

# Interest in inconsistency: It can lead to excellence

Once grapes are harvested, winemakers may choose one of two directions in producing wine. They can force their will on the grapes, the sledgehammer theory of winemaking, or they can work with the specific, regional viticulture site and complement the grapes with their craft to make a wine with bright, expressive fruit.

Personally, we prefer wines made under the latter regime. So does ophthalmologist turned vintner Robert Sinskey. His preference is reflected in the wines of Robert Sinskey Vineyards.

Sinskey contends that he has always been fascinated with wine growing. In the past, he has been perplexed by the inconsistent quality of California pinot noir. To enter the belated side of his bewilderment, he became a partner in Acacia Winery in 1980.

He quickly learned that good pinot noir could be grown in California if it was planted in the proper location, such as the Los Caneiros region.

In 1983 Sinskey purchased property in Carmelo and planted pinot noir, merlot and chardonnay — varietals appropriately suited to the region.

In 1988 winery construction on the Napa property was completed. Five acres of the winery site are planted to cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and merlot.

Today, the winery produces pinot noir, merlot, chardonnay and the new, first release 1988 Robert Sinskey Vineyards Carmelo Cabernet. In very limited quantity, it is a Bordeaux-style blend consisting of 59 percent merlot, 23 percent cabernet sauvignon and 19 percent cabernet franc.

Sinskey continues his medical practice in Santa Monica, Calif., while son Rob manages the winery. Winemaking is in the capable hands of Acacia's former winemaker Joe Cafaro.

"The winery plan is to make two Estate Proprietary wines from two appellations," Rob said. "In the 1988 harvest, we crushed merlot from our original Carmelo parcel. Additionally, we sourced merlot, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc from Tony Trachsel's renowned Los Caneiros vineyard. These wines were blended to produce the winery's proprietary blend, Carmelo Cabernet."

"Within the next few years, we will follow up with a counterpoint proprietary wine from the Stag Leap District," said Rob. "It will be a cabernet sauvignon-based wine blended with cabernet franc and merlot."

"We are producing Bordeaux-style blends, but it is not our intention to imitate the French. We remain inspired by them, but our winemaking practice will always focus on showcasing the California origin of the fruit."

Rob contends that his father's passion remains pinot noir. "For him, it is the Holy Grail," he said. "Pinot noir is a fickle wine variety. It reflects both the vineyard and the slightest winery manipulation."

Robert Sinskey Vineyards produces a small quantity of chardonnay. "We make it the way we like it, not the way the market dictates," said Rob. "We structure the wine to be food complementary."

Additionally, chardonnay, merlot and pinot noir are produced under the Aries label. "We do this for two reasons," said Rob. "First, we want to provide consumers with a good-value wine. Second, we can maintain the highest standards for our primary and reserve wines."

Aries wines are made from young vines, experimental lots or wines that don't fit into the stylistic elements of the primary Robert Sinskey Vineyards label.

## cooking calendar

### COOKING CLASSES

Several cooking classes are coming up at the Williams-Sonoma store at Laurel Park Place in Livonia. On Saturday, Oct. 19, at 1 p.m., Larry Jones will present a class on fall soups. Other classes include the Children's Cooking School at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 23, and a Pasta and Ravioli Class at 11 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 26. Call 953-0515 for details.

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focus on wine

Eleanor and  
Ray Heald

### WINE SELECTIONS OF THE WEEK

**Aries Carmelo Chardonnay**, (910) It's loaded with tropical fruit flavors and integrated oak. Full, luscious and smooth, it's a dynamite mouthful.

**Robert Sinskey Vineyards Carmelo Chardonnay**, (17.50) is a contrast to its little brother, the Aries Chardonnay. Pleasant and elegant, it is designed for food and further aging.

**1989 Aries Carmelo Pinot Noir**, (910) produced by Robert Sinskey Vineyards showcases delicious dark cherry fruit and a peppery finish.

**1988 Robert Sinskey Vineyards Carmelo Pinot Noir**, (910) will make believers out of any who still think California can't produce a world-class pinot. The wine has a deep, rich black cherry aroma that is mirrored on the palate with the addition of toasty, spicy nuances.

### WINE BULLETIN BOARD

The Red Wagon Wine shop will hold its annual fall tasting of 50 wines at Birmingham's Townsend Hotel, 7-9 p.m. Monday, Oct. 21. Cost is \$20 in advance (435-0719) or \$24 at the door.

At 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 24, Anthony Bell, vice president and general manager of Napa Valley's Beaulieu Vineyard, will present nine wines with a multi-course meal at the Golden Mushroom Restaurant. Cost \$90 per person, call 559-4330.

On Tuesday, Oct. 29, at Pike

Street Restaurant in downtown Pontiac, nine of Bordeaux's premier producers will conduct a tasting of 30 wines from the 1988 and 1989 vintages. A tasting at \$50 per person will begin at 6:30 p.m. A \$95 per person cost includes tasting followed by a four-course dinner at 8:30 p.m. featuring older Bordeaux vintages. Call 334-7878 for details.

The renowned Alsace wines of Hugel & Fils from the 1988 and 1989 vintages will be featured at a seven-course dinner, \$68 per person 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 30, at the Golden Mushroom. Reservations, 559-4330.

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