

Wine Spectator Insider

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CALIFORNIA and France's Burgundy and Rhône Valley regions are covered in this week's *Wine Spectator Insider*. James Laube highlights Chardonnays from California, including four 2008s from top producer Peter Michael. The Peter Michael Chardonnay bottlings are grown at high-elevation vineyards in Sonoma County and are consistently some of the Golden State's best. Two of this report's 2008 Chardonnays earn classic ratings; you'll find both among the Hot Wines, on page 4.

Bruce Sanderson also focuses on Chardonnay this week—from the Chassagne-Montrachet vineyard of Burgundy—reviewing 15 mineral-driven 2007s. And James Molesworth provides tasting notes for a range of Rhône Valley reds from multiple vintages, including a classic-rated 2007 Châteauneuf-du-Pape from Pègaü as well as Guigal's newest Côte-Rôties and a Hermitage from M. Chapoutier.

California

FISHER

Chardonnay Sonoma County Whitney's Vineyard 2007
93 points | \$60 | 165 cases made | White

Rich and layered, showing ripe fig, melon and hazelnut, with a hint of citrus. Complex and full-bodied, with a nice overlay of toasty oak, spice and lemon peel, gaining body and turning complex. Drink now through 2014.—J.L.

MALDONADO

Chardonnay Sonoma County Parr Vineyard 2007
93 points | \$25 | 824 cases made | White

Smooth, rich and creamy, with fig, tangerine and nectarine flavors that are full-bodied, pure and complex, floral and spicy, with a long, persistent finish that picks up flavor. Drink now through 2014.—J.L.

PETER MICHAEL

Chardonnay Sonoma County La Carrière 2008
93 points | \$80 | 2,100 cases made | White

Young, raw and vibrant, yet rich and concentrated. Still coarse and leesy, but with a rich, solid core of fig, melon, pear and spice. Full-bodied, focused and persistent, gaining depth. Drink now through 2015.—J.L.

ROBERT YOUNG

Chardonnay Alexander Valley 2007
93 points | \$40 | 2,103 cases made | White

Rich and opulent, with layers of fig, melon and honeysuckle flavors that are full-bodied, silk-textured, long and persistent, unveiling the vineyard's purity of flavor. Drink now through 2010.—J.L.

FREESTONE

Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Ovation 2007
92 points | \$45 | 2,400 cases made | White

Tightly wound, firm and concentrated, with a laser beam of citrus-infused green apple, lemon drop and melon notes. Full-bodied, gaining complexity and finishing with a vibrant finish. Drink now through 2016.—J.L.

CHAPPELLET

Chardonnay Napa Valley 2008
91 points | \$32 | 3,800 cases made | White

Rich, layered and full-bodied, with a mix of toasty oak, ripe fig, anise and honeysuckle, holding its tight focus and ending with a long, persistent finish. Drink now through 2015.—J.L.

HANZELL

Chardonnay Sonoma Valley 2007

91 points | \$70 | 1,324 cases made | White

Sleek and focused, with a grainy edge to the citrus, pear, apple and spice notes that are intense, vibrant, tight and focused. Slow to unfold, but a good cellar choice. Drink now through 2016.—*J.L.*

France Burgundy

MICHEL NIELLON

Chassagne-Montrachet Clos St.-Jean 2007

93 points | \$68 | 90 cases imported | White

Verges on pungent and oily in texture, with corn, nut oil, herb, citrus and mineral aromas and flavors. Tensile in character, with fine intensity and a long, stone-driven aftertaste. Shows real *terroir*. Best from 2012 through 2025.—*B.S.*

MICHEL NIELLON

Chassagne-Montrachet Les Vergers 2007

93 points | \$68 | 100 cases imported | White

There's a stony depth to this white, with hints of chalk and smoke complementing the apple, peach and spice flavors. The supple texture coats the mouth, despite the lively structure underneath. Best from 2012 through 2024.—*B.S.*

PHILIPPE COLIN

Chassagne-Montrachet La Maltroie 2007

92 points | \$58 | 25 cases imported | White

On the tight side and compact, this needs air to reveal its crushed stone, lime blossom and citrus flavors. Matched to a smooth texture that gives a gliding impression on the long finish. Best from 2011 through 2020.—*B.S.*

MICHEL NIELLON

Chassagne-Montrachet Clos de la Maltroie 2007

92 points | \$68 | 100 cases imported | White

There's a touch of green herb and grapefruit peel accents in this apple- and peach-flavored white, which is reticent at first, but air coaxes out the mineral intensity. Shows plenty of freshness and energy on the finish. Best from 2012 through 2024.—*B.S.*

