



ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

PINOT NOIR, FOUR VINEYARDS, LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY 2018





THE PINOT OF OUR FATHERS

by Rob Sinskey

A brief history of Pinot Noir

It was a mysterious enigma. It could be aloof or sublime, sexy or austere. You didn't know what you would get or the mood it would be in when you opened the bottle. Its intrigue was in the hunt, the ongoing search for that one bottle that would once again take you to that place - the sensory climax where the olfactory piqued with the aromas of the gods, a subtle dance that developed into an explosion of flavor that left a wake of silk, leather, sandpaper, fruit, funk, earth and sex. Pinot Noir could be a rarified gem or plonk. That was Pinot Noir in the sixties.

The few who cared followed with awe and respect for the vigneron who toiled over the fragile Pinot Noir grape. They read the tea leaves in the weather patterns of each vintage with the hope that just enough sun would lead to perfectly ripened fruit - just ripe enough... not too ripe, because the magic happened when it was on the razor's edge with good acidity, bright fruit and moderate alcohol - 12.5 to 13.5% versus today when most are right around 14%.

Pinot Noir was beautifully inconsistent and almost unknown in the New World back then. Most people, if they knew it at all, just called it Burgundy. Americans had no respect for the fact that Burgundy was a place where great Pinot was grown and some put other grapes in the bottles they called Burgundy.

It was in the late seventies that the New World began its obsession with the delicate Pinot Noir grape. It became the holy grail of vintners to grow the "Heartbreak Grape" and craft it into a classic Pinot that was on par with the greatest in the world.

The early eighties saw a revolution in Pinot Noir. More growers got into the game, including us. But in the early eighties, you didn't have access to many clones so you would taste your neighbors wines and if you liked what you tasted, you took cuttings from that vineyard to plant in your own. These "massale selections" were the heirlooms that had been kicking around the Napa/Sonoma regions for decades and had been selected for their unique qualities and how well they grew in the chosen micro-climate. We didn't know it at the time but these heirlooms would be the key to great Carneros Pinot Noir.

As the '80's came to a close, the perfect storm was brewing. The root louse phylloxera mutated in the monoculture of vines that were planted on the once resistant AXR rootstock, causing mass replanting at the same time as the new French clones were becoming available. These new clones seemed like a revelation. They had wonderful aromatics with a deep, rich texture, and the new 100-point wine critics loved the new, more powerful wines. So, more and more people planted the clones. Suddenly, California Pinot Noir started having higher alcohol and lower acidity. These were not the classic style of Pinot Noir we were captivated by. We were concerned that the potential loss of the heirlooms would lead to a generic, fruit-driven style of Pinot Noir that was the opposite of the complex, delicate Pinot that we loved. ***(Continued in winegrowing notes)***



Winegrowing Notes

(Continued from “The Pinot of Our Fathers”)

Save the heirlooms! In the 1990's RSVnapa recognized that relying too much on the new French clones would result in a style of Pinot that was more about making a bold first impression than a wine you wanted to get to know over dinner. They sugared up before they were physiologically ripe, causing winemakers to pick at higher sugars and lower acidity to get the flavor development from a clone that was created for the cooler French environment. We found the answer was right in front of us all along and we needed to collect as many cuttings from heirlooms as possible before they all disappeared. We originally planted the “S” and the “I” selections, then later added cuttings from Chalone, Hanzell, M and H, Swan and more. These heirlooms ripened more slowly, developing flavor at lower sugars for a wine with moderate alcohol and bright, mouth watering acidity.

Now in the 2020's - we face new challenges. How do you create a delicate and delicious Pinot Noir in the age of climate change? Well, some years we don't and we have chosen to not make wine from the grapes that have been exposed to extreme heat and/or smoke from fires. The main challenge is to find a selection that is resilient to the extremes - heat spikes, unseasonal rain, etc. We feel that organic, biodynamic and regenerative farming has helped, but we may need to look for new solutions like blending Pinot Noir with one or more other varieties to find the wine's natural balance that we are looking for. As a famous French vigneron once told me: “Follow nature and the rest will come.” We will always let nature take the lead and we will do our best to keep up.

Tasting Notes

The allure of a classic Pinot Noir is in the slow reveal as evolving aromas and flavors take you on a ride, a journey, until the bottle is empty... and it then is just a satisfyingly happy memory. The 2018 Four Vineyards Pinot Noir is such a classic Pinot Noir. The four organically farmed vineyards in the Carneros region of Napa Valley are divided into many small blocks and fermented independently. Select blocks are chosen for the Four Vineyards cuvée that express the attributes of a classic Pinot Noir... elegance, bright fruit balanced by darker earth and tea tones, mouth watering crispness, age worthiness and, of course, the slow reveal.

