

San Francisco Chronicle

Northwest Chardonnay: The Chronicle Recommends

Jon Bonné

Sunday, February 20, 2011

For the 2009 vintage, at least, it was Oregon's show in this corner of the country. Following on its exceptional 2008s, the 2009 whites show a winning richness and depth of fruit. Many bottles among the 3 or so we tasted showed style in the winemaking without falling to oak or steel extremes.

Chardonnay-wise, Washington has placed big bets on value bottles, and that's where most of the action is. The state does so many wines well, but in this one spot its southern neighbors are outpacing it. The oak - the wines in general, actually - seemed burlier in 2009, many of them trapped in the Chardonnay style vortex.

No matter: The virtue of the Northwest is beautiful acidity that endures even in broad-shouldered wines. Our top picks showed that brilliant energy - a cornerstone of great Chardonnay.

2009 Cameron Hughes Lot 215 Willamette Valley Chardonnay (\$11): As always it's a mystery where super-negotiant Hughes unearths his sources, but here's a tribute to his efforts: Nothing flashy, but pretty, ripe apple-driven aromas, with warm tangerine and slight herbal notes. Richer to the taste, with a touch of butter at the end. Chardonnay built to please.

