

VARIETAL FOCUS:

Cabernet Franc

Lance Cutler

Lance Cutler has been a working winemaker in Sonoma County for 35 years. He has been a contributing editor for *Wine Business Monthly* for more than 10 years. His unique perspective on winemaking has led to our Industry Roundtable series and our Varietal Focus series. Lance is also the author of four books, including *The Tequila Lover's Guide to Mexico*.

CABERNET FRANC IS A RANDY VARIETY—its DNA suggests it likely hooked up with Sauvignon Blanc to create Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc is also a probable genetic parent for both Merlot and Carmenère. While it is often grown for blending with progeny like Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties, when vinified on its own, the old man can produce a wine vibrant with peppery aromas as well as tobacco, cherry, cassis and violets.

Records show that Cabernet Franc was planted in Bordeaux by the end of the 18th century. Plantings of Cabernet Franc, known as Bouchet, were distributed throughout Fronsac, St. Emilion and Pomerol where they made excellent wines. Before that, the grape was very popular in the Libournais region of southwest France. Cardinal Richelieu supposedly brought cuttings to the Abbey of Bourgeil where they were tended by an abbot named Breton, which remains the name for Cabernet Franc in that region. The variety is widely planted in the Loire Valley in the regions of Anjou, Chinon, Saumur-Champigny and Bourgeil.

France has the largest acreage dedicated to Cabernet Franc in the world with more than 35,000 acres. Italy has the second largest planting, primarily in Friuli, but also in the Veneto and Chianti where it is often used in Super Tuscan blends. Outside of France, Cabernet Franc can be found in Spain, Hungary, Bulgaria and Croatia. The variety first traveled to California in the 1870s, but those first vines were basically lost to phylloxera. Cabernet Franc was replanted in California in the 1960s and used primarily in Meritage blends that emulated the wines of Bordeaux. Current plantings in California exceed 3,400 acres, most of which are in Napa and Sonoma counties. Cabernet Franc is also found in Australia, Chile, South Africa and Argentina, where many winemakers think it will become that country's next great varietal.

Cabernet Franc can be similar to Cabernet Sauvignon, but it buds and ripens earlier, which makes it more suitable in cooler climates. Varietal wines made from Cabernet Franc tend to have a natural balance between tannins and acidity. Spicier and less fleshy than Merlot, Cabernet Franc is more herbaceous than Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as lighter in color with less tannin. When ripe, Cabernet Franc offers aromas of ripe plums, cherries, violets and complex floral notes. When not fully ripened, those aromas and flavors can tend toward a green, vegetal, herbaceous character.

Because it tends to ripen earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon and seems to handle cold temperatures pretty well, Cabernet Franc is a red grape of choice in cool-climate zones like the Finger Lakes and Long Island in New York, the Leelanau Peninsula of Michigan and in places as diverse as Colorado and Virginia. Washington state is very active with Cabernet Franc where it is used in blends and is becoming an ever more popular varietal on its own.

Because Cabernet Franc often does well in cool areas where Cabernet Sauvignon struggles, it has been planted in many areas it shouldn't have. The trick with Cabernet Franc seems to be planting it in the right place and tending the vines to control the pyrazines. Over-cropping and poorly drained soils serve to intensify the variety's tendency toward herbaceous, green aromas and flavors. Well-drained soils, particularly high iron soils like volcanic, limestone, chalk or even sand, seem to bring out the best that Cabernet Franc has to offer while minimizing the green character many people find off-putting.

Cabernet Franc is also a food-friendly varietal. It exhibits complex aromas and flavors that include red fruits, floral character, spice and herb. It can produce a wine with depth, body and good mouthfeel without being overly astringent from tannins. It is equally at home as a red wine or a Rosé. One thing for certain, winemakers working with the variety are passionate about it.

For this Varietal Focus examination of Cabernet Franc we selected high-elevation El Dorado County, the huge spread of California's Central Coast and the legendary Napa Valley. We spent time with **Paul Bush** from **Madroña Vineyards**, one of the first producers of Cabernet Franc in El Dorado County, **Tyler Grace** of **Grace Patriot Wines** and **Frank Hildebrand** from **Narrow Gate Vineyards**, who farms biodynamically and produces a Cab/Cab Franc blend. **Sean Pitts** from **Happy Canyon Vineyard** provided his Piocho Reserve, which is anchored by 70 percent Cabernet Franc, **Damian Grindley** brought the Estate Cabernet Franc from **Brecon Estate**, and **Chuck Carlson** had us taste his estate wine from **Carlson Wines**. **John Skupny**, one of the first in Napa Valley to focus on Cabernet Franc, gave us his **Lang & Reed Wine Company** "Two-Fourteen." **Laura Díaz Muñoz** presented the Howell Mountain Cabernet Franc from **La Jota Vineyards**, and **Mabel Ojeda** shared the estate bottled wine from **Clos Du Val**.



Tyler Grace
Grace Patriot Wines



Paul Bush
Madroña Vineyards



Chuck Carlson
Carlson Wines



Damian Grindley
Brecon Estate



John Skupny
Lang & Reed Wine Company



Mabel Ojeda
Clos Du Val



Laura Díaz Muñoz
La Jota Vineyards

EL DORADO COUNTY

GRACE PATRIOT WINES

Grace Patriot Wines

2012 LEWIS GRACE CABERNET FRANC, 14.9% ALC., 125 CASES, \$29,
100% CABERNET FRANC

After studying geology at **Dartmouth** and in the field, Tyler Grace earned a degree in enology and viticulture at **Fresno State University**. He then gained experience in a Southern Hemisphere crush before making his way to Yountville as an assistant winemaker. After seven years in the Napa area, he came to El Dorado County to help establish the family vineyard and winery. He now makes Lewis Grace wines at Grace Patriot winery.

According to Grace:

We try to produce a wine that combines bright, mature fruit with a firm mouthfeel while avoiding excessive astringency. We look for deep color, full body, a long life and no bitterness. Our Cab Franc is fruit forward with raspberry, plum and dark fruit. We harvest at higher Brix to minimize underripe “green” flavors while maximizing dark fruit components. We want to balance the acidity to emphasize fruit without adding a sharp side.

