

## 8 Expressive Sonoma Chardonnays Up to 92 Points

The 2023 vintage shines with these new reviews of prime California whites from Jordan, La Crema, Rodney Strong and more, priced as low as \$26



In Sonoma's Alexander Valley, Jordan has been producing noteworthy wines, including Chardonnay from nearby Russian River Valley, since 1979. (Courtesy of Jordan Vineyard and Winery)

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■ Sep 8, 2025

*Tasting Highlights' wine reviews are fresh out of the tasting room, offering a sneak peek of our editors' most recent ratings—including scores and full tasting notes—to WineSpectator.com members.*

The **2023 growing season** in Sonoma was a standout. Rain was plentiful in spring, and summer saw dry and cool conditions without significant heat spikes. Harvest was several weeks later than average, and rainwater reserves helped when the grapes needed a longer time to ripen. The resulting slow phenolic development yielded wines with tremendous freshness, length and intense flavors. This week's **Tasting Highlights** showcases eight Chardonnays that exemplify the excellent 2023 vintage.

One thing to note about the Chardonnays below is the presence—or, in some cases, the absence—of **malolactic conversion** (when tart malic acid is converted to softer, creamier lactic acid). Some winemakers allow a full conversion of malic to lactic acid, while others choose partial or none.

The stylistic differences can be sensed in the textures of the Chardonnays, which can range from steely and crisp to soft and creamy, and anything in between. The top-rated **Knights Bridge** Chardonnay blends grapes from multiple cool-climate vineyards in Sonoma County and employs partial malolactic conversion to balance a full-bodied, creamy texture with plenty of freshness.

Meanwhile, **Sojourn Cellars** produced several single-vineyard Chardonnays from fantastic Sonoma vineyards like Durrell, Sangiacomo, Gap's Crown and Reuling. This Sonoma Coast bottling uses grapes from each to create a balanced blend and goes through partial malolactic for a sleek and juicy profile.

In the Russian River Valley, longtime farmer John Balletto converted 700 acres of vegetable farms into grape vineyards in the late 1990s to form **Balletto Vineyards**. The winery uses four sites in the region for the Chardonnay on this list, which underwent complete malolactic conversion, softening the finish while retaining bright flavors.