



ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

MERLOT, LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY, 2010



MOD MERLOT...

by Rob Sinskey

the pendulum swings!

It's déjà vu all over again. Skinny ties and tight suits are back "in." I've seen this cycle a few times in my now-not-too-short life - first when the Rat Pack seduced my parents generation and then when the "Mod" inspired Who exploded on m-m-m-my generation.

When the seventies dawned, ties and lapels widened and tight pants bloomed bells on their bottoms. The human silhouette morphed into an exaggerated, exuberant caricature of self - look at the Partridge Family or Brady Bunch (or my high school yearbook) to see how bad those fashions were.

Punk imploded the late seventies, hatching a back-to-the-future, faux-mod movement with bands like the Jam and the Specials turning punk into the new wave. Skinny ties and tight suits were cool again and Vespa riding mods adorned their scooters with a plethora of unintentionally symbolic rear-view mirrors. Oh, but that too was short lived. The eighties witnessed a return to bad fashion with Miami Vice shark-skin zoot-suits and big-hair that only a David Byrne/Talking Heads giant suit parody could de-rail, making way for the next generation of trend setters... grunge!

Well, the skinny tie is back. Though in a curated way. People want to be down to earth, yet fashionable. A black denim trucker's jacket cut tight in a sport coat trim. Jeans made of Japanese fabric, tailored to fit close. It is a mash-up of what came before... a search for something authentic from the land where anything goes.

I've always said that RSV Merlot is not a fashion statement. It can't be when you are farming the land and growing the grapes. It takes too long to create the wine to be a follower of trends... that is,

unless you go out of your way to be trendy - but then you run the risk of one day becoming unfashionable.

The history of Merlot in the New World is actually shorter than the story of the skinny tie, but in some odd way it has parallels.

Merlot was a relatively unknown upstart, living in the shadow of Cabernet Sauvignon and looked upon as a blending grape when, in the early nineties, it took center stage. At first it was seen as an elegant counter point to the more tannic and green Cabernet Sauvignon of the time. But it slowly began to believe its own press. Merlot producers latched on to the buzzwords of "soft," "lush," and "unctuous," and learned that Merlot could be planted in marginal areas and manipulated to fulfill pre-conceived notions. As the nineties became more exuberant, the wines did too until, like David Byrne wearing the giant suit, Paul Giamatti uttered the now famous cinematic Merlot slur and suddenly, no one wanted to be seen with a glass of Merlot in their hand. Excess killed the grape.

However, excess also did the grape a favor. Since Merlot lived and died the trendy life, it fell off the radar. Those chasing the market had no choice but to rip up their Merlot vineyards and plant something that might be producing in time for the next trend. But those committed to the grape (with vineyards in select regions that produce elegant, untrendy Merlot) stuck to their guns and soldiered on... focusing their production and their skills to make classically proportioned Merlot that they wanted to drink.

Perhaps RSV Merlot is more like fashion than I want to admit... yes, it's a timeless classic.





Winegrowing Notes

by Jeff Virnig

I like looking at accumulated degree day charts, comparing one vintage to another for an aggregate view. However, there are many things degree day charts don't reveal, like how certain vintages can be defined by a few days of extreme weather - excessive rain, heat, sleet, or even hail. A heat summation chart leaves out that 120% of normal rain fell in 2010 and the inch of April rain that disrupted bloom leading to a particularly small crop. What it does tell you is that it was unseasonably cool up through mid-August then, between August 20-23, the thermometer rocketed to 108 degrees fahrenheit for three days of scorching weather. Many growers lost large portions of their crop to the melting heat, but RSV's organically farmed Carneros Merlot withstood the hot temps better than most as the vines were balanced and did not need to support large canopies of green growth.

This is a juicy vintage with great structure-building tannins. RSV grows Merlot in three Los Carneros vineyards, Vandal, OSR, and the Three Amigos. A night pick helped conserve the bright fruit character and good acidity as the fruit was delivered to the cellar door in optimum condition. A delicate crush followed by two years of rest in French Oak, of which 30% are new barrels, assured an elegant, complex wine that shines at the dinner table.



Tasting Notes

by Jeff Virnig & Rob Sinskey

You can't ask for much more than a well balanced wine that is both luscious and bright. The 2010 vintage was long and cool yet finished with a spike of warmth for optimal ripeness. Aromas and flavors of juicy red and black fruits, followed by notes of cocoa, bay leaf, bramble, and earth. The wine is warm and inviting yet finishes long and bright... what's for dinner?

ONCE BITTEN, NOT SHY...

Merlot is known for its fruity plum and dark cherry aromas and flavors. But good Merlot isn't just about plump fruit, a high quality rendition can carry a good dollop of tannin and a slight herbal note that adds complexity and balance to its luscious red fruit.

RSV Merlot is not shy. It sports a dark cherry core, a dusting of mineral, and a hint of dried herb character for a deep and complex wine. A Merlot such as this begs for a bit of tart fruit and the soft kiss of herbs like sage and rosemary - both found in the Rib roast and Delicata Squash recipes that follow.

Until the Next Wine....

Maria

PORK COUNTRY RIB ROAST WITH CRANBERRIES

A Country Rib Roast is a succulent, meaty roast with 3 to 4 bones cut from the top of the loin and the end of the shoulder. Not quite loin, not quite shoulder, it's perfect for roasting and just the right size for a small dinner. Serves 6 to 8

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| Kosher salt | ½ cup dried cranberries, coarsely chopped |
| 2 teaspoons cracked black peppercorns | 2 tablespoons minced shallots |
| 2 teaspoons plus ½ teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary | Freshly ground black pepper |
| 2 2 pound country rib roasts | 1 teaspoon brown sugar |
| Extra virgin olive oil | ½ cup dry fruity red wine plus ½ cup water |

1. Mix 1 ½ tablespoons kosher salt, cracked peppercorns and 2 teaspoons rosemary in a small bowl.
2. Place the roasts on a cutting board meat side up. Butterfly the roasts. Using a sharp knife, start at the top of the bones and cut down toward the thick meaty side, keeping the knife flat against the bone to make a flap of meat. Be sure to keep the meat and bones attached.
3. Open the flap and lay the roasts side by side. Rub evenly on all sides with the salt mixture. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.
4. Heat a medium sauté pan over medium high heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil then the cranberries and shallots. Sauté until the shallots are golden. Add the brown sugar and ½ teaspoon chopped rosemary. Stir well.
5. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add the wine and water. Cook until liquid is evaporated and the mixture has thickened, about 15 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and transfer to a plate so it will cool quickly. Chill in the refrigerator.
6. Place the roast on a cutting board and open up the flap. Spread the cranberry mix evenly over the bone side of the meat. Replace flap and use butcher's twine to tie snugly.
7. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F.
8. Heat a large sauté pan over medium high heat. Add a little olive oil to barely cover the bottom of the pan then the roasts bone side up.
9. Brown on all sides for about 10 minutes then remove the pan from the heat. Place in the preheated oven and roast for 1 hour to 145 degrees F internal temperature. Let the roast rest in the pan for 20 minutes before slicing.
10. Cut the strings off the roast. Slice the eye of the roast off the bone and then slice thinly. Cut through the ribs to separate and serve on the side.



ROASTED DELICATA SQUASH WITH CRANBERRIES AND SAGE

Delicata squash is delicate as the name implies. It has a bit of starchiness and sweetness that lends itself well to sweet-tart cranberries and earthy, sultry sage. No need to peel this squash as the skin softens nicely as it roasts. Roast until golden to bring out its best flavor. Serves 6 to 8

3 pounds Delicata Squash
1 small yellow onion, cut into ½ inch pieces
½ cup dried cranberries, coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage leaves plus 20 whole leaves to fry
1 tablespoon honey mixed with 2 teaspoons hot water
Extra virgin olive oil
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
Aged balsamic vinegar

1. Preheat the oven 425 degrees F. Ready a sheet pan.
2. Wash and dry the squash, cut in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds. Place the squash flat side down on the cutting board and slice into ½-inch-thick pieces. Place in a large bowl.
3. Add the onions, cranberries, chopped sage, 3 tablespoons of olive oil and honey to the bowl and toss, season with salt and pepper.
4. Spread out evenly on the sheet pan.
5. Roast approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes until squash are tender and golden. Gently turn over squash two to three times during roasting to cook evenly.
6. Fry the sage while the squash is roasting. Line a pie pan or plate with paper towels. Place 1 cup of olive oil in a 10-inch sauté pan or small 3-quart pot.
7. Heat over medium high heat until a sage leaf added to the pan sizzles. Add the leaves and cook, stirring gently with a spoon, until the leaves become translucent and crisp but not brown. They will turn a beautiful jewel-like green. Remove with a slotted spoon to the paper towels. Sprinkle lightly with salt and reserve at room temperature.
8. Transfer the squash to a serving dish and drizzle lightly with balsamic vinegar. Top with the fried sage leaves. Serve immediately.

CRANBERRY, PECAN AND FENNEL SEED BISCOTTI

These crunchy, nutty biscotti with a hint of fennel can be served with a bit of cheddar for a sweet-savory finish to a meal if you haven't quite finished your glass of wine, or serve them on their own after dinner with coffee or tea. Yield: many, many crunchy biscotti - a full 1 gallon size zip lock bag

2¼ cups all-purpose flour
2½ teaspoons baking powder
¾ teaspoon kosher salt
3 large eggs
1 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar
2 cups lightly toasted pecans, coarsely chopped
½ cup dried cranberries
1 tablespoon toasted coarsely chopped fennel seed
Egg wash: 1 large egg lightly beaten with 1 tablespoon cold water

1. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper.
2. Combine flour, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl.
3. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, beat eggs and sugar to a thick ribbon.
4. Add the flour mixture and mix until just combined.
5. Remove the bowl from the stand and fold in pecans, cranberries and fennel seed with a rubber spatula.
6. Use 2 spoons to scoop the dough from the bowl and shape into 2 long 2-inch-thick logs the length of the sheet pan. You may have to make an additional half log if there is extra batter. Brush with egg wash.
7. Bake at 375 degrees until lightly golden 20 to 25 minutes. Slice on the bias ½" thick. Bake again at 325 degrees until lightly toasted, about 15 to 20 minutes.



FINE WINES. ORGANIC VINES.

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