

## Brewer-Clifton

Josh Raynolds

*The long, cool growing season of 2010 allowed Greg Brewer and Steve Clifton to make chardonnays that "are plenty ripe, thanks to some late season heat, but with real energy," according to Brewer. As usual, these wines were raised in neutral wood, in accordance with the winery's philosophy that barrels are a vessel, not a flavoring medium. While both Brewer and Clifton are ardent fans of white Burgundy, especially Chablis, they make no claims that their wines are "Burgundian." "Burgundy is an inspiration but you can't copy it, not here, anyway." Clifton said. As for the 2009 pinots, they were fermented with 100% whole clusters; saw long, drawn-out fermentations; and aged in little or no new oak, as usual. Production was off thanks to spring frosts and the lower yields show in the power and depth of these wines. That said, the fruit intensity of the '09 Brewer-Clifton pinots makes most of them very seductive right now.*

**2010 Chardonnay 3-D Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills**(\$52) (100% chardonnay): Green-tinged gold. An explosively perfumed bouquet evokes pear skin, melon, honey and toasty lees, plus a strong note of iodine. Pungent, palate-staining and deep, with smoky orchard fruit flavors and notes of anise, saffron and chamomile. One of the most impressive New World sparkling wines I have ever tasted, with the type of complexity that many Tete de Cuvee Champagnes can only hint at. Finishes spicy, smoky and very long, with the smoke, melon and anise notes echoing. **92**

**2010 Chardonnay Sta. Rita Hills**(\$36) Light gold. Musky, spice-accented aromas of pear, melon and honeysuckle, with a strong note of toasty lees. Smoky and broad but vibrant, with impressive depth to its orchard and citrus fruit flavors. Spicy and precise on the impressively long finish, which strongly echoes the smoke and floral notes. **92**

**2009 Chardonnay 3-D Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills**(\$42) Bright gold. Fresh pear and tangerine on the nose, with complicating notes of clove, chamomile and white pepper. Deep and chewy in texture, offering intense citrus zest and orchard fruit flavors that gain weight with air. Finishes broad but focused, with a repeating tangerine note. This wine deserves patience.

**92(+?)**

**2010 Chardonnay Gnesa Sta. Rita Hills**(\$48) Vivid yellow. High-pitched citrus fruits on the nose, with slow-building smokiness and complicating notes of candied ginger, jasmine and iodine. Sharply focused Meyer lemon and quince flavors stretch out with air and pick up weight. Deeper pear and melon flavors come up on the finish, which lingers with impressive intensity and mineral-driven persistence. **93**

**2010 Chardonnay Sea Smoke Sta. Rita Hills**(\$52) Bright, green-tinged gold. Powerful orchard fruit and orange marmalade aromas and flavors, with intense spice and anise qualities and a touch of agave. Deeply pitched but lively pear and lemon curd flavors pick up spiciness with air, along with a sweet butter nuance. The rather smoky finish shows outstanding clarity and resonating spiciness. For a big wine this is quite lithe. **92**

**2010 Chardonnay Sweeney Canyon Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills**(\$52) Vivid yellow-gold. High-pitched aromas of fresh orchard fruits, minerals, honeysuckle and white pepper show serious power and focus. Deep, palate-staining and precise, with impressive thrust to its pear and Meyer lemon flavors. Picks up smoke and iodine qualities with air, along with suggestions of licorice and chamomile. Rich but lively and incisive, with superb finishing clarity and lingering florality. This just refuses to let up, which is no problem for me. Wow! **93**

**2010 Chardonnay Mount Carmel Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills**(\$52) Vivid gold. An explosively perfumed bouquet displays scents of candied lime, lemongrass, anise, iodine and ginger. Deeply pitched but energetic, with precise, incisive citrus and orchard fruit flavors that pick up smoke and floral nuances with air. Shows a tangy, stony note on the finish, which emphatically repeats the lime and ginger notes. This is still a baby but shows terrific potential. **93(+?)**

**2009 Pinot Noir Sta. Rita Hills**(\$36) Vivid red. Pure, energetic aromas of strawberry and raspberry, with sexy floral and spice notes adding complexity. Juicy and precise, with good depth and a seamless texture to its spicy red fruit flavors. Closes on a nervy note, with lingering spiciness and excellent persistence. This drinks very well right now. There's a lot of this to go around--almost 40,000 bottles, in fact. **91**

**2009 Pinot Noir Zotovich Sta. Rita Hills**(\$46) Bright red. An intensely perfumed bouquet evokes red fruit preserves, Asian spices and woodsmoke, with a sexy note of rose pastille in the background. Juicy and expansive on the palate, with very good depth to its sappy black raspberry and cherry flavors. The rose note gains strength with air and lingers on the long, spicy, clean finish. **92**

**2009 Pinot Noir Clos Pepe Sta. Rita Hills**(\$48) Vivid ruby-red. High-pitched aromas of red berries, rose, Asian spices and incense. Fresh and racy on entry, then deeper in the mid-palate, offering sweet, seamless, expansive cherry-cola and black raspberry flavors. A ripe but extremely energetic pinot that finishes with outstanding clarity, length and lingering florality. **93**

**2009 Pinot Noir Cargasacchi Sta. Rita Hills**(\$52) Full ruby. An explosively aromatic bouquet displays red and dark berries, Asian spices, rose and minerals. Deeply concentrated but also energetic, offering spicy raspberry, mulberry and bitter cherry flavors and picking up a candied floral note with air. Finishes with noteworthy focus and mineral-driven lift, with the floral and spicy qualities repeating strongly. This sexy wine is delicious right now but I'd let it rest for at least a few more years. **94**

**2009 Pinot Noir Ampelos Sta. Rita Hills**(\$52) Bright ruby-red. Powerful, spice-accented aromas of black raspberry, cherry and sassafras. Bitter cherry and dark berry flavors stain the palate and show serious structure as well as energy. Extremely young but promising pinot with excellent finishing thrust and spicy persistence. Like the 3-D bottling, this really deserves patience. **92(+?)**

**2009 Pinot Noir 3-D Sta. Rita Hills**(\$52) Deep ruby. Aromas of blackberry, incense, anise and Asian spices. Juicy, sappy and deeply fruity, with red and dark berry, mineral and floral pastille flavors enlivened by juicy acidity. Vibrant and light on its feet, with excellent focus and back-end cut. Elegant, flavorful wine, finishing with firm tannins, solid grip and outstanding persistence. **93**

**2009 Pinot Noir Melville Sta. Rita Hills**(\$56) Bright red. Intensely perfumed bouquet offers red fruit and floral scents, along with notes of star anise, cinnamon and smoky minerals. Bright and energetic in the mouth, with excellent clarity and power to its strawberry and raspberry preserve flavors. Tangy acidity adds lift and bite to the very long, sweet, spice-accented finish. I really like this wine's graceful, balanced character. **94**

**2009 Pinot Noir Mount Carmel Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills**(\$56) Vivid ruby. High-pitched, pure, floral-accented aromas of red berries, Asian spices, blood orange and potpourri. Concentrated, lithe and precise, offering juicy raspberry, cherry and rose pastille flavors and a seamless, silky texture. Finishes sappy, sweet and very long, with resonating floral and spice notes. This sexy wine is delicious right now. **93**

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