

PINOT GRIS LATE
LOS CARNEROS
2006



ROBERT SINSKEY VINEYARDS
R S V
NAPA, CALIFORNIA

NOSTALGIC SUGAR TRIP!

A little bit about a little bottle of Pinot Gris Late...

By Rob Sinskey

I can still feel the headache, even though it occurred almost thirty-five years ago. My buddies and I were riding our Stingrays through our small home town of Cambria when one of them came up with a bright idea involving a key member of our posse that had just landed a boxboy position at Soto's market. His ingenious plan was to have Joe acquire a few bottles of wine from Soto's for a little "picnic" in the hills.

Now I don't want to incriminate anyone or slander any brands, so I won't go into detail about how he "acquired" the wine. The selection? Let me just say that instead of Chateau or Clos, they had cute names like Annie, Boone's and Strawberry.

Into our backpacks the bottles went, along with bags of chips, cheese puffs and beef jerky; an ideal food and wine pairing for fifteen year old boys.

Cambria in those days was a sleepy little tourist village on the coast. A long time ago, a real estate developer coined the name "Cambria Pines by the Sea" and the quaint label stuck. It was a beautiful place to grow up. The rolling hills (emerald green in winter, golden in summer) were capped by crooked Monterey pines. The cold water of the Pacific crashed onto beaches of moonstone and jade. It was an outdoor lover's paradise with fishing, surfing, hiking, hunting, rock collecting and biking. On this day none of that mattered though, as we were on a mission to experience our first drunk.

Up into the hills and down a dirt road we peddled until we found the perfect spot for our picnic. We dropped our bikes into the tall dry grass, excitedly dumped our stash onto the ground and enthusiastically embarked on our first food and wine pairing.



With typical boy-like bravado, we dared each other to take large swigs from the bottles, chasing them with fistfuls of orange powder covered cheese puffs and tortilla chips. The wines were sticky sweet, resembling fruit punch, but with a chemical aftertaste. It was challenging drinking, but the sugar helped the medicine go down. At first we were having fun, telling dirty jokes, laughing, enjoying the numbing effect of the alcohol. That lasted for about an hour or two before a hush came over the group. "Mully" was the first to go. He looked up at me, his face a little green and twisted. "I don't feel very well" he muttered. It was a chain reaction after that. We each went down one at a time, and spent the rest of the afternoon sleeping it off under the towering pine trees.

The sun was setting as we awoke. My head was pounding and my mouth was dry. My friends and I gathered our possessions and silently peddled off in different directions toward home.

It's a story we could all tell... how our first experience with cheap, sweet wine stamped an indelible negative imprint on our psyche. When someone asks, "Do you like sweet wine?",

it elicits a Pavlovian response of nausea and headache. The reality is that we order dry but drink sweet. Many wines are sweet and we don't even know it. Some supposedly dry Chardonnays and Cabernets have a good dollop of sugar that makes them feel fleshy and full. Done well, sugar can help balance the harsher notes of acid and tannin. Done poorly, they make a wine seem like hard soda pop.

I'm not a big fan of excessively sweet wine. Many lack the balancing acidity that provides a refreshing break from the sugar. I like my sweet wines to resemble tree or vine ripened fruit. Like a perfectly ripened peach or nectarine, sweet and refreshing at the same time.

A pure, natural sweetness contrasted by good acidity, like in RSV's Pinot Gris Late, makes for a food friendly wine. There is no comparison to the manufactured concoctions that used to line the supermarket shelves. We no longer need to fear sweet, especially when it is so well balanced. The sweetness can play off spicy dishes from regions like Thailand, India or Mexico, while the acidity can leave your mouth watering.

RSV's Pinot Gris Late is a dessert wine that is not just for dessert. It is an amazingly flexible wine that can dress up or down as the mood strikes. From sausages to foie gras, tacos to tarts, soup to nuts, it is always an exciting surprise. If you do have this wine with dessert, my only caution would be don't go too sweet. Desserts with cheese, almonds, walnuts and fruit are ideal with this wine... and whatever pairing Maria suggests. Don't worry, all the rest of the baggage associated with sweet wine is just a nostalgia trip.



WINEGROWING NOTES

By Eric Sothern

In Alsace, a major source of inspiration for the whites of RSV, traditional wisdom holds that great Rieslings eclipse even the best wines of the other grapes grown there; but over the last several years, a growing number of young winegrowers herald Pinot Gris as the classic variety of Alsace. Pinot Gris grabs sugar more easily than Riesling, retains nearly as much acidity, and carries a golden richness and enticing spicy character that intensifies with age. Furthering its case, Pinot Gris, because of its brisk edge and relatively reserved aromatic demeanor, serves as a superior food wine to its Alsace brethren. Amongst the best expressions of Alsace Pinot Gris are those harvested late to attain Vendange Tardive (VdT) status.

The Vendange Tardive category denotes wines made from grapes left to hang long on the vine. The grapes must reach a minimum natural potential alcohol by law, and in principle should display the complexities gained from extended hang time. Wines carrying the related Selection de Grains Nobles designation require even higher must weight requirements, and must be made from grapes afflicted with botrytis, the noble rot that desiccates affected berries, concentrating their flavors and sugars while contributing texture and exotic flavors.

Botrytis is elusive, at least where you want it, and we haven't seen any on the Pinot Gris yet, so we've set our sights on paying homage to the Vendange Tardive tradition.

After taking most of the Pinot Gris from RSV's Scintilla Vineyard on the Sonoma side of Carneros, the harvest crew left a few select rows to hang. They came back for the fruit on October 12, 2006. It came in at 27.5° Brix, well above the minimum requirement for VdT in Alsace. After a gentle whole-cluster press and a three day juice rack at low temperature to settle solids, the must fermented in stainless tank for 24 days to 5.2° Brix.



