

## International Chardonnay Tasting

**A**s usual, we conducted an international tasting in conjunction with our Small Vigneron Awards judging. Ten judges assessed the twenty wines which are reviewed in order of average score (out of 20) after the highest and lowest scores were removed. The number of gold medal scores (out of ten) is also shown. No discussion was permitted during judging and scoring. Please note that the judges are very experienced in tasting chardonnays from all over the world, and they are admirers of chardonnay from Burgundy and New Zealand. The wines were poured by our stewards and tasted “blind”.



**2016 Penfolds Reserve Bin 16A Adelaide Hills Chardonnay** A very fresh, complex chardonnay with nutty, almond meal barrel ferment characteristics backing up the intense white peach varietal aroma and flavour. The seamless palate is a textural delight. (\$110.00) 18.7 average score/9 gold medal scores  
[https://www.danmurphys.com.au/product/DM\\_916214/penfolds-reserve-bin-a-chardonnay-2016](https://www.danmurphys.com.au/product/DM_916214/penfolds-reserve-bin-a-chardonnay-2016)

**2016 Oakridge Local Vineyard Series Hazeldene Yarra Valley Chardonnay** A beautifully restrained style with a strong line of acidity. White peach aromas and flavours carry the complexity of the barrel ferment inputs comfortably. This wine will be even better in a couple of years. (\$36.00) 18.2/6  
[https://www.danmurphys.com.au/product/DM\\_665732/oakridge-hazeldene-chardonnay](https://www.danmurphys.com.au/product/DM_665732/oakridge-hazeldene-chardonnay)

***Note:** Winemaker David Bicknell kindly sent the 2016 864 Funder & Diamond Chardonnay, but it arrived too late for the tasting. The Hazeldene was a last-minute purchase.*

**2016 Tolpuddle Vineyard Tasmania Chardonnay** A multi-faceted chardonnay reflecting excellent source material and skilled barrel work. There's a touch of matchstick on the cool-area white peach nose, and the palate is long and creamy, finishing acid-fresh. (\$68.00 per bottle if purchased by the half-dozen) 18.0 /6

<http://www.summerhillwineshop.com.au/wines/2016-tolpuddle-vineyard-chardonnay-tasmania/>

**2016 Vasse Felix Heytesbury Margaret River Chardonnay** Although the oak is quite prominent, it doesn't jar with the bright citrus aromas and flavours. The palate is long, creamy, precise and pristine. (\$79.00) 18.0/5

<https://www.winesquare.com.au/catalog/product/view/id/4441/s/2016-vasse-felix-heytesbury-chardonnay-margaret-river/>

**2016 Whimwood Estate Nannup Chardonnay** Here's a ground-breaking wine in Winewise history. This year it won a Championship medallion, a Small Vigneron Awards trophy and was included in this International Tasting. If we had to name a wine of the year, this would be it. Complex and satisfying, it fills the mouth with flavour and texture, backed up by lively acidity. (\$180.00 for 6 bottles) 17.6/3

<https://www.whimwoodestatewines.com.au/buy-wine-859039.html>

**2016 Kumeu River Mate's Chardonnay** Wall to wall flavour backed up by all manner of complex notes! A panel-splitter. Oak and sulphides play strong roles, but the fruit intensity is such that all the components meld into a fascinating whole. A sensory roller coaster ride. (\$70.00) 17.6/3

<https://www.winesquare.com.au/2016-kumeu-river-mate-s-chardonnay-kumeu-auckland-nz.html>

**2015 Giaconda Chardonnay** Much of what is written about the Kumeu Mate's applies to this celebrated Beechworth wine. Gunsmoke, grilled nuts, matchstick and bacon were descriptors used. Above all, this wine has the power to carry all the artifact with ease, and remains one of Australia's great chardonnays. 17.5/5

**2016 Kumeu River Coddington Chardonnay** A very cleanly made chardonnay with a tight, textural, white stone fruit palate. It's very different from the Mate's, but just as good, and it appears to have greater cellaring potential. (\$54.00) 17.3 /4

<https://www.winesquare.com.au/2016-kumeu-river-coddington-chardonnay-kumeu-auckland.html>

**2015 Criots-Batard-Montrachet (Blain-Gagnand)** Quite voluptuous and showing obvious bottle age, butteriness and very nutty oak. The fruit intensity is impressive. This bottle, at least, was at its peak. (\$380.00) 17.2/3

<https://www.langtons.com.au/product/4443/1/2015/blain-gagnand/criots-batard-montrachet?basket=44970>

**2015 Xanadu Margaret River Reserve Chardonnay** Perhaps a tad too much oak for the peachy aroma and flavour that verged on tropical. Still, it's very fresh and full of life. (\$75.00) 17.0/2

