# Dry Creek Vineyard, Dry Chenin Blanc 2006 Clarksburg

23 Apr 2007 by JR
Find the Chenin

At a time when so many important wine regions of the world seem to be running out of water it seems appropriate to pay attention to one that has almost too much. Clarksburg is an unusual AVA in the Sacramento Delta in northern California just southwest of Sacramento (and therefore Davis). The water table is so high here that the vineyards have to have special drain systems embedded in them, and when growers want to hasten ripening they actually have to pump water out of the vineyards' super fertile clay loams.

All of which might suggest that Clarksburg is capable only of producing thin, uninteresting plonk. Not so. Clarksburg Chenin Blanc is some of California's most distinctive white wine and has been recognised as such for three decades, making the vines some of the state's more venerable. Other producers of Clarksburg Chenin today include Pine Ridge, an outfit new to me called Chard-No-Way, and Bogle, the only winry actually based in the Delta. Gerald Asher, no less, has called Clarksburg 'California's Vouvray', although please note that **Dry Creek Vineyard, Dry Chenin Blanc 2006 Clarksburg** is indeed dry, even if not bone dry but just 6 g/l residual sugar – not tasteable.

Based over in Sonoma, Dry Creek Vineyard was already making fine Chenin Blanc from this very special and largely overlooked wine region in the early 1980s and has continued to do so through thick and thin, the thin being the widescale replanting of California's once-extensive acreage of Chenin Blanc with the other Ch… white grape. This wine is lightly honeyed like a Loire Chenin with great zest and just a little smoky on the nose. At just 12.5% alcohol, this would make a great aperitif – and keeps winning prizes as a partner for shellfish. The maritime labels are a Dry Creek Vineyard thing rather than a Chenin thing; founder David Stare being a mad keen sailor.

The wine style has changed remarkably little over the years and the wine has always had steady distribution in the US at a bargain price. What has encouraged me to bring it to your attention is that it is now being imported into the UK by Bibendum Wine who are currently offering it at the slightly less bargain price of £8.28. I hope they will manage to sell it in to other stockists too.

With the pound now worth more than two US dollars, you would think more British wine merchants might be taking advantage of this by offering us some exciting American wine bargains, but they still seem puzzlingly short on the ground which is a shame. Bibendum however have been beavering away and can also offer two special bottlings created especially for them by well-known California winemaker Larry Brooks from fruit grown in the excitingly cool Edna Valley in the Central Coast. **Marmesa Chardonnay 2005 Edna Valley** is an unoaked, super-appetising dry Chardonnay that smells attractively of white peaches while **Marmesa Syrah 2005 Edna Valley** is an even better buy, I think. Reined in rather than OTT fruit with just a little French oak results in something quite sophisticated and decided succulent – all for £8.99 a bottle the pair of them.

UK stockists of the Marmesa wines include:

Wright Fine Wine, Horwich 01204 697805

Mullwood Wine Co, Ormskirk  01704 895 955

The Little Tipple near Bristol 01275 392978

Wine Buy the Case (www.winebuythecase.com)

As well as www.bibendum-wine.co.uk or 020 7449 4120.

I just wish there was more wine exported from California at this useful price level between the cheap-but-dull-to-dire at the bottom end of the California range and the beautifully-made-but-jaw-droppingly-expensive stuff at the top.

PS from Julia: My current favourite great-value dry French Chenin is **La Grille Classic Loire Barrel-Fermented Chenin Blanc 2005**, produced by Philippe Germain at Ch de la Roulerie in Anjou in the Loire Valley, in partnership with Loire wine broker Charles Sydney. It's an absolute bargain: plenty of fruit, lovely weight in the mouth (the 14% alcohol contributes to that), with just the right Chenin freshness, very long and with the potential to get more honeyed and complex over the next year or so. Just what is says on the label. Classy stuff for the price, which is £5.99 until 7 May but available at Waitrose only. Even at its usual price of £7.99, it's pretty good value. (By the way, Jancis suggested I mention that I did once work for Waitrose!)

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