

The Great Blind Chardonnay Challenge 2018 – New World Chardonnay Giving Burgundy a Run For Its Money...

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Chardonnay is often called the chameleon of grape varieties, adapting itself to its environment and terroir with impressive ease. Yet for almost all Chardonnay producers around the globe white Burgundy Chardonnay remains the zenith of quality and expression for this variety and understandably so when the region boasts iconic appellations like Chevalier Montrachet and Le Montrachet Grand Cru.

But there is only one problem, well, actually a couple of problems. The first and most obvious one is that Burgundy is a small region in reality and production is greatly outstripped by global demand, hence pushing prices of fairly basic quality wines to astronomical levels. Then, just to rub salt in the consumer's purchasing wounds, Burgundy has been afflicted, and many argue still is, by the dreaded pox... or premature oxidation (premox).

In the context of this scenario, the concept of the *Great Blind Chardonnay Challenge* was born between obsessive UK based oenophiles Keith Prothero and Paul Day. The idea was simple... Keith Prothero would pitch 10 of the world's best New World Chardonnays against 10 of Burgundies finest with no price limit set for either camp but with wines being drawn from recent vintages, mostly post-2011, and all commercially available in the UK.



Neal Martin from Vinous assessing the selection of Chardonnays

The assertion was obviously that prices of Burgundy bore no relation to their quality and that the New World has more than enough well priced prime talent to challenge for Burgundy's unassailable crown. So in effect, consumers were being hood winked and almost 'conned' into buying labels and names, not wine quality from Burgundy... 'drinking the label' as it's called in the trade.

After multiple blind selection tastings by both camps, 20 wines were chosen, served and assessed blind over dinner to 12 tasters made up of experienced Burgundy collectors and several trade professionals, who would be asked to rank the wines by quality and then submit their top 5 before the reveal. As a side show, tasters would be asked to list the blind wines as New World or Old World. Wines were served by the sommelier in two random blind flights of 10 with no group discussion permitted during tasting or before results were collected.



The grand reveal!

Fine Wine Safari Chardonnay Tasting Results for Wines Tasted Blind:

1 Kumeu River Mates Vineyard 2014, NZ

NW – 96/100

2 Coche-Dury Meursault Les Rougeots 2009

OW – 94/100

3 Rhys Horseshoe Vineyard 2012, USA

NW – 96/100

4 Dom. Leflaive Chevalier Montrachet 2014

OW – 94+/100

5 Sorrenberg Beechworth 2016, Aus

NW – 92+/100

6 Le Montrachet 2012 Fontaine Gagnard

OW – 93/100

7 Neudorf Moutere 2014, NZ

OW – 96/100 (NW)

8 A Ente Meursault Clos des Ambres 2014

OW – 94+/100

9 Sandhi Sanford & Benedict 2011, USA

NW – 95/100

10 Giaconda Beechworth 2015, Aus

NW – 93/100

11 Morgen Long Willamette Valley 2015, USA

NW – 92/100

12 Arnaud Ente Meursault 2014

OW – 94+/100

13 Flametree Margaret River 2016, Aus

NW – 93+/100

14 Bernard Moreau Batard Montrachet 2013

NW – 95+/100 (OW)

15 Tissot Arbois Les Clos 2015, Jura

NW – 92+/100 (OW)

16 Le Montrachet Marquis de Laguiche 2011

OW – 93+/100

17 Littorai BA Thieriot Vineyard 2014, USA

OW – 95/100 (NW)

18 Jules Desjournays Pouilly Fuisse 2014

OW – 94/100

19 Brokenwood Indigo Vineyard 2016, Aus

OW – 94/100 (NW)

20 Le Montrachet 2014 Marc Colin et Fils

OW – 94+/100



My Top Five Wines: *(Re-tasted for final order where scores were tied)*

1 Kumeu River Mates Vineyard 2014 – 96

2 Rhys Horseshoe Vineyard 2012 – 96

3 Neudorf Moutere 2014 – 96

4 B Moreau Batard Montrachet 2013 – 95+

5 Sandhi Sanford & Benedict 2011 – 95

The Group's Top 5 Wines:

1 Dom. Leflaive Chevalier Montrachet 2014

2 A Ente Meursault Clos des Ambres 2014

3 Kumeu River Mates Vineyard 2014

4 Neudorf Moutere 2014

5 Sandhi Sanford & Benedict 2011

Conclusions and Observations?

So all in all a fantastic tasting, with 3 out of the top 5 wines from the New World illustrating how good some New World Chardonnay can be and how difficult it is for seasoned professionals to tell the two styles apart. I for one was pleased to pick a worthy 15/20 correctly in the New World versus Old World stakes. It would have been 16/20 if I didn't try and second guess the Tissot as a natural-style Chardonnay from the New World, very similar in style to a wine tasted in one of our preliminary selection blind tastings. Also, the Jura is not technically Burgundy but we will overlook that point.

There was also an impressively high Top 5 consistency for the whole group, with my personal selection including 3 of the 5 winners. Hats off to the Domaine Leflaive Chevalier-Montrachet 2014 for taking the overall top honours, but then again at around £650 per bottle, you would expect a wine of this price to perform. Impressively, all the New World wines in the Top 5 were sub-£55 per bottle, confirming that there is still some great value and quality out on the market.



The Burghounds at the tasting were very gracious and humble with the surprise results. Many openly admitted their complete surprise and that maybe they should look at drinking more premium New World Chardonnay in the future. This was a fun exercise held in good humour, among friends, but also at great expense. So certainly a big thank you is due to Keith Prothero and Paul Day for their exceptional vinous generosity.