This pure wine has palpable energy as it slowly reveals layers of depth, complexity and a precise, clear structure. Red berries, cranberry, plum, citrus peel and pomegranate are crisp, while fresh savory herbs with hints of violet, lavender and black tea with a touch of cinnamon lead into a mouthwatering finish balanced by fine, integrated tannins. This wine makes for a phenomenal dinner companion that will continue to deliver age enhanced nuances for years to come. (05/2024)

THE SLOW ACT OF FERMENTATION

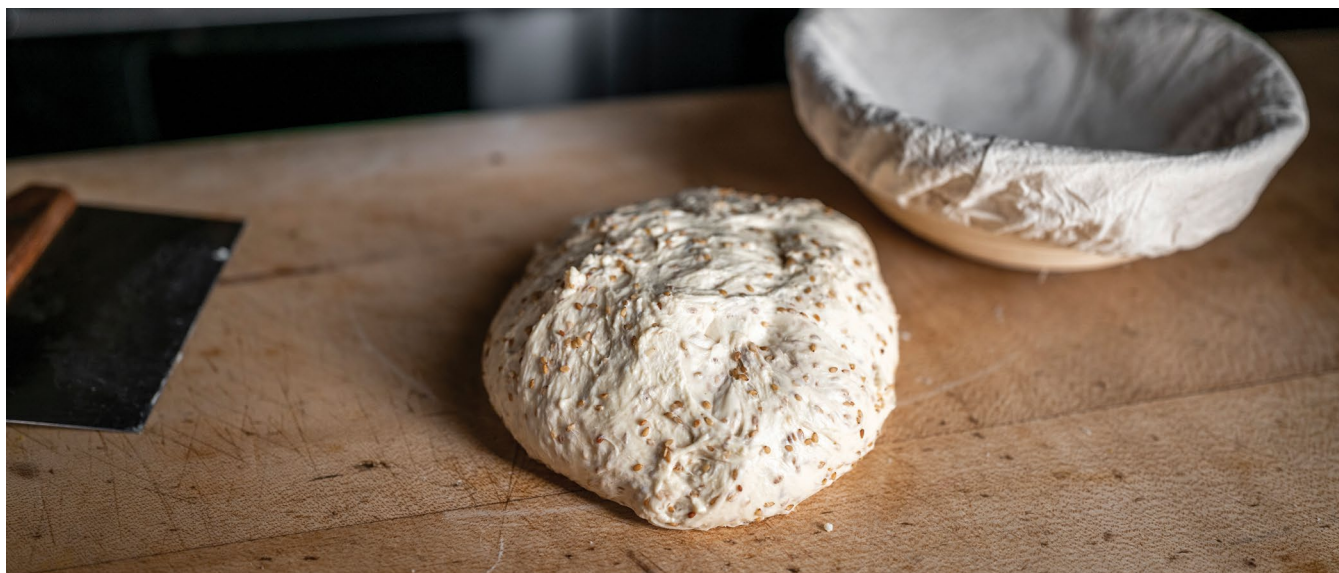
Baking bread is my zen time; it slows my roll and gives me time to think. When I'm in bread-baking mode it's hard for me to make just one loaf so, much to Rob's chagrin, I'll double or quadruple the recipe. What I don't give away I wrap tightly and store in the freezer.

Fermentation is nature's miracle. How simple flour and water with yeast collected from the air can create a fragrant and complexly flavored loaf of bread, that will never be reproduced exactly the same due to changes in weather, flour and time, is awe inspiring. The same miracles of fermentation go into wine-making. Each year the make-up of the ingredients shift according to nature – weather, temperature and time. Grapes, as an ingredient, aren't constant. It is up to us as winemakers, to work with what nature has given us and ferment them into wine that reflects the nature of the vintage. It's the same way a baker shapes the flavor and texture of their bread using artisanal flour whose make-up changes slightly with each wheat harvest and how the captured yeast adds its aroma and flavor based on when and how it was fed. Managing fermentation is a very complex art shaped by the hand of the baker and the wine-maker. The outcome is never guaranteed - perhaps that's why I enjoy the process so much.

The process begins with water and yeast in a bowl and continues on until the final long proof in a banneton or other similarly shaped vessel. I prefer the banneton for fermentation. Its coiled cane sides allow for an easy and gentle release of the dough from the form. A lightly floured linen or cotton liner also helps to release the dough and keep the coils clean. I use my banneton not only to shape and proof bread but to serve it. I throw a nice napkin into the banneton to line it and voila a perfect breadbasket.

I think bread and wine are perfect together because of the fermentation process. I like nothing better than a slice of freshly baked bread spread with funky soft cheese or a piece toasted with bubbling melted cheese on top. For our Four Vineyards Pinot Noir I would choose a grilled cheese made with Comte cheese or Cowgirl Creamery's Wagon Wheel. So simple, yet so delicious.