TASTING NOTES

By Eric Sothern

You couldn't call RSV's Pinot Gris Late a dry wine, but it's not all that sweet either. The aroma reveals spiced white peach and nectarine with traces of citrus zest and white flower. A sip feels ripe, gold and luscious, but bright, like very ripe stone fruit. After a few years in the bottle, the spicy exotic notes that lurk just behind the fruit, will come forward. Sure, it's great with dessert,

but nothing too sweet, and to limit this wine to non-savory applications would be a shame. Pate comes immediately to mind, as do many cheeses. 12/08 (530 cases (12-375ml) produced)

Certified Organic Vineyards,
Biodynamically Farmed

“THE LAST TASTE OF SWEETS IS SWEETEST LAST.”

William Shakespeare

This Pinot Gris Late is an ethereal dessert wine. Its delicate flavors are amplified by a whisper of sweetness, balanced by a touch of crisp acidity. It is a dessert wine that will not weigh you down. However, don't hit it over the head with sugary sweetness, as you will overwhelm it. Instead, think light. It sings with crunchy, nutty biscotti and desserts where the natural sweetness of fruit is the focal point.

Cooking, like winemaking is all about the quality of the ingredients. When a recipe calls for Vanilla, I like Nielsen-Massey (www.nielsenmassey.com) Organic Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract. Nielsen-Massey is a family-owned company that has been in the vanilla business since 1907. I have used their flavorings for over 25 years. Here is a quote from their website:



“Our vanilla extract is made from the highest quality, certified organic vanilla beans and pure, certified organic alcohol, processed using our cold extraction process. This time-consuming procedure slowly and gently extracts maximum flavor without heat damage. The process can take up to five weeks. The result is an organic vanilla extract with a creamy, sweet, smooth, mellow vanilla flavor.”

I selected Nielsen-Massey' Organic Vanilla Extract for the January 2009 Glutton and Gourmand wine club gift for use in these recipes to pair with our

Pinot Gris Late... because its delicate flavor puts a smile on my face and makes the wine sing.

Until the next wine...

Maria



ALMOND PISTACHIO BISCOTTI

Try a variety of different nuts in these biscotti. For a bit of chewiness, add raisins or chopped dried fruit such as apricots.
Yield: 12 dozen small biscotti

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder

3/4 teaspoon kosher salt

3 large eggs

1 cup sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon fennel pollen or 1/4 teaspoon ground fennel seed

1 cup whole almonds, coarsely chopped

1 cup pistachios, coarsely chopped

Egg wash - 1 large egg beaten well with 2 teaspoons cold water



1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Line 2 sheet pans with parchment paper.
2. Mix the flour, baking powder and salt together in a medium bowl. Reserve.
3. In the bowl of a stand mixer using a paddle attachment, beat the eggs, sugar, vanilla and fennel to a thick ribbon.
4. Add the flour mixture to the eggs on low speed and mix until the flour is incorporated. Add the nuts and beat in for 20 seconds. Use a rubber spatula to turn the batter over in the bowl to make sure all the ingredients are evenly incorporated.
5. Using a pastry bag with a large 9 PT tip, pipe into 2 inch wide logs onto the prepared sheet pans. You may also use two soup spoons to shape the batter into logs. Brush the logs lightly with egg wash.
6. Bake in the preheated oven until lightly golden and puffed, 15 to 20 minutes. Cool slightly and then, using a thin serrated knife, slice 1/4-inch-thick. Bake again at 325 degrees F until lightly toasted, about 10 to 15 minutes.



CARAMEL ROASTED PEARS WITH VANILLA ICE CREAM

Pears are divine in this preparation. They come out of the oven looking like bejeweled mountains capped with caramelized peaks. I prefer Bosc pears for their medium size, smooth texture and the fact that they retain their firmness when ripe. Also, their seeds sit lower in the core making them easier to remove without damaging the integrity of the fruit and lessening the chance the pear will collapse when roasted.

Serves 8

8 large Bosc Pears, ripe but firm

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

3/4 teaspoon kosher salt

1 cup granulated sugar

1 cup sweet white wine

1 cup water

2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Best Quality Vanilla Ice Cream



1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Peel the pears and leave them whole keeping the stem intact if possible. Core them from the bottom using a dual sized melon baller or a 1/4 teaspoon measuring spoon. First remove the bottom of the core with the small end of the baller, taking out the surface with about a quarter inch of flesh then plunge the larger end of the melon baller into the same hole to remove the core and seeds. Slice the very bottom off so that the pear stands flat.
3. Add the butter to a large 12 inch sauté pan over medium high heat. When the butter starts to brown, add the pears and sauté, turning them frequently, until they are golden all over, about 5 to 10 minutes. Adjust the heat if necessary. Sprinkle the pears with salt and then sprinkle with sugar and continue cooking, rolling the pears around with a rubber spatula, until sugar is caramelized and thick, about 5 to 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, away from the open flame, and add the wine.
4. Place the pan back on the heat and reduce the wine, be careful of flame ups as the alcohol cooks from the wine. When the wine and caramelized sugar have reduced to a thick bubbly syrup, about 10 minutes, add the water and stand the pears upright in the pan. Bring liquid to a boil and add the vanilla extract.
5. Place the pan in the preheated oven and roast for 1 to 1 1/2 hours basting every 15 minutes until pears are tender and caramelized and the liquid has reduced to a thick syrup. Add more water, 1/4 cup at a time if the liquid reduces too quickly.
6. Remove the pan from the oven. Cool the pears to warm, periodically basting them with the caramel syrup. Place one pear each on individual plate or in shallow bowls. Place one scoop of ice cream next to each pear and spoon the cooking syrup over the pear and the ice cream.

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Printed on 100% recycled paper using soy based ink



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