

Robert Sinskey Vineyards

Napa

When Rob Sinskey's father began planting vineyards while a partner in Acacia winery, he fulfilled an old fantasy. After Acacia's sale to Chalone in 1985 Sinskey elected to try his hand at winemaking. "Before the winery was completed," Rob relates, "my father started making noises that his avocation had gotten out of control and he could use a little help. I think a week had passed when I discovered that his avocation had become my obsession."

"Carneros is to Napa," Rob Sinskey insists, "as Pomerol is to Bordeaux" with clay soils and a temperate climate that ripen merlot to memorable distinction. He has proven "this pigheaded idea" in the face of countless naysayers.

Still, no grape is more dear to Robert Sinskey Vineyards and none more decisively imprinted by the soil and microclimate of Carneros than pinot noir. The "Carneros connection" to pinot has been around since 1939 when André Tschelitscheff proclaimed these fog-shrouded hills "Napa's Burgundy". Be that as it may, Sinskey insists growing and making wine from the illusive madame pinot will always remain "a masochist's dream."

Although the address is in the Stag's Leap region, only a precious five-acre morsel of Stag's Leap acreage is cultivated by Sinskey Vineyards. Stag's Leap fruit of a quality that could interest Rob Sinskey generally disappears into the top bottlings of other wineries. And in any event, having recently achieved his goal of certification as an organic winery, grapes not grown under the winery's tight control are no longer thinkable.

Jeff Virnig joined the Sinskey team in 1988, quietly honing his cellar craft



and planting many of the vineyards which, since 1997, Kirk Grace has overseen as manager. In 1991 Jeff, who epitomizes the idealistic and experimental Sinskey spirit, was promoted to winemaker.

Now that the vines planted in the eighties have matured, production under the Sinskey label won't significantly increase. "We made our commitment to get better, but not bigger," says Rob. The interactions of place, personality and grape that fascinate him are best observed, and best preserved, on a small scale.

Sinskey believes that "you've got to think like a Burgundian, to isolate and capture the character of each vineyard block." So for instance 32 separate lots of pinot noir were vinified in the '96 vintage. Each member of the winery's tasting team tastes and studies the lot of them, then comes up with a hypothetical blend of his or her own, dismissing barrels that are not whole and harmonious wines in themselves.

The proposed blends are then tasted blind and put on the table for discussion. Or perhaps one should say "on the chopping block", because the team here is ruthlessly committed to making less if that means making better. "A legendary photographer," Rob (himself trained in that craft as well) recalls, "once said that his talent was in knowing what to leave out of the frame."

Sinskey's are meticulously-crafted wines designed not to "win" competitions but to compliment cuisine and to grow in the glass and the cellar, revealing the outcome of a unique intersection of man and vine, vintage and microclimate.

Production: ca. 25,000 cases

Varieties: Pinot Noir, Merlot, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Cab. Franc, Cab. Sauvignon

Fruit sources:

5 acre Sinskey Vineyard on Silverado Trail in Stag's Leap; 160 acres in northern Carneros including Los Amigos, Stuart, Buhman and Pickford ranches.

Vineyard Practices: certified organic

Pinot Blanc Los Carneros
Chardonnay Los Carneros
Chardonnay Three Amigos Vnyd.
Vin Gris of Pinot Noir
Pinot Noir Los Carneros
Pinot Noir "Four Vineyard"
Pinot Noir "Vandal Vineyard"
Pinot Noir Three Amigos Vnyd.
Merlot Los Carneros
Cabernet Sauvignon
RSV Stag's Leap
Stag's Leap Claret

"... straight to the top of the A-L list... This wine is what pinot noir should be about."

Larry Walker, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"... you have to admire the effort that Robert Sinskey Vineyards is putting into pinot noir."

Norm Roby, **Wine Spectator**

"Rob Sinskey is no tree hugger; he just thinks organic viticulture produces better things to drink. ... his Johnny Appleseed enthusiasm for organics masks a deep conviction that he has seen the future of wine." **Saveur** May, 2004