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Two Winning American Chardonnays & One Famous Over-Priced Disappointment



Say what you like about Kendal-Jackson's winemaking choices, you can't fault their commercial acumen. A few years ago, sensing a growing trend among drinkers of California Chardonnay to move away from creamy oak-bombs towards more linear versions, they came up with Avant Chardonnay.



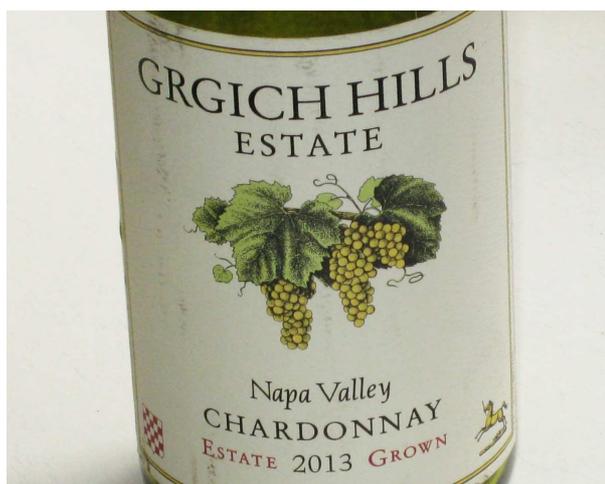
The 2014 vintage, \$17, is simply designated "California" which I take to mean it's a blend of fruit from K-J's multiple vineyard properties. The label proclaims "FRESH/CRISP/CLEAN", and for once a label description is correct.

Wow! Pretty unusual stuff.

I wade through endless press releases, PR fluff telling me that this or that \$14 wine from Lodi really, really is as packed full of the most extraordinary adjectives as the next vintage of [Domaine de la Romanée-Conti](#).

So, when a wine claims to be fresh, crisp and clean, and actually is, I am thrilled, so unexpected and rare is this treat in a California Chardonnay.

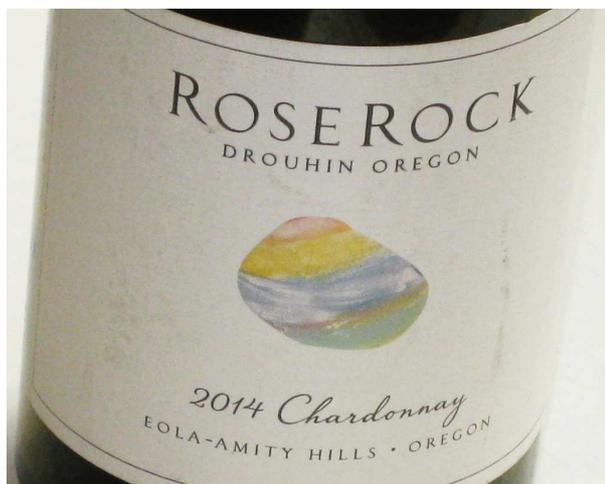
It was doubly welcome as I tasted it right after the big disappointment of the three, the Chardonnay 2013 (\$43) from the storied [Grgich Hills Estate](#) in Napa.



Mike Grgich shot to wine super-stardom in 1976 as the winemaker at Chateau Montelena whose Chardonnay knocked the labels of the French wine world by winning the now famous Judgement of Paris wine competition. He rode the subsequent acclaim to his own winery, and for years I enjoyed his wines, even organizing [corporate wine events](#) featuring his portfolio.

But in recent years his wines have disappointed and this is a continuation of the trend – it's lifeless, heavy and lacks any sense of fruit.

What a contrast then to the third wine, the [Roserock](#) Chardonnay 2014 (\$35) the first vintage from Oregon's [Domaine Drouhin's](#) new Roserock venture.



[Joseph Drouhin](#) are one of the top producer/négociants in Burgundy so when in 1987 they launched Domaine Drouhin in Oregon it represented a huge vote of confidence in the then nascent region, conferring instant legitimacy, not to mention a nice dose of publicity.

Domaine Drouhin is based in the Dundee Hills but they've always been intrigued by the volcanic soil of the Eola-Amity Hills AVA further south – or so they tell me – so when Roserock became available in 2013, they snapped it up.

I won't touch the 2014 Pinot Noir for a few years yet – I can understand their enthusiasm to show off their new baby, but please! – but the Chardonnay is a pure delight now.

Veronique Drouhin's impeccable winemaking skills are on fine display here – there's not a discordant note to the wine. A touch more minerality, perhaps, and the cooler climate gives it a bit more grip than the Domaine Drouhin Chardonnays, even in the warm 2014, but it's very definitely an Oregon Drouhin.

She's judged the oak perfectly – it just kisses the wine, enhancing the pure honeysuckle, tangerine, and melon flavors.

And here's another marketing blurb that's spot-on true. "French Soul, Oregon Soil" is Domaine Drouhin's motto, and what better way to describe this Chardonnay, and Oregon's wonderful Pinots and Chardonnays as a whole?

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