



ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

PINOT NOIR, LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY 2016





Harvest is brought to a stop as an almost unheard of dry lightning storm runs through the Capa Vineyard on August 14, 2020, triggering fires throughout the region. The very challenging 2020 vintage saw extreme drought with many triple digit days in Napa and a world record of 130 degrees F in Death Valley in what turned out to be the hottest summer in California's recorded history. The heat, drought and lightning created the perfect storm for a disaster. RSV only harvested the Pinot Noir on the Capa Vineyard for Vin Gris. No other wine was made in 2020.

No time for subtlety!

The smiling Frenchman pulled a bottle of Burgundy from his cave. He turned his back to obscure the label, dusted off the bottle and carefully removed the cork. As we held out our glasses in reverence, he poured each a taste and proudly asked us to guess the vintage. We knew it was old, but it was so fresh, so delicious, that most of us guessed the wine was from the '70s (we were tasting it in the '90s). The vigneron puffed up and enthusiastically declared the wine was from 1945 and proceeded to tell us stories of his parents building a fake wall in the cellar to hide the wine from the Nazis... and of the difficulties growing and making wine in an occupied nation while war raged.

I couldn't imagine what it would have been like to make wine during wartime. I found it fascinating that someone could stay focused with chaos and destruction all around them - with the constant fear that something might destroy generations of work. I speak in the past tense because I think I now have an inkling of what that might have been like. The past few years have been warlike. Since the fire event of the century that almost took out the winery in 2017, we have seen two more fire seasons surpass that ugly benchmark. This year will set the California record for the most acreage burned in a year... and, as I write this, the official 2020 fire season has just begun even though it has already created the most polluted air in the world and turned the skies into a dark, glowing-red Martian horizon. Yet the war we are waging is not just against the immediate threat of the fires but the existential threat of climate change. It is time to call it out for what it is.

We have all benefited from cheap energy. It has fueled an unprecedented period of prosperity. We like our big cars and many of us feel we have a right to them. We are used to jumping on planes for work and pleasure. We have grown plump on inexpensive food grown on industrial farms. The unfortunate reality of our prosperity is that it has downstream costs that are coming due in the form of weather anomalies and environmental degradation that are already costing billions, if not trillions in damage, lost crops and increases in food and insurance costs and a decrease in health and quality of life. If we want to enjoy the prosperity of the past, we need to embrace the realities of the future. Right now, California farmers are paying a "cheap energy tax" in the form of the costs of the losses associated with climate change.

First, we need an administration that recognizes and sees climate change as the existential threat that it is. Then, we need a Manhattan or a "moonshot" project to develop a response to climate change. This can be the development of more efficient batteries or non-polluting fuels, modernization of the electrical grid, guidelines on zero net carbon agriculture or carbon sequestration. This country has tremendous technologically advanced capabilities. We need to use the power of the tech industry for the good of all by using their data crunching capabilities to re-think how transportation works and redesign our transportation system to keep things moving with vehicles that "see" each other to allow traffic to maintain pace and reduce start and stop traffic that cause vehicles to burn more energy standing and starting. What about roads that charge vehicles while they drive? The ideas are limitless and beyond my daydream abilities, but, in a capitalistic society, we must create financial incentives so we can move forward and leave self destructive habits behind.

In the process of making fine wine, we have learned that when we only address a symptom of the problem and not trace it back to the root of the issue - which in our case usually has to do with soil health or pestilence due to monoculture and lack of biodiversity - we only compound our problems. We have learned to take a holistic approach to keep things from becoming a problem in the first place. Climate change will require a holistic approach that will be uncomfortable for some but better for all.

Winegrowing Notes

by Jeff Virnig

After a prolonged drought, nine inches of rain fell in December 2015 through January 2016. Then, February was unseasonably warm with less than ½ inch of rain in Carneros, resulting in an early bud break with a beautiful set and relatively low cluster counts. The warm patterns continued and harvest proceeded at a brisk rate with all white varieties and pinot noir harvested by September 10th.

