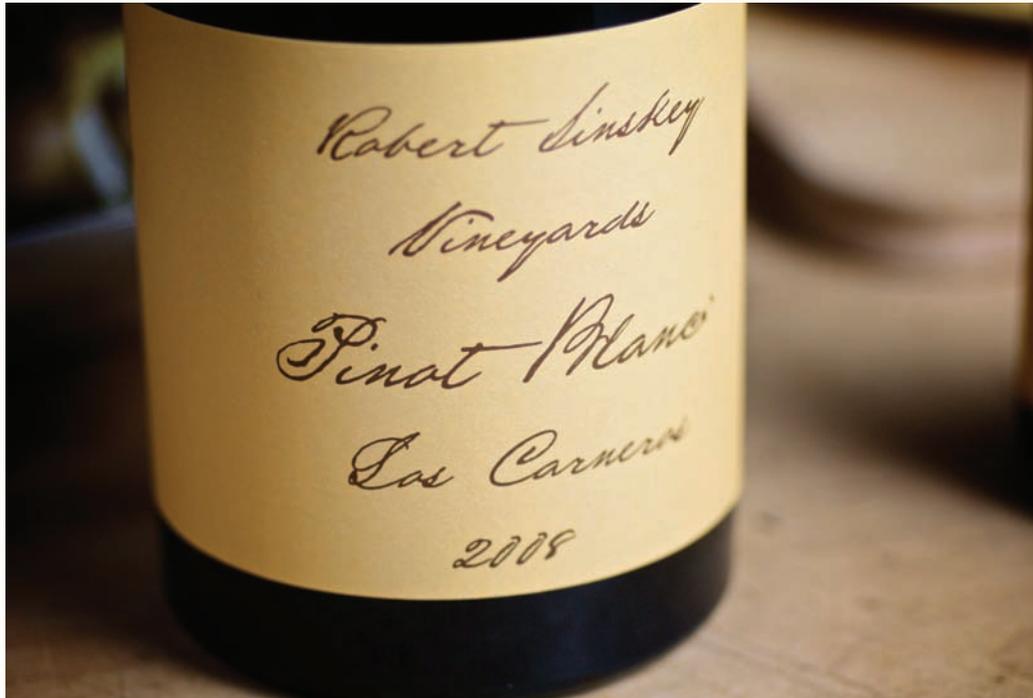


PINOT BLANC  
LOS CARNEROS  
2008



ROBERT SINSKEY VINEYARDS  
R S V  
NAPA, CALIFORNIA

# A COLD ONE!

## Pinot Blanc with your crabby patty...

By Rob Sinskey

When my grandmother's eyes set upon me, I knew she was appalled. Turning to my father she hissed, "You shouldn't let him drink beer!" My father just shrugged it off. He figured if I tasted beer and wine in his presence, I would not look upon them as forbidden fruit.

I learned a lot that sweltering summer at one of our infrequent family reunions in Baltimore. The gathering's focal point was Chesapeake Bay crab. We would cook up as much as we could handle and wash it down with beer or, depending on your age, soda. We made crab cakes that were almost all crab, placed between two saltines and eaten like a sandwich. We boiled bushels of whole crab, laid them out on newspapers, smashed their shells with hammers and cracked their claws with nutcrackers. Juice and bits of shell flew everywhere; if we got too messy we would just jump into the pool. My father's favorite was softshell crab pan-fried in butter and eaten for breakfast.

I learned not only that there were many ways to cook crab, but that there were beer foods and wine foods. I have spent the rest of my life unlearning the lessons of that summer. Being a native Californian, I grew up with an eclectic culinary mix: the American junk foods of the 60's and 70's combined with Mexican and Japanese cuisines. Each food had its own beverage pairing option,



none of which was wine. With Mexican food you had beer or margaritas. With Japanese it was beer or sake and with Dodger dogs, you drank beer and then, later, Alka-Seltzer.

