

# ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

## CABERNET FRANC, VANDAL VINEYARD

### LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY, 2012



- From RSV's Northern Carneros "Vandal Vineyard" near the foothills of Mt. Veeder
- CCOF Certified Organic vineyards
- Cool maritime growing region influenced by the San Pablo Bay
- Heat summation comparable to St. Emilion
- Cave aged 18 months in French oak
- 30% new barrels for subtlety
- 35 barrels produced

#### *Winegrowing Notes*

The 2012 vintage was as close to ideal as we have seen in our thirty-plus years as winegrowers. Optimal weather patterns at flowering led to a healthy set and the long, cool growing season let the fruit ripen evenly. Everything in the vineyards was gorgeous in 2012... a situation that almost never happens.

2012 was one of the driest winters on record, saved by a "March Miracle" spring rain. As the clouds cleared, the groundwork was laid for near perfect flowering conditions. The exceptional growing season culminated in just about perfect ripening weather that allowed for concentration and flavor development with lower potential alcohols.

Cabernet Franc is one of the last varieties harvested during early morning picks. It was destemmed, then either went into small, open top fermenters and hand punched or into stainless steel tanks and cap irrigated. All of the Cabernet Franc spontaneously fermented with feral yeast. Once each lot achieved dryness, it was put to bed in French oak barrels, both new and older (up to 3 years old), and aged in the RSV caves for almost two years.

#### *Tasting Notes*

Cabernet Franc wines produced from average vintages are a thrill, but wines from a great vintage like 2012 have the structure to gracefully develop in the bottle for a long-term relationship.

Fruity yet restrained, this Cabernet Franc has aromas and flavors of mulberries, blueberries and/or violets backed by leather and peat. The wine is full and complex with youthful tannin and a great mouthfeel. A decant while young or a nap in the cellar will reveal a hidden gem.

#### *Anticipation - by Maria Helm Sinskey*

Every time I taste a new vintage of RSV's Cabernet Franc, I fall in love again. Its limited production barely covers half a year of quaffing and, since we run out before the next release, anticipation builds for a taste of each new vintage. I remember what it tasted like when it was bottled, but it's a different animal when, after some time resting in the bottle, it emerges as a sleek and supple animal, with hints of graphite, violets and cocoa dust minerality that we all know, love, and crave... and I crave the Cabernet Franc with lamb, herbs, and olives. The recipe follows. The wait is over. **Visit [www.robertsinskey.com/kitchen](http://www.robertsinskey.com/kitchen) for the *Lamb Racks with Tapenade* recipe and other tempting originals by Maria Helm Sinskey.**

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If wine were cars, Cabernet Franc would be a Citroën DS from the early sixties. Misunderstood, quirky, unreliable - but, a good one is smooth and elegant... maybe one of the best cars in the world.

The Citroën DS was designed to compete on the world stage but, unlike the generic nature of cars today, it maintained its French heritage. It doesn't so much as cruise down the road as hover; with a beak-like hood, sloping roofline and tucked in tail, it resembles a metal foie gras goose in a beret. A forward looking marvel that pioneered safety, comfort and performance technologies, it still remains a highly sought after collectible some 50+ years after unveiling. Dan Neil of the Wall Street Journal recently described it as the ultimate classic car.

Then there is Cabernet Franc. It too is misunderstood, quirky, unreliable - and when you find a good one, smooth and elegant... maybe even one of the best wines ever - like the '47 Cheval Blanc! Franc wasn't so much engineered as inherited and, like a prized classic, fussed over for generations. Cabernet Franc is one of the more primitive grape varieties and, along with Sauvignon Blanc, is the genetic parent of the warm weather tolerant Cabernet Sauvignon. Being the cretin that it is, Cab Franc is less adaptable with a narrower comfort zone than its offspring and, like the DS, almost became a sidebar to history. Fortunately, its distinctiveness is heralding a return.

Franc requires a long, cool growing season to realize its full potential. Too warm and the sugar develops before flavor for a high octane wine that tastes of canned green beans. Too cool and the wine is acidic, lean, and funky. But, in a few places - like the Right Bank of Bordeaux, parts of the Loire, Bolgheri on the Tuscan coast, Long Island, the Finger Lakes and — what I consider the Right Bank of Napa Valley — the upper Carneros, the weather patterns match the ripening cycle of this fickle grape, creating a sublime, if precocious, wine.

Cabernet Franc, like the Citroën, seems to speak with a French accent no matter where it is grown. One of its quirks is that it harbors *Brettanomyces* yeast in the vineyard that imparts characteristics onto the finished wine. In addition to having first hand experience with this phenomena, I've spoken to several winegrowers who've said that "Brett" exists only in their Franc and not in any other variety in their vineyard or cellar. This harmless yeast strain imparts an aroma with a hint of "saddle sweat" or "barnyard" for that je ne sais quoi "sauvage" character. Too much and the wine smells like the tail end of a horse and the fruit becomes overwhelmed with gaminess, but in the right amount, Brett adds a complexity that compliments the fruit and reminds one of an old school French wine.

The Citroën DS exudes elegance with a touch of aristocratic arrogance. I have a black and white memory (probably from Life Magazine) of Charles de Gaulle, upper torso projecting high above the Citroën's ragtop, his gloved hand waving in a powerful yet effete, very French manner. Compare that to an American leader like Kennedy, whose automotive statement was all about massive power (like a new world Cabernet Sauvignon) and his ride of choice was a custom Lincoln or Cadillac with a large engine. In contrast, the Citroën had just four cylinders and only 70 horsepower. It relied on subtle aerodynamics and sophisticated hydraulics to get the job done... and it looked great doing it. It is even credited with saving de Gaulle's life: the tires were shot out in an assassination attempt and, much to the chagrin of the attackers, the hydraulic suspension literally rose to the occasion, clearing all obstacles to make a clean escape.

Cabernet Franc doesn't need massive power. Grown in a cool climate, the Franc ripens slowly, developing flavor in sync with the sugars. The grapes get plenty of hang-time yet the fruit can be picked at relatively low sugars for a wine with moderate alcohol. Full flavor, elegantly balanced alcohol, vibrant acidity and fruit with a touch of earthy, leathery, herbal notes: this wine is able to navigate most culinary hurdles. Plus, Cabernet Franc's gregarious nature has a particular affinity for the table.

The Citroën DS is a collectors' car that you can still drive today and the Cabernet Franc is a collectors' wine that you can drink today, yet both will continue to age gracefully for years to come.

