  
**90 points | \$56 | 3,330 cases made | Red**

Crushed blackberry, dark chocolate and spices on the nose follow through to a full body, with very soft tannins that turn silky and refined. Fresh, rich and racy. Better than previously reviewed. Best after 2013.—J.S.

## PENSÉES DE LAFLEUR

Pomerol 2006

**90 points | \$NA | NA cases made | Red**

Complex aromas of strawberry, peach pit and raspberry follow through to a full body, offering a solid core of ripe yet subtle fruit, with cream, blackberry and cherry character. Long and silky, with a dense, wonderful texture. Amazing for the second wine. Best from 2013 through 2020.—*J.S.*

## France Champagne

### MOËT & CHANDON

**Brut Champagne Cuvée Dom Pérignon Oenothèque 1995**  
**93 points | \$450 | NA cases made | Sparkling**

Rich in texture and beautifully balanced, showing lemon, honey, floral and peach notes. There's just a hint of toast and brine. This is lively and reveals candied citrus on the lingering aftertaste. Excellent length. Disgorged in 2005. Drink now through 2020.—*B.S.*

### HENRI GIRAUD

**Brut Champagne Aÿ Fût de Chêne 1999**  
**92 points | \$248 | 1,000 cases imported | Sparkling**

Very spicy, featuring clove, dried orange peel, cinnamon and cardamom aromas and flavors overlaying the red berry and light toast notes. This is expressive, turning nutty on the finish. Not typical, yet tasty. Drink now through 2018.—*B.S.*

### A.R. LENOBLE

**Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne 1996**  
**92 points | \$71 | NA cases made | Sparkling**

This is round for the vintage, yet with a racy structure underneath. Citrus, ginger and toast flavors converge on the refined texture, and the acidity emerges on the finish. The aftertaste evokes toasted walnut, suggesting this is nearing its peak. Drink now through 2018.—*B.S.*

### LILBERT FILS

**Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Cramant 2002**  
**92 points | \$90 | 20 cases imported | Sparkling**

A high-toned, floral style, with a firm structure supporting freesia, cherry and lime aromas and flavors. Tightly wound, with intensity and a long, chalklike finish. Needs time. Best from 2010 through 2020.—*B.S.*

### R.H. COUTIER

**Brut Champagne 1998**  
**91 points | \$59 | 60 cases imported | Sparkling**

A full-bodied bubbly, with red berry, graphite and whole-grain toast flavors. This is almost creamy, then turns grainy on the finish, with a chalky feel on the aftertaste. Sacrifices elegance for power. Drink now through 2016.—*B.S.*

## South Africa

### A.A. BADENHORST FAMILY

**Coastal Region 2006**  
**92 points | \$NA | 683 cases made | Red**

Enticing, with black tea and mesquite aromas that give way to a silky, racy palate of black currant, black Mission fig, iron, incense and lavender notes. Long and very finely tuned through the finish, with nice mouthwatering acidity. Shiraz, Mourvèdre and Cinsault. Debut release from former Rustenberg winemaker Adi Badenhorst. U.S. distribution not yet determined. Drink now through 2012.—*J.M.*

### SPICE ROUTE

**Malabar Swartland 2005**  
**92 points | \$66 | 100 cases imported | Red**

Exotic and flashy, but well-integrated, with lush, velvety-textured fig, hoisin sauce, melted licorice, macerated currant and blackberry fruit woven with intriguing incense and mesquite notes. The finish is long and smoldering. Syrah, Petit Sirah and Grenache. Drink now through 2011.—*J.M.*

### SPICE ROUTE

**Syrah Swartland Flagship 2006**  
**92 points | \$38 | 100 cases imported | Red**

Deep, with melted fig, hoisin sauce, freshly ground espresso, aged tobacco and loam notes carried by broad but well-integrated tannins. Still has plenty of muscle. Drink now through 2011.—*J.M.*

### A.A. BADENHORST FAMILY

**Coastal Region White 2007**  
**91 points | \$NA | 341 cases made | White**

Plump and dense, but focused, with delicious white peach, Cavailon melon and brioche notes held together by a thread of blanched almond. Long finish has a nice waxy hint echoing, along with nicely imbedded acidity. Roussanne, Grenache Blanc, Viognier, Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc. Drink now through 2010.—*J.M.*

### SPICE ROUTE

**Chakalaka Swartland 2007**  
**91 points | \$20 | 500 cases imported | Red**

Very pure, with mouthwatering sanguine notes piercing through the deliciously ripe blackberry, blueberry and raspberry fruit. The long, silky finish lets incense and mineral notes play out. Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Carignan. Drink now through 2010.—*J.M.*

### FAIRVIEW

**Viognier Paarl 2007**  
**90 points | \$20 | 1,500 cases imported | White**

Juicy and focused, with ripe apricot, peach and melon notes kept lively on the finish with a streak of salted butter. Delicious. Drink now.—*J.M.*

### MILES MOSSOP WINES

**Saskia Coastal Region 2007**  
**90 points | \$35 | 70 cases imported | White**

Very plump and inviting, with tasty star fruit, candied grapefruit peel, chamomile and buttered brioche notes. Long, creamy finish stays bright and fresh. Drink now.—*J.M.*

# HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in *Wine Spectator Insider*. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

## MOËT & CHANDON

Brut Champagne Cuvée Dom Pérignon Oenothèque  
Commande Spéciale 1975  
**97 points | \$1,500 | NA cases made | Sparkling**

Offers a wonderful bouquet of toffee, coffee, truffle and toast. A graphite note emerges with air. In the mouth, citrus and ginger notes chime in with the vibrant acidity, keeping this fresh and driving the long finish. Firm and taut, with a mineral finish. Mature and complex. Disgorged in 2007. Drink now through 2012. *From France.—B.S.*

## KRUG

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Clos du Mesnil 1998  
**96 points | \$1,250 | NA cases made | Sparkling**

A picture of finesse and harmony. Hints of vanilla and warm baking spices and floral aromas introduce flavors of fresh chanterelle, honey, lemon and mineral. The vibrant structure emerges from midpalate through the finish as this unravels its charms. The aftertaste echoes orange peel, spice and woody notes. Drink now through 2020. *From France.—B.S.*

## TOR

Chardonnay Sonoma Valley Durell Vineyard  
Wente Clone 2007  
**95 points | \$60 | 80 cases made | White**

Opulent yet elegant, this is smooth, rich and creamy, with tiers of fig, honeydew melon, spicy, toasty oak and hints of hazelnut. Ends with a long, layered finish. Drink now through 2012. *From California.—J.L.*

## FAILLA

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Estate Vineyard 2007  
**94 points | \$42 | 125 cases made | White**

Shows wonderful richness, depth and complexity. Full-bodied, with layers of creamy fig, apricot and green apple, shaded by spicy, toasty oak. Ends on a delicate note. Drink now through 2012. *From California.—J.L.*

## WINE SPECTATOR'S TASTERS

### The Most Experienced Team of Wine Journalists in the World

*Wine Spectator's* tasting staff includes 14 people in four offices. They work together to review more than 18,000 wines each year, more than any other publication. Together, our seven senior tasters count more than 140 years of tasting experience.

We always taste wine blind in our offices in San Francisco, Napa, New York and Tuscany, and in the vineyard regions of Europe. This is your guarantee that our reviews are fair and objective, and that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed. We score wines using the 100-point scale, explained below.

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Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

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Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat:  
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**Thomas Matthews** Executive editor, New York  
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat:  
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**James Molesworth** Senior editor, New York  
Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997. Tasting beat: Argentina, Chile,  
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#### Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended