

ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

POV, LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY, 2011



- Organic - CCOF Certified Vineyards
- Three classic Bordeaux varietals: Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon
- From RSV's Vandal, Three Amigos and OSR Vineyards
- Cuvee changes every vintage
- 19 months in 30% new French oak barrels
- Labels feature original photography by Rob Sinskey
- Three photos per vintage - Four each case

WINE GROWING NOTES

You can't fight mother nature. The winter of 2011 was wet with 130% of normal rain for the season. A cooler than normal spring delayed bloom, reducing fruit set in many of RSV's vineyards.

These vintages, where late spring and early summer rains become an issue, the cover crops are left growing in the field longer to wick away moisture and throttle back vine vigor. Cover crops are mowed and vine tillage is delayed if employed at all. If these actions don't control the vigor enough, leaf pulling and other canopy management methods are employed to increase sunlight on the fruit and enhance air circulation for reduced mildew pressure.

With a vintage like 2011, it helps not to have a fixed mind set. If you are only interested in making a big, powerful wine, you are destined for failure, but if your practices reflect the vagaries of vintage and you are more interested in the expression of terroir, you will succeed with an elegant, flavorful and balanced wine like the 2011 POV.

WINE TASTING NOTES

A "Right Bank" of Napa wine from RSV's certified organic Carneros vineyards. This aromatic, supple, yet vibrant proprietary cuvée of the classic Bordeaux varieties of Merlot, Cabernet Franc

and Sauvignon is full of red berry notes backed by dried violet, fennel or bayleaf like herbs with a subtle spiciness reminiscent of cinnamon or clove. It is an elegantly rich wine with just a suggestion dark chocolate and fully ripened yet moderately firm tannin for staying power on both your palate and the cellar. This wine over delivers in the pleasure department.

DAMN TASTY! - by Maria Helm Sinskey

The first thing that strikes me about the 2011 POV is the perfume of violets wafting up from the glass. It mingles with a bit of dried herb and the scent of just ripened mulberries, tart cherry and red plum and a dusty minerality that I have come to expect from POV. It is a heady mix. POV's cool vintage profile has a lithe body with bright acid. So quaffable that I had to cork the bottle and push it far away before I absent-mindedly sucked down the entire bottle. The bright acid called for fat - crisped duck, juicy pork and cherries, not sweet but tart so as not to bash up against the wine. I grabbed some dehydrated sour cherries from the pantry, cooked up some duck breasts and make a quick and simple sour cherry sauce. Damn tasty with the POV. Try it. You won't be disappointed.

Visit www.robertsinskey.com/kitchen for the Pan-Roasted Duck Breast with Sour Cherries recipe and other tempting originals by Maria Helm Sinskey.

FINE WINES. ORGANIC VINES.

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How I learned to ignore score and appreciate my Somm!

The era of wine arrogance is over. It was dismantled by a chorus of young voices from the ether. Unlike the recent past when an ex-attorney could anoint himself the palate of America, a new generation of wine professionals seized control by embracing the Old World discipline of the sommelier. They even have a cool, shortened moniker. They call themselves Somms. The good ones have finely tuned BS meters and take their craft seriously. But instead of a singular voice, they talk amongst each other in online public forums, wine seminars, culinary events and gatherings. They challenge preconceived notions, kill sacred cows, encourage, question, prod... but the difference between the new communal voice of wine and the wine critic of past is that these professionals rose through the ranks of cuisine and service. Their loyalty is to their patron's palate and, hopefully, not their own ego.

A brief history of American wine is needed for perspective. At one time, wine was utilitarian. Fermentation was a way to preserve fruit while creating a safe beverage free of the water-borne pathogens that plagued pre-chlorine civilizations. As they settled new frontiers, John Chapman, aka Johnny Appleseed, planted apples for hard cider while missionaries planted grapes for sacramental wines. These beverages were fermented in wood vats with no refrigeration. They were riddled with harmless bacteria that imparted a gamut of non-fruit flavors from mustiness, to leather, to horseshit. Though safe to drink, they would never be confused with fine beverages. They satisfied the need for calories, sated thirst, cured boredom and killed pain. Once in a while, when the weather cooperated, someone would make a sublime wine - but that was the exception.

In the mid-1800's the "Father of California Viticulture," Agoston Haraszthy, in an attempt to make wine on par with the great beverages of the Old World, imported hundreds of varieties of European vinifera but, in doing so, he inadvertently created the first known infestation of phylloxera (an American root louse responsible for nearly destroying the vineyards of Europe) that proceeded to wipe out his Sonoma vineyards. As wineries recovered from this blight, they struggled to make drinkable wines let alone fine wines... but what nature couldn't completely destroy, puritanical law attempted to finish off - prohibition almost bludgeoned the wine industry to death.

