



ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

CABERNET SAUVIGNON, SLD ESTATE, STAGS LEAP DISTRICT, NAPA VALLEY, 2012



MAKE CABERNET GREAT AGAIN

by Rob Sinskey

Reflections on Old School Cabernet

"Damn, that's good!" - I just couldn't contain my enthusiasm as the 1973 Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon slipped past my lips. My father stashed that bottle at release to enjoy at a future occasion that never came. Now he is gone - without knowing how the wine evolved or how his cache of old California wine brings us pleasure. I am not going to make the same mistake. I plan to enjoy as many old wines as I can before my time is up.

The occasion was a gathering of tribes the day after the presidential election. Our UK importer, Pol Roger, was in town. They invited several wineries they represent to have dinner with us at RSV. Each guest was instructed to bring a special bottle of wine - something with personal meaning.

The Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon was special for many reasons. Not only did it come from my father's cellar, it was one of the first wine brands I had the pleasure of tasting as an underaged imbibor. The wine, in its youth, was rustic and full bodied with firm tannin. It had an intriguing herbaceous quality with a savoriness that after a splash in a decanter, paired well with the meat-centric dishes of the day. Decades later, the fully mature wine showed bone dry with no perceptible sweetness and it kept opening throughout the course of the meal. Its very structure not only allowed the wine to evolve as we enjoyed it, it is what allowed the wine to last for forty three years, improving, mellowing and becoming more complex with age.

The wine was also particularly special to RSV winemaker Jeff Virnig. It was after tasting the 1973 Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon that he became inspired to pursue a life in wine. These early wines imprinted their style and structure upon us. Many modern wines are picked at higher sugar (some would say over ripe) to create wines with high alcohol and a sweet, dramatic first impression. However, many don't seem to evolve as gracefully. The old school wines, with their subtle elegance, moderate alcohol, firm tannin and vibrant mouthfeel are reminiscent of a certain RSV wine - like the SLD Estate Cabernet Sauvignon.

RSV is not trying to emulate the old California style; rather, those wines, along with many classic Old World wines, are benchmarks. They have been etched in our taste memory and are the reason we love growing and making wine. It requires discipline to avoid manipulative techniques that might make the wine more commercially acceptable in the short term but compromise the wine's sense of place, aging and evolutionary potential over the long haul. It is critical to know what came before to know where you want to go.



Winegrowing Notes

RSV's SLD Estate Cabernet Sauvignon is an elegant beast. It is dense with perfectly ripened tannin, bright, mouth-watering crispness, black stone fruit and an undercurrent of pyrazine compounds for a unique, savory, herbaceous character that is distinct to Cabernet Sauvignon picked at optimum (not over) ripeness.

Steeply terraced, RSV's organically farmed SLD Estate Vineyard is just four and a half acres of shy-producing vines; each vine carrying only a few clusters of intensely flavored grapes. This vineyard yields the fewest tons per acre (2012 was considered a large crop at just two tons per acre) of any of RSV's properties. The Stags Leap District is ideal for creating a classic style of wine. The amphitheater-like vineyard hugs the base of the mountain and rises up from the valley floor, capturing early morning fog and reflecting heat off the stony precipice in the afternoon. Lean, volcanic soils keep the vines in a state of stress that concentrates energy on the grapes instead of big leafy canopies. This idyllic combination of micro-climate, exposure and soil helps to create Cabernet Sauvignon that is elegant, balanced, full-flavored and age worthy.

Tasting Notes

RSV's Stags Leap District Estate Cabernet Sauvignon is a 2012 release worth the wait! This one's a firm handshake with a first impression of wisdom beyond its years. An aromatic greeting of boysenberry, cassis, spice, bay laurel and cocoa bean is backed by complex notes of leather, graphite and earth. After five minutes or so come hints of cherry and strawberry. The wine suggests old world complexity endowed with new world richness. It is both delicate and powerful with a brightness on the palate that balances the firm tannins and the weightiness of a perfectly ripened Cabernet from the SLD. A splash in the decanter while the wine is young will make it a great dinner companion or, for those with patience, a candidate to lose in the cellar for a few years... or decades! Patience will be rewarded as the wine evolves into an elegantly complex, supple and delicious beverage. Just 1,457 six-bottle cases were produced.

SAUCED!

Sauce-making has become a lost art. A great sauce derives its richness, complexity and depth of flavor from the alcohol, aromatic herbs, and vegetables added during the reduction phase of cooking. A knob of butter added at the end provides a luxurious texture and glistening gilded appearance. Spoon silky sauce over perfectly cooked, fowl, fish or meat as the crowning touch. A spoonful of a well-prepared sauce is the “coup de grâce” that declares a dish complete.

The SLD Cabernet Sauvignon with its finely tuned balance of cassis, black stone fruit, fresh acidity and supple, ripe tannin is an elegant companion to a fine guinea hen with silky sauce spooned over it. Most people think Napa Cabernet Sauvignon should be served with a thick, sauceless steak. Though a perfectly cooked steak might suit the SLD Cabernet Sauvignon just fine, the elegance and subtlety of this wine makes it a beautiful companion to well-sauced birds - duck, guinea hen, pheasant and squab... dishes normally considered companions to Pinot Noir. Open up a bottle of this Cabernet Sauvignon with your next saucy bird and let it take flight.

Until the Next Wine...

Maria



GUINEA HEN WITH SAVORY SAVOY CABBAGE PURSES

This is one of my favorite preparations of guinea hen. The bird is packed with flavor and has a richness derived from the fine quality of its fat. I often make this dish for a crowd because most of the preparation can be done in advance. Simply roast the breasts and heat the purses to finish and serve. It makes for a delicious and elegant meal that is finished in 30 minutes.

Butcher the birds and marinate before moving on to stock preparation. You will need the stock to braise the legs — get on it! The braising liquid is rich and should be used to make the sauce. Additional stock can be added to it to total 3 cups. Freeze extra stock to use for soups and braises. It's better than chicken stock. If you can't find guinea hens, substitute chicken or pheasant. Serves 6

2 2½ to 3 pound guinea hens, chicken or pheasant may be substituted	Kosher salt, must be coarse salt!
2 large shallots thinly sliced	Extra virgin olive oil
2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves	Guinea Hen Stock, recipe follows
1 ½ teaspoons finely cracked black peppercorns	Guinea Hen Sauce, recipe follows

1. Use a sharp knife to free wish bone at the neck end of the bird. Twist wish bone and pull to remove. Remove breast one side at a time from the body of bird. Keep the knife flat against the rib cage to avoid cutting into meat. Cut at wing joint to free the breast. Remove the wings and reserve for stock.
2. Remove thigh and leg in one piece. Remove the thigh bone and cut at leg joint. Slice along leg bone to expose top part of leg meat. Reserve.
3. Place the shallots, thyme leaves, black pepper and 1 tablespoon of kosher salt in a large bowl. Add 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Mix until well incorporated.
4. Add the breasts and legs and toss well so that marinade is distributed evenly on all pieces. Place the meat in a zip lock bag and marinate overnight in the refrigerator. Breasts can be left in marinade while stock is made and legs are braised.
5. To braise the legs after stock is ready: Remove the legs from the bag and brush off marinade. Keep the breast refrigerated in the bag.
6. Heat a medium sauté pan over medium high heat. Add a little olive oil to the pan and then place the legs skin side down in the pan. Brown well. Turn legs over and brown the other side. Add enough stock to the pan to cover the legs. Cover pan and place in oven.
7. Cook for 1 ½ hours until legs are tender. Cool in the broth and then pick the meat off the bones and reserve the meat in the refrigerator until ready to mix the cabbage stuffing.
8. To serve, preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Reheat the purses, and have the sauce kept warm and ready to go while you roast the breasts.
9. Remove the breasts from the bag and brush off marinade. Season lightly with salt.
10. Heat a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil to the pan and then the breasts skin side down. Slowly brown until skin is crisp, about 7 to 10 minutes. Reduce heat if pan gets too hot.
11. Turn the breasts over and continue to brown for another 5 minutes. Place in the oven for 7 to 10 minutes to cook through.
12. Remove the pan from the oven and place the breasts on a plate to rest for 5 to 10 minutes.
13. Slice each breast into 3 pieces. Place the reheated cabbage purses on 6 dinner plates and then divide the slices evenly among the plates. Pour the hot guinea hen sauce over the breast and purses and serve immediately.

SAVORY SAVOY CABBAGE PURSES

Cabbage purses can be served with the roasted breast or on their own. They can be shaped one at a time using a small bowl or the bowl of an 8 ounce ladle if you don't own any ramekins. Yield: 6 cabbage purses

1 small head savoy cabbage	1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
1 large carrot, finely diced	1 cup cooked farro, barley or wild rice
1 celery stalk, finely diced	2 cups braised guinea hen leg meat
1 small onion, finely diced	6 tablespoons unsalted butter
4 ounces button mushrooms, finely chopped	

