

The Press Democrat

Wine of the week: Cycles Gladiator, 2014 Central Coast Chardonnay

PEG MELNIK June 6, 2016,



Cycles Gladiator winemaker Adam LaZarre in the cellar (photo: Charles Communications Associates)



THIS WEEK'S BLIND TASTING: Chardonnay

TOP PICK

Cycles Gladiator, 2014 Central Coast Chardonnay, 13.5% alcohol, \$11.

★★★★

A tasty wine that's a steal for the price. What makes it a standout is its stone fruit, with just the right oak treatment. While it's not complex, it's layered, which makes it an interesting chardonnay. Smart.

Tasty ALTERNATIVES

Singing Tree, 2014 Russian River Valley Chardonnay, 14.1%, \$17.

★★★★1/2: This is a well-crafted chardonnay with notes of toast, apple and caramel. It's dry and bright, yet rich. It works — a budget-savvy chardonnay that will turn heads.

Amapola Creek, 2014 Jos. Belli Vineyards, Russian River Valley Chardonnay, 13.9%, \$45. ★★★★★1/2:

This is a serious chardonnay with depth, gorgeous fruit and a supple texture. Notes of creme brulee and ripe apple. Rich, yet balanced. Top rate.

Edna Valley Vineyards, 2014 Central Coast Chardonnay, 13.9%, \$15.

★★★★1/2: This is a tasty chardonnay with tropical fruit riding on bright acid. Lively notes of pineapple and apricot. Tasty.

La Follette, 2013 Sangiacomo Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County Chardonnay, 14.1%, \$38.

★★★★: A blousy chardonnay with notes of creme brulee, apple and mineral. Lush, yet manages to be balanced with bright acidity. Lovely.

Tasting Room: Peg Melnik's wine blog

What makes Adam LaZarre a good fit to craft chardonnay?

He jokes it's his attention deficit disorder coupled with his anal-retentive approach to chardonnay.

LaZarre is the head winemaker behind our wine-of-the-week winner, the Cycles Gladiator, 2014 Central Coast Chardonnay at \$11.

It's a tasty chardonnay that's a steal for the price. What makes it a standout is its stone fruit with just the right oak treatment: light. While it's not complex, it's layered which makes it interesting.

"I think (the wine) hits on so many levels," LaZarre said. "It has great aromatics, lush fruit, and modest oak, much less than I would have used in the past."

The most challenging part of crafting a great chardonnay is pinpointing the pick, LaZarre explained.

"Then you have to make sure you have a plan before the grapes arrive at the winery," he said.



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“Every step of the process needs to be mapped out and followed. If you encounter some deviation in the process, you need to be able to react immediately. Wine doesn’t forgive.”

LaZarre, 52, said he fell in love with wine when he joined the Navy in 1985. He spent part of his seven-year tour stationed near Seattle.

“I really wanted to enjoy the unique culinaria of the region, so to truly get the complete experience I needed some wine knowledge,” LaZarre said. “A particular book called “Windows on the World Complete Wine Course” by Kevin Zraly hooked me.”

LaZarre graduated from Fresno State in 1995 and by 2005 he was crafting Cycles Gladiator.

His vision was to craft a fetching wine with a fetching label — a naked woman, with blonde flowing hair, riding a bicycle.

The sensuous label drew the ire of the Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board in 2009, which deemed it inappropriate for sale in the state. But that ban has quietly been lifted this year.

The risqué label didn’t upset anyone in the other 49 states. Perhaps, like LaZarre, they believe art and wine go hand in hand.

LaZarre, who played the guitar, ultimately decided to set aside his rock star aspirations when his muse led him to the world of wine.

“I’m a failed musician like so many of us in this business, so the need to pursue some creative endeavor is paramount to my happiness.”

