



ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

CABERNET FRANC, VANDAL VINEYARD, LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY 2015





Can we respect the past while charting a course into the future? I sure hope so. Years ago, I sat next to a well-known, lifelong Napa vintner who said the average person working in the wine industry had a seven year frame of reference and it was our responsibility to keep reminding people what came before or risk losing that history. The concern is not only with preserving the verbal history, but the stylistic history of wine from all the different wine regions of the world. How does one know what a classic wine is if they have only tasted what is currently trendy?

One of my friends, restaurateur and master sommelier, Bobby Stuckey, was recently accused of being an elitist for writing that many young sommeliers do not have enough experience with classic wines to have a frame of reference and instead focus on wines with a good story regardless of whether the wine is sound or has a decent price-value relationship. Anyone who knows Bobby will know that he is not an elitist - however, he is demanding. He expects people who work for or with him to take the time to learn their craft and respect the trade for the benefit of their customer.

A classic wine is elegant, balanced, free of major flaws, enhances the food it is served with, and will age gracefully so that some day it will provide pleasure at the table. Now I prefer and respect well-farmed, minimally-manipulated, pure wines, but I would rather drink a beer or a cocktail than drink a flawed/funky wine with a good story. After all, the purpose of a wine is to bring pleasure. My first question when tasting a wine: Does it put a smile on my face? Then, usually the second question is: What will I serve with it?

Some day, I hope we will have a “wine bank”, where aspiring wine professionals can go to learn the history of wine. A place where they can understand the historical trends in wine and a place where they can learn that a great wine might be able to happen by accident in certain vintages - but a consistently great wine usually comes from a vigneron with discipline, diligence, restraint and a respect for craft. Knowledge is a great way to future-proof and learn from tradition.

Winegrowing Notes

The organically farmed Vandal Vineyard sits in the foothills of Mount Veeder on the northern border of the Carneros. This is a magical spot for the notoriously finicky Cabernet Franc grape. The long growing season allows the Franc to achieve physiological ripeness at lower sugar levels than warmer growing regions - this leads to elegantly balanced wines with complex, deep flavors at naturally lower alcohol levels.

The grapes were night-harvested by hand and delivered to the cellar in the wee hours of the morning where they were destemmed and fermented on ambient yeast. The wine was aged in approximately 30% new French Oak for about two years.

Tasting Notes

Inviting aromas of fresh dark fruit like black cherry, blackberry and ripe, tart plum, reveal a wine kissed by the even ripening of the Carneros sun, tempered by morning fog and the cool afternoon winds. Violet, rosemary, bayleaf and a touch of white pepper add layers of intrigue. The first sip delivers a lush and juicy mid-palate that marries generous red and black fruit with kalamata olive and mocha. The finish has classic old world styling in its backbone of graphite minerality, focused, firm tannin, and freshness that carries length and invites a variety of cuisine. (4/19 Tasting notes by Phil Abram, Jeff Virnig and Rob Sinskey) Bottled June 19, 2017 - 489 (12x750ml) cases produced.





THE FEMININE SIDE

Cabernet Franc is a mysterious grape. As the parent of Cabernet Sauvignon it expresses none of its massive toughness. It is much more delicate with a soft fragrance that shines when grown in the right spot like the steep rocky red volcanic soils of RSV's Vandal Vineyard. Violets and cocoa dust with underpinnings of graphite come to mind when I think of Cabernet Franc - particularly RSV's. It possesses nicely structured tannins that don't rip your mouth out. Instead they support the fragrance and soft fruit notes of sour plum and blackberry. It's the feminine side of Cabernet Sauvignon with a grace that makes it a wonderful companion for food, especially roasted birds and dishes vibrant with herbs.