BRUNO COLIN

Chassagne-Montrachet La Maltroie 2007

91 points | \$63 | 25 cases imported | White

This has terrific focus, from the lime blossom, apple and peach aromas and flavors to the vibrant structure to the mineral underpinning. Harmonious, graceful and long. Best from 2011 through 2022.—*B.S.*

ALEX GAMBAL

Chassagne-Montrachet 2007

91 points | \$48 | 100 cases imported | White

A mix of oak spice, coconut, lime blossom and white peach aromas and flavors highlight this elegant white. Though lean, this has intensity with an expansive finish. Best from 2012 through 2024.—*B.S.*

ALEX GAMBAL

Chassagne-Montrachet Clos St.-Jean 2007

91 points | \$60 | 35 cases imported | White

This white is all about the beautiful balance and silky texture. Add to that lime blossom, peach, toast and spice notes and the combination is alluring and lasting. Best from 2011 through 2023.—*B.S.*

ALEX GAMBAL

Chassagne-Montrachet La Maltroie 2007

91 points | \$60 | 50 cases imported | White

Shy in aroma, this white offers lime and mineral notes set against a lean frame. Builds nicely, showing balance and an expansive aftertaste of mineral and spice. Best from 2012 through 2023.—*B.S.*

CAMILLE GIROUD

Chassagne-Montrachet Les Vergers 2007

91 points | \$73 | 5 cases imported | White

A linear style, with tension between the racy structure and mineral core. Apple, citrus and floral notes swirl around these points. Just as it seems to dissipate, a stony intensity marshals the aftertaste. Drink now through 2022.—*B.S.*

BLAIN-GAGNARD

Chassagne-Montrachet 2007

90 points | \$40 | 130 cases imported | White

A bit austere now, but rooted in mineral flavors, along with lime and apple flavors. Builds nicely from start to finish and should develop well over time. There's a fine, stony aftertaste. Best from 2012 through 2024.—*B.S.*

BLAIN-GAGNARD

Chassagne-Montrachet Clos St.-Jean 2007

90 points | \$50 | 50 cases imported | White

Notes of seashore, oyster shell, peach and apple mark this firmly structured, racy white, which has adequate flesh and a hint of smoke on the finish. A touch bitter in the end. Best from 2012 through 2022.—*B.S.*

BRUNO COLIN

Chassagne-Montrachet 2007

90 points | \$45 | 60 cases imported | White

There are plenty of subtleties to this, from the fleeting aromas of flowers and citrus to the spice and toast accenting the apple and lime notes. Firm and racy, with a long finish. Best from 2012 through 2024.—*B.S.*

PHILIPPE COLIN

Chassagne-Montrachet Clos St.-Jean 2007
90 points | \$58 | 25 cases imported | White

There's a softness to the texture of this white, yet also a bright structure, setting the stage for pastels of peach, grapefruit and spice flavors. Deftly balanced and long on the finish. Drink now through 2020.—*B.S.*

PHILIPPE COLIN

Chassagne-Montrachet Les Vergers 2007
90 points | \$58 | 50 cases imported | White

Moderate richness is backed by a vibrant structure in this juicy white, which boasts apple, peach and butterscotch flavors and a lingering finish. Best from 2011 through 2022.—*B.S.*

RAMONET

Chassagne-Montrachet Vergers 2007
90 points | \$60 | 60 cases imported | White

Very austere, with a bite, this citronella-, lime- and chalk-flavored white seems fused with acidity. This is long, yet even the finish is austere. Needs time. Best from 2012 through 2024.—*B.S.*

France Rhône

E. GUIGAL

St.-Joseph Lieu-Dit St.-Joseph 2007
93 points | \$50 | 650 cases made | Red

Alluring cocoa powder, black tea and espresso aromas give way to a nicely structured core of black cherry, black currant and fig notes. An espresso edge takes over on the still-grippy finish. Best from 2011 through 2018.—*J.M.*

M. CHAPOUTIER

Crozes-Ermitage Les Varonniers 2007
92 points | \$55 | 132 cases imported | Red

Very stylish, with soft but persistent mouthfeel to the blackberry, pepper, tobacco and cocoa notes. Features lingering black tea and iron notes on the finish. Drink now through 2015.—*J.M.*

SÉLECTION LAURENCE FÉRAUD

Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2007
92 points | \$59 | 420 cases made | Red

