

PINOT NOIR  
THREE AMIGOS VINEYARD  
LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY  
2006 & 2007



ROBERT SINSKEY VINEYARDS  
NAPA, CALIFORNIA

# A VINTAGE PERSONALITY!

## ONE VINEYARD, TWO GROWING SEASONS...

By Rob Sinskey

Every growing season creates a wine with a personality born of the elements. “Bad” vintages are no more. Advances in knowledge, technique and technology, not to mention Napa’s advantageous climate, have done away with the scandalous vintages of years past.

The basic character of a wine is sculpted by heat summation, modified by weather extremes (heat spikes, rain, cold snaps, drought) and defined by a vigneron’s timing. Since Pinot Noir is a transparent variety (whereby anything that occurs during the growing season appears in the finished wine), it is arguably the ideal conduit for capturing the essence of a year in a bottle. Some winemakers, like Jeff Virnig, embrace the vintage eccentricities of Pinot Noir while others utilize technology to mask the character of the year to fit a consistent taste and texture profile.

Pinot Noir is, by nature, a delicate, thin-skinned grape, demanding full attention in vineyard and cellar to realize the potential of the vintage. However, there is a difference between being attentive and being manipulative. Recent trends encourage winemakers to manipulate Pinot Noir, maximizing extraction in a quest to make a powerful statement. I argue that other grapes are better suited to this power struggle than Pinot Noir... Syrah, Zinfandel and some of the Bordeaux varieties come to mind. Pinot Noir’s strength is its ability to create a delicately complex wine that expresses the character of the grape, vineyard and vintage while maintaining its culinary flexibility.

Pinot Noir put the “geek” in “wine geek.” It is a wine of minutiae where every detail elucidates character. To celebrate the geeks of the world, this booklet is dedicated to two vintages of Pinot Noir from one vineyard, along with an attempt to explain cause and effect. There is no “right” answer, but each fact should shed some light on the character created by vintage.



## THREE AMIGOS VINEYARD PINOT NOIR 2006

## THREE AMIGOS VINEYARD PINOT NOIR 2007

THE THREE AMIGOS VINEYARD WAS PLANTED TO HEIRLOOM SELECTIONS BEGINNING IN 1982. ALL OF RSV'S VINEYARDS ARE CERTIFIED ORGANIC AND WERE FARMED BIODYNAMICALLY, THOUGH BIODYNAMIC CERTIFICATION WAS NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL 2007. HEIRLOOMS TEND TO BE LATER RIPENING AND MAINTAIN THEIR ACIDITY BETTER THAN MODERN FRENCH CLONES.

### 135% average annual rainfall

A growers' year with heavy, large-berried clusters requiring "thinning" and vigor management. There were fewer average clusters per vine than 2007.

Bud break started toward the end of March and finished in a week in some blocks, while other blocks didn't finish until early April. Harvest occurred mid-September.

The entire growing season shifted later because of a cool spring. June was hot followed by mild weather through late September. The big difference in the two vintages was the amount of water available to the vines in 2006.

### Yield averages: 3.5 tons/acre

Though a larger yield than the tiny 2007 vintage, 3.5 tons per acre is just slightly larger than "normal" resulting in softer tannin and more "fruit" character than 2007, suggesting this vintage should be consumed earlier.

6 g/l TA 3.56pH 14.2%

Numbers wise, these two vintages are close. The 2006 has higher alcohol, higher pH and lower acidity than the 2007. The alcohol will give the wine higher viscosity (glycerin) with a sensation of sweetness even though the wine is dry. The lower acidity will make the wine feel softer, suggesting earlier drinkability. Though I feel that all wines should be served with food, this wine would be a better candidate for the cocktail hour if food is limited.

30% new oak, barrel aged for 16 months. Bottled Feb 18, 2008

Barrels are ordered months before harvest so the percentage of new oak is dictated by the yield. Because of the lower percentage of new oak, we decided to age the wine for 16 months. The goal is always for the wood to support the fruit and not become the defining statement.

The additional barrel aging in the cave, combined with the additional year in the bottle have softened this wine to where it should be consumed in the near term.