I created this couscous dish with a spirit of adventure. I didn't want to focus on meat as the main part of the meal but as the side dish. The couscous is the star here packed with roasted tomatoes, a hint of olive and a good handful of chopped fresh herbs that bring out the Cab Franc's beautiful fragrance and fruit. If you don't feel like roasting duck, then roast chicken breasts or a lamb leg will substitute just fine. You can also serve the couscous on its own and round it out with a few more vegetables. Don't worry, the Cab Franc can handle it!

Until the Next Wine... *Maria*

ROASTED TOMATO AND BLACK OLIVE COUSCOUS

The beauty of this couscous is that it can be served warm, room temperature or chilled. For an extra kick, sprinkle the tomatoes with Aleppo pepper flakes or similar mild chili flake when they come out of the oven. Serves 6 to 8

2 pints cherry tomatoes, cut in half
Extra virgin olive oil
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
3 large garlic cloves, peeled and sliced thinly
6 fresh bushy thyme sprigs

2 large shallots, peeled and trimmed
2¾ cups couscous
½ cup chopped Kalamata olives
Fresh lemon juice
⅓ cup finely chopped fresh flat leaf parsley
¼ cup medium chopped fresh mint

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Pour enough olive oil on a half sheet pan to heavily coat the bottom. Add cherry tomatoes cut side up.
3. Drizzle the tomatoes with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and grind pepper lightly over the top. Top the tomatoes with the sliced garlic and then lay the thyme sprigs over the top. The garlic and the thyme do not have to evenly cover all the tomatoes.
4. Place the tomatoes in the preheated oven and roast until the tomatoes are puckered and browned. You may have to move the outside tomatoes to the inside if they brown faster than the center tomatoes and vice versa. Redistribute the tomatoes and continue roasting.
5. When the tomatoes are roasted, discard the bare thyme stems and remove the tomatoes from the pan to a bowl, scrape the olive oil over the top and store at room temperature for up to 3 hours. May be done a day ahead and refrigerated. Bring up to room temperature before using.
6. Cut shallots in half and slice thinly. Place in a medium sauce pan over medium heat. Add 2 tablespoons of olive oil and then the shallots. Saute until the shallots are golden.
7. Add the couscous and stir continually to lightly toast the grains, about 2 minutes.
8. Add 4¼ cups water and bring to a boil. Simmer half-covered with a lid until the water is absorbed, about 8-10 minutes. Place the lid on the pot tightly. Remove the pot from the heat and let the couscous sit covered for 10 minutes.
9. Turn the couscous out into a large bowl and add the tomatoes with their olive oil, chopped olives and 2 tablespoons of lemon juice. Toss and taste for seasoning. Add more lemon juice to taste.
10. Fold in the parsley and the mint and serve warm, room-temperature or chilled.

FENNEL-ROASTED DUCK BREAST

I like to use the large breasts from fattened Moulard ducks called magret. Moulard ducks are a cross between White Pekin and Muscovy ducks. They are rich and meaty. If you can't find Moulard magret, use 3 or 4 smaller duck breasts such as pekin or Muscovy instead. Serves 6 to 8

2 large duck breasts, about 1 pound each, trimmed
1 teaspoon ground fennel seed

Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper

1. Score the skin of the duck breasts with a fine diamond pattern. Sprinkle the fennel seed evenly over both sides of the duck then follow with salt and pepper.
2. Heat a medium heavy-bottomed sauté pan over low heat. When pan is warm, add the duck breasts skin-side down. Let the heat draw the fat from the skin to slowly crisp the skin for about 10 minutes until the skin is golden. Increase the heat slightly if the fat is rendering too slowly but do not let the pan smoke. It is a slow process and you should see the skin gradually crisp and turn golden. Drain the fat into a heat proof container as it accumulates. This can be reserved and used to fry potatoes. Use a heatproof spatula to hold the breasts in place as you tilt the pan to drain.
3. When the fat is thoroughly rendered and the skin is crisp. Turn the breast over and cook for 3 to 4 minutes on the meat side. Remove the breasts from the pan and let rest on a plate for 10 minutes before slicing.





FINE WINES. ORGANIC VINES.

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