

# Something for Everyone

## CENTRAL COAST CHARDONNAY CAN PLEASE ALL PALATES

by Meg Houston Maker

“Chardonnay is still the largest white wine category,” says Alison Carscaden, owner and sommelier at 15 Degrees C Wine Shop & Bar in Templeton, CA, just south of Paso Robles, where she sells more Chardonnay than any other white wine. Carscaden’s customers run the gamut from wine-savvy industry folks to wine-loving novices, so she offers a range of Chardonnay expressions, from the lean and mineral-driven to the rich and buttery.

Central Coast Chardonnay hits all of those notes. “What I love about the Central Coast is that we grow Chardonnay in many of the eleven sub-appellations of Paso, but we also have some beautiful Chardonnay from South County, Edna Valley, Santa Maria and Santa Barbara County,” she says. And while she describes the style as somewhat on the rich side—it’s generally a warm, if rangy, appellation—the wines have some gravitas, too, “some unexpected acid and minerality.”

That means these wines can please any palate that walks through her door. Carscaden’s favorite producers include Jack Creek, Scar of the Sea, Presqu’île and Liquid Farm, and she loves to pair them with local shellfish, especially scallops.

I recently tasted a range of 2014 and 2015 Central Coast Chardonnays that are in broad release, and, like Carscaden, found them to be ripe but not overt. I was also happy to discover a few wineries relying on ambient yeasts and minimal cellar handling, and preserving freshness with judicious use of barrel and malolactic fermentation.

The best of these Chardonnays expressed a zesty, earthy streak with a decoration of herbs and flowers, qualities that make them versatile by the glass but also great for lighter preparations, especially of fish and shellfish—foods from the coast, naturally.



**Cycles Gladiator 2014 Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$11)**

Tropical, offering pineapple and mango, melon and citrus. The body is ample with a hint of oaky spice, and the finish is like a shot of sweet Meyer lemon. Friendly but not heavy, and a great price-point for BTG programs.

WINE HOOLIGANS



**Calera 2014 Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$20)**

A ripe wine with bite, hand-harvested, native yeast-fermented and moved by gravity in the winery. It’s sappy, soaked with savory yellow fruits and citrus peels with a snappy, nearly briny herbal finish. Super food-friendly.



**Edna Valley Vineyard 2015 Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$15)**

Its lovely fragrance mingles lemon cream, apple flesh, quince paste and ginger, while the body suggests tree fruits, chamomile, laurel and something like green olive. Pair it with herbed fresh cheeses, crispy chicken or tempura.

E&J GALLO



**Talley 2014 Chardonnay, Arroyo Grande Valley (\$27)**

Springlike and scented with whiffs of daffodils and citrus, pineapple and orchard fruits. Its silky body offers a sense of cultured cream and lemon curd. Talley’s single-vineyard Chardonnays are also terrific.



**Broadside 2014 Wild Ferment Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$18)**

A restrained, elegant wine with subtle notes of lemon peel, orchard fruits and white peaches. It’s got a stratum of wet stone, too, and is lightly spiked with white pepper. Breezy but serious.

WINE HOOLIGANS



**Dierberg 2014 Estate Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley (\$32)**

Nimble and elegant, mingling honeysuckle with tropical fruits, while lovely, silken acidity leavens the finish. The wine’s smooth and substantial body makes it a serious gastronomy wine.



**Talbott 2015 Kali Hart Chardonnay, Monterey (\$20)**

A wine with white peaches and pineapple, lemon curd and lemon zest, plus a complement of herbs and spices and cream. It’s a smiling wine with substance, good by the glass and friendly with richer preparations.

E&J GALLO



**Dolin 2014 Chardonnay, Bien Nacido Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley (\$39)**

Concentrated and structured, its citrus-ripeness is balanced by the presence of oak, suggesting this wine is age-worthy and showing what great fruit from an esteemed Central Coast cru can do. ■■