Of course wine was not offered at Dodger stadium, that would have been un-American; however, every once in a while a wine would show up on the menu at the Japanese or Mexican place. If you were brave enough to order it, you were rewarded with something that tasted like swill by itself and absolutely horrendous with the food. This plonk forever damaged the reputation of wine's ability to pair with the intricacies of ethnic cuisine. As a result, you rightly assumed you were better off with a beer.

Even with a proper bottle of wine, these foods can make for a challenging pairing. An oaky white wine, no matter its pedigree, will not pair well with crab, aggressive spice, chile or the umami of Asian foods, but a clean, bright, un-oaked white wine can. There is a reason tradition calls for unwooded Chablis with shellfish instead of heavily wooded white Burgundies.

Traditionally, most Pinot Blanc was made in a clean, bright, and straightforward style. It wasn't until Pinot Blanc hit the New World that many winemakers decided more is more and allowed the wine to go through both barrel and malolactic fermentations - two techniques that soften the wine and mask its fruit with secondary flavors and aromas. Since Pinot Blanc is delicate to begin with, the wood can overwhelm the fruit, and become the main flavor of the wine. This can work at cocktail time and maybe with chicken, but this style is clumsy with delicate foods or ethnic cuisines.

White wine can be so much more. It can be the salve that cools the heat of spice or the refreshment that washes down the crab. However, not all white wine will do. If you want to replace beer with wine for traditional beer foods, you need to understand a few rules.



1. Unoaked is good. The recession is encouraging wine-makers to use less oak to cut costs, prompting the realization that many grapes don't need oak in the first place. There are more fresh whites than ever before.

2. Fruit is your friend. Wines that taste like grapes and fruit will pair better with a wider range of cuisine.

3. Acid is good. Bright acidity makes you salivate and helps the wine cut through strong flavors.

4. A little bit of sugar turns down the heat. Spicy food either requires lots of fruit or a touch of sugar (RSV Pinot Blanc is fermented dry but it does have lots of fruit character) to tame the heat. The best combination for Mexican or Thai food is a wine that has forward fruit, a touch of residual sugar and good acidity.

5. Serve the wine a little colder than optimum. It will be refreshing and will quickly warm up in the glass.

6. If you still miss beer, just let out a big belch.

Not too long ago, I was in Wisconsin, where beer and brats are not just a ballpark favorite, but part of their identity. I hope I live long enough to see the day when a nice crisp American white wine is poured alongside kegs of suds and I witness a burly guy in a Packers jersey yell out, "Give me a Blanc and a Brat!"



## WINEGROWING NOTES

By Eric Sothern

*P*urity is a mantra at RSV and the Pinot Blanc embodies dedication to that ideal from dirt to bottle. RSV's certified organic and Biodynamic vineyards produce balanced fruit that does not require remedial or cosmetic winemaking. The cellar crew whole-cluster presses the hand-picked fruit gently, avoiding the extraction of bitter compounds from stems and seeds. After a short racking to settle out solids, the wine ferments in stainless steel at low temperature, preserving the fresh fruit flavors while stretching the ferment out, keeping the wine and yeast in contact for weeks, adding complexity and texture. No oak was harmed in the production of this wine, not even for the cork, as the wine's closure is an elegant glass stopper.

2008 was a short vintage. Yields were low due to drought and some untoward weather during flowering and fruit set. This means two things: the low yields provide for intense fruit and there's not a lot to go around.



## TASTING NOTES:

By Eric Sothern

*P*erilliant pale lemon shimmers from the glass, as intense aromas of verbena, ripe apples, and almond greet a sniff. The wine is silky on the palate, with melons, citrus and white flower underscored by subtle minerality. It leaves fresh and bright, and keeps you coming back for more.

100% CCOF Certified Organic and Demeter Certified Biodynamic Vineyards

## ANOTHER CRAB TALE

Each summer, at our little beach cottage on Fire Island, my brothers, sister and I devolved into wild hunter-gatherers. We'd be so excited that we would crawl out of bed at 5 a.m. to fish off the dock in the marina. Then, in the afternoons, we'd clam during low tide, wriggling in the mud until we felt a hard lump underneath our feet. Sometimes we were met with the pinch from a scallop, or something else, that lurked below.



