

THE **tasting** panel

ZINE

TAKING FLIGHT

Something for Everyone

CENTRAL COAST CHARDONNAY CAN PLEASE ALL PALATES

by Meg Houston Maker

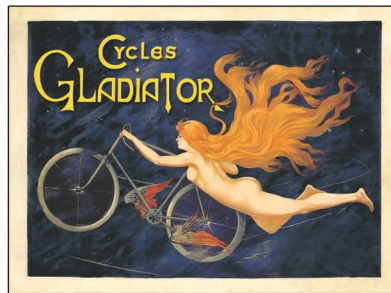
“Chardonnay is still the largest white wine category,” says Alison Carscaden, owner and sommelier at 15 Degrees C Wine Shop & Bar in Templeton, CA, just south of Paso Robles, where she sells more Chardonnay than any other white wine. Carscaden’s customers run the gamut from wine-savvy industry folks 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 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



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