

CABERNET SAUVIGNON  
"SLD" STAGS LEAP DISTRICT  
NAPA VALLEY, 2004



ROBERT SINSKEY VINEYARDS  
R S V  
NAPA, CALIFORNIA

## THE KING OF GRAPES, A PUNK?

Every now and then something or someone irreverent and revolutionary bursts on the scene, pushes all others aside and changes everything... and that's just what this little punk did. King of Grapes maybe, but after digging around in Cabernet Sauvignon's past, you've got to admit, it's nothing but a punk. Now, that's meant in the very best sense of the word, as punk counts as high praise around here. Those of the right age probably remember just how cool punk was. Keith Richards was an original punk and now he is the grand old man of Rock and Roll, he's even been imitated by Johnny Depp. Then there was Lou Reed, hanging with another revolutionary Andy Warhol, both punks in our book. Oh, but the list goes on: if it weren't for the Sex Pistols, there would never have been the smash commercial successes of Nirvana or Green Day... but I digress.

Cabernet Sauvignon seized its throne swiftly and surprisingly recently. Unlike Pinot Noir, which could be as old as 2,000 years, Cabernet Sauvignon, a brash young interloper of a vine, popped up in a Bordeaux vineyard in the mid-18th century, a product of a happen-chance cross of Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc... yes, that is Blanc, as in the white grape! By the mid-19th century, Cabernet Sauvignon had already begun its continuing reign with fruit hanging in Australia and California.

In retrospect, the vine beat some long odds just to emerge from the ground. When two varieties cross-pollinate, every resulting pip is unique, meaning that only one seed contained the potential to become Cabernet Sauvignon. That pip managed to make it into the ground, likely through the digestive tract of a bird, and then had the audacity to survive through maturity. At some point, the intense blue-black fruit drew the attention of some vigneron, who must have boasted to a few friends, and the rest, as they say, is history. Every Cabernet Sauvignon vine in the world is a descendent of that one seed!





The whole business could never have happened if phylloxera had arrived in Europe a bit earlier. The pesky little root louse forced nearly all vines off their rootstocks by the end of the 19th century. As a result, virtually no spontaneous sexual propagation has been possible since the end of the Victorian Age. These days, meaningful and productive *Vinifera* sex is largely confined to laboratories... poor vines!

What propelled Cabernet Sauvignon's spectacular success? Well, the vine has a lot to offer on many levels and its timing was exquisite. Even today, vignerons still prize the outsized punch of the impish little Cabernet Sauvignon berries. Small size, thick skins, high pip-to-pulp ratio and an amazing concentration of phenolic compounds lead to remarkable extraction of color and flavor. But remember, deep dark extracted wines are a relatively recent phenomenon. Demand for such wines, and positive recognition of the grapes that produce them, barely preceded Cabernet Sauvignon on the scene.

Bordeaux's vineyards, today planted to a patchwork of more or less related cultivars, were formerly inter-planted with many different varieties. Varieties didn't mean much to anyone, nor did the odd white grape in the mix. Up until the 17th, and largely into the 18th century, Bordeaux's wines saw very little of their skins. These light pink quaffing wines, coined clarets from the French for "pale," were meant to be drunk soon after their time on the vines and were mainly consumed by the British. In 1704, though, the Brits signed a preferential trade treaty with Portugal, amplifying an already formidable English thirst for the dark, powerful and then-dry wines of the Douro Valley.

The Bordelaise, watching their market share erode, and armed with new developments in bottle and closure technology, responded to the demand for stronger wines by abandoning the "claret" of the past in favor of wines with more extraction and body. Privateers and smugglers ensured a fairly consistent supply of the "new claret" to the thirsty Brits, even when the countries were

not officially conducting trade. This new fashion favored burly Cabernet Sauvignon, and it's a hit to this day.