Our hunting instincts carried us into the night as we slid our boat out into the bay to crab. Moonlight crabbing was an adrenaline charged adventure, but I don't think it was fair to the crabs. As we'd shine a light on the water, the crabs would rise to the surface, allowing us to net and bring on board an angry mass of snapping claws and twitching legs. Once a dozen large blue claws were netted, we'd be set for the next day's crab feast.

The crabs would boil in huge pots on the grill and when my father deemed them perfectly cooked they would be drained in the sand and dumped down the center of newspaper-cloaked tables. We'd stuff ourselves with the sweet, rich meat as flies and bees buzzed about our heads and angry sea gulls cawed in the air above.

My father-in-law hails from Maryland, so my husband, like me, grew up under the sign of the crab. Today, when the two sides of the family get together, it becomes a seafood competition as we determine who can shuck oysters and crack crab the fastest. My children love the excitement of a crab boil. They pick meat until they have a big pile, then they wolf it down. Sometimes, if I grease their palms with a cookie or two, I can get them to pick meat for crab cakes. One summer, we visited my brother's family in New Hampshire and saw many small crabs in the tide pools off Rye Beach. My daughter wanted to take them home and cook them.



When I told her that they were too small she replied, "That's OK Mama, they can be the appetizer!"

We've been eating crab with the Pinot Blanc since its inception. Snowy crabmeat is sweet and delicate – a perfect match for the wine. The citrus and melon notes meet the crab head on and the nice acidity cuts through the richness of the meat.

When I was young, we used "Old Bay" for the boil, but I could not leave well enough alone and created my own spice mix, with the help of Shuli of the Whole Spice Co. in Napa's Oxbow Market, and called it "Screaming Seagull" Crab Boil. It adds a sweet and subtle spiciness to the crabmeat. It's wonderful mixed into the meat or sprinkled lightly on top of the whole crab. As you crack the crab and eat it, you will get bursts of spice from your fingers. Use it to marinate vegetable, fish and seafood brochettes.

Grab your spice bag and pull together your fantasy crab boil, whether it be on a sun-kissed West Coast winter day or a steamy summer day back East....and don't forget the Pinot Blanc.

Until the next wine...

Maria



## CRAB BOIL

Two crabs cook perfectly and quickly in 8 quarts of water. Be sure to use an enamel, stainless steel or other non-reactive pot to cook the crabs.

Serves 2 to 4

*8 quarts water*

*1/4 cup Screaming Seagull Spice*

*1/4 cup vinegar*

*1/4 cup kosher salt*

*2 2 1/2 pound crabs*

Bring the water, spice, vinegar and salt to a boil. Add the crab and boil for 12 minutes. Reduce the heat if the pot starts to boil over. Remove the crabs promptly and cool to warm before cracking.



## CRAB CAKES

These subtly spicy cakes are delicious served with coleslaw or a green salad. They're also great tucked into a soft egg bun.

Serves 2 to 4

*1/2 pound crabmeat, picked to remove shells*

*1 cup soft white bread crumbs*

*1/4 cup mayonnaise*

*1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice*

*1/2 teaspoon Screaming Seagull Spice*

*Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper*

*1 tablespoon unsalted butter or oil*

*Watercress to garnish*

1. Place the crabmeat in a bowl and gently shuffle through it with your fingers to pull out bits of shell and cartilage. Try not to break up the chunks of meat.
2. Add the breadcrumbs, mayo, lemon juice and spice and mix gently until all the ingredients are well distributed. Taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper to taste if needed.
3. Shape into 4 large or 6 medium crab cakes and place them on a plate. Let them rest in the refrigerator for 10 minutes to overnight to allow the juices and mayo to soak into the bread.
4. Heat a 10-inch sauté pan over medium high heat. Add the oil, heat for a moment, then add the crab cakes to the pan and cook until golden on one side, 3 to 4 minutes. Flip the cake over with a thin metal spatula and cook on the other side until golden. Lower the heat if the crab cakes brown too quickly before warmed through.
5. Remove the crab cakes from the pan to a serving plate and garnish with watercress.



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