Our vineyard is situated between volcanic and granitic bedrock. There is the relatively deep reddish clay soil on top of the grey, thin rocky soils of the underlying granitic layer. The vineyard sits at 2,750 feet, and vines are own-rooted with the Cabernet Franc 1 clone in 6x11 foot spacings. We farm traditionally, practice deficit irrigation and average 2 tons per acre.

Vines are spur-pruned with VSP. We do some leaf-pulling and cluster-thinning. The dry, south-facing aspect of the site prevents vigorous growth, so we look to have flecks of sunlight in the canopy without roasting the grapes. We determine when to pick using the standard combination of Brix, pH and TA combined with qualitative measures of ripeness like seed maturity/color, taste of sample and physical appearance. We prefer riper flavors, so we tend to pick around 26° or 27° Brix, certainly below 28° Brix and before grapes



Tyler Grace

shrivel. That gives us a pH between 3.6 to 3.8, so we will add acid when necessary but try not to add water.

Grapes get picked in October and come in cool. They get standard machine destemming and light crushing with less than 50 percent of individual berry breakage. After crushing, the pH is adjusted to 3.63 with acid going to 6.4g/L. We add 50 ppm SO₂ at crush and then have a one day cold-soak below 60° F. BDX yeast is added along with nutrients and then yeast food one-third of the way through fermentation. We ferment in half-ton bins with three punch-downs daily, backing off to one or two times daily as we near 0° Brix. Temperature peaked at 85° F. We press to tank, removing the hard press fraction.

After settling for one to two days we go to a combination of French and American barrels with 33 percent new oak. On about 16 percent we use French oak chain-type inserts. Commercial ML is added. We rack three times: once post ML, again in the summer and finally for bottling. The wine spent 22 months in barrel. It is plate and frame filtered to 0.35 microns and then aged in bottle for 11 months before release.



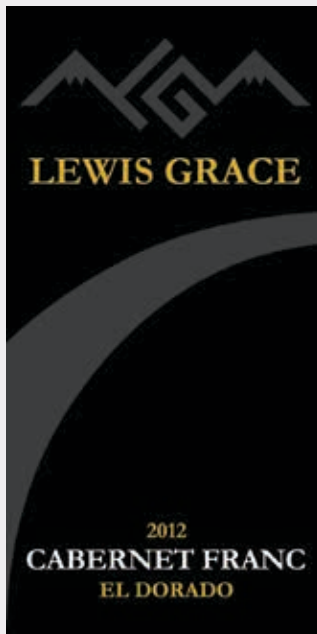
Tasting Notes:

GRACE: Well-extracted with dark color. Notes of black cherry, plum, blackberry, currant and raspberry. Hints of vanilla, leather and tobacco leaf with a slight pepperiness. Luscious in the mouth with a long-lasting finish. Firm tannins and balanced acidity.

HILDEBRAND: I get aromas of vanilla, probably coming from the oak. There is a bit of herbaceousness like thyme. There is red fruit and dark cherries on the aroma. On the palate I get more blackberries than cherries and a bit more currant. Fairly forward tannins in the front of the mouth, but with good acid and balance. Good wine.

BUSH: Nice aromas of dark cherry and Marionberry. There are subtle hints of spice, more on the savory herbal side. The entry has a nice soft character to it that is luscious. The mouthfeel comes across with this dark cherry fruit. I get a touch of heat on the finish.

DÍAZ MUÑOZ: It has a nice, dark color with a blue edge. It is kind of spicy with black pepper and mushroom. There is more mineral, like the kind that comes from rock. I get some complex chocolate. It has more weight with a long finish. The red fruit and black cherry flavors finish long. It is very nice. I like it.



SKUPNY: Deep ruby color, almost opaque with a touch of violet. Almost a cherry liquor type of aromatics. It was bright and much more effusive than the other wines of this flight. There is a bit of earth, plum and black cherry in the nose. It has more volume with a little bit of a sweet/sour character. It might not be totally dry, but it has very nice black cherry flavors with good supporting tannins that lend it nice texture. More weight than length.

OJEDA: This has the most personality of the flight. It is the most earthy with more tannins, which give more weight to the mid-palate with a longer finish than the others. It has more complexity, and it has a mineral finish that is very pleasant with the tannin. The finish is less fruity with more earth and mineral.

CARLSON: It is very representative of Cab Franc in that riper, richer style. Pyrazine is in balance. There is a nice integration of oak. It has bright acidity with plenty of grip in the back end.

GRINDLEY: On a global scale, this is typical of Cab Franc. It has drying tannins. There are pyrazines and tannins in the style of the Old World, but it has a big slug of fruit, which is more the California style. As the tannins soften, this will be a really nice wine, but it needs more time.

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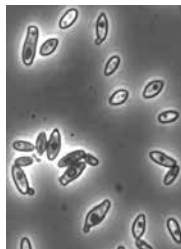
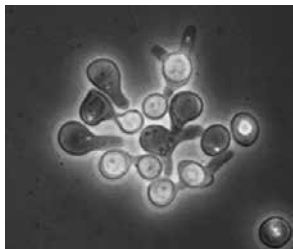
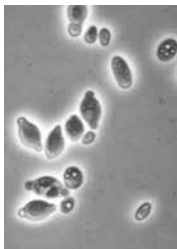
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Left: Kloeckera (Hanseniaspora) is the most common yeast on grapes, though up to 100 other non-Saccharomyces species can come from grapes, and most are undesirable in wine. Kloeckera produces ethyl acetate and acetic acid, often causing stuck ferments. The problems start before fermentation and although the yeasts die, their effects can last throughout the wine's life.

Middle: Zygosaccharomyces, a difficult problem in bottled wines. Insensitive to SO₂ and sorbate, Zygo can live in bottling lines, causing months or years of fermenting wines. Zygo often comes into wines from grape juice concentrate.

Right: Brettanomyces

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VARIETAL FOCUS: *Cabernet Franc*

Narrow Gate Vineyards

2011 ESTATE CAB/CAB FRANC, 13.9% ALC., 97 CASES, \$32, 50%
CABERNET FRANC, 50% CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Frank Hildebrand moved to El Dorado County in 2000 with the dream of starting a biodynamic winery. He left a position in the fashion industry with the desire "to get closer to the earth and farther away from the freeway," as he puts it. He and his wife bought 85 acres and began a quest to get to know everything about their land. "Biodynamic farming is not just science," said Hildebrand. "Faith is an important component. Practices come into play, such as no pesticides or herbicides, but so does creating a naturally bio-diversified environment conducive to the plants you are cultivating."

