



BRUNELLO & BORDEAUX: OVER 280 REVIEWED

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MAGAZINE

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## 7 New Stars of California Chardonnay

With the consecutive release of stellar vintage bottlings, these producers have shown they have the talent and tenacity to offer Chardonnays of class and character.

By Steve Heimoff

### Pfendler Vineyards

The late Peter Pfendler developed his vineyard at the limit of Chardonnay's ability to ripen: in the chilly Petaluma Gap area, south of Russian River Valley on the road to San Francisco. His wife, Kimberly, now manages the company. From Pfendler's inaugural 2007 vintage, the wines were made by Greg Bjornstad (Bjornstad Cellars, and formerly of Tandem). He left in the summer of 2010, replaced by John Raytek, who was previously assistant winemaker at Copain.

Bjornstad describes the small estate vineyard as "really cold [and] incredibly promising. We get great flavors while preserving acidity." Wines from the vineyard made earlier than 2007 were bottled under the Copeland Creek brand. "I was hired...to make a stylistic change," Bjornstad allows, adding, "They wanted me to kick things up." He had been making Tandem's Chardonnay from a vineyard right across the street from Pfendler, and he knew how good the area could be.

The regimen is classic: low yielding vines, hand-sorting at the winery, barrel fermentation in 50% new French oak, indigenous yeast, sur lie aging, malolactic fermentation, bottled unfined and unfiltered after 11 months. Production averages only a few hundred cases annually.



Kimberly Pfendler has a tradition of preparing a lobster and corn on the cob dinner paired with her Chardonnay every June. She also recommends a cheese plate, which includes Bellwether Farms Carmody, hazelnut flatbread and fig cake. Gougeres, French-style popovers traditionally made with Gruyère, is another favorite.

**93** **Pfendler Vineyards 2008 Estate Grown Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast), \$38** Not for fans of rich Chardonnays, this is a very dry, acidic bottling. It's more about clean mouthfeel than hedonism. What fruit there is suggests limes, pears and brisk minerals, while smoky oak and lees contribute toasty, buttery, creamy notes. A distinguished and elegant wine that defines cool-climate coastal conditions. Grows more complex and interesting as it warms in the glass.

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