Robert Sinskey Vineyards

ORGANIC. BIODYNAMIC. REGENERATIVELY GROWN.

MERLOT, LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY 2019

Good is Real... Good is Cool!

GOOD IS REAL...

Good is Cool!

Truly cool people stopped trying to be cool a long time ago. They figured out what they loved and let everyone else catch on. Jonathan Richman and the ironically named Modern Lovers were never going to swagger like Jagger, yet they wrote an iconic anthem like "Roadrunner" alongside gloriously geeky songs like "Rockin' Rockin' Leprechauns." David Byrne turned awkwardness into art. Thom Yorke and Radiohead became cool by singing "I'm a Creep, I'm a weirdo!" The geeks became cool by shedding cool tropes and becoming themselves completely.

Merlot almost became a victim of cool. It earned its reputation as the more elegant version of Cabernet Sauvignon, grown and crafted by winemakers who cared. It was enjoyed by people in the know; it was their secret. Then it scored a hit with a Ducky wine and went mainstream; some would say it sold out. So instead of being that cool band you discover in a coffee house or a punk club, it became the Arena Rock of wine. Bigger, louder, more alcohol, more wood, more tannin. For a while, Merlot was everywhere. Then, almost overnight, it became the wine you weren't supposed to drink. Like a great band with a money-hungry manager, it was manipulated into the Yacht Rock of wine. Merlot went from indie darling to something playing softly in the background at the country club.

The strange thing is that the wine geeks among us knew better. The vines kept growing. We didn't care that it had fallen out of favor. We knew what we loved, and we kept on keeping on, farming it in the Carneros sun with morning fog and cooling afternoon winds off the bay.

Organically. Biodynamically. Regeneratively.

Not because those words are fashionable, but because a living farm makes better wine. We geek out on building the soil and encouraging life around the vines. We pay attention to what the vine needs and don't ask it to be something it isn't.

There is a temptation in wine, as in life, to become the version of yourself that gets the most applause. Bigger, louder, more impressive and more important. Merlot suffered for it.

RSVnapa Merlot never chased what was trendy or cool. It has always been good. Growing it in a cool place, with restraint and patience, we didn't need to force it to become anything else. Generous but not blowsy. Dark-fruited and alive. Supple, savory, earthy yet bright.

The 2019 Merlot is simply the result of good farming, made without trying to turn it into something more important than itself. It's good and maybe good is that simple. It just feels right before anyone tells you it is.

Perhaps that's why it suddenly feels cool again.

The ultimate geek band Devo sings about everybody wanting a good thing in "That's Good."

Good is the meal you cook and the music you play, not because they're fashionable but because you love 'em. And it's the bottle you reach for because the geek in you knows what's good.

Robert Sinskey

Merlot, Los Carneros, Napa Valley 2019

Damn, that's good... and good says it all. Grown in the cool Carneros region from vines planted and farmed by RSVnapa organically, biodynamically and regeneratively, this is Merlot allowed to be completely itself and not pushed to be bigger, louder or more important. This wine is full of depth and character, with generous, fresh dark-red fruit, black cherry and Burgundy plum, that carries through, while savory herbs and subtle floral tones unfold across the mid-palate. Bay leaf, black tea and rich mocha emerge on the long finish, all held together by the freshness and quiet structure that come from a cool place and patient winegrowing. Fire up the grill, hearth-roast a favorite bird or beast, or put on a pot of beans. This is a wine made for the table now, but RSVnapa also gives its wines years to find themselves before release, and this beauty has decades ahead for the geeks patient enough to put some away. Sometimes knowing what's good is enough. (9/2026) *383 cases produced*

Winegrowing Notes

RSVnapa has always been run by a bunch of geeks who actually care about the things that matter. Every Merlot vine was planted by RSVnapa, then farmed organically, biodynamically and regeneratively in the cool Carneros region, where morning fog and afternoon winds off San Pablo Bay keep the growing season long, slow and fresh. The vineyards are treated as living places: soils are built with compost and cover crops, biodiversity is encouraged, tillage is minimized, and animals are brought into the farming system whenever they can do the work more naturally. None of it is about making Merlot bigger, louder or more fashionable. It is about giving the vine what it needs to become the best version of itself. Then RSVnapa does something increasingly unfashionable: waits. The 2019 was given years to settle into itself before release, because good wine, like good music, doesn't need to chase the moment. Sometimes the geeky thing is simply knowing what's good and having the patience to let everyone else catch on.

