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10 Outstanding California Chardonnays

New reviews of Napa and Sonoma successes from the difficult 2010 vintage

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

These 10 California Chardonnays are easy to recommend, despite the challenges of the 2010 vintage. Growers were faced with an uncommonly cool growing season, and some vineyards suffered from mildew and rot, but most of the 2010 Chardonnay crop was picked before heavy rains during harvest that challenged later-ripening grapes.

Because of the challenges and the smaller crop in 2010, use some discretion when purchasing a bottle. This week we found 10 Chardonnays from the 2010 vintage that are solid picks; some are rich, others are remarkable for their supple textures, and pure fruit flavors.

PAHLMAYER Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2010 Score: 94 / \$75

A tour de force, with layers of rich, smoky oak, fig, honeydew melon and baked, glazed apple, this weaves together a broad range of flavors, yet for all its size remains elegant and delicate. A roasted marshmallow aftertaste marks the finish. Drink now through 2019. 1,600 cases made.—*J.L.*

PAUL HOBBS Chardonnay Russian River Valley Ellen Lane Estate 2010 Score: 93 / \$75

Liquid butterscotch, rich and full-blown, this is an opulent style to be sure, yet very well-done. Chill this, then enjoy the creamy mix of baked apple flavors that unfold. Drink now through 2017. 112 cases made.—*J.L.*

PAUL HOBBS Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2010 Score: 92 / \$45

Exhibiting layers of rich, creamy fig, melon, smoke, white flowers and honeysuckle, this is full-bodied, yet elegant and graceful. Drink now through 2018. 3,283 cases made.—*J.L.*

PAUL HOBBS Chardonnay Russian River Valley Ritchie Vineyard 2010 Score: 92 / \$70

Rich and creamy, both in flavor and texture, this white displays a pure beam of ripe apple, pear, fig and butterscotch notes, which glide along on the finish. Drink now through 2018. 222 cases made.—*J.L.*

ROCHIOLI Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2010 Score: 92 / \$53

Full-bodied, rich and layered, with honeysuckle, smoke, roasted fig and melon flavors that are pure, focused, subtle and persistent. Drink now through 2018. 1,647 cases made.—*J.L.*

CHAPPELLET Chardonnay Napa Valley 2010 Score: 91 / \$32



Federico Garcia

Four of this report's outstanding 2010 Chardonnays come from Paul Hobbs.

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Combines richness with density and a tight core of pear, melon, green apple and light cedary oak flavors. This is raw and young, so give it time. The finish is complex, layered and nuanced. Drink now through 2018. 4,800 cases made.—*J.L.*

PAUL HOBBS Chardonnay Sonoma Mountain Richard Dinner Vineyard 2010
Score: 91 / \$65

Aromas of smoke, roasted fig, honeysuckle and melon are opulent, with a spicy, herbal edge. Not as rich and potent as some vintages, but likely to gain. Drink now through 2018. 373 cases made.—*J.L.*

LYNMAR Chardonnay Russian River Valley Monastery 2010 **Score: 91 / \$70**

Rich, generous flavors of peach, nectarine and honeysuckle are pure, focused, intense and lingering, turning delicate and detailed on the finish. Best from 2013 through 2023. 297 cases made.—*J.L.*

ROMBAUER Chardonnay Carneros 2010 **Score: 91 / \$32**

This ripe, exotic style boasts gobs of fruit but also a measure of finesse. Ripe, sweet-tasting flavors of pear, fig and tangerine are intense and focused, leading to a long, clean, lingering finish. Drink now through 2017. 70,000 cases made.—*J.L.*

STAGLIN Chardonnay Napa Valley 2010 **Score: 90 / \$75**

Understated, with subtle white peach, nectarine and dried apricot notes, this gains a nice spicy edge. Pure, clean finish. Drink now through 2020. 1,250 cases made.—*J.L.*

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