### Start of the drought years with 35-60% of average annual rainfall

The drought resulted in smaller berries and lighter clusters, even though average clusters per vine were the same or slighter higher than 2006.

Bud break started mid-March and finished in a little over two weeks. Harvest occurred the last week of August through the first week of September.

Early budbreak, a mild summer and hot weather around Labor Day made for an almost ideal growing season, though drought conditions lowered yields.

### Yield averages: 2 tons/acre

The tiny yield resulted in a more concentrated character with higher tannin levels and "spicier" fruit suggesting this wine can age longer and/or benefit from decanting.

6.3 g/l TA 3.48pH 13.6%

The higher acidity, lower pH and lower alcohol of this vintage suggests this wine will appear tighter knit, dryer and more structured than the 2006 vintage resulting in a wine that will have the potential to age longer and pair better with higher fat foods like lamb and duck.

40% new oak, barrel aged for 9 months. Bottled July 22, 2008

Smaller yields led to a higher percentage of new oak, which the concentrated character of the wine could support. However, we chose to have this wine spend less time in the barrel, compared to the 2006, to preserve the higher notes of berry fruit.

The youthful quality of this wine would suggest that it would benefit with longer aging or decanting before serving.

Is one wine better than the other? Only your palate can decide which is better for the way you intend to serve or cellar the wine. Some people will prefer the suppleness of the 2006 while others the structure of the 2007. However, if I were a gambling man, I would cellar the 2007 for a few years and drink the 2006 with dinner tonight.



The color leans from ruby towards garnet while the aromas suggest sweet red cherry, black tea, vanilla and violet. Macerated cherries burst bright on the palate, joined by nutmeg spice and that earthy, sensual and highly addictive “Pinotness” that can only be described in the sort of sensational, erotic language best left to your imagination.

Right, saturated ruby color gives way to a thin clear rim by the edge of the glass. Bright red fruit and forest floor aromas presage deep flavors of cherries and winter spices nestled in a luxe texture. Well-developed, fine tannins and bright acidity provide the sort of balance and structure that will allow many years, if not decades, of enjoyment. It only hints of its potential now, baring just the first bit of skin in a very slow striptease.

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100% CCOF Certified Organic and Demeter Certified Biodynamic Vineyards

## DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE...

...was a favorite game of mine from long, long ago. Running in a dizzying circle, lungs bursting, trying to catch the friend that tagged me, grasping for anything, the loose arm of a sweater, a ponytail, anything at all so I would not be IT.

I've radically changed the game this incarnation. It involves no running or gasping for breath, just a keen sense of adventure in the kitchen, the ability to grasp a glass of wine and enjoy a well-prepared meal... or three.

The 2006 Three Amigos Vineyard Pinot Noir is on the cusp of developing a nice bottle patina. It is well-structured with supple tannin, good acidity and moderate alcohol for a "drink now" food wine. Whereas, the 2007 Three Amigos Vineyard Pinot Noir is still showing its bold, youthful, brashness. The brightness of this wine will slice through the richness of a fine, fat goose.

Play around. Start with one and finish with the other. Snack on Duck and Scallion Pancakes while putting the finishing touch on the goose. It's a new way to play a very old game.

Until the next wine...  
Maria



## FIVE SPICE DUCK WITH SCALLION PANCAKES

The moist duck and crispy golden pancakes are fun to eat. They can be served as a main course or a light appetizer for 12.

Serves 6 to 8

*4 to 5 pound duck*

*1 tablespoon kosher salt*

*2 teaspoons Chinese 5-Spice Powder*

*1/2 teaspoon ground Indonesian Long Pepper\**

*Plum Sauce*

*Scallion Pancakes, recipe follows*

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F.
2. Mix together the salt, 5 spice and long pepper in a small bowl.
3. Place the duck in a roasting pan, rub well with the spice mixture, and roast for 20 minutes. Reduce heat to 325 degrees F and continue to roast for 2 hours. Baste every 30 minutes with the fat in the bottom of the pan.
4. Return the heat to 425 degrees F and roast for 20 minutes to lightly crisp the skin. Remove the duck from the oven and let rest for 20 minutes before slicing.
5. Remove the legs from the duck and slice the meat from the bone. Remove both breasts from the bone and slice them thinly. Serve with warm Scallion Pancakes and Plum Sauce.