According to Hildebrand:

The grapes for this wine come from a single half-acre block in our vineyard. Both the Cabernet Franc and the Cabernet Sauvignon grow and act the same, like twins. This is a very low yield section. The vines are farmed biodynamically, and the varieties are co-fermented. We are trying to express the vintage and vineyard foremost. In cool vintages this wine shows more cranberry and less cherry with tobacco and herb. In warmer vintages we get more black cherry, more spice and less fruit. Whatever the conditions we always look for a wine that is fruit- and spice-forward with good concentration and soft tannins.

Our vineyard sits in Josephine silt loam at a 10 percent slope and has well-drained soils underlain by vertically tilted schists, slates and contact metamorphic rock at depths of 40 to 60 inches. The vineyard is south-facing at an elevation of 2,550 feet, and vines are spaced at 6x10 feet. The clone is 332 planted on 3309C, whose vigor is a little too low for the site, which accounts for our very low yields, about 1.5 tons per acre. We are Demeter-certified Biodynamically farmed and use drip irrigation.

In our vineyard biodynamic farming has definitely had a positive influence on each vintage. In wetter years, like 2011, we were able to apply multiple mow-downs before discing, creating a healthy boost of nitrogen that might not otherwise be present. This natural boost of nitrogen positively impacts both the grapes and the resulting wine, providing healthier fermentations.

We use VSP, so we sweep shoots post-flowering. We typically clean out canopy and shoot position to two buds at each spur. Post-set we will thin to five spurs each side. We will drop fruit at veraison if green clusters lag behind and pull leaves on the morning sun side post-fruit set.

The low yields mean that this block ripens very evenly, and flavors, acid and sugar come together fairly consistently vintage to vintage. To harvest, we watch sugar until 22° Brix, and then we focus on acid and pH. Acid is the key. We are looking for the acid to drop into the 7g/L range, and we wait for green flavor and astringency to subside.

We field-sort as buckets come to half-ton bins in the vineyard starting early in the morning so grapes are cool. We destem only, trying to keep as many whole berries as possible and use no SO₂. Grapes sit in one-ton bins for two to three days before spontaneous fermentation begins. Because of the cold vintage, we inoculated with D21 for this vintage. We try to have long, slow fermentations starting in the 60s and moving into the low to mid 70° F range. Fermentation takes 14 to 17 days. We punch-down twice a day right up to pressing around 0° Brix. We dump bins to the press to hold back as many seeds as possible, trying to minimize harsh tannins and astringent flavors. We press directly to barrel, keeping press juice and free run separate, but usually blend the lots together later.



We inoculate for ML in barrel just before dryness is complete. Wine is aged in 100 percent French oak. This vintage was split between one-, two- and three-year-old barrels, with no new oak. We rack the wine after ML, then again in March and again for bottling. The wine is aged in oak for 10 to 11 months. We sterile filter to bottle and age for a minimum of two years before release.

Tasting Notes:

HILDEBRAND: I get an array of spices on the nose, including floral notes and some herbs, grounded with some bright cherry. It is very berry on the palate with bright red fruit, raspberry and some cranberry flavors that linger with some floral spice on the finish. It has fairly soft tannins and medium acid on the finish.

BUSH: There is a very pleasing slight herbal note in the nose that is very clean. There is a pencil shaving type spice to it that works. There is a cherry plum mélange in the fruit characteristics of it with a couple hints of vanilla. Very nice elegant palate with up-front herbal notes that change into a cherry pie/cranberry fruit character. It has a lingering finish with nice balance. The tannins are youthful but approachable. More age would be nice on this wine.

GRACE: I get cherry and a slight cinnamon and spice. I also get plum, blackberry and a little bit of candied fruit. It is well-balanced with softer tannins. It is a bit on the tart side in a kind of French style.

SKUPNY: It has pretty even color but looks a bit oxidized. It has very light, delicate aromas with a little bit of chocolate milk aromatics mixed with fresh cherries. The palate is on the cherry scale of Cab Franc without a huge bit of complexity. It was easy to drink, simple without a lot of heavy tannin. A bit of a quaffer.

OJEDA: Definitely lighter than the wines from Napa. It is lighter in tannins and color with more leather in the nose with less fruit but herbal notes. It has a soft entry, and the tannins are not very present. It makes for a very easy wine to drink.

DÍAZ MUÑOZ: I agree that it is very light. It is pretty young to have this bit of oxidation. It is not really expressive of fruit, but there is some vanilla and cherry. It is a pleasant wine to drink but doesn't have a lot going on.

GRINDLEY: I think the 50/50 thing really shows through on the tannin structure and the length. It is not a typical Cab Franc finish. There are hints of cranberries and pomegranate in that not fully ripe style, probably vintage-related. The oak is in balance.

CARLSON: I think it is very reflective of the vintage. I agree that the Cabernet Sauvignon has made this very different. There is a chalkiness and tightness in the finish and more length from the Cabernet Sauvignon. Overall a very enjoyable, pleasant wine, but leaning more toward that lean style.

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Madroña Vineyards

2011 SIGNATURE CABERNET FRANC, EAST BLOCK, 13.5% ALC., 47 CASES, \$35, 98.4% CABERNET FRANC, 1.4% CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Madroña Vineyards was one of the first wineries established in El Dorado County in 1973. Paul Bush grew up with the cycles of family winery life, spending school vacations pruning vines and washing barrels at the winery. Today, Bush is both vineyard manager and winemaker for Madroña, balancing his days among the vines and barrels.

According to Bush:

My goal is to retain the subtleties of Cabernet Franc with its floral notes and complex spice character while showcasing the elegance of the variety. Big structure is the norm from our vineyards with a terroir aspect of minerality and earthiness. In the end, complexity with balance is my indication of success.

Our vineyard is comprised of Aiken clay loam, volcanic in origin. The vineyard has a slight northern exposure, sits at 2,915 feet and is planted to 7x12 foot spacing. The rootstock is from Gewürztraminer vines and was grafted with the only Cab Franc clone available in 1984, which we believe was Clone 1.