Until the Next Wine... *Maria*



HOMEMADE SOURDOUGH BREAD

This recipe makes a gorgeously browned loaf with amazing texture and flavor. Active time for this recipe is about 2 hours. However, during that span, there's a lot of down time. After the first 2 hours, you have long stretches where you can go about your business. If you don't have a starter or can't snag some from a friend, you can order one from King Arthur and follow their instructions to activate it. I like to use locally milled artisan bread flour but if you're looking for a high quality commercial bread flour, reach for organic King Arthur bread. Its consistent protein content makes it a reliable flour to bake a beautiful loaf. If you don't have a starter and waiting around for sourdough isn't your thing, you can substitute dry commercial yeast with additional flour and water for the starter. The second rise time will be faster than for a starter - about 2 hours. Note: Total time depends on how long your final proof is. This is a long process with lots of down time. Yield: One 2 pound loaf

100g bubbly, active starter or 3g ($\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon) of dry commercial yeast
400g (1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups) warm water, or more (plus 50g of water if using commercial yeast)
500g (4 cups plus 2 tbsp) bread flour (plus 50g of flour if using commercial yeast)
50g wheat bran (NOT wheat germ)
12g (2 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons) kosher salt
Rice flour for dusting the banneton

1. Stir the starter (or yeast) and water together in a large bowl with a large fork until evenly combined. Mix in the flour, wheat bran and salt with a sturdy wooden spoon.
2. When it gets too hard to use the spoon, use your hands to form a shaggy dough. The dough should hold all the dry ingredients. If there is still a lot of dry flour in the bottom of your bowl add a little water until the flour is combined but the dough is still shaggy. Cover with a damp towel and let the dough rest for 30 minutes.



STRETCH AND FOLD: After 30 minutes, grab one side of the dough and pull it up and over the dough and tuck under the opposite side. Move the bowl one quarter turn and repeat pulling the side of the dough up and over until you've turned the bowl 360 degrees. You will have performed this series of folds 4 to 5 times with the dough. Let dough rest for another 30 minutes and repeat the stretching and folding action. Repeat 2 more times for a total of 4 stretch and fold series.

FIRST RISE. BULK FERMENTATION: After the last series of folds. Cover the bowl with a towel and let rise at room temperature, about 8 to 10 hours at 70°F (21°C) or even less if you live in a warm environment. If you are using commercial yeast it could take 12 hours and up to 18 depending on the temperature of your kitchen. The dough is ready when it increased 50% in volume. The surface should have a few bubbles and the dough should jiggle when you move the bowl from side to side. If your kitchen is warm this may take less time. Go by increase in volume not just time.

SHAPING THE DOUGH: Use a scraper to gently turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface. Gently shape it into a round: fold the top down to the center, turn the dough, fold the top down to the center, turn the dough; repeat until you've come full circle. Flip the dough over and If you have a bench scraper, use it to push and pull the dough to create tension, then flip the dough over again so seam side is up.

FIRST REST: Let the dough rest seam side up for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, line an 8-inch (20-cm) bowl or banneton (proofing basket) with a flour sack or linen towel. Dust the towel with rice flour. (Rice flour doesn't burn, but regular flour is ok to use.)

FINAL SHAPE: Use a bench scraper or your hands to shape the loaf again as in the first shaping. Place the shaped dough into the lined and floured form, seam side up.

PROOF (LONG SECOND REST/RISE): Cover the dough and refrigerate for 12 to 24 hours. For commercial yeast dough. Cover and let rise at room temperature for about 2 hours. I reuse produce bags to slide the form into and loosely tie the end.

BAKE: Place a 5 quart Dutch oven in your oven and preheat your oven to 550°F (290°C). Cut a piece of parchment to fit the size of your pot. Note: Lodge makes a great pocket-book friendly Dutch oven. A great alternative to the pricey Le Creuset ones.

SCORE: Place the parchment over the dough and invert the bowl to release. Using the tip of a small knife or a razor blade, score the top of the loaf. Hold your blade at a 40 degrees angle and score deeply. You can do a simple straight across or an X. Grab the edges of the parchment and gently lower the loaf into the Dutch oven.

Cover the Dutch oven and place in the preheated oven. Immediately lower the oven temp to 450F (230C). Bake the dough for 35 minutes, covered. Remove the lid, lower the temperature to 425F (218C) and continue to bake for 15-20 minutes more. If your loaf isn't browning, lift it out of the pot, and bake directly on the oven rack for the last 5 to 10 minutes. Cool on a wire rack for 1 hour before slicing.

Bread will stay fresh up to 5 days stored at room temperature well-wrapped. It freezes beautifully just be sure to keep it wrapped while it is defrosting so it doesn't dry out. Pop it in a 400F oven for 15 minutes after defrosting to revitalize the crust or use as is.



FINE WINES. ORGANIC VINES.

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