The best of both chardys

TRUE. I do tend to bang on about new and unusual grape varieties. Sometimes it must seem like the only wines I allow past my lips are those made from obscure and funny-sounding cultivars such as assyrtiko, rkatsiteli or picolit. So it may come as a surprise to learn I've been drinking a lot of chardonnay recently.

Then again, perhaps this isn't such a surprise. As you know — and as I've written here before — Oz chardy has been through a remarkable makeover since about the middle of the past decade. A combination of factors — maturing vineyards; winemakers picking their grapes earlier, retaining fresh natural acidity; less heavy-handed oak treatment in the cellar, and so on — has resulted in wines that are finer, more complex and more restrained than Australian chardonnays were in the 1990s.

In a few cases, though, I think the chardonnay style pendulum has swung too far: I'll find myself tasting a new-wave Oz chardy that others have lauded for its "lean minerality" and be left wondering where the flavour is. That's not to say I don't like elegant chardonnay: the four single-site 2011 wines just released by Oakridge in the Yarra Valley under the $40 Local Vineyard label, for example, are exquisitely crafted and refined, each with a unique and distinct personality that I would recommend very highly.

So I love the elegant style. I do. When it's good. It's just that, sometimes, I hanker for chardonnay with a bit more flesh, stuffing and richness. And I've come across a few lately that absolutely fit that bill; none of them is cheap, but all are, I think, delicious and rewarding.

The 2010 Hoddles Creek 1er Chardonnay ($40), for example, sits on the fringe of the modern, austere style, but also has some fabulous weighty flavours of nectarine and almond.

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The 2008 Mountadam Marble Hill High Eden Chardonnay ($65) is made from a single clone of the grape thought to date back to the 19th century, and has flavours not commonly found in other chardonnays: amazing full fruit sweetness, a perfumed complexity like leatherwood honey, and just enough powdery acidity to balance out the wine.

I wrote glowingly about a sneak preview of Cobaw Ridge's 2010 L'Altra Chardonnay from the Macedon ranges in this column last year, so I'm very happy to report that it tastes even better now it's been released ($43). Although there are plenty of features characteristic of its cool-climate origins — a touch of herbal spiciness and lively, juicy acidity — there's also an open, mouthfilling grape-pulpy texture and richly savoury quality.

And I enjoyed the 2010 Cullen Kevin John Margaret River Chardonnay ($100) over three days, relishing each sip as the wine evolved with exposure to air, revealing deeper layers of flavour and texture: wholewheat toast and peach kernels. An absolutely cracking wine.

max@maxallen.com.au