Paul Bush

We farm non-certified organic, don't fertilize and use overhead irrigation once at veraison and then again post-harvest, depending on the season.

Vines are cane-pruned with excess shoot removal done in the spring. We pull leaves just after veraison on the eastern side of the vine to open up the canopy. The trellising system is a two-wire California sprawl system, which requires a lot of hand work. We will drop fruit to balance out ripening.

Logistics certainly comes into play with our picking decisions because we farm 29 varieties. Cab Franc is a priority. Initially, I look for overall evenness of coloring before selective berry tasting. Once the grapes develop dark cherry flavors, I'll do cluster samples. Once fruit character is right, I'll check pH of soaked-out samples with an eye to Brix levels. Then it is a waiting game, letting the fruit ripen until the pH levels start to increase (3.6 or above) while still trying to harvest under 24.5° Brix.

Grapes are sorted in the vineyard and again at the crusher. Grapes are destemmed only with a 20 to 35 ppm addition of SO₂ depending on vintage. They are pumped to macro bins and go through a two-day cold-soak before being inoculated with Lalvin D-254 yeast. We will add 2 pounds per 1,000 gallons of Fermaid K when the Brix has dropped below 20° Brix. We don't need to make acid additions. We punch-down manually twice a day until 5° Brix and then punch-down just once a day. Fermentation peaked at 76° F. We press at 0° Brix, looking to minimize astringent tannin extraction. We separate free run from press juice based on astringency of the tannins.

We press to tank, settle for a day or two and then rack to barrels to finish fermentation and for ML. ML goes slowly, often taking as long as five months. This 2011 vintage had 67 percent of the wine aging in one-year-old French oak. We raked every six months during the 26 months of barrel-aging. The wine was passed through coarse pad filters (3 microns) and bottled. It received six months bottle-aging before release.



Tasting Notes:

BUSH: This has some herbal character on the front side with slight floral aspects of lavender with cherry/cranberry character on the aromas. I like the entry, mouth-filling aspects. There is a richness without being luscious until more of that cranberry character comes in. There is a lingering finish of black pepper and a spice rack aspect.

GRACE: It is earthy with a bit of pepper. It is definitely spice-dominated, but with strawberry, cherry and raspberry coming through. At first I thought it was a bit tart, but by the second taste that didn't seem so. It is soft with a well-balanced mouthfeel. I would call this is more of an Old World style.

HILDEBRAND: I get floral spice along with baking spice, cherries and a flash of nuttiness, which I think is classic Cab Franc in an Old World way. On the palate there is an earthiness along with cranberry and sage. I pick up the lavender. The tannins are not too aggressive with a nice lengthy finish, so it has a good balance on both ends. There is some spice and white pepper on the end, making an age-worthy wine.

OJEDA: I like this one. The color is a bit darker than the Narrow Gate. It doesn't have too much fruit, but the leather and oak show up on the nose. It has a medium-full palate. The oak balances the fruit very well, without being oaky.

DÍAZ MUÑOZ: It is darker but not too dark. To me the pyrazines are very present. There is a bit too much leather, and it hides the fruit. The mouthfeel is light with medium body. It is a little bitter on the finish.

SKUPNY: The color is even throughout with some violet tint. It is vinous with some fresh wood vanilla, slight white mushrooms and a little bit of green herb. It is on the medium cherry scale with a little cola quality to it. There are more tannins than the Narrow Gate, but they were silkier, easy-drinking tannins. There was some of that cherry pit bitterness on the end.

GRINDLEY: This is a leaner, less-ripe style with cranberries and pomegranate being dominant. Seems like short chain tannins, which are a bit drying. It is not fruit-dominant, but they have not tried to dominate it with oak. I think some of the cool vintage is coming through in this lean fruit, which makes it interesting.

CARLSON: To me it is the most atypical Cab Franc so far. Bright red fruit with very assertive acidity. The oak is very forward. The ripeness level is more red fruit with cranberry and red cherries versus darker flavors. The wood is quite forward.

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CENTRAL COAST



SLIM PALEY

Carlson Wines

2012 CABERNET FRANC, 14.2% ALC., 570 CASES, \$30, 80% CABERNET FRANC, 20% PETIT VERDOT

Chuck Carlson has more than 34 years of winemaking experience in Santa Barbara County and has spent the past 10 as owner of Carlson Wines. After graduating from Fresno State University with an enology degree, he joined **Zaca Mesa Winery & Vineyards**, where he helped create their groundbreaking Rhône varietal program. He served as winemaker at **Curtis Winery** in the Santa Ynez Valley for nearly 20 years. In 2004, he launched Carlson Wines with a trio of Pinot Noirs. He has since added Cabernet Franc and aromatic whites to his portfolio.

According to Carlson:

I want to create a wine that showcases the varietal as grown on the Curtis Estate vineyard. That translates as a food-friendly wine that is not super extracted with a long finish. There may be a touch of pyrazine, but red fruit should dominate. I want it to be medium- to full-bodied with a long lingering finish.

The vineyard has Ballard sandy loam soil with limestone sitting on a flat mesa about 1,100 feet elevation. The soil is deep and does not retain moisture. There is a lot of marine influence with both morning and evening fog. Vines are planted 8x5 feet with 1,090 vines per acre. Rootstock is 101-14 with clone 214. We farm traditionally and sustainably and use drip irrigation. Typically, we harvest 8 to 11 pounds of fruit per vine, about 5 tons per acre. We are traditional in the vineyard. We shoot thin, sucker and drop green clusters. We try to open windows on the south side of the vine and leaf-pull moderately on the north side. We green-drop at 50 to 75 percent veraison.

We monitor Brix, acid and pH walking through the vineyard and tasting the grapes. I factor in the weather as well. I am waiting for the pyrazine level to drop. I look for brown seeds and yellowing of the basal leaves. The vineyard tends to ripen evenly. We want balanced alcohol and typically pick between 24° and 24.5° Brix.



