

MERLOT
LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY
2004



ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS
R S V
NAPA, CALIFORNIA



RSV's organic and Biodynamically farmed OSR Vineyard already shows established cover crop shortly after harvest.

GUILT FREE HEDONISM

Good wine shouldn't hurt...your palate or the planet. Unfortunately, the tillage practices of modern industrial farming (also called "conventional" farming) inadvertently cause more harm than good by contributing to global warming. Conventional farming "wisdom" advocates a "fenceline-to-fenceline" bare soil practice, using chemical tillage (herbicides) and mechanical tillage (discing) to combat weeds. A little tillage can be a good thing, but heavy cultivation creates more CO₂ emissions than a battalion of Hummer-driving single commuters.

Think the CO₂ emissions created by cultivating originate from tractors burning fossil fuels? If you answered yes, you are partly correct; diesel fuel does contribute to air pollution. However, the larger problem lies with the soil management practiced in conventional farming. CO₂, or carbon dioxide, is created when carbon mixes with oxygen. Plants, by way of photosynthesis, take carbon dioxide from the atmosphere

and convert it to sugar, of which carbon is a key ingredient. What's great about this process is the "waste" product is oxygen. The routine of a plant's life-cycle locks up carbon dioxide that would otherwise be in the atmosphere and transfers it to the soil where it is sequestered as organic material, or humus. When a tractor tills the soil, pulling a disc or a rototiller, that carbon rich humus is released to potentially mix with oxygen to become global warming CO₂ gas.

Instead of chemical or heavy mechanical tillage, organic and Biodynamic wine grape farmers plant cover crops in and between the vine rows during the winter and often leave the cover crops to grow year round. Organic farmers mow these cover crops using either farm implements (RSV uses biodiesel powered tractors) and/or animals (RSV uses sheep) which further reduce fossil fuel emissions. Occasionally, minimal tillage is used to break up compaction, maintain







RSV plants and maintains native grasses in open spaces adjacent to planted vineyards.

soil structure and encourage new root growth. For example, RSV's soil management practices include tilling every other vineyard row once a year in appropriate areas. A spader is used rather than a disc, as the action of the spader protects the structure of the soil while a disc has a tendency to pulverize it, thereby releasing more carbon. These simple practices can sequester up to 667 tons of carbon per acre that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere.

Lately, misinformation has been circulating, perhaps spawned by the herbicide companies, claiming that herbicide use reduces emissions and, thus, global warming. The main argument is that it takes fewer tractor passes to spray the chemical herbicide than it takes to mechanically mow cover crops. Separated from the rest of organic farm practices, it would appear to be a true statement. We know better; this is just another green-washing campaign that obscures

the whole truth. Again, the failure to recognize important interrelationships has allowed this misinformation campaign to flourish and be repeated by otherwise well-intentioned farmers.

Conscientious farmers constantly question their practices and continually look for ways to improve the quality of their produce while lessening their global impact. Reconsidering tillage practices is one example. Fortunately, nature supplies many models for efficient farm management; this means that the more a farm models itself after a functioning ecosystem, the easier it is to manage. It is still up to the farmer to recognize the interrelationships that make these efficiencies effective, and put them into practice. They just need the faith to take it one step at a time.



WINEGROWING NOTES:

The early spring warmth of 2004 stirred the vines from slumber, prompting budbreak to commence a few weeks earlier than normal. Cooler weather ensued, leading to a modest fruit set. Relatively cool weather prevailed until summer heat spikes accelerated sugar development, leading to an early harvest with modest yields of beautiful and intense fruit.

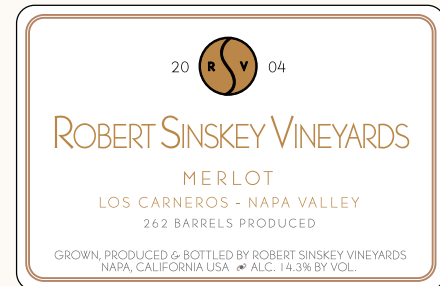
Three Amigos, OSR and Vandal Vineyards, all contributors to this cuvée, lie just north of the San Pablo Bay in Carneros. The Bay creates a convection current that draws off the summer heat and blows in cool air off the water, allowing for relatively gentle and even ripening. In a warm year like 2004, this natural “swamp cooler” was particularly welcome. Merlot finds the maritime influence to its liking, as it closely resembles its ancestral home

in Aquitaine where the grape still rules. In Bordeaux, Merlot accounts for nearly 70% of plantings, whereas in California, Merlot is the second most planted cultivar behind its half-brother Cabernet Sauvignon.

The wine spent eighteen months in one-third new French oak barrels before bottling in the spring of 2006. A dollop (ten percent) of Cabernet Sauvignon plays a supporting role, adding structure. Two hundred and sixty-two barrels were produced.

TASTING NOTES:

A dark, yet brilliant, ruby color augurs pleasure for the other senses. Halfway to the glass, the olfactory sense meets fennel-laced plums and vanilla cassis; while aromas of violets and bay leaves vie for attention. A tipping of the glass reinforces these flavors on the palate and wraps them in the plush texture that makes Merlot so appealing. A refreshing snap and ripe polished tannins work together to provide structure and balance following through to a never-ending finish.



RSV's Vineyards are Certified Organic and this year they are all Demeter Certified Biodynamic!

DUCK, DUCK, MERLOT!



Merlot is a great companion to food. Its bright red fruit flavors and semi-soft tannin structure make it eminently quaffable with many of the same foods that pair well with Pinot Noir. Take duck for instance. The breasts are meaty enough to stand up to Merlot's fabulous mid-weight and the compote adds a touch of sweet savory-ness that complements the fruit of the wine. Enjoy!

Until the next wine...

Maria

HERB ROASTED DUCK BREAST

A good roasted duck breast is always welcome in my house. The rosy pink slices with crisp skin and crunchy herbed bread crumbs are absolutely delicious and highly anticipated. Serves 6

6 6 ounce boneless Pekin or Muscovy duck breast, trimmed

1 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves

1/4 cup dry, lightly toasted bread crumbs

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1. With a sharp knife, score the skin of the duck in a diamond pattern. Cut through the skin but not into the meat. Season both sides with salt and pepper. In a small bowl, mix together the thyme leaves, bread crumbs and softened butter thoroughly
2. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Heat a large sauté pan over medium high heat. When the pan is hot add the duck breasts skin side down and reduce the heat to medium. Render the skin, draining the fat as it accumulates, until it is golden and crisp, about 7 to 8 minutes.
3. Turn the breast over and sear for 2 minutes on the flip side. Divide the bread crumb mixture equally between the breasts, pressing them into the skin in an even layer.
4. Place the breasts in the oven and cook for 2 to 3 minutes on the top rack. Remove the pan from the oven and place the breasts on a rack to rest for 5 minutes before slicing into 6 equal pieces.
5. Serve one breast per person with Apple Cranberry Compote and Wild Rice on the side.



APPLE CRANBERRY COMPOTE

This sweet and savory compote goes wonderfully with chicken, turkey and pork. Use it as part of your Thanksgiving feast! Serves 6

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
4 medium Fuji apples, peeled, cored and diced into 1-inch pieces
2 teaspoons salt plus more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper

1 cup fresh cranberries
3 tablespoons granulated sugar
Freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon mixed shallot
2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves



1. Heat the butter in a large sauté pan over medium high heat until it begins to brown on the edges. Add the apples and season with salt and pepper. Cook the apples until they are golden on all sides.
2. Add the cranberries, sprinkle the sugar over all and continue to cook for 5 minutes until the cranberries begin to pop and the sugar caramelizes. Lower the heat if the pan begins to smoke.
3. Add the shallot and thymes leaves and cook 2 to 3 more minutes. Add a few tablespoons of water to release juices stuck to the pan. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Served warm. Compote may be made several days in advance and warmed to serve.

WILD RICE WITH AROMATIC VEGETABLES AND TOASTED PECANS

This rice dish covers all the flavor and texture bases, aromatic, nutty, crunchy and satisfyingly chewy all rolled into one. It is a great side for all manners of poultry as well as game and pork. Serves 6

1 cup wild rice
4 cups water
2 teaspoons salt plus more to taste
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 celery stalk, trimmed and finely chopped

2 medium carrots, peeled, trimmed and finely chopped
1 large shallot, peeled, trimmed and finely chopped
1 tablespoon chopped flat leaf parsley
1 cup lightly toasted coarsely chopped pecans

1. Mix together the rice, water and 2 teaspoons salt in a large pot. Cover and bring to a bowl. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 50 minutes to 1 hour until all the water is absorbed and the rice has split. Keep warm and covered off the heat.
2. Heat the butter in a large saucepan over medium high heat until the butter begins to brown on the edges. Add the vegetables and cook them until they are golden and tender, about 5 minutes. Reduce the heat if necessary to keep the vegetables from getting too brown. Season them with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Fold the vegetables, along with the parsley and pecans, into the rice. Season to taste and serve warm. May be made 1 to 2 days ahead and warmed to serve.

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