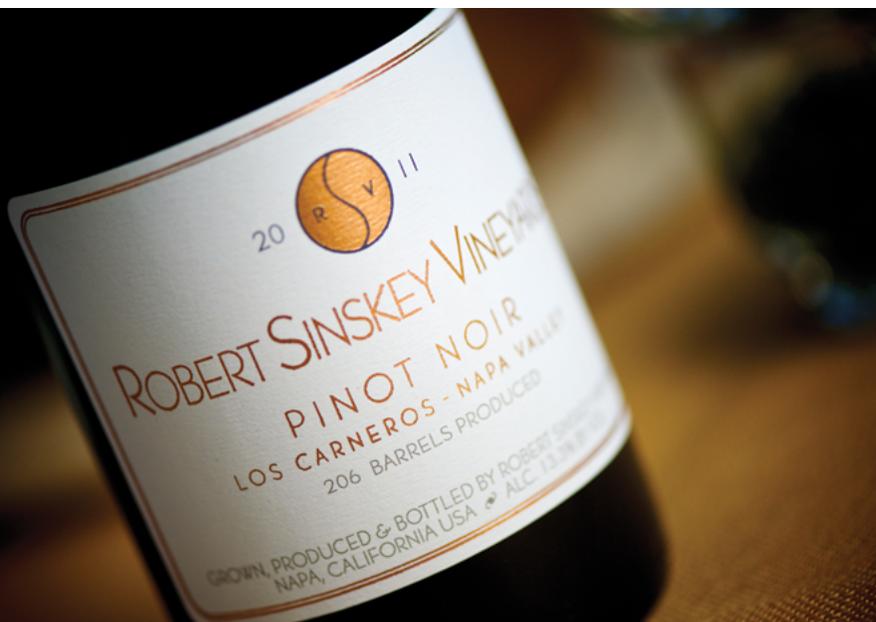


# ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS



## PINOT NOIR, LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY, 2011



- CCOF Certified Organic Vineyards
- 100% Pinot Noir
- Heirloom Selections and French Clones
- 32 Separately Harvested and Vinified Lots
- From All Five of RSV's Los Carneros Vineyards
- Cave Aged 10 Months in French Oak
- 30% New Barrels for Subtlety
- 206 Barrels Produced

### WINE GROWING NOTES

The second low yield vintage in a row, 2011 was dubbed the year with "twice the work for half as much." Spring rains came as the whites and Pinot Noir were flowering, causing a sparse fruit set and lots of extra handwork. Leaf pulling became an art, as we found the balance between encouraging air circulation without exposing the delicate grapes to potential late season sunburn. Then, there was the vigorous cover crop. Even our gluttonous sheep couldn't keep up, requiring extra passes with the mower. Yes, we could have sprayed herbicides to save a buck or two, but that's not our style.

There was a good side - the growing season was long and cool for excellent Pinot Noir, particularly if you prefer a more elegant European style. The only downside is that the crop was almost 40% below average.

### WINE TASTING NOTES

A delicious, elegant and focused Pinot Noir. This 2011 vintage of RSV Los Carneros Pinot Noir is a return to style after the more boisterous 2010. Winemaker Jeff Virnig sacrificed the single vineyard Pinot Noir production (very little Perfect Circle Pinots were produced in 2011) to make sure this wine continues to be the RSV standard bearer, selecting lots from five of RSV's Carneros vineyards to create a graceful cuvée that is on par with the best wines RSV has produced. Tight notes of raspberry, cranberry, and tea are backed by crisp acidity, for a wine that opens slowly, rewarding with a vibrant mouthfeel and a bright finish. The vivacious wine is great with rich foods now, but will reward those who have the desire to cellar the wine and allow it to transform into an elegant beauty.

### FINE WINES. ORGANIC VINES.

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There are two things in the culinary world that are almost as satisfying as sex: truffles and perfectly aged Burgundy, um... I mean, Pinot Noir. But sometimes it's difficult to know the real thing when chatter, created by our virtual, over-amped, "turn-it-up-to-11" conditioned society, obscures it.