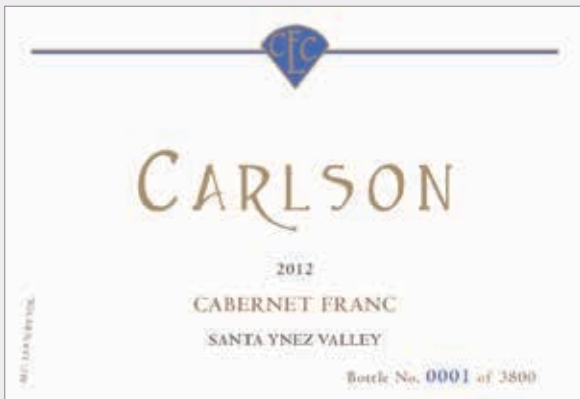
Chuck Carlson

We pick at night so grapes arrive at the winery cool. We destem and crush to bins, adding 25 ppm SO₂. We cold-soak for three to four days at 40° F to 45° F. We think this time extracts good color and fruity flavors. We add BDX and D-254 yeast. I'll add acid after cold-soak, if needed, up to 1 g/liter. I add DAP twice early in fermentation. Bins get punched down twice daily while open top fermentors get a combination of punch-down and pump-overs at the height of fermentation. I will ferment on oak segments or medium+ toasted French oak in bags, looking to achieve early oak integration. Fermentation is carried out in the 75° F to 80° F range in a refrigerated room, and then they get dragged outside to finish fermentation.

We use a basket press, pressing around 0° Brix and mixing free run and press juice. We press to a tank, settle overnight and then go to barrels the next day. Malolactic starts in fermentors at 1° or 2° Brix and completes in barrels. The wine is aged in 80 percent French oak barrels (20 percent new) and 20 percent American barrels (two- to four-year-old wood). Post-ml, the wine is racked off the lees and gets 50 ppm SO₂. It is racked again in the summer and once more along with fining for bottling. It gets 18 to 20 months in barrel. We rough pad-filter post-finishing and then bottle. We age in bottle for 10 to 12 months before release.



Tasting Notes:



CARLSON: I get a nice dark, red cherry. There is a touch of pyrazine for sure, but there is nice integration of bright acidity. From start to finish, the wine is consistent all the way through. There is a bit of chalk and tannin on the finish.

GRINDLEY: This is what people currently think a Cab Franc should be in that it has that cooler climate edge showing through. The fruit is slightly dark and cool. I pick up on the chalkiness on the finish. There is a bit more pyrazine, but it's not dominant. I like this because of the mid-palate fruit weight. Great balance makes for a great food wine.

BUSH: Nice, extracted color. At the beginning it had some reduced character that opened up with some air. More of a brooding, dark berry character that opens up into more of a strawberry character with a little bit of sage herbal character. It is more of a linear style palate with youthful tannins. Fruit character is intense black cherry with a hint of oregano, thyme spice.

HILDEBRAND: I got some big herbaceousness up-front with some reductive character, which still hasn't blown off yet. It is lightly spiced with aggressive forward tannins in the mouth. Strong notes of cherry, cranberry and spice, with a little thyme on the finish.

GRACE: It is well-extracted, with a good mouthfeel, but that reduction is pretty strong and overpowers the dark fruit that is trying to get out. I get some coffee and earthy character. It is a wine that could last a while, but I think it needs to be decanted to realize its full potential.

DÍAZ MUÑOZ: It is deep red, ruby-colored. It has more green character in the beginning. It has floral notes with violets. It is definitely red fruit, like berries, a little white pepper. It is not very earthy, but it has some pencil notes. It is tight in the mouth, a young wine. It has nice acidity with medium-full body. The oak is well integrated. It has length and a lot of life.

OJEDA: In the beginning I got some Brett, but then it went away. For me it was a savory wine, like salami and spice. The flavor was very interesting. It was savory but young. It needs more time.

SKUPNY: I think I get that leathery Brett with almost a little H₂S reduction taint on the nose, but it seems to be resolving into candied cherry. I get that sweet/sour salami stuff on the aromatics. The tannins were a little harsh and tight for the medium fruit behind it. It was more pleasant in the mouth than in the nose. It had that hard tannic playback on the finish that clipped the fruit a little bit.

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Brecon Estate

2013 ESTATE CABERNET FRANC, 14.8% ALC., 191 CASES, \$48, 95% CABERNET FRANC, 5% PETIT VERDOT

Damian Grindley has worked in the wine industry for more than 20 years, crafting wines across the United States, Australia and Europe. During that time, he has used his spare time to map some of the longest and deepest caverns in the world. Seventeen years ago he ended up in the Central Coast where the presence of limestone soils and the opportunity to purchase Brecon Estate convinced him to settle down and craft his own wines.



Damian Grindley

According to Grindley:

We are trying to produce a fruit-forward Cabernet Franc with plenty of varietal character. We want ripe fruit but try not to over-extract tannins. The pyrazines should be a complexing element, not a dominant one. Mouthfeel is important, and we concentrate on developing the mid-palate while avoiding mouth-drying tannins. All of the above is not dominated by, but has a framework of, fine French oak.

Our estate vineyard has high pH calcareous shale, which produces low pH wine. The elevation is 1,400 feet, south-facing and planted to 5.5x12 foot spacings. We're not sure which clones we have, because they were planted 38 years ago, but we know they are on Chardonnay rootstock that had Cab Franc grafted to them. We farm sustainably and dry-farm except in extreme drought years like 2015. We will pull leaves on the north side in years with sufficient canopy. We green-drop most years and raise wires on the north side only most years. Production is about 2 tons per acre.

We tend to pick in mid to late October. We usually have morning fog and cool days, so we are not in a rush to pick. Sugars stabilize around 24° to 25° Brix, and we let the grapes hang to allow the acids and flavors to come into balance. We wait for the pyrazine character to diminish, pass through a neutral phase and develop forest and red fruit character. We look for brown, crunchy seeds and soft, but not shriveled, skins.

Grapes are picked twice, about seven to 10 days apart. They are hand-picked, destemmed, sorted and then crushed directly to fermentors. Depending on fruit quality, we might cold-soak one fermentor to get some aqueous extraction and different mouthfeel. We ferment the first 5° Brix using wild yeast, starting with just one punch-down daily, increasing to three daily at peak where temperatures hit 80° F to 82° F, and then dropping back to one or two punch-downs towards the end of fermentation.