The quality of the Pinot Noir fruit was exceptional. The warm conditions warranted much of the fruit to be night-picked, which ensured cool grapes and a slow ramp up to peak fermentation temperatures. Most of the fermentations were native with only a few lots inoculated with non-aromatic yeast to control the effects of “feral” yeast imparting foreign aromas.

The wines were aged for a year in French oak barrels, of which about 30% were new.

Tasting Notes

by Phil Abram & Jeff Virnig

This vintage of Los Carneros Pinot Noir is unmistakably true to variety with an aromatically inviting bouquet and striking complexity. Bright red fruit characteristics of pomegranate, bing cherry, cranberry and raspberry are seamlessly woven together with floral tones of violet and rose, balanced with subtle earthy notes of forest herbs, cinnamon and cardamom. The wine’s mouthfeel is generous and well rounded yet focused and fresh with a mouthwatering brightness and a firm back bone you expect to see in a well crafted Pinot Noir. Food pairing possibilities are limitless, or pour and serve on its own to savor its subtleties and evolution in the glass.





SPREAD THE WORD

RSV's Los Carneros Pinot Noir is dear to my heart. It encompasses all of the unique characteristics that our vineyards bring to the wine. It is expansive and welcoming soon after release yet possesses enough stuffing to last a good long while. It is a pleasure to cook for this Pinot Noir and chanterelle rillettes have enough richness to meet the brightness and freshness of the wine.

Chanterelles are available late summer through fall. They are a real treat for the cook and dinner guest alike. These rillettes gain flavor as they rest under their delicate cap of butter, so make them a day or two ahead of serving.

Spread the word: the next vintage of Los Carneros Pinot Noir has been released to the world, and it's packing a side of rillettes.

Until the Next Wine....

Maria

CHANTERELLE MUSHROOM RILLETTES

The meaty texture of chanterelle mushrooms and their ability to soak up flavor makes them perfect for these “rillettes”. White button mushrooms can be substituted, but increase the quantity by half a pound as they contain a bit more water than chanterelles. Yield: 2½ cups

½ pound unsalted butter, divided	2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves, finely chopped
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil	Kosher salt
1 pound chanterelle mushrooms, washed, trimmed and slice thinly	Freshly ground black pepper
1 medium garlic clove, minced	2 teaspoon high quality balsamic vinegar
2 large shallots, minced	3 or 4 small fresh thyme sprigs for garnish

1. Add 4 ounces of butter to a large sauté pan over medium high heat. Cook until the butter foams and lightly browns then add the olive oil and the mushrooms. Stir well to coat the mushrooms with the fat. Cook 1 to 2 minutes until the mushrooms begin to exude their juices.
2. Add the garlic, shallots and thymes leaves. Stir to combine evenly. Cook 4 to 5 minutes until juices have reduced by half. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
3. Place a strainer over a medium bowl. Remove mushrooms from the heat and transfer to the strainer. Drain the mushrooms well and press with a large spoon to get as much of the juice from them as possible.
4. Turn the mushrooms out onto a large cutting board and chop finely with a sharp knife. A food processor can also be used but proceed carefully. You don't want the mushrooms to turn into a paste. A finely chopped texture is very important.
5. Whisk the balsamic into the strained juices. Then add the mushrooms and mix until juices, fat and mushrooms are evenly combined. Spoon into 3 or 4 ramekins, ceramic pots or small dishes.
6. In a small pan over medium heat, slowly clarify the remaining 4 ounces of butter. Cook until butter separates and becomes clear and solids are slightly golden and stick to the bottom of the pot. The browned solids will lend their nutty taste to the clarified butter. Strain the clear butter off the top into a heatproof bowl.
7. Use a ladle or place the butter into a heatproof measuring cup and pour the clarified butter evenly between the pots of rillettes to cover and seal. Place a small thyme sprig into the butter to garnish.
8. Chill in the refrigerator until butter is solid and rillettes have time to settle into their flavor.
9. Bring to room temperature before serving so you are able to easily strike through the butter seal and spread the rilette. Do not remove the butter seal. It is delicious eaten along with the rilette spread on crisp crostini.





FINE WINES. ORGANIC VINES.

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