



# ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

PINOT NOIR, VANDAL VINEYARD, LOS CARNEROS, NAPA VALLEY 2018



A PERFECT CIRCLE

20  18

VANDAL VINEYARD  
PINOT NOIR  
LOS CARNEROS - NAPA VALLEY

GROWN, PRODUCED & BOTTLED BY  
ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS  
NAPA, CALIFORNIA USA - ALC. 13.2% (26.4°)



*Polaroid of the Vandal Vineyard - long before camera phones were king.*

# THE VANDALS AND THE VINEYARD!

---

by Rob Sinskey

The sheriff looked at the totaled tractor with a bit of bemusement. "Those boys must have gone on a wild ride!" he said with a good ole' boy laugh. A quarter acre of vines lay broken on the ground, loaded with grapes that were destined to become wine in a few short weeks. Now they were victims of bored-kids-in-a-small-town syndrome. These were kids who had been participating in lesser forms of vandalism for a couple of years and leaving booze bottles and other garbage behind. This time, they found the keys under the seat of the brand new tractor and rode it around on the top of the hill before pointing it at the vineyards and jumping off. Fortunately, the tractor caught up in the trellis wires and flipping instead of going through a fence and into someone's swimming pool, through a house or, worse, running over someone!

"Aren't you going to look for fingerprints?" the vineyard manager asked. "Naw, no need for that." said the sheriff in a knowing way. You see, there was evidence in a streak of orange paint left on the gate. We think the sheriff knew that one of the neighbors, whose family had lived in the area for generations, had a white and orange truck. The sheriff was going to let the parents dole out the punishment instead of the legal system. Good old fashioned small town justice at work.

Well, the grapes were not ripe enough for a red wine, so we picked what we could and made a rosé out of it. We called it our "Vandal Rosé" and the rest is history. The vineyard was christened "The Vandal Vineyard" and it has gone on to produce some of our finest single vineyard Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and even Cabernet Sauvignon.

## ***Winegrowing Notes***

The 2018 vintage is a classic, producing a single vineyard Pinot Noir with amazing depth, complexity and structure. The long, cool growing season rendered beautiful, evenly-ripened Pinot Noir with great, mouth-watering acidity and supple tannins. RSVnapa's organically farmed Vandal Vineyard is planted with heirloom selections and French clones of Pinot Noir that produce a wine with a beautiful tart pluminess balanced by savory black tea notes.

The wine was cave aged in small oak casks (30% new) selected from French coopers whom we have known for decades to specifically compliment the Vandal Vineyard Pinot Noir.

## ***Tasting Notes***

Classic Pinot Noir and classic Vandal Vineyard! This wine from RSVnapa's organically farmed land in the Northern Carneros has notes of rose, violet, black tea and sage that wrap around a core of cranberry, pomegranate and red plum mid-palate. A complex savory edge marks every vintage of Vandal Vineyard Pinot Noir. This wine sings in harmony as well-integrated, small French oak barrels add subtle spice (cinnamon?) that frames a long, mouth watering finish. Optimally ripened fruit at lower sugar levels means a wine with lower alcohol than is typical of Napa with a structure that will allow it to be consumed in the near term or cellared for years. (O2/2024)

*The equivalent of 365 cases produced for 730 - six bottle cases.*



## A NEW, OLD TRADITION

---

Long ago and far away, I found myself in a tiny *Winstub*, oblivious that the course of my life was forever to be altered. I was working at a three-star Michelin Restaurant in Strasbourg and my chef had directed me to a fire-warmed, snug space to experience a regional dish called *Tart Flambé*. The giant circle of a *Flambé* landed on the table with bubbling *crème fraîche*, lightly caramelized on the apex of each bubble. The aroma of smoked ham and onions wafted up from the table. The crust, was thin and crisp with its entirety kissed by the smoke from the wood oven. What looked heavy proved to be light as a feather after the first bite. The amount of *crème fraîche*, ham and onions was just enough for the thin crisp crust. Anything more and it would have been too much. After this experience, I held firm to the belief that the thin cracker crust of a *Tart Flambé* should only be topped with *crème fraîche*, onions and ham and consumed with a bright, aromatic, unoaked white wine. That is the way I enjoyed it when I lived in Alsace and that's the way it imprinted in my brain. A good *Tart Flambé* was a luxury. Ironically, in a region that considered *Tart Flambé* a dish of regional pride, it was awash with many badly constructed versions. This little *Winstub* in Strasbourg set the bar high and will forever be the *Tart Flambé* standard bearer.

Some 20 years later, I returned to Alsace on a writing assignment and discovered much had changed on the *Tart Flambé* scene. No longer were they just topped with ham, onions and cheese. They had become loaded with a whole plethora of pizza-like toppings. While they were tasty, the thin crust couldn't hold up to the weight of these *nouveau* versions. Time and time again, the crust would fold like soggy cardboard.

Times changed in the wine-making arena too. *Pinot Noir*, once relegated to one or two barrels tucked into a corner of the cellar, had found the spotlight. Winemakers became serious about adding a red to their quiver and *Pinot Noir* was the chosen candidate. Alsatian *Pinot Noirs* are mostly on the lighter side with a bright, fruity character. Some, from select sites, can be more broody with a darker complexion but are still bright and fresh. Perhaps the climate has shifted in *Pinot Noir*'s favor and/or winemakers have mastered growing and making wine from this fickle grape, but they are much more serious than I remembered them to be.

A traditional *Tart Flambé* can work with *Pinot Noir* but let's not set limitations. An Alsatian friend once mentioned a *Tart Flambé* "of the forest" that his family would make using foraged mushrooms and a good grating of *Comté* cheese. He also affirmed what I observed in the *Winstub* that the key to success was to not overload the crust.

