



A Winning Move

CHARDONNAY IS KING AT CHECKMATE ARTISANAL WINERY
IN CANADA'S OKANAGAN VALLEY

by Anthony Dias Blue

Forty years ago, Anthony von Mendl planted some grapevines in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, across the border from Washington. It was just an experiment, but thanks to Australian-born winemaker Phil McGahan and a little help from climate change, the venture has yielded some of the world's most honored Chardonnay. (Von Mendl discovered he was onto something in 1994, when one of his wines was named "Top Chardonnay in the World" at the International Wine & Spirit Competition in London.)

Recently, CheckMate Artisanal Winery released no fewer than seven Chardonnays from the 2015 vintage, each named for a chess move in honor of von Mendl's favorite pastime. Six of them are single-vineyard wines; one contains grapes from all six vineyards.

I tasted through the stunning lineup with McGahan—who refined his craft at Williams Selyem in Sonoma County by shadowing the brilliant Bob Cabral—via Skype. He carefully described each wine and discussed its provenance. With only a few hundred cases per label, production was small, so the wines are difficult to find. They can, however, be purchased online through vinoshipper.com. Here are my notes:

CheckMate Artisanal Winery 2015 Capture Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, Canada (\$75)

Smooth, rich, mellow, and lovely with soft peach and soft acidity. Barrel-finishing in neutral French oak for 16 months gives this wine a rich complexity with hints of vanilla and toast. **93**

CheckMate Artisanal Winery 2015 Queen's Advantage Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, Canada (\$75)

Smooth and opulent with a creamy texture and notes of wet stone; dense, tangy, and long with depth and finesse. **94**

CheckMate Artisanal Winery 2015 Queen Taken Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, Canada (\$100)

Juicy and bright; rounded and opulent with classic fruit; long and balanced. Produced from vines planted in 1973, this wine is quite Burgundian in style. **95**

CheckMate Artisanal Winery 2015 Knight's Challenge Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, Canada (\$75)

Hints of green with an herbal nose. Crisp, racy, and tangy with green apple; rich and elegant with a lengthy finish. **94**



CheckMate Artisanal Winery 2015 Attack Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, Canada (\$90)

Juicy, racy, and crisp with a hint of sea salt; fresh and tangy with citrus notes; bracing and long. **94**

CheckMate Artisanal Winery 2015 Little Pawn Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, Canada (\$85)

Smooth, luscious, and rich; balanced, long, and generous with depth and finesse. Lovely. **94**

CheckMate Artisanal Winery 2015 Fool's Mate Chardonnay, Okanagan Valley BC VQA, Canada (\$75)

A blend of fruit from the six vineyards represented in the other wines. Hints of stone fruit, with rich weight and complexity; full and lush. **93** ■■