We add yeast hulls and BM4X4 yeast, which we select to increase mid-palate and to help finish fermentation. Then we press to chillers, reducing the temperature to 45° F. This shocks the yeast, but hopefully we have enough nutrients to finish the fermentation. This step really helps with mid-palate.

The wine is pressed off between 3° and 6° Brix and goes directly to barrels, down and dirty. Natural malolactic occurs in 65-gallon French oak barrels with about one-third new oak. After malolactic, some wine gets racked; some stays on lees and might get stirred. We use Bordeaux barrels with Burgundy heads. Wine is aged for 15 months and only racked post-ml and at blending or bottling, depending on vintage. The wine is passed through a bug catcher prior to bottling and aged a minimum of three months in bottle before release.

BRECON ESTATE



Tasting Notes:

GRINDLEY: There is a level of fruit right at the beginning that continues through the mid-palate and into the finish. It is even right across with bright acidity from the calcareous soil. It is fairly soft on the tannins with a slight bit of chalkiness. It is silky in the mid-palate. It is not a huge fruit bomb. The fruit is there, but without the tea leaf, pyrazine character, so it is very approachable.

CARLSON: Everything here is in balance. In the beginning there is the dark, rich fruit with plenty of ripeness without being overwhelming. The acid is integrated on the palate and into the finish. There is that subtle chalkiness on the back end. It is really pretty with dark, black fruit for me. A beautiful wine.

GRACE: I get a lot of nice cherry, blackberry fruit on the nose. It has good mouthfeel on it. There is some vanilla and almond with good tannin and acidity. Very nice, rounded wine.

BUSH: I get hints of floral, violet spice in the nose with a candied fruit characteristic and some white pepper spice. It has more of a canned cherry on the palate with a nice texture on the entrance. It has a nice balance with just a hint of heat on the finish. It is nice, pleasurable wine.

HILDEBRAND: I get a lot of vanilla up-front with floral spice. It has a very high note of brighter red fruit, like strawberries and raspberries. On the mid-palate it has nice round tannins with good length on the finish.

OJEDA: It is earthy with red fruit. It is soft with good acidity. I like the finish. There is some tannin that gives it weight, but it is a very easy-drinking wine that finishes earthy.

SKUPNY: It has that opaque kind of color. A lot of plum and some raisin aromatics and a little bit of heat backed up with some earth. On the palate it is that warm rush of red wine. It is easy to drink. While there are tannins, they provide a soft landing.

DÍAZ MUÑOZ: I get some candied, sweet aromas. It is kind of warm, which may come from high alcohol. After that, it has earth notes and some spiciness with white pepper. The tannins are bold without being aggressive. The finish is red fruit, but it is a little sweet.



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Happy Canyon Vineyards

2010 PIOCHO RESERVE, 14.1% ALC., 312 CASES, \$39,
70% CABERNET FRANC, 12% CABERNET SAUVIGNON,
12% MERLOT, 3% MALBEC, 3% PETIT VERDOT

Sean Pitts serves as executive winemaker and managing director and is responsible for all operations of the vineyard and winery. Married to **Jodi Barrack**, one of the owners, he previously spent 14 years in the pharmaceutical industry. **Doug Margerum** has worked alongside Pitts as consulting winemaker since the first bottle.

According to Pitts:

The Happy Canyon Piocho Reserve is all about making a Bordeaux-style blend of varietals from our estate vineyard while highlighting the Cabernet Franc, which is the star of our vineyard. We want a wine that has both structure and balance. We look for the wine to be smooth and plush with soft tannins, sort of halfway between a Merlot and a Cabernet Sauvignon. We want the wine to be balanced, fruit-forward, with spice character and verve. We try to exist in that sweet spot between the big and rich Napa Valley style and Old World classic styles.

Our soil is a mixture of loam and clay loam with red and yellow chert and serpentine cobbles, which lend a chalkiness that helps the Cabernet Franc. The elevation is 400 to 800 feet. Rows are planted 10x5 feet. The exposure is southwest. Our Cabernet Franc is clone 332, and it is planted on 5BB rootstock. We are non-certified organic and sustainable. We use drip irrigation and generally harvest about 3 tons per acre. In 2010 we shoot-thinned, did a green-drop and pulled leaves on the Cab Franc to reduce pyrazine.

Once we pass 20° Brix, we will fill a bucket with samples, crush the grapes and test Brix, TA and pH. We'll let the juice sit for a while and then taste it, looking for fruit flavors and diminished pyrazine. We want to pick before grapes shrivel but after seeds have turned brown. We want to harvest the grapes at full physiological ripeness but hopefully at 24° Brix or less.

Grapes are picked by hand and hand-sorted to remove any leaves or raisins. We destem, but do not crush, then add SO₂. We will cold-soak at the ambient winery temperature of 55° F anywhere from three hours to three days. This wine had commercial yeast added to begin fermentation. Wine was fermented in small-scale, open-top fermentors, and we punched down three to five times a day. We press at dryness and mix the free run with the press juice. The wine settles in a tank for 24 hours and then goes to barrels for malolactic fermentation.

We use 100 percent **Taransaud** French oak, thin-stave barrels. All of the barrels are medium toast, and 50 percent is new oak. We believe the thin stave barrels allow for a bit more oxidative interchange, which helps reduce reductive character. We are in barrel for 22 months and rack three times over that period. We neither fine nor filter our red wines, and we age this wine for a minimum of one year before release.

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Tasting Notes:

CARLSON: The vintage was cooler, and the wine reflects that. You get characteristics from the other varieties. It is soft on the entry. Not much chalkiness or dry tannin. I'd like to see a bit more of a fruit punch in the front end. It is pleasant.

GRINDLEY: This is not your big California fruit bomb. In leaner years there is great acidity like this. With time they can be delicious, and I think this might be one of those wines. The acid is super bright. It has great length on the back palate, but it is not super fruit-forward. The pyrazines are there but again not dominant. If you've grown up with European Cab Francs, you'd be very happy with this.

HILDEBRAND: This has big fruit with a lot of raspberries. It seems like very ripe red fruit, almost like a Zinfandel, instead of Cab Franc. The finish is very soft, especially in comparison to the other wines. It's a nice wine.