<https://www.langtons.com.au/product/41667/1/2015/xanadu/reserve?basket=57681>

**2015 Meursault-Perrières (Domaine Michelot)** A nutty nougat style with good fruit intensity, but the firmness imparted by oak and skin phenolics is just a little too prominent. (\$210.00) 17.0/1  
<https://www.langtons.com.au/product/37454/1/2015/domaine-michelot/1er-cru?basket=57443>

**2015 Chablis Bougros (William Fevre)** Varietal white peach aromas show out together with a touch of brown apple developed character. The palate offers good flavour, texture and acidity. (\$153.00) 16.9/1  
<http://www.princewinestore.com.au/shop/index.php/category-list/liquor/white-wine/william-fevre-bougros-grand-cru-2015-888034.html>

**2015 Pouilly-Fuissé Clos des Quarts** A fascinating wine that combined some honeycomb-like mature characteristics with faintly vegetal overtones and refreshing underlying acidity. It provides satisfying drinking now. 16.9/3

**2015 Corton Charlemagne (Bonneau du Martray)** Deep yellow colour. Probably not a great bottle, but still has a lot to offer. Shortbread and nougat overtones show on a mature nose. The palate has considerable drive and acidity, finishing with oak firmness. Some of the magic of Corton-Charlemagne remains. (\$325.00) 16.8/1  
<https://www.langtons.com.au/product/4197/1/2015/domaine-bonneau-du-martray/corton-charlemagne?basket=57615>

**2015 Chablis Blanchots Reserve de L'Obedience (Domaine Laroche)** Strong honey and nougat nose reflecting too much development. The palate still delivers richness and acidity. Why did Laroche return to cork after bottling such impressive wines under screwcap? (\$214.00) 16.6/0  
[http://www.aussiewines.com.au//wine\\_Growing\\_Regions.php?pid=4603&page=198&s=&f=&wines=international](http://www.aussiewines.com.au//wine_Growing_Regions.php?pid=4603&page=198&s=&f=&wines=international)

**2015 Chassagne-Montrachet Caillerets (Blain-Gagnand)** Although this wine was possibly affected by low level TCA (cork taint), it still drew considerable support. It's an unctuous, mouthfilling wine which is rich and creamy, with a toasty oak finish. A different bottle may have fared very well. (\$130.00) 16.5/4  
<https://www.langtons.com.au/product/2646/1/2015/blain-gagnand/caillerets-1er-cru?basket=45783>

**2016 Cullen Kevin John Margaret River Chardonnay** Plenty of colour. Toasty and ripe - almost fat. Some honey and butter development. Slightly sweet and sour. (\$115.00) 16.4/2  
<https://www.boccaccio.com.au/buy/cullen-kevin-john-chardonnay-2016/LQ506222>

**2015 Puligny-Montrachet Champ Gain (Faiveley)** Very full-on. Peach, nougat and obvious oak – even a hint of brown apple. Voluminous fruit with a drying back palate. Definitely ready to drink. 16.4/1

**2015 Pyramid Valley Field of Fire Chardonnay (NZ)** This one definitely walks on the wild side. It's not 100% brilliant in appearance and, although there's good weight of fruit, barnyard characteristics are prominent. (\$120.00) 16.00/0  
<https://www.langtons.com.au/product/44063/1/2015/pyramid-valley-vineyards/field-of-fire?basket=54405>

The order of preference in this tasting was determined by the quality of the wines in the glass. One of the determinants of quality in any wine tasting is freshness, and screwcap plays a major role in freshness and longevity. At 2-3 years of age, the differences in vibrancy between screwcap-sealed and cork-sealed wines are usually clearly evident. Even at the highest level, a 5-10 year old chardonnay is usually fully mature, so the method of sealing the bottle is tilted strongly in flavour of screwcap.

Eleven of the twenty wines were sealed with screwcap. Significantly, the top nine wines wore the metal closure.

We urge Australian chardonnay makers to take our wines to overseas markets and show them in "blind" tastings similar to this one. However, be warned. The tastings must be genuinely "blind", with wines poured out of the sight of tasters by non-participants. Don't take the lazy way of using paper bags to mask bottles. The glimpse of a screwcap by some prominent American, English or European wine writers could well be the kiss of death.

## The Panel

<b>Jeff Byrne</b>	Agnew Wines, Hunter Valley
<b>Bryan Currie</b>	Hungerford Hill, Hunter Valley
<b>Lex Howard</b>	Winewise
<b>Lester Jesberg</b>	Winewise
<b>Harry Kinsman</b>	McWilliams, Griffith
<b>Helen McCarthy</b>	Mountadam, Eden Valley
<b>Ian McKenzie</b>	Consulting Oenologist
<b>Nick O'Leary</b>	Nick O'Leary Wines
<b>Dean O'Reilly</b>	Moët-Hennessy
<b>David Yeates</b>	Winewise

**Note:** Deb Pearce, one of our regular tasters, could not participate because of illness. Her place was taken by associate judge Harry Kinsman.

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