A chef once told me he used truffle oil to exaggerate the flavor of real truffles because his customers complained the dish without the oil did not have enough flavor. That complaint might be viable if the chef used the lesser Summer or Chinese truffle, but not the elegant Perigord or White truffle.

The irony is that there is no truffle in truffle oil, yet we think its flavor is powerfully rich and decadent. Occasionally, pieces of Chinese truffle float in the oil to make it look like an infusion - but it rarely is. Instead, it's usually a synthetic compound that combines thioether (2, 4-dithiapentane) with an olive or grapeseed oil base. Thioether is similar to ether except instead of an oxygen atom, it has a sulfur atom. Sounds yummy... gives new meaning to the expression, "a knock out dish!" People have come to associate and confuse the exaggerated, overzealous aroma and flavor of truffle oil for the real thing. Robert Chang of The American Truffle Company says the greatest threat to truffle farming is truffle oil, because people expect the blatancy of the oil and no longer appreciate the subtlety of the real thing.

Recently, Maria and I celebrated our anniversary with a simple white truffle pasta dish. The main flavors were from the truffle and Parmesan cheese. It was elegant and subtle... perhaps too subtle for the chosen wine that was showing a bit too sweet. Now we didn't open a "sweet" wine per se, but this particular Pinot Noir, an expensive, highly regarded wine, was picked ripe, had relatively high alcohol and left us with a perception of fruity sweetness. So we dug deep into our stash and found an orphan bottle of our 1988 Pinot Noir. This was only our third vintage and we were still figuring out our style. When this wine was released, it was hard with tannin, high in acidity, low in alcohol and had a subtle raspberry/cranberry, tea-like aroma and flavor. The youthful version of this wine took some time to show its potential, yet it was incredible with this dish - a full twenty-five years after it was produced!

I have been fortunate to be the recipient of dumb luck. My father planted our original Pinot Noir the old-fashioned way. We tasted wines and, when we found one we liked, we went to that vineyard to take cuttings to plant in our vineyard. Much has changed since those innocent days. Back then, there was an industry-wide inferiority complex that those early Pinot Noir cuttings lacked the "oomph" associated with high quality wine. It wasn't unusual for those early Pinot Noirs to be blended with Petite Sirah for intensity of flavor and color - but the manipulation didn't stop there. Wood chips or planks were used to give the wine the sweet vanilla flavor of toasted oak. Then, about the time that our 1988 wine was made, vineyards were being replanted with what some vintners thought were superior clones of French Pinot Noir. These clones ripened earlier and produced wines with more intense aroma and flavor, higher alcohol and a perception of sweetness. They received high scores that resulted in more being planted... but that was not good enough. People picked riper and added acid. Some bled off juice to concentrate the juice-to-skin ratio, making the wines more intense. They sometimes even put it into a centrifuge to reduce the alcohol from these powerful, overripe wines... and somewhere along the way; some people lost their taste for elegant, subtle, and perhaps even earthy, Pinot Noir. They wanted Pinot to "knock you out!" I'm surprised that no one has yet added a little thioether to give it an exaggerated earthy, truffle "pseudo-terroir" note.

There is an old saying that the further we are from nature, the more we lose our natural taste. Or to say it another way - once we accept artifice as reality, can we regain our ability to recognize and appreciate natural purity? I am encouraged that there is a growing backlash against "overdone" wines, yet the most popular wines continue to be very ripe and sweet, with relatively high alcohol that hits you over the head. I guess there is a place for those wines... just not at the table paired with a subtle white truffle pasta dish.

That dumb-luck, combined with stubbornness, saved my beloved elegant, understated Pinot Noir. Those early "inferior" cuttings (that we now refer to as heirloom selections) turned out to be the right selection for the climate. We just had to learn how to grow it well and keep our manipulative hands off it... to trust it for what it was and let it be what it is.