There you have it; a memory as the perfect match for this release of the *Vandal Vineyard Pinot Noir*. Dark and broody with its hints of forest floor, sour cherry and plum fruit, if there were ever a wine that went beautifully with wild mushrooms and a shower of *Comté*, this was it. I realize that by going forward while looking back, I had created my own new tradition for *Tart Flambé* and *Pinot Noir*.

Until the Next Wine... *Maria*



# WILD MUSHROOM AND COMTÉ CHEESE TART FLAMBÉ

*Yield: 4 very thin-crust 12" tarts*

## Yeasted Tart Dough

3½ cups all-purpose flour  
1 tablespoon dry yeast  
2 teaspoons kosher salt  
8 ounces water  
4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter, softened

## Toppings

4 cups grated Comté cheese  
4 cups wild mushroom ragout, recipe follows  
1 recipe béchamel sauce, recipe follows  
Kosher salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
½ cup finely ground cornmeal or semolina for sprinkling the dough and sheet pans  
¼ cup chopped chives, optional

## To prepare the Tart Dough

1. Whisk together the water and yeast in a small bowl.
2. Combine the flour and salt in a large bowl.
3. Add the yeast mixture to the flour mixture. Mix together until combined. The dough will look dry; add the butter. Knead to a smooth and elastic dough and let rise, covered, for 1 hour until doubled.
4. Punch the dough down and divide into 4 equal pieces. Roll into balls and let rest, lightly covered with plastic wrap for 30 minutes.
5. On an un-floured counter roll each dough ball as thinly as possible into rounds. Peel the dough off the counter and flip over and keep rolling until you can see light through the dough. Prick all over with a fork. Dust both sides with semolina flour and place on a sheet of parchment paper. Roll the remaining rounds.

## To assemble the Tart Flambé:

1. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F. Sprinkle 4 sheet pans lightly with semolina.
2. Place 1 round of dough on each sheet pan. Use a large spoon to divide the béchamel evenly between the dough rounds. Use the back of the spoon to evenly coat the dough with the béchamel almost to the edge of the crust.
3. Sprinkle evenly with the mushrooms and then the cheese. Season with salt and pepper. Bake in the preheated oven for 15 to 20 minutes until the béchamel bubbles and cheese is lightly caramelized.
4. Remove from the oven and sprinkle with chives. Cut into 4 to 6 pieces. Serve immediately.



## MUSHROOM RAGOUT

**Yield: 4 cups**

2 pounds assorted wild or domestic mushrooms

Extra virgin olive oil

1 large shallot, peeled, trimmed and minced

1 large clove of garlic, peeled, trimmed and minced

1 teaspoon chopped thyme leaves

Sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Clean the mushrooms thoroughly. Keep each variety separate. The dirty stem end should be trimmed with a small sharp knife and the pine needles should be gently brushed away with a semi-stiff brush.
2. Wash the mushrooms thoroughly. Fill a large bowl with cold water. Quickly dip and swish the mushrooms in the water two handfuls at a time. Lift the mushrooms from the water and place in a colander. Repeat the process until there is no dirt at the bottom of the bowl. Drain the mushrooms in a colander. Never allow the mushrooms to soak. They are like sponges and will quickly become sodden if allowed to sit in water for any amount of time. Slice the larger mushrooms into bite sized pieces and cut the smaller mushrooms in half or, if they are very small, leave them whole.
3. Heat a large sauté pan over high heat; add 1 tablespoon of olive oil and then one type of mushroom. Each variety must be cooked separately as they cook at different speeds. Sauté the mushrooms until they are golden, and their juices are almost dry, about 5 to 7 minutes. Stir the shallots, garlic and thyme into the mushrooms (be sure to reserve equal amounts for the rest of the mushrooms) and season the mixture with salt and pepper to taste.
4. After all of the mushrooms have been sautéed, mix them together and reserve them in a warm place until ready to be used or, if you prepare them in advance, cover and store them in the refrigerator.

## BÉCHAMEL SAUCE

**Yield: 2¾ cups**

2 tablespoons (¼ stick) unsalted butter

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

2½ cups whole milk

¼ small yellow onion, peeled

1 small bay leaf, dried or fresh

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Melt the butter in a medium saucepan. Stir in the flour with a wooden spoon until the butter and the flour are thoroughly combined. Continue to cook the mixture over medium heat for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove the pan from the heat.
2. Whisk in the milk 1 cup at a time. Whisk until the paste is smooth then add another cup of milk and repeat the process until the milk is finished. The milk and flour should be smooth and slightly thickened.
3. Place the pan back over medium heat and add the onion and the bay leaf. Bring the sauce to a boil while whisking constantly. Reduce the heat to low and cook for 15 minutes stirring every 5 minutes with a wooden spoon. The sauce will form a crust on the bottom so try not to disturb it with the wooden spoon or you will have brown flecks in your sauce. To avoid this, you can transfer the sauce to a double boiler and continue to cook it for 20 minutes without having to stir.
4. Strain the sauce into a large bowl and season with salt and pepper. Reserve at room temp for use within a couple of hours or refrigerate covered for later use.



## FINE WINES. ORGANIC VINES.

---

Robert Sinskey Vineyards & Wilding Farm  
4059 Old Sonoma Road  
Napa, CA 94559  
707.944.9090  
robertsinskey.com

Winemaker: Jeff Virnig  
Chef: Maria Helm Sinskey  
Photos and Text: Rob Sinskey  
gluttons@robertsinskey.com