*\*Long Peppercorns can be found at [www.wholepsice.com](http://www.wholepsice.com). You may also substitute freshly ground black pepper.*



## SCALLION PANCAKES

These pancakes can be served on their own with a little soy sauce for dipping.

Yield: 16 scallion pancakes.

*2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour*

*1/2 teaspoon baking powder*

*1 teaspoon kosher salt*

*2 teaspoons vegetable oil plus additional for frying*

*1/4 teaspoon toasted sesame oil*

*1 cup boiling water*

*2 spring onions (scallions, green onions), washed and thinly diced*

1. Place the flour, baking powder, salt, 2 teaspoons vegetable oil and sesame oil in a food processor.
2. Run the food processor and add the water in a thin stream until the dough forms a ball. Gather the dough and knead it on a lightly floured counter until it is smooth and elastic. Place the dough in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let rest for 1 hour.
3. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Roll into a large rectangle 1/4 inch thick. Sprinkle the dough evenly with spring onion pieces and then roll up the rectangle and cut into 16 equal pieces. Use the palm of your hand to flatten each piece. Roll out into a very thin pancake, about 1/8 inch thick.
4. Heat 1/4 inch of oil in a 10-inch skillet. Shallow fry the pancakes until both sides are golden brown. While cooking, press down on the center with a spatula to make sure the pancake cooks evenly. Add oil to the pan if necessary before adding the next pancake. Drain on a rack or on thick paper towels. Serve whole or cut into quarters.



# THYME ROASTED DUCK BREAST WITH SUNCHOKE PUREE, BRUSSEL SPROUTS, BACON AND CHESTNUTS

This dish requires a little prep time but once the components are done, it's a breeze to put together. Peel the green outer leaves from the Brussel Sprouts for this dish. Save the tightly curled center leaves for another meal.

Serves 4 to 6

*4 medium duck breasts, about 8 ounces each*

*1 cup bacon lardons\*\**

*Kosher salt*

*Freshly ground black pepper*

*1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves*

*6 cups Brussel sprout leaves*

*1 cup peeled, roasted chestnuts, sliced into quarters*

*1 cup duck or chicken stock*

*Sunchoke Puree, recipe follows*

1. Trim the excess fat from the edges of the duck breasts. Score the skin in a diamond pattern. Cut through the skin and fat just to, but not into the meat. Reserve in the refrigerator. Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before cooking.
2. Sauté the bacon lardons over medium heat until they have rendered much of their fat and are crisp-chewy. Drain and reserve in a warm place near the stove.
3. Heat a 12-inch sauté pan over medium heat. Season both sides of the breasts with salt and pepper and a sprinkle of thyme leaves.
4. Add the breasts to the pan skin side down. Cook slowly to allow the fat to render from the skin. Cook until the skin is crisp and golden, about 10 to 12 minutes. Turn the breast over and continue to cook for 8 to 10 minutes for medium. Remove to a plate to rest before slicing.
5. Wipe out the pan with a paper towel. Place the pan over medium high heat, add the bacon and cook for 1 to 2 minutes to allow it to exude some fat, if the bacon is dry add a little olive oil to the pan to moisten. Add the Brussel sprouts and chestnuts, season with a little salt and pepper. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes until the leaves start to wilt. Add the stock to the pan and quickly reduce by half over high heat.
6. Slice the duck and arrange over a spoonful of sunchoke puree. Spoon the Brussel Sprouts, lardons and chestnuts around with some juices over the top.

*\*To make lardons, slice 6 thick cut pieces of bacon 1/4 inch thick across the width. Blanch in boiling water for 30 seconds and drain. Add to a sauté pan and cook over medium heat until golden but still soft and chewy.*





## SUNCHOKE PUREE

Sunchokes are the tuberous root of a native American sunflower plant. They are also called Jerusalem Artichokes because their slightly sweet taste is similar to that of an artichoke. If you can't find them substitute mashed sweet potatoes.