GRACE: I get some candied fruit: violet and strawberry to this wine. It is spicy and peppery, which is reminiscent of Zin. There are some cedar notes, making for a very complex aroma. It has firm mouthfeel, but is not astringent or overpowering. It is very drinkable wine.

BUSH: Upfront it has more of a ripe character although it still has that high-tone fruit character: candied cranberry and an interesting forest pine character to it. I find the palate to be a riper style with lower acid, but it retains a nice balance. There is some heat on the finish, but overall there is nice fruit throughout.

SKUPNY: This had an even color throughout, with a little bit of brown on the edge. It has that ripe, grape skin, pomace aroma and a bit of fusel to it. It has some very likeable plum to raisin. It probably has more tannin than it appears, but it has a soft landing to it, making it silky and plush in the mouth. That said, it is not overtly Cab Franc-ish.

DÍAZ MUÑOZ: I find that the fruit is really ripe. It has brown edges. The fruit is ripe, like dates or ripe plums. I like it actually. It is a bit medicinal; the tannins are round, silky, well-integrated.

OJEDA: When I first smelled it, I got mushrooms on the nose. Now it has gone to ripe fruit. It changed. It is not typical of Cab Franc. I kind of get lost with this wine. It is complex and interesting. The mouth is super-pleasant, really soft and balanced. It has good acidity. No alcohol at all but it was changing all the time.

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NAPA VALLEY

LANG & REED WINE COMPANY

Lang & Reed
Wine Company2013 "TWO-FOURTEEN" CABERNET FRANC, 14% ALC., 856 CASES,
\$48, 100% CABERNET FRANC

John Skupny started Lang & Reed Wine Company with his wife 20 years ago with the distinct purpose of trying to find the unique characteristics and inherent qualities of Cabernet Franc. Before that, he had a varied life in the wine business. After working for **Vintage Wine Merchants**, he became director of marketing and sales for **Caymus Vineyards** in 1984 and then vice president of marketing and sales for Clos Du Val, finishing as general manager and sales manager at **Niebaum Coppola Estate** before founding Lang & Reed in 1996.

According to Skupny:

We try to express the delicate aromatic and flavor profiles of the varietal as purely as possible. We favor subtlety and nuance over extraction and power. We look for cherry, floral and some herbaceous aromas. We want fruit flavor that is neither heavy nor ponderous. We prefer light tannins but enough to give us length and structure. This is a single-vineyard, single-clone Cabernet Franc, which gives us a purity of varietal aromas and flavors.



John Skupny

The Sugarloaf Vineyard sits at about a 200-foot elevation with a 20 to 30 percent slope. Vines are planted 5.75x3.3 feet, and the soil is Hambricht rock (basaltic igneous). The exposure is southwest. The clone is Entav 214, and it is planted on 3309 rootstock. We sustainably farm and use regulated deficit-irrigation, providing very little water post-veraison. Vines are VSP. We do some moderate leaf-pulling and selective fruit-thinning pre- and post-veraison. Tonnage averages 3.5 tons per acre.

This vineyard is in a cool region, so grapes ripen slowly. There are two blocks, and we harvest them separately. Block 9, which accounts for about 85 percent of this wine, usually ripens first. We shoot for a Brix window of 23.5° to 24.5° because much past that, we start losing varietal character. We watch the TA and pH, but we go a lot by flavor. We are looking for green flavors to subside and to pick before things taste like raisins. We look for seeds to brown and grape tissue to loosen from the pulp. We want no raisins. We will pick Block 2 around 23° to 23.5° Brix while it still has searing acidity. When blended with Block 9, it provides acid and some austerity.

Once the fruit has been harvested, we steer away from too much manipulation in the cellar. Grapes are picked at night and come in cold. We will sort and then add 35 ppm SO₂ at the destemmer but do no crushing. We do no cold-soak, but there is a two- to three-day lag time before fermentation gets started. The first day we will incorporate a firehose pump-over to get the fermentor well-mixed. We rarely have to add acid. Occasionally, we will use a minimum nutrient addition of **Laffort Nutristart O**.

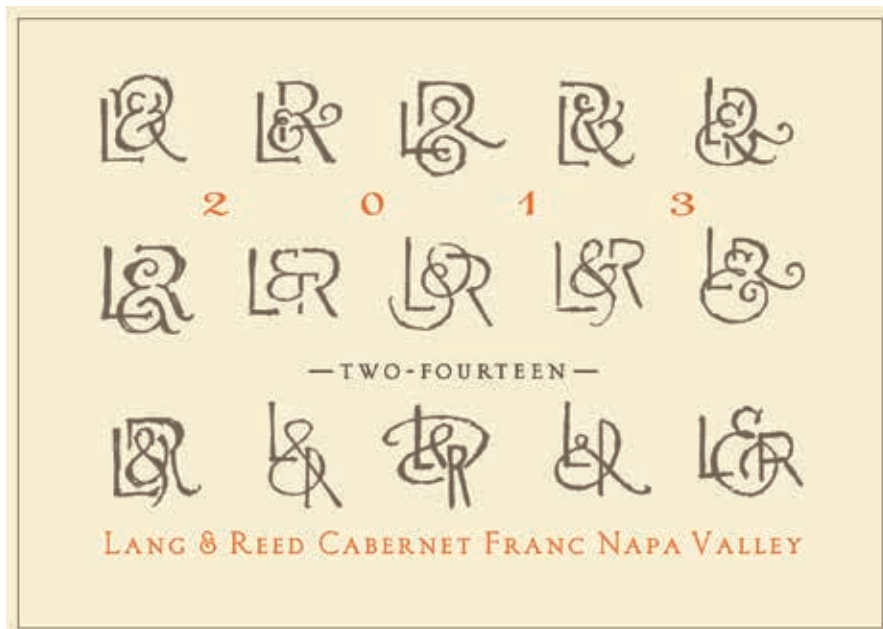
We inoculate with Laffort RB2 yeast. We usually pump-over twice a day, using sprinklers for the first third of fermentation. After that, we shift to one pump-over per day and then stop before pressing. If the wine lags, or develops some off odors, we will run it through a tub and screen to introduce oxygen. We



ferment in the 75° F to 85° F range. We ferment two separate lots for this wine. The first lot is pressed at 0° Brix because we are hoping to keep fruit aromatics. That lot goes directly to barrels for malolactic. Sometimes we inoculate at pressing; other times malolactic is an act of the gods. The second lot gets extended maceration, up to 16 days. This lot contributes depth, softer tannins and some of those forest floor aromatics.