Around the same time the style of Bordeaux's wines began to change, Dutch engineers entered the picture. The Medoc, which today harbors four of the five First Growths, was originally a swamp. The crafty Dutchmen, skilled from improving the swampy lowlands of home, drained the swamps to reveal the famous gravel beds of the Medoc. Haut-Brion in Graves, another First Growth and the first of Bordeaux's "estate wines," had already attained recognition for its wines and therefore for vines planted in gravel. Thus, wealthy merchants and landowners immediately snatched up the gravel beds of the newly drained Medoc and set about building their now-storied reputations. It is in these soils that Cabernet Sauvignon grew to prominence. If not for the Dutch engineers, much of the plantable acreage of Bordeaux would not have been very suitable for Cabernet Sauvignon.

The weather also conspired in Cabernet Sauvignon's success. Northern Europe was in the throes of a "little ice-age" when the vine sprung up. With its hard wood, Cabernet Sauvignon is extremely resistant to cold, an advantage it flaunted when many killing frosts occurred during its nascent decades. The vine also boasts good resistance to rot and disease. Any sensible vigneron, will act as Darwin's enforcer by replacing dead or diseased vines with cuttings from vines that do not succumb so easily.

Like any successful monarch, Cabernet Sauvignon rose on a confluence of circumstance that matched its natural proclivities. It continues to prove its worth, not just in creating wines of power and substance, but when nurtured by respectful hands and farmed in the best sites, it can express the nuances of terroir that make wines great... *but it's still a punk!*







## WINEGROWING NOTES:

RSV's Stags Leap District Estate vineyard wraps around the winery in terraced steps that rise into the hills bordering Napa Valley to the east. The vineyard is at the end of a wind channel that funnels fog and cold air from the San Pablo Bay and the Pacific Ocean beyond. This maritime influence softens extremes of temperature in the SLD, helping to ensure hot, but not sweltering, days, a distinct advantage during the scorching summer of 2004. Soils are volcanic and well drained. Yields, always under 2 tons per acre, were even smaller in 2004. The Cabernet Sauvignon came in at 7.3 tons, or 1.6 tons per acre, on September 11th, 2004. Just over a ton of Merlot came in the previous week. The wine rested for twenty-two months in twenty-one French oak barrels (40% new).



## TASTING NOTES (11/07)

Impenetrably dark opalescent ruby color provides the eye candy, while aromas of sweet herb-laced black currant and violet draw you in. The wine is so vibrant on the palate that it takes a moment to notice the “high-thread-count” mouth-feel that gives the flavors a luxurious texture to play on. This wine walks a thin line between power and elegance, marrying intensely pure Cabernet fruit and ample structure with the more delicate nuances of the grape. It's attractive now, but is one to watch in the cellar.



RSV's Vineyards are Certified Organic and this year they are all Demeter Certified Biodynamic!

## START ME UP!



Sometimes dinner parties falter before they have begun. There is nothing worse than having hungry guests pass out for lack of food while you're busy making their dinner. No seriously, I like to start the evening with Champagne or a crisp white wine with nibbles, but some guests just need their red wine fix. What's a poor host(ess) to do? Here are some festive pre-dinner (cocktail party) nibbles with a red wine bias... in this case Cabernet Sauvignon. However, don't take my words too literally, Abraxas, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir or just about any well-made and balanced (not too oaky) wine will do. The point is to enjoy.

Until the next wine...

Maria



## LITTLE MEATBALLS

(100 little bites)

*2 cups soft breadcrumbs*  
*1/2 cup whole milk*  
*2 teaspoons minced garlic*  
*3 tablespoons minced shallots*  
*1/2 pound ground veal*  
*3/4 pound ground pork*  
*3/4 pound ground beef*

*1/2 cup shredded parmesan*  
*2 tablespoons chopped flat leaf parsley*  
*1 tablespoon kosher salt*  
*Freshly ground black pepper*  
*2 teaspoons ground fennel seed*  
*2 eggs*

1. Prepare the tomato sauce. Have it ready in a large pot ready to receive the meatballs.
2. In a small bowl, soak the breadcrumbs in the milk for 10 minutes. Squeeze the excess milk from the breadcrumbs until almost dry and place them in a large bowl. Discard the milk.
3. Add the remaining ingredients to the bread crumbs and mix well. Test the seasoning by making a small patty and cooking it in a small sauté pan with a little olive oil. Cook through and cool before tasting. Adjust the salt and pepper accordingly.
4. Preheat the oven to 400 degree F. Lightly coat a sheet pan with sides with olive oil.
5. Use a small ice cream scoop to shape 1 1/4 inch diameter meatballs. Roll into balls and place 1/4 inch apart on the prepared sheet pan. Bake in the oven for 25 to 30 minutes until browned and cooked through. Place the meatballs in the prepared tomato sauce, bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 1 hour. If the sauce thickens too much, thin it with a little water.
6. Serve the meatballs in a small dish with sauce on the side. Replenish as necessary with hot meatballs from the pot. The meatballs can be made in advance and frozen in the sauce after cooking.