Serves 6

*1 1/2 pounds large Sunchokes (Jerusalem Artichokes)    2 tablespoons unsalted butter*  
*Kosher salt    1/4 cup heavy cream*

1. Peel the sunchokes and reserve in cold water to keep them from turning color. Cut off the knobs and peel individually to make peeling easier.
2. Bring a pot of water to a boil, add 1 tablespoon of salt and cook until the sunchokes are very tender, about 30 minutes. Drain and puree in a food processor until smooth.
3. Heat the cream and butter together in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Gradually add the cream mixture to the pureed sunchokes, with the machine running, until the consistency is smooth and light, season with salt to taste.



The pieces of the braised goose leg creates the foundation for the succulent sliced breast.

## ROAST GOOSE WITH A VEGETABLE RAGOUT

Roasting a whole goose can be a challenge if you want to produce juicy breasts and tender legs. I like to braise the legs for succulent meat and then sear the breasts stove top to render off the thick layer of fat and produce perfectly cooked tender medallions of rosy meat. Choose vegetables that are in season for this dish. Adjust the cooking time accordingly. You want the vegetables to be just tender and bright.

Serves 4 to 6

*6 to 8 pound goose*

*Kosher salt*

*Freshly ground black pepper*

*3 celery stalks, washed and cut in thirds*

*2 medium carrots, peeled and cut in thirds*

*1 small yellow onion, peeled and quartered*

*1 bay leaf*

*1 cup red wine*

*12 pearl onions, peeled and trimmed*

*2 medium carrots, peeled, cut in half lengthwise and sliced  
1/4 inch thick on bias*

*12 snap peas, sliced into 1/2 inch pieces on bias*

*1 cup diced pancetta, rendered until golden on the edges  
but still chewy*

1. Remove leg and thigh in one piece from the goose. Debone the breast and cut off the wings. Roast the carcass and the wings for stock if desired, otherwise discard.
2. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.
3. Season the legs with salt and pepper. Heat an ovenproof pan with a fitted lid over medium high heat. Add the legs and brown on both sides. Add the chunks of celery, carrots, quartered onion, and bay leaf to the pan and saute for 2 minutes.
4. Add the wine and bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Add 1 cup of water to the pan, cover and place in the oven. Cook for 1 1/2 to 2 hours until the meat is tender, succulent, and pulls easily away from the bone. Cool to warm in the braising juices.
5. Remove the legs with a slotted spoon and strain the juices through a fine mesh strainer. Discard the vegetables and season the juices with salt and pepper to taste. Pull the meat from the bone and remove, skin, gristle and veins. Place the meat in a small pan for reheating and pour the juices over. You may cook the legs 1 to 2 days in advance and then store in the refrigerator until ready to reheat.
6. Trim the excess fat from the edges of the breast. Score the skin in a diamond pattern. Cut through the skin and fat just to, but not into the meat. Reserve in the refrigerator. Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before cooking.
7. Heat a 10-inch sauté pan over medium heat. Season both sides of the breasts with salt and pepper. Add the breasts to the pan skin side down. Cook slowly to allow the fat to render from the skin. Cook until the skin is crisp and golden, about 12 to 15 minutes. Turn the breast over and continue to cook for 8 to 10 minutes for medium. Remove to a plate to rest before slicing.
8. Drain and then wipe out the pan with a paper towel. Place the pan over medium high heat and add 4 tablespoons of butter to the pan. Heat until the butter bubbles briskly. Add the pearl onions and sauté for 2 minutes until they start to turn translucent, season with salt and pepper.
9. Add 1 cup of water to barely cover the onions and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 8 minutes. Add the carrots, season, and cook for 4 minutes. Add the snap peas and pancetta and cook for 3 to 4 more minutes, until the snap peas are bright green and tender with a bit of crunch. Add more water if the pan dries out.
10. To serve, heat the leg meat and place in the center of a serving plate. Slice the goose breast and arrange on top. Use a slotted spoon to spoon the vegetables around. Spoon the seasoned braising juices over the top.



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