

Rā Tuarua - Rāmere 18 Mahuru 2026

Day 2 - Friday 18 September 2026

Wāhanga (session) 3: So what is quality?



JULIA HARDING MW

Quality in Chardonnay

Chardonnay is adaptable

“Chardonnay is much better adapted to climate change than Pinot Blanc or Pinot Gris and has real potential for greatness not just easy drinkability. Do you know one other variety that produces excellent wine under such different climatic conditions? There is great Chardonnay in California, in New Zealand and Australia, and at the same time you have the great wines of Burgundy and Champagne.”

Klaus Peter Keller, 2025

Is Chardonnay a wine of place or a wine of technique?

“Few grape varieties possess Chardonnay's remarkable ability to adapt to different soils, climates and cultures. Yet it is the choices made in the vineyard and the winery that ultimately determine whether the variety merely reflects technique or becomes a genuine expression of place.”

Pablo Ugarte, President of Catad'Or World Wine Awards, writing about Chilean Chardonnay, Wine-Searcher, August 2026

Is there a relationship between style and quality in Chardonnay wines?

- ❖ fruity — savoury
- ❖ oaked — unoaked
- ❖ opulent — lean
- ❖ creamy — stony — chalky — mineral

“Style is no longer defined simply by winemaking, but by the interaction between place, viticulture, thoughtful cellar decisions, and the way each wine evolves in bottle.”

Pablo Ugarte, 2026

Can you create or manufacture quality?

create

- ❖ 'bring something into existence'
- ❖ 'cause (something) to happen as a result of one's actions'

manufacture

- ❖ 'make (something) on a large scale using machinery'
- ❖ *manufactus* – made by hand

steward = 'manage or look after'

Preserve or enhance?

**When is technique more important than
place of origin?**

**How do you
steward
quality?**

Can quality be masked or destroyed?

Chardonnay is malleable.

Does that mean its **quality** is more malleable?

Quality may be created incrementally.

But it can be lost quickly.

In the vineyard



Made with AI



A word cloud of winemaking terms. The words are arranged in a circular pattern around a central point. The words are: hygiene, selection, temperature, malo, reduction/oxidation, lees, Extraction, Blending, stabilisation, bottling/packaging/TPO, storage, and oak. The words are in various shades of blue and green, with different font sizes and orientations.

hygiene selection temperature malo
selection **Yeast** reduction/oxidation
lees **Extraction**
oak **Blending** stabilisation
storage bottling/packaging/TPO

In the winery

What is
excessive?

What is well-
judged?

Fashions and
style.

Storage and transport

Made with AI

light

oxygen

temperature

*time in
the bottle*

THE WINES

WINE 1

Crystallum, Ferrum Chardonnay 2025 Western Cape

“We strive to find a balance between using old-world methods and traditions while keeping in tune with the vineyards we source our fruit from. This philosophy is followed through in the cellar, where we nurture what comes off the vines rather than manipulating the fruit to fit a predetermined outcome.”

Peter-Allan Finlayson





Crystallum, Ferrum Chardonnay 2025 Western Cape

- family-owned and run
- vineyard at 220 m in the Shaw's Mountain area of the Overberg
- similar to Hemel-en-Aarde Valley but closer to the coast
- ocean-cooled
- iron-rich low-vigour shale
- 100% whole-bunch pressed with no additions and settled overnight
- spontaneous fermentation in 300- and 500-litre French oak (20% new)
- aged 10 months in those barrels
- TA 5.8 g/l | pH 3.33 | RS 2.2 g/l | Vegan
- Diam

WINE 2

Littorai, BA Thieriot Vineyard Chardonnay 2023 Sonoma Coast, California

“Where some see technology as the route to great wines, we see farming.”

Ted Lemon





Littorai, BA Thieriot Vineyard Chardonnay

2023 Sonoma Coast, California

- coastal-mountains influence
- cool but protected south-facing slope at 900 ft (274 m)
- long-term lease 2 acres (0.8 ha)
- planted 1996
- loam over sandstone
- Dijon 95, Hyde and Dutton Selections
- organic and biodynamic but not certified
- cool and delayed vintage
- spontaneous fermentation: 85% in French oak (20% new), 15% in 228-litre stainless-steel barrels
- aged 11 months in oak and 5 months in tank
- unfinned and unfiltered
- 293 cases produced
- cork
- 13%

WINE 3

Sugrue South Downs, Cuvée Boz Blanc de Blancs 2020 England

“The key to the 2020 is Mount Harry itself – it's a magical vineyard that's surrounded by woodland in the South Downs National Park near Lewes ... The site produces a wonderfully pure and crunchy style of Chardonnay that typically exhibits a high-toned floral/hedgerow note alongside its chalky spine.”





Sugrue South Downs, Cuvée Boz Blanc de Blancs 2020 England

- Dermot and Ana Sugrue
- 2.2-ha Mount Harry vineyard in East Sussex
- planted 2006, managed by the Sugrues since 2013
- sloping site on shallow clay loam over chalk at 70 m
- “exceptional year”: long spells of warmth and higher-than-average light levels
- sustainable/organic but not certified
- spontaneously fermented and aged in 500-litre barrels and stainless steel
- no malo
- bottled July 2021, 36 m on lees
- disgorged July 2024
- 3,000 bottles
- 12% | RS 5 g/l

WINE 4

Samuel Billaud, Mont de Milieu Premier Cru 2020 Chablis



Samuel Billaud, Mont de Milieu Premier Cru 2020 Chablis

- immediately E of Montée de Tonnerre, right bank of the Serein
- high level of Kimmeridgian limestone
- Billaud owns 3 parcels of vines at different levels on the hillside
- two plots c 80 years old, one plot 45 years old
- organic but not certified
- 2020 was picked early, 28 August to 6 September
- spontaneous fermentation
- 80% in stainless-steel and 20% in 2- to 4-year-old 456-litre French oak casks (Chassin)
- full malo
- 12 months on lees (same vessels) then racked to tank, no stirring
- blending
- 6 months on fine lees in tank
- bottled spring 2022
- 13% alcohol

WINE 5

Vasse Felix, Heytesbury Chardonnay 2020

Margaret River, Western Australia





Vasse Felix, Heytesbury Chardonnay 2020

Margaret River, Western Australia

- Home Block in Wilyabrup and Gnarawary in Wallcliffe
- Gingin clone, vines 22/15 yrs
- dry-farmed
- warm, dry vintage
- low yields
- hand-harvested, chilled, whole-bunch pressed
- unclarified juice to barrel
- high solids (600 NTU)
- spontaneous fermentation in French oak barriques
- 61% new oak, the rest 1–4 yrs
- 95–100% malo
- 10 months in barrel and 7 months in tank post blending
- regular lees stirring
- 13.9% | TA 6.7 g/l | pH 3.14

**Thank you to all the producers
who kindly gave their wines**