Grippy for the vintage, with cedar, coffee and roasted fig notes framing the black currant paste, hoisin sauce and roasted beef flavors. There's a long, tarry note on the finish with a nice wild edge. Drink now through 2020.—*J.M.*

E. GUIGAL

Côte-Rôtie Château d'Ampuis 2006
92 points | \$175 | 2,500 cases made | Red

Still a touch tight, this builds slowly with tangy red and black currant fruit married to dark olive notes. There's a tarry edge on the finish, with lingering iron and espresso notes that gain steam nicely as they air in the glass. Drink now through 2019.—*J.M.*

MAISON BENEDETTI

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Les Larmes Papales 2007
91 points | \$60 | 20 cases imported | Red

A silky, perfumy style, with lush black cherry, raspberry ganache and mulled red currant notes that glide over hints of fresh mineral and shiso leaf. Flirts with jammy on the finish, but stays focused enough. Drink now through 2017.—*J.M.*

YVES CUILLERON

St.-Joseph Les Pierres Sèches 2007
91 points | \$39 | 2,683 cases made | Red

Nicely juicy for the vintage, with sanguine, iron and mulled cherry notes backed by twinges of briar and lavender. Really rock-solid, with a long finish. Drink now through 2015.—*J.M.*

E. GUIGAL

Hermitage 2005
91 points | \$80 | 2,500 cases made | Red

Not as grippy as most 2005s, but wonderfully ripe and balanced, with dark plum, fig and blackberry fruit laid over hints of suave black tea and melted licorice. The lingering, toasty finish is well-integrated. Drink now through 2016.—*J.M.*

MAISON BENEDETTI

Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2007
90 points | \$45 | 100 cases imported | Red

Ripe and very friendly, with silky, lush blackberry and raspberry notes laced with hints of sandalwood, pepper and shiso leaf. The finish is stylish. Drink now through 2016.—*J.M.*

E. GUIGAL

Côte-Rôtie Brune et Blonde 2006
90 points | \$70 | 21,000 cases made | Red

This is rock-solid, with a tangy core of red currant and red licorice fruit framed by sandalwood, black tea and iron notes. There's nice grip on the olive-tinged finish. Drink now through 2015.—*J.M.*

VIDAL-FLEURY

St.-Joseph 2007
90 points | \$29 | 2,500 cases made | Red

This has a nice sappy feel, with kirsch and raspberry notes laced with hints of briar and black tea. Stays lively on the finish, with a mineral note adding length. Drink now through 2013.—*J.M.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in *Wine Spectator Insider*. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

PETER MICHAEL

Chardonnay Sonoma County Ma Belle-Fille 2008
97 points | \$85 | 2,100 cases made | White

A tremendous Chardonnay, intense, pure, ripe and complex, with concentrated pear, apple, fig and melon flavors that are elegant and refined. Well-defined and long on the finish. Drink now through 2016. *From California.*—J.L.

PETER MICHAEL

Chardonnay Sonoma County Mon Plaisir 2008
96 points | \$80 | 1,100 cases made | White

Unctuous and layered, rich and creamy, showing opulent fig, melon and honeysuckle flavors that are full-blown and flow easily, with touches of ginger and honey. Complex, intense and persistent. Drink now through 2016. *From California.*—J.L.

DOMAINE DU PÉGAÛ

Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Réservee 2007
95 points | \$119 | 700 cases imported | Red

This packs it all together, with the ripe plum sauce, braised fig and currant paste notes of the vintage matched with invigorating hoisin sauce, brick dust and grilled beef notes. The long finish drips with fruit, but stays framed by a wild edge that keeps this firmly planted in *terroir*. Best from 2011 through 2031. *From France.*—J.M.

PETER MICHAEL

Chardonnay Sonoma County Belle Côte 2008
94 points | \$75 | 2,200 cases made | White

A rich, unctuous, full-bodied style, with ripe fig, melon, honeysuckle and floral scents that are full-bodied and concentrated, turning elegant, with a long, persistent finish. Drink now through 2015. *From California.*—J.L.

WINE SPECTATOR'S TASTERS

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Wine Spectator's tasting staff includes 14 people in three offices. They work together to review more than 18,000 wines each year, more than any other publication. Together, our seven senior tasters count more than 140 years of tasting experience.

We always taste wine blind in our offices in Napa, New York and Tuscany. This is your guarantee that our reviews are fair and objective, and that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed. We score wines using the 100-point scale, explained below.

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Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

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Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended