

CABERNET FRANC
VANDAL VINEYARD
LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY
2004



ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS
R S V
NAPA, CALIFORNIA

CABERNET FRANC AND THE COOPER'S CRAFT

“We select barrels for subtlety,” declares RSV’s winemaker Jeff Virnig, “we want the wood to support the wine.” He adds, “We have spent much effort in the vineyard growing grapes with an elegant flavor profile and balanced structure. We don’t want to ruin the wine by colorizing it with woody, green or burnt flavors.”

RSV has spent over twenty years experimenting with wood, personally getting to know the coopers, divining the subtle differences of the various forests, figuring out which type of wood is best, how much new oak to use and how long to barrel age each red wine.

Much like the winemaker’s art, the cooper’s craft is a mix of tradition and technology. The trees grow in different “appellations,” each with their own

“terroir” expressed in grain structure, tannin content and flavor profile. The French are excellent at managing their forests sustainably, ensuring adequate supply despite the eighty-year minimum age for cooperage quality oak. The French coopers compete in an auction to buy the trees they desire, thus determining the price for that season’s raw materials.

After the trees are felled, the oak timbers (left) begin the process of seasoning the wood and curing the sap. Each log bears a tag (middle) identifying its owner. When it is time to mill the staves, the logs are cut into barrel length sections (right) and moved indoors so the artisans can practice their craft.





French coopers must split each timber by eye into stave-like widths, then trim each stave on a band saw closely following the grain, again by eye, with no guides or safety devices. American



oak, much less porous than French, may instead be sawed into shape, arguably exposing more surface area to the wine, and influencing the wines more assertively. The French method is significantly less efficient, and that's the main reason why French oak is more



expensive. The staves are then stacked one layer for each barrel then left in the yard to season for two more years before returning to the cooperage for assembly and toasting.







Toasting is the critical moment in the cooper's craft. A small fire, made of the oak trimmings, is set and the barrel is placed over it. The idea is to caramelize the sugars in the sap without burning the wood. "Think of it as toasting a marshmallow," says winemaker Virnig, "you want it to be golden brown, not black and blistered." A perfectly toasted barrel lends a subtle, sweet vanilla note to the wine, whereas an underdone barrel will impart



a green sappy note and an overtoasted barrel imprints a wine with a burnt meat or roasted coffee note. If the barrels aren't right, then the wine won't be right.

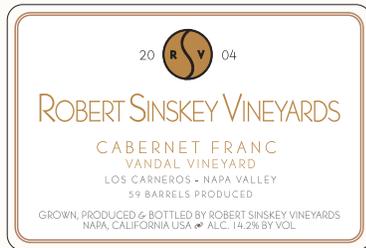
Photos taken at the François Freres Tonnellerie, St. Romain, Côte d'Or, France

WINEGROWING NOTES:

Cabernet Franc is a genetic parent of Cabernet Sauvignon, the result of a 18th century dalliance with Sauvignon Blanc. As such, perhaps it is a little more primal, a little less forgiving and a touch savage. The key to Franc is to find a location that is warm enough for it to ripen, yet not so warm that it sugars up before it has had time to lose its herbal tendencies and develop berry-like flavors. RSV's organically farmed Vandal vineyard in northern Carneros is ideal for Franc. We are so enamored by this grape in this location that we recently replaced a block of Merlot with Cabernet Franc. A simple equation explains why one of the greatest red wines in the world is made predominantly of Franc. Location + Variety & Clone + Farming + Restrained Winemaking= Great Wine!



TASTING NOTES:



This Cabernet Franc does not shirk its heritage. Its core, just shy of opaque, gleams with a rich, deep-ruby hue. All of the hallmarks of a well-grown Cabernet Franc show themselves in this wine. It has a fragrance reminiscent of a bramble thicket full of ripe raspberries and blackberries. It flaunts its rich perfume of sweet fruit and dried aromatic herbs. Its flavors ally with its aromatics by contributing layers of complexity with hints of sweet spice, licorice, pepper and cocoa. This is not a timid wine. Its mouthwatering brightness and assertive ripe tannins provide a solid framework for the flavors to develop...that is, if you have the patience.



GRILLED LAMB KEBABS

Serves 4

2 to 3 pounds boneless lamb leg, trimmed of sinew and cut into 2-inch cubes *12 large crimini mushrooms*
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil *12 small cipolline or pearl onions, peeled*
4 thyme sprigs *12 red or gold cherry tomatoes*
4 rosemary sprigs *Salt*
6 garlic cloves, unpeeled and smashed *Freshly ground black pepper*
12 small creamer size Yukon gold potatoes *Tapenade, Recipe Follows*



1. In a large bowl, combine the cut lamb with the olive oil, crushed herb sprigs and garlic cloves. Place the lamb in a non-reactive dish and marinate covered overnight or for up to two days.
2. Scrub the skins of the potatoes well to remove any dirt. Place them in a pot of cold water and bring it to a boil. Add 3 tablespoons of salt, reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 12 to 15 minutes until the potatoes are tender. Drain the potatoes and chill over night in the refrigerator.
3. Preheat the grill or broiler.
4. Remove the lamb from the marinade and brush off the herbs and garlic. Divide the lamb among 4 long kebab skewers or wooden skewers that have been soaked in water for 30 minutes. Place 3 potatoes, 3 mushrooms, 3 onions and 3 tomatoes on each skewer spaced equally with the 4 cubes of lamb. Start and end with a lamb cube. Season the kebabs with salt and pepper.
5. Grill the kebabs over medium heat or broil for 7 minutes on each side for medium/medium rare. Let the lamb rest for 5 minutes before serving. Serve with tapenade on the side.

TAPENADE

Yield: 1-1/4 cups

1 cup pitted nicoise olive or pitted calamatas, packed *3 anchovy filets (optional)*
2 small garlic cloves *1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil*
2 teaspoons lemon juice *2 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley*
1 shallot, coarsely chopped *Kosher salt*
2 tablespoons capers *Freshly ground black pepper*
1/2 teaspoon lemon peel, mixed

Place all the ingredients except the olive oil and the parsley in a food processor. Chop coarsely by pulsing the machine. Drizzle in the olive oil and pulse a few more times. Season with salt and pepper. If you are sensitive to salt you may not want to add more. Fold in the parsley by hand. The tapenade is best when made a day in advance so flavors have time to marry.

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