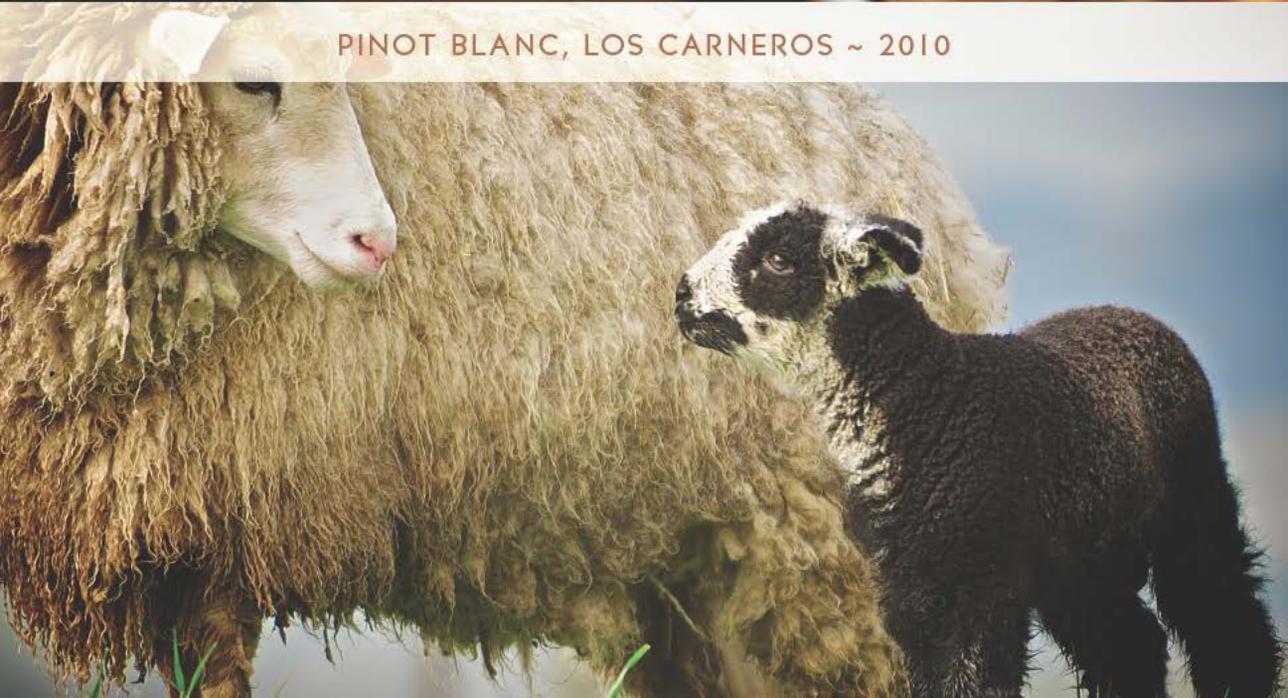




PINOT BLANC, LOS CARNEROS ~ 2010





King of the hill...

With Pinot Blanc, less is more!

— by Rob Sinskey —

I'm thrilled that we're finally getting over the 'mine is bigger than yours' syndrome. It started several years back as a few sommeliers quietly came out against overdone wines. Then, the tipping point came with the second most infamous onscreen wine moment when Miles critiqued a high alcohol, overdone Pinot. Now, we have achieved critical mass as an outcry against overdone wines reaches mob-like proportions with a chorus of newspaper articles exposing winemakers who have reversed course and changed their style. What's the buzz? It would seem that less buzz is the buzz! New World winemakers are reinventing their image and reengineering their wines to have less kick.

When I read this stuff, all I want to say is: "Hey, look at us! We've been quietly making elegant, balanced, understated wines all along..." but no one wants to read an article about understated elegance, that's a boring story. A winemaker in search of redemption is much more interesting.

We've seen it played out over and over again with different varieties during our almost thirty years in wine. First it was Chardonnay that suffered the wrath, leading to the creation of the acronym, "ABC" for "Anything But Chardonnay." A few years later, Merlot became part of a famous movie epithet, upending its run toward red wine dominance. Then the quirky



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elegant, balanced, understated
wines all along...





Instead of braggadocio, Pinot Blanc is happy to be clean and pure, elegant and balanced ... and one of the most flexible culinary wines money can buy.



Zinfandel garnered a reputation as rocket fuel and now Pinot Noir's elegant image is slowly tarnishing under a blanket of ethyl alcohol.