After repeal, American wine lacked respect. Most were made in volume at the lowest cost per unit and was bottled without barrel aging (small French and American oak barrels did not come into wide use until the '60's and '70's) Other than a few outliers, most California wine was unrefined compared to its European counterparts and suffered with the perception as cheap plonk. Great wine was imported - inferior wine was domestic. The only way to battle this negative perception was to position American wine as exclusive and elitist. Wine producers began to emulate the image of the European wine snob - with classical music playing in the background, wine was served by monkey-suited, tastevin swirling, arrogant a-holes whose wine opening rituals were more about intimidation - orchestrated to make consumers feel like ignorant neophytes that alienated rather than expanding the fold. The message was clear: wine was for the privileged elite - beer was for the masses. This confused messaging created a void where a consumer advocate was needed. In walks Robert Parker Jr. with his simplistic 100-point scale for judging wine. His eponymous newsletter, first published in the late '70's garnered world-wide attention after Parker reviewed the 1982 vintage of Bordeaux. Now, instead of learning the nuances of variety, region or vintage, the wine buyer was armed with a definitive guide. This wine was better than that wine because it scored more points.

Parker's Wine Advocate came at a perfect time. People distrusted authority and business - it was, after all, not long after Watergate - and wineries were perceived as being a part of the evil empire. This, in combination with the public's insecurity with their own palate, led them to seek an arbiter of taste. American wine, unlike Old World wine regions, evolved separate from other agriculture and devoid of local culinary traditions. It's hard to imagine now, but there was no locavore movement. Wine came from one place and food came from another. American wine was now being judged as if it were an athletic event - by which wine grabbed your attention in a blind tasting and not by how well it went with cuisine. Technical prowess and ripeness reigned supreme and not the traditional ideas of terroir, typicity, complexity or deliciousness. Elegant, subtle wines were being passed over for bombastic powerhouses.

As the 100-point system rose in popularity throughout the '80's, a bug was also

rising... the dreaded phylloxera (yes the same root louse that almost destroyed the wine industry in the 1800's) mutated to attack modern vines. You see, in our arrogance we decided a hybrid of vinifera with native American rootstock could thwart the louse, but nature has a way of destroying a monoculture and, since everyone was planting this hybrid known as AXRI, it provided a perfect environment for the louse to adapt and mutate. This resulted in a mass replanting of California vineyards in the late 1980's and 90's. A pre-'80's winery would normally replant by taking cuttings, from their own or neighboring vineyards, from vines that were well adapted to the area. But now, winery owners had a model to shoot for based on the new style of wines garnering the highest scores. Nurseries started supplying "French" clones of varieties that ripened earlier in the California sun and developed more sugar than the old "heirloom" selections. These vines created more powerful wines and, as more wineries were rewarded with higher scores, more of these varieties and clones were planted.

Though the intention of the 100-point system for rating wine was based on the idea of advocacy for the consumer, it had the opposite effect. The new wine scoring methodology led to homogenization as wineries planted varieties and clones deemed more likely to score higher points, adopted tech driven winemaking methods or hired consultants that could achieve the style of wine Parker liked. Retailers started selling wine based on score and price instead of their own palates. Sommeliers were no longer needed as customers consulted the guide and only wanted the highest scoring wines at the dinner table.

A new cynicism began to develop as some consumers tired of the sameness expressed in expensive wines regardless of variety and where they were grown. As wineries relied more and more on score to sell their wines, certain wines became formulaic - what mattered more than place was if the "right" winemaking consultant was employed that used a "recipe" of ultra-ripe fruit, low acidity, soft tannin and lots of new oak. The high scoring wines were so "good" in their ripe, sweet, alcoholic bigness that you couldn't finish the glass. They became too much of a good thing. Score lost its meaning.

The traditional job of wine merchant or a sommelier is to taste and find wines that they think their customers will like. Like with any profession, some are scumbags and will take advantage of the naive, but most are professionals who love what they do and want to select the right wine for the purpose, whether it's finding wines for their chef's cuisine or finding the "perfect" wine for your rendition of spatchcock chicken. They are the arbiters of taste whose job it is to fill the void between the winery and a customer's particular palate. Their job is to ask questions, figure out what you like, and suggest wines based on the food being served. Most people don't realize there are more Master Sommeliers, and people aspiring to become M.S.'s, in this country than at any time in history. It is a profession that is finally getting respect.

If you've tired of over-the-top, sweet, ripe, alcoholic 98 point wine, how do you go about communicating your desire to the wine professional who could potentially have a conflict of interest by taking your money? A good Somm isn't there to tell you what they like, but to listen and figure out what they have that you will like. But you need to level the playing field so you both understand the rules. The best way to do this is to pick a wine you already know and ask the Somm to describe it. If their description matches what you know about the wine, then you are golden. If they describe it in terms that make sense to you, like level of oak, brightness (acidity), Old World or New World style etc., then talk about the food you are having, your mood, if you want to go long or if there is a price comfort zone (btw, it's not tacky to tell a Somm you want something in a certain price range) then let them make suggestions. A good Somm will not sell you the most expensive wine, but the most exciting wine for the food and the price. A great Somm will take you on an unexpected journey by suggesting wines you've never heard of that are great with the food in front of you. This is what they are paid to do and this is what gets them excited. To tell them you only want a wine with a high score is a buzz kill.

The new Somm is the up and coming rock star of the culinary world. They are much more casual than the caricature of the arrogant stuffy sommelier of old. So even though the new Somm may be dressed in their lumber sexual best, take advantage of their skill and let them take you on a journey to wine lands less travelled.