

Scott Greenberg—The [Vine Guy](#)

Time is a funny thing. It is fungible and malleable (I love being sesquipedalian). If you are waiting for a plane that has been delayed, it crawls by at a snail's pace. If you are under deadline to get a wine column in to your editor, it flies by faster than the last sheets on a roll of toilet paper. But when you have spent four years dishing out wine advice on the radio, well, time seems to pass by in the blink of an eye.



Today marks the Fourth anniversary of Wine of the Week on WTOP radio. During that time, I have had the privilege to share with listeners each week the discovery of unknown gems, delicious bargains and fantasized about a few special occasion wines. But today, I thought it would be fun to revisit the broadcast that started it all.

Yes, today, we are revisiting Naked Chardonnays.

Drinking naked is not as naughty as it sounds. The expression is actually a wine term of art that was coined by Australian winemakers. It refers to any white wine that has been made without the use of any “new” oak.

Other idioms include virgin, au natural, in-the-buff and birthday suit. You have to love Australian wine humor.

The practice of making wine without oak is not new. Ancient Romans made and stored wines in clay jugs. As the Romans moved throughout Europe and the Middle East, a sturdier vessel was required to withstand the long journeys, so wooden barrels were fashioned to transport the wines. The method quickly gained popularity for both its durability and for the subtle flavors - typically vanilla and buttered toast – that the wood imparted to the wine. In addition, the porous wood allowed the wines to “breathe” and develop as it aged.

Today, winemakers use oak as a “flavoring” and, like any seasoning, it can be very subtle or heavy-handed. Either way, oak barrels are expensive – particularly French oak – and winemakers have found less expensive ways to impart oak characteristics to the finished product. In some instances, winemakers add oak-flavor by utilizing oak staves, oak chips or – in the case of very inexpensive wines – teabags filled with oak sawdust.

However, “naked” chardonnays are fermented and stored in stainless steel tanks where they don’t receive any oak treatment whatsoever. Without any influence from the oak, naked chardonnays allow the full, natural flavor of the fruit to shine through. Characteristically, these wines feature flavors of crisp green apples, nectarines and pears. And since there isn’t any oak to interfere with the acidity, these wines have a tendency to be more refreshing than their oak-soaked cousins. This style of chardonnay is actually very versatile and can add a refreshing touch during the summer when warmer months call for lighter-styled, crisper wines.

For those wine consumers whose battle cry is ABC (anything but chardonnay), unoaked chardonnays offer a pleasant alternative to sauvignon blancs, pinot grigios and rieslings. They are just the thing to serve along with seafood, shellfish or roast chicken. Or you can simply enjoy them while sitting on the porch. Soon, your new motto will be “drink naked.”

Here are a few of my favorite “naked” wines that are available in our area.

If you’re looking for a delicious value, look no further than the **2011 Four Vines Chardonnay “Naked”** from Santa Barbara County, California. A great value for a wine of this quality, the bouquet is full of green apples, pear and nectarines. The flavors of peach, nectarine and kiwi are supported by surprisingly good depth that carries the fresh fruit across the palate. The bright acidity on the finish really accents the notes of citrus and pineapple and makes this a great pick to enjoy on a summer picnic. **\$10**

Another charming value white is the **2011 Toad Hollow Unoaked Chardonnay “Francine's Selection”** from Mendocino County, California. This winery was originally founded by wine veterans Rodney Strong and Todd Williams, who began experimenting with unoaked chardonnay as far back as 1993. One of the things that give this wine nice depth is the eight months it spends on the lees (yeast and other sediment) in the stainless steel fermentation tanks. It has lovely scents of Gala apple, acacia flowers and Bartlett pear. The supple palate displays notes of ripe apple, nectarine, pink grapefruit and lemon zest up front with notes of tropical fruit on the medium-bodied finish. **\$14**

Of course, we have to review a wine from the land Down Under – after all, the term “Naked” originated in Australia. And the **2010 Trevor Jones “Virgin” Chardonnay** from Barossa Valley, Australia chose to describe their wine as “Virgin.” As the name suggests, this wine receives no oak treatment. It has a dazzling bouquet of Gala apples and white peaches. Mouth-filling flavors of apples, nectarines and ripe pear are built on a medium frame and the finish is long and impressive. The naturally abundant acidity keeps the entire experience fresh and crisp. **\$12**

Also from south of the equator is the deliciously refreshing **2011 Villa Maria Private Bin Unoaked Chardonnay** from Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. It exhibits a zesty bouquet of lemon/lime and fresh peach. The acidity accents the fresh flavors of peach, pineapple, honeydew melon and tropical fruit. The finish ends cleanly with accents of grapefruit on the back end. **\$15**

From the southern hemisphere, comes the **2012 Zolo Unoaked Chardonnay** from Mendoza, Argentina. This chardonnay derives its pure fruit flavor from the temperature controlled stainless steel fermentation and native yeasts, producing layers of fruit-focused tropical fruit and pear aromas with a clean, crisp balance on an easy, charming frame. The abundant acidity keeps the finish fresh and balanced. A great value for an unoaked chardonnay. **\$11**