

Wines Of The Week: Red Car Chardonnay And Mayacamas Merlot



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Food & Drink

I cover food, wine, drinks, travel; host dinners; and consult on wine

Members of the “ABC Club,” the unofficial group of people who will drink “Anything But Chardonnay,” are as passionate in their dislike of that grape variety as are anti-Merlot ideologues. Both, however, are wrong. Or, to paint with a slightly less broad brush, both are missing the true breadth and range that Chardonnay and Merlot are capable of. Chardonnay is far more than the oaky, vanilla-spiced monster that it’s reputed to be—great Chablis is the opposite of that—and Merlot is capable of magic (I’m thinking of you, Château Pétrus).

Today’s Wines of the Week are delicious bottles of each, both from California, that dispel the misapprehensions with exuberance and a real sense of character.

The Red Car Estate Chardonnay 2016, from the Fort Ross - Seaview appellation in the Sonoma Coast, proves that power and elegance can easily coexist. It’s effusive in the glass, with aromas of Meyer lemon and key lime pie, tarragon, and ripe pears, all setting the stage for a beautifully structured palate with a serious spine of acid and mineral from which flavors of fresh-squeezed lime, Granny Smith apple, springtime flowers, and the subtlest touch of sweet spice creeps in at the edges.

Sourced from Red Car’s estate vineyard, the grapes for this wine grow between 900 and 1,000 feet above sea level, which is right near the coast. The temperatures are kept fairly consistent by the Pacific, and each vine yields a relatively small crop: Just 103 cases of this excellent wine were produced. If you find a bottle in your local wine shop, it’s well worth the \$62 to check it out: This is a delicious example of how serious California Chardonnay can be...and how wrong the ABC folks are.

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Both the Merlot and the Chardonnay are phenomenal examples of why it's so important to revisit the grape varieties that you thought you knew: Great producers, working with world-class sites and passionate winemakers, have the ability to challenge or completely destroy those stereotypes. In the case of these two Wines of the Week, it's done in the most delicious way imaginable.

Red Car Wine Co. Estate Chardonnay 2016 Fort Ross - Seaview

This estate-grown Chardonnay is effusive in the glass, with aromas of Meyer lemon and key lime pie, tarragon, and ripe pears, all setting the stage for a beautifully structured palate with a serious spine of acid and mineral from which flavors of fresh-squeezed lime, Granny Smith apple, springtime flowers, and the subtlest touch of sweet spice creeps in at the edges, likely the result of its 14 month in French oak, only 25% of which was new. This finds an excellent balance between bracing and rich, and I suspect it'll age nicely for the next 5 to 7 years. Only 103 cases were produced. SRP: \$62



The Red Car Wine Co. Fort Ross - Seaview Vineyard, where Chardonnay of both generosity and precision is grown (Credit: Red Car Wine Co.)

RED CAR WINE CO.