JOY OF PRUNES

Back in the day, walnut and prune orchards dotted the Napa Valley. Sure, grapes were planted here and there, but the Valley had not yet become the monoculture it is today. Prunes were once farmed on the piece of land now called Wilding Farm. There are still vestiges of that prune past on the farm: a few ancient trees and the old metal-clad drying shed, now home to the ceramic studio and woodshop. These relics of past agricultural diversity are comforting.

When you own a prune farm, it can become the butt of a lot of jokes. It seems we always get a good chuckle when we talk about our love of prunes, not just the trees, but the joy of cooking with them. Prunes aren't cool, but they're good. Fresh prune plums make delicious tarts, while dried prunes soaked in Armagnac are delicious over vanilla ice cream. On the savory side, dried prunes with pork, chicken or duck are heavenly. Prunes add a melting sweetness to red wine-scented braising juices for an unfussy one-pan main course.

I cook this dish often. It's easy to make ahead and reheat, and it gets better as it sits.

The prune-scented juices find an easy partner in the cherry and plum fruit and subtle herb notes of RSVnapa Merlot. Its vivid natural acidity cuts through the rich, savory fat of the duck, while the wine's gentle, fine tannins settle right into the braise. It is one of those combinations that simply tastes right. Turns out there is a lot of joy in a prune.

Until the next wine… *Maria*

RED WINE-BRAISED DUCK LEGS WITH PRUNES

Serves 8

8 Pekin duck legs
8 sprigs of thyme
3 large garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
16 whole cloves
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1 medium yellow onion, peeled, trimmed and sliced into thin wedges
16 prunes, with or without pits
2 cups dry red wine
2 cups rich chicken or duck stock

1. Trim the duck legs to remove excess fat. Cut along the sides of the thigh and leg bones to expose the meat next to the bone.

2. Lay the duck legs on a flat surface so the meat side is facing up. Sprinkle both sides evenly with 1 teaspoon of kosher salt per leg. Distribute the garlic, thyme, black pepper and cloves evenly over the legs, pressing the seasonings well into the meat. Press two legs together, meat side to meat side. You will have four pairs of legs.

3. Place the legs in a shallow pan. Cover with plastic wrap and press lightly with a weighted pan on top. Turn the legs over the next day. Drain any juice from the bottom of the pan, re-weight and marinate overnight.

4. To cook the duck, preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.

5.. Unpair the legs and clean off the thyme, garlic and cloves; reserve them. In a large sauté pan over medium heat, sear the legs skin side down until golden, about 5 minutes on each side. Adjust the heat if the pan gets too hot. Remove the seared legs to a plate.

6. Add the onion to the pan. Sauté until golden, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

7. Add the prunes to the pan along with the wine. Increase the heat and bring to a boil. Reduce the wine until the pan is almost dry.

8. Add the legs back to the pan along with the chicken stock and the reserved thyme, garlic and 4 cloves. Bring to a boil. Cover and place in the preheated oven.

9. Cook for 1 hour. Remove the lid and continue to cook for 30 minutes more. Add up to ¼ cup of water to the pan if it looks dry. You don't want the juices to burn.

10. Remove the pan from the oven and transfer the duck legs to a plate along with the prunes and onions. Pick out the cloves and thyme sprigs, then pour the juices over the duck. Serve with wild rice, golden roasted potatoes or the side of your choice.

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