## TOMATO SAUCE

*3 cups chicken stock*  
*3 cups tomato puree*  
*1 bay leaf*  
*3 thyme sprigs*  
*3 large garlic cloves*

*3 tablespoons soy sauce*  
*2 tablespoons sugar*  
*Salt*  
*Freshly ground black pepper to taste*

1. Place all the ingredients in a large pot. Bring the sauce to a boil, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 40 minutes until slightly thickened then season to taste with salt and pepper.
2. Strain the sauce and place it in a large pot to receive the meatballs.

## FRIED BLACK OLIVES WITH REGGIANO PARMESAN

*Cerignolas are imported from the Apulia region of Italy. They are the largest olives in the world. Cerignolas have a fruity, mild, clean taste, but their most impressive feature is their size and resulting meatiness.*

(48 olives)

*4 dozen large black Cerignola olives or other mild black olive*

*48 small Parmesan chunks*

*1 1/2 cups fine bread crumbs*

*Kosher salt*

*Freshly ground black pepper*

*1 cup flour*

*3 large egg whites, beaten*

*1 quart cold pressed olive oil for frying*

1. Slit the olives lengthwise and remove the pit. Replace the pit with a chunk of Parmesan and squeeze the olive around it.
2. Season the bread crumbs with salt and pepper and place them in a pie pan or a shallow bowl.
3. Place the flour and the egg whites each in their own pie pan or shallow bowl.
4. Heat the oil in a large pot. The oil should rise no further than halfway up the side up the pot to prevent the oil from boiling over after the olives are added. Prepare a cake rack placed over a sheet pan to receive the fried olives.
5. Roll the olives in the flour. Shake off the excess flour and then roll them in the egg whites and then the bread crumbs to coat well. Place the olives on a plate coated with breadcrumbs to keep them from sticking until you are ready to fry them.
6. Fry 8 to 10 olives at a time. Do not crowd them or they will stick together. Remove them from the oil with a slotted spoon and place them on the prepared rack. Cool the olives slightly then pile them on a tray to serve. Serve warm.



# WILD MUSHROOM TARTLETS

(48 Tartlets)



*2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil*  
*3 cups sliced assorted raw mushrooms*  
*2 tablespoons minced shallots*  
*1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme*  
*Kosher salt*  
*Freshly ground black pepper*  
*1 cup heavy cream*  
*2 large eggs*  
*1/2 cup grated Gruyere cheese*  
*1/4 cup grated Parmesan*  
*1 tablespoon chopped flat leaf parsley*  
*48 2-inch pie dough circles – 1/8-inch thick*

1. Add the olive oil to a large sauté pan over medium high heat. Add the mushrooms and sauté until they begin to turn golden and their liquid has evaporated, about 7 minutes.
2. Add the shallots and thyme to the mushrooms and season to taste with salt and pepper. Spread out on a plate to cool.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs and cream together. Add the cooled mushrooms and the cheese. Season with 1 teaspoon of salt and a few grinds of pepper. Mix in the parsley. Reserve the filling mix under refrigeration.
4. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Position an oven rack on the lowest rung in the oven.
5. Line a 12-compartment mini-muffin tin with the pie dough circles. Press the dough into the compartments firmly.
6. Use a spoon to fill the tart shells. Its OK if a little filling spills over the edge of the pie dough. Place the muffin tin on a sheet pan and bake the tartlets in the oven until they are puffed and golden, about 30 minutes. Remove the tartlets from the pan while they are still warm and repeat the procedure until all of the tartlets are baked.

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