1. Cut the core from the cabbage and gently remove 6 large outer leaves from the head. Push at the base near the core to free leaves.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the leaves and blanch for 60 seconds. Plunge into the ice bath to cool. Drain leaves and pat dry.
3. Slide a knife along the rib to trim it so that it is flat against the leaf. This will make the leaves easier to shape. Layer the leaves with paper towels and wrap or place in a bag and reserve in refrigerator until ready to use.
4. Heat a large sauté pan over medium high heat. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and then the diced carrot, celery and onion. Sauté for 5 minutes until golden and soft. Reduce heat if pan gets too hot and vegetables brown too quickly.
5. Add the mushrooms and cook until their liquid is dry. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Pour into a medium bowl and cool.
6. When vegetables are cool, add the picked leg meat, parsley and farro or other grain. Mix well. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
7. Line up 6 8 ounce ramekins. Place the blanched cabbage leaf rib side up over the ramekins and press gently to line the ramekin with the leaves. The leaves should hang over the edges. Place 1 tablespoon of butter in the bottom of the cabbage.
8. Fill the cabbage-lined ramekins with the stuffing mix and press down firmly to pack with stuffing. Fold the edges of the leaves over the top and press down firmly to seal. Turn the stuffed leaves out of the ramekins and place on a buttered sheet pan with the leaf edges down, smooth top up. Leave at least 1 inch between purses. Cover and reserve in refrigerator until ready to reheat.
9. To reheat, preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Place the sheet pan with the purses in the oven and bake for 20 to 30 minutes until the leaves turn golden and filling is heated through.

GUINEA HEN STOCK

As mentioned in the recipe headnote, the stock should be made as soon as possible after butchering the birds as it needs 6-8 hours to simmer. Use the mushroom stems cleaned from the tops for the filling and the parsley stems left from picking the leaves. Waste nothing! Yield: 2 quarts

Guinea hen bones	2 cups white wine
Handful mushroom stems	1 fresh or dried bay leaf
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and quartered	3 bushy thyme stems
2 large carrot, peeled and cut into thirds	Handful parsley stems
1 celery rib, trimmed and cut into thirds	

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Place the guinea hen bones in 1 layer on a sheet pan. Add the mushroom stems, onion, carrot and celery to the pan.
3. Place in the oven and roast until bones and vegetables are well browned.
4. Scrape the bones into an 8 quart stock pot.

5. Place the roasting pan over medium heat and add the wine to the pan. Bring the wine to a boil and use a spoon to scrape the caramelized bits off the bottom of the pan. Pour the wine and all the scraped bits into the pan.
6. Fill the pot with water to an inch below the top edge. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and skim off the fat.
7. Once the fat is removed add the bay leaf, thyme and parsley stems. Simmer the stock on very low heat for 6-8 hours. Skim fat off the surface as needed. If liquid in pot reduces by more than half, add more water to fill pot $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way to prevent the liquid from running dry and burning the stock.
8. Strain the stock into a clean large sauce pan. Discard the bones and reduce the stock to 8 cups.
9. Strain through a fine strainer into a suitable container and cool uncovered in the refrigerator if not using immediately. Once cool, store sealed for up to 1 week in the refrigerator or freeze for up to 6 months.

GUINEA HEN SAUCE

This is a luxuriously silky rich and aromatic sauce that perfectly coats and compliments the roasted breast and cabbage purses. It is key to use a well-made stock with delicious flavor for any flaws in the stock will be magnified as the stock reduces. Yield: 1 ½ cups

4 tablespoons unsalted butter divided, room temperature
 1 medium shallot, sliced thinly
 1 cup Marsala wine, fine quality
 1 1 x 4 inch strip orange peel
 1 bushy sprig fresh marjoram

3 cups guinea hen stock – braising liquid from legs plus added stock if necessary
 Kosher salt
 Freshly ground black pepper
 2 teaspoons finely chopped parsley

1. Heat a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon of butter and brown lightly.
2. Add the shallots and cook until the shallots are golden and very soft.
3. Add the orange peel and marjoram and cook until the pan emits a nice perfume.
4. Add the Marsala and bring to a boil. Reduce by two thirds at a simmer.
5. Add the stock, return the sauce to a boil, reduce heat to a simmer and then simmer until sauce is reduced by half. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
6. Just before serving bring sauce to a boil and reduce to a simmer. Whisk in the remaining 3 tablespoons of butter until butter is emulsified.
7. Stir in the parsley just before serving.





FINE WINES. ORGANIC VINES.

Robert Sinskey Vineyards
6320 Silverado Trail
Napa, CA 94558
707.944.9090
robertsinskey.com

Winemaker: Jeff Virnig
Chef: Maria Helm Sinskey
Photos and Text: Rob Sinskey
Vineyard Manager: Debby Zygielbaum
gluttons@robertsinskey.com

