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TRAVELERS' TALES, FROM NEAR AND FAR

Edited by PETER TERZIAN

THE CASE FOR CHARDONNAY

Before rosé begat brosé and frosé, there was Chardonnay, America's favorite grape. T+L wine and spirits editor **RAY ISLE** heads to Sonoma County to find out how the passé variety got cool again.

A Chardonnay tasting at Banshee Wines, in Healdsburg, California.

WINE LIST

WHITES & ROSE
2018 ROSE MENDOCINO CO.
2017 SONOMA COUNTY
2016 SONOMA CO.
2016 MARINE



▲
The swimming pool
at the Farmhouse
Inn, in Forestville.

Chardonnay that's one of the county's best. Lioco has long been a pioneer of excellent, low-alcohol Chardonnays, like the subtle, layered Demuth Vineyard bottling.

Not all big-name wineries traffic in big-style, oaky Chardonnay. Drive north to **Jordan Winery** (jordanwinery.com), where Chardonnay has been made with an elegant restraint since the first harvest in 1979. Take the in-depth library tour, which often features an older Chardonnay along the way before ending in the cellar room with a tasting and a selection of local and French artisanal cheeses.

When you're ready for some downtime, check in to the **Farmhouse Inn** (farmhouseinn.com; doubles from \$495), on bucolic River Road in Forestville. Though siblings Joe and Catherine Bartolomei opened the property in 2001, it's still

the most luxe destination in Sonoma County—helped by an \$8 million renovation a few years ago, which added nine guest rooms and a full-service spa. Tucked away in the trees, it has the feel of a serene private compound; the fresh flowers and enormous fireplaces in every room only add to the inviting atmosphere. Lounge by the pool and sip a glass of Chardonnay from Geoff Kruth and Megan Glaab's nearby winery, Lost & Found, until the sun starts to set, then relocate to the Michelin-starred restaurant for dinner. The wine list offers a chance to try excellent new Chardonnays from producers who aren't open to the public (usually because they're too small to employ full-time tasting-room staff). I recommend the mineral 2015 Peay Estate, one of the star vineyards of the Sonoma Coast, where cold ocean winds make for more intense wines.

As an alternative to the Farmhouse Inn, the newly renovated **MacArthur Place** (macarthurplace.com; doubles from \$509) is about a 50-minute drive south in the quaint town of Sonoma, within walking distance of the main square. It's easily the town's most significant hotel opening in decades. Rooms, which are filled with natural light, have enormous walk-in showers and bath amenities from organic fave Grown Alchemist. Chef Cole Dickinson's Mediterranean-influenced food at the property's Layla restaurant is top-notch. His *patatas bravas*, which take the form of crisp-fried, perfect cubes of potato drizzled with a whipped garlic aioli, are particularly addictive. You have been warned.

SATURDAY

Pop back into Healdsburg to visit **Ramey Wine Cellars** (rameywine.com). Winemaker Dave Ramey is one of the longtime wizards of California Chardonnay. His single-vineyard bottlings, like the 2013 Ritchie Vineyard Chardonnay, are some of the best in the state: complex, perfectly balanced, and beautifully aged.

A 20-minute drive south brings you to **Benovia Winery** (benoviawinery.com), set among the vineyards between Healdsburg and Sebastopol. There you'll find Mike Sullivan's 2017 Three Sisters Vineyard, which flirts with the idea of a rich, classic California Chardonnay before finishing firmly on vivid acidity and mineral notes. It's also worth booking a private tour of Heidi and Ted Lemon's **Littorai** (littorai.com), located just