This keeps occurring because winemakers ignore balance in search of a competitive edge, often in the form of a vineyard technique or a cellar trick, that makes the wine scream, "Look at Me!" And, for a while, critics and consumers do look - until they finally question why these "good" wines hurt with excessive alcohol burn, are sweet when they should be dry, or are just plain unbalanced and don't work with the food on the table. It is then that those same critics and consumers lash out at a whole category of wine and come looking for the opposite ... something elegant.

I like Pinot Blanc because it is off the radar—no one is expecting it to be the next big thing. It plugs away in obscurity, grown in places like Alsace, Nahe, Alto Adige or, in our case, Carneros, where it has earned a reputation as a superlative table wine. It is never going to be king of the hill, it doesn't even want to be competitive. Instead of braggadocio, Pinot Blanc is happy to be clean and pure, elegant and balanced ... and one of the most flexible culinary wines money can buy.

There is a reason RSV only makes it in half bottles and magnums, because it is a great way start a meal or a phenomenal wine for a party - refreshing, pure, elegant and flexible ... less is more!

Tasting Notes

— Eric Sothorn —

A swirl sends brilliant, platinum blond waves up the side of the glass, releasing a cloud of aromas redolent of jasmine, lime, almond and flint. Upon a sip, the wine fills the mouth, hitting many notes at once, rich with texture, showing ample weight, but bursting with a bright, refreshing cut that gets you right back to your plate and/or glass to repeat the experience. (03/2011)

The equivalent of 809 cases produced, packaged in 6x1.5ml and 12x375ml cases.

Winegrowing Notes

— Rob Sinskey —

Grow Pinot Blanc well and try not to mess it up in the cellar! RSV grows Pinot Blanc in three CCOF Organic and Demeter Certified Biodynamic Vineyards in Carneros where the cool climate allows slow flavor development while retaining a natural, refreshing brightness.

The 2010 vintage was slow to start, then ended with a bang, allowing for a long hang time that was finished with enough heat for perfect ripening. Since the heat came late in the season, the grapes reached physiological ripeness without gaining excessive sugar that can lead to elevated alcohol levels. Selective harvesting assured that only the best grapes entered the cellar. The grapes were whole cluster pressed then stainless steel fermented for a clean, elegant and tremendously satisfying wine.



Sheep in the vineyards?

A successful integrated farm models itself on nature. It finds the right number of animals to balance the resources within a closed-loop, sustainable system. Sheep graze in the winter, birth their lambs in the spring, have their wool sheared before the arrival of the heat of summer and a few grace our table in the fall. It is the cycle of life. The sheep reduce tractor use, enrich the soil, keep us warm with their wool and nurture us with their meat.

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*Robert Sinskey
Vineyards
Pinot Blanc
Los Carneros*







It was a Dip Happening.
There were cheese dips,
spinach dips, hummus dips,
all kinds of dips.

THEY'RE BACK

Maybe they never left. Perhaps it was short sightedness that caused me to overlook the omnipotence of **THE DIP**.

Last summer, our family spent the latter half of July in Little Compton, Rhode Island. We packed up our whites and reds, along with everything else necessary for a summer sojourn, and headed for the beach.

The first evening, our friends who had summured there for ages told us to bring a couple of bottles down to the beach to watch the sunset. So we packed a couple of magnums of Pinot Blanc, along with some fine local cheddar and joined in. At first it seemed we were premature with our libations. Others were at the beach, but there was nary a bottle or glass in sight. It seemed that the tradition was to take a dip before sunset, towel off and then imbibe. So we sat and watched the various groups bobbing in the swells or swimming around the great rock and waited.

After about an hour, when the sun was halfway to the horizon, people started to appear on the beach with bowls of dip, chips, and crackers. Bowl after bowl arrived borne in the hands of handsomely dressed men, women and children. I was amazed. It was a Dip Happening. There were cheese dips, spinach dips, hummus dips, all kinds of dips. I was dipless, but I had an ace in my pocket... the perfect wine for this plethora of dips—Pinot Blanc. The citrus and floral notes of the wine held court with the many flavored dips. It met them head on and joined them in a wonderful mouth dance. After that evening I went to bed dreaming of the dips I could create to contribute to this time-honored tradition, smiling with satisfaction that the wine was taken care of.

Until the next wine...

—Maria

P.S. I couldn't resist throwing in the cracker recipe. They are divine on a Chip-n-Dip tray or with your favorite cheese.



HERBED CUCUMBER DIP

I like using this blend of herbs but you can add mint, chives or a blend of whatever tender herbs you enjoy. Keep the ratio of about 7 tablespoons of chopped herbs to 1 cup yogurt. If you don't have access to Greek yogurt, find a plain yogurt without thickeners such as tapioca or gelatin and drain in a cheese-cloth-lined strainer over a bowl in the refrigerator overnight.

Yield: about 1 1/2 cups

- 1 cup grated cucumber, peeled and seeded before grating
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh dill
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh flat leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 small garlic clove, pressed
- 1 1/2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Place the cucumbers in a medium bowl and add 1 teaspoon of salt. Toss well and place in a strainer to drain over the bowl for about 20 minutes. Squeeze out the excess water into the bowl, discard the liquid and then place the moist shreds of cucumber back into the bowl.

2. Add the remaining ingredients, minus the black pepper and mix well, season with salt and black pepper to taste. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or overnight to allow flavors to blend. Season the dip again before serving, if necessary.



SMOKY LEMONY CHICKPEA DIP

Make sure the chickpeas you use have been cooked until very soft. While home-cooked chickpeas taste the best, you can substitute high quality canned chickpeas in a pinch. Freshly shucked, cooked green chickpeas add another dimension if you can find them. Pimenton is smoked paprika from Spain, which can be found in specialty grocery stores or online at www.thisspanishable.com. For more heat, add hot pimenton instead of sweet.

Yield: about 2 1/2 cups

- 2 cups cooked chickpeas
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon smoked sweet pimenton
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt plus more to taste
- 1 medium clove garlic, pressed
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

1. Place all of the ingredients, minus the olive oil, in the bowl of a food processor, process until smooth. Run the processor while slowly adding the olive oil to emulsify.

2. Turn out into a bowl and season to taste with salt. Let sit for 1 hour at room temperature or overnight in the refrigerator. Bring to room temperature and adjust salt, if necessary, about 30 minutes before serving.



CARAMELIZED TWO ONION DIP WITH NIGELLA SEEDS

Created in the spirit of a 70's style dried onion dip mix, this fresh and savory dip gives that old standard of yesteryear a run for its money. Fresh chives may also be added for color, if you desire.

Yield: about 2 cups

- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup finely diced sweet yellow onion
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 3 green onions, trimmed, sliced thinly
- 1 1/2 cups sour cream
- 1/2 teaspoon Nigella seed
- 1 1/2 teaspoons red wine vinegar

1. Heat a medium sauté pan over medium high heat. Add the olive oil and then the onions. Season with salt and pepper and cook until the onions are sweet, caramelized and just barely moist. Turn out onto a plate to cool.
2. In a medium bowl, mix the cooled onions with the remaining ingredients and season to taste with salt and pepper. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or overnight before serving to allow the flavors to blend.

RSV FARMSTEAD CHEDDAR & NIGELLA SEED CRACKERS

These crisp, light crackers are delicious on their own, topped with cured meats, slathered with cheese or plunged into dips.

Yield: Enough crackers for 20 people... depending

- 1 cup warm water
- 1 tablespoon yeast
- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 cup finely grated cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon Nigella Seed
- 4 tablespoons (1 1/2 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Fleur de Sel or kosher salt for sprinkling
- Semolina for dusting sheet pans

1. Place the warm water in a small bowl. Sprinkle the yeast evenly over the top of the water and allow it to "bloom" for 5 minutes. Whisk it into the water until smooth.
2. Place the flour and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer. Make a well in the flour and pour in the yeast. Knead with the dough hook until the dough is roughly combined and then add the cheese, Nigella seed, and soft butter. Knead until the dough is very smooth, about 5 minutes. You can also hand knead the dough.
3. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and place in a warm corner of the kitchen to rise. Let the dough rise for 1 1/2 hours until doubled. Punch the dough down and divide into 3 pieces. Cover the pieces of dough with plastic wrap to keep moist.
4. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.
5. Remove one section of dough from the wrap and roll thinly with a rolling pin on an un-floured counter. Lift the dough and turn it to get it really thin. You can also use a pasta machine to roll the dough thinly. Brush the dough lightly with olive oil and then sprinkle very lightly with salt. Prick well with a fork.
6. Use a knife to cut into any size and shape you wish. Sprinkle a sheet pan very lightly with semolina and place the cut crackers on top. Let the cracker sit for 10 minutes before baking.
7. Bake for about 15 to 20 minutes, turning once until the crackers have bubbled and are golden and crisp.
8. Cool before storing in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.



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