We use selected top-quality seasoned cooperage to mature the wine with minimal flavor impact.

This wine was aged in 100 percent French oak, all of it one and two years old. The wine sits on the lees, until the following August, when it is blended. In all it remains in oak 16 to 17 months. We do not fine, and we use a simple polish-filtration at bottling. The wine gets one year in bottle before release.



Tracey Skupny harvesting Cabernet Franc

Tasting Notes:

SKUPNY: It is a darker deep purple. It has a fairly big nose with floral, pencil, a little bit of forest floor and a lot of mixed herb. On the palate it is pretty weighty. It is assertive on the palate with a fair wallop of tannin, which I think is typical of the vintage. On the cherry scale it is very dark red, almost cola-like. It is lengthy with long tannins with a nice beginning, middle and finish.

OJEDA: I like the color. It looks super clean for unfiltered wine. The nose smells ripe, but the taste is not too ripe. I like the balance between fruit and tannin. There is red fruit, cherry and some herb like rosemary. I like the finish and the structure.

DÍAZ MUÑOZ: I get a lot of plum and dried fruit combined with layers of herbal notes, like rosemary and bay leaf. Very nice. In the mouth it is very big with tannins which will benefit from more time but should help age the wine. It has a big structure, and the tannins need time to integrate with the wine. The finish is long with a lot of layers. It is interesting, and I like it.

GRINDLEY: This has the best acidity and aging potential. I like this as a food wine. The great acidity would cut through a great steak, but it has plenty of fruit character as well. It is not the heaviest fruit of the set, but it hasn't tried to dominate with oak. It is letting the fruit come through. For me, it is the most balanced food wine of the set.

CARLSON: I think it is between the other two looking at the extract and concentration. The acid is right as is the tannin extraction and oak integration. It is classic Cab Franc with plenty going on. I get a bit of tobacco quality in the front, and I like that.

HILDEBRAND: I get some glycerin upfront on the nose and some earthiness with a bit of reductiveness that seems to be blowing off. The mid-palate has black cherry and mocha. It is nicely balanced on the finish with good length and fairly assertive tannins.

BUSH: Great color. It started a bit herbal for me, but then the nose really opens up, more of a black raspberry character for me. It has a bold entry. It is extracted and starts out tannic but moves into a dark cherried fruit. It has a nice balance, and I'd like to see it in another five years.

GRACE: It starts with strong black cherry and dark fruit complemented by vanilla and some rhubarb. It is powerful with high tannin content, a beefier structure than the other wines. It has a very long-lasting finish, promising long ageability.



Clos Du Val

2013 CABERNET FRANC, STAG'S LEAP DISTRICT, 13.8% ALC.,
400 CASES, \$65, 96% CABERNET FRANC, 4% CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Kristy Melton grew up and went to school in El Paso, Texas. She went to **UC Davis** for her master's degree in Enology. After graduation, she worked at **Seresin Estate** in New Zealand and **Iron Horse** and **Saintsbury** in California before accepting the assistant winemaking position at Clos Du Val in 2010. By 2012 she was named senior winemaker and was responsible for focusing on estate-grown fruit and developing a riper style with more mid-palate and greater tannin integration. By the time of this tasting, Melton had left Clos Du Val, so assistant winemaker Mabel Ojeda, by way of Chile, sat in for our tastings.

According to Ojeda:

Our main focus is to preserve the classic Cabernet Franc fruit characteristics of plum, black cherry and anise. We want a round mouthfeel, balanced oak and a velvety tannic structure. We are careful not to over-extract because that leads to a loss of the fruit character we want.

This wine comes from our estate vineyard. Most of the vines were planted between 1995 and 1997 on the valley floor in sandy loam soils. Spacing is 7.5x5 feet. This is all Clone 1 planted to 3309 rootstock. Vines are VSP, drip-irrigated and traditionally farmed. We will soon be



Mabel Ojeda



CLOS DU VAL



adding cross-arms to spread the canopy and protect the grapes from the sun. We will leaf-pull, mostly on the afternoon side, and do a green-drop mid-veraison. Harvest averages 4 tons per acre.

We check Brix, TA and pH to determine when to pick. We wait for the fruit to lose that "green" taste, which usually happens after 24° Brix. The fruit for this vintage was harvested at 24.7° Brix. Fruit was harvested at night and came in cold. It was sorted, destemmed and crushed to stainless steel tanks, and 40 ppm SO₂ was added.

We cold-soak for two days at 55° F, wetting the cap once a day. We inoculate with Laffort FX-10 yeast and incorporate two doses of Nutristart, one at the beginning and another at the first third of fermentation. We pump-over twice a day during fermentation and cut back to one pump-over as fermentation ends. The wine ferments at 85° F to 88° F, which gives us good extraction and keeps the yeast happy. Once we finish primary fermentation, we use extended maceration, tasting regularly for astringency. This Cabernet Franc spent 30 days on the skins in total.

We press based on taste. The wine settles in tank for 24 hours and then gets racked to barrel for native malolactic fermentation. We top monthly until ML is finished; then we add SO₂ to keep the wine at 35 ppm. We leave the wine on the lees until February or March, when it is racked. It will get racked a second time for blending and bottling. We use 100 percent French oak; 37 percent of that is new. The wine aged in barrel for 18 months, and then was cross-flow filtered and bottled. It rested in bottle for eight months before release.



Tasting Notes:

OJEDA: There is a nice, bright ruby color with violet edges. On the nose there is the classic graphite and coffee and plum. When you taste, you get more of the black cherry and blackberry fruit. It is ripe without being too ripe. The palate is supported by velvety tannin. There is a bit of chocolate and smoke coming from the oak.

DIAZ MUÑOZ: I really like the style of this wine. I like that it is fruit-forward with a lot of red fruit and plum. There are floral and spice notes. The oak is gentle and well done, and it doesn't hide the fruit. It has nice acidity as well. You feel the oak with some coffee notes.

SKUPNY: Nice color that is beautiful and clean with a violet edge. It is very aromatic in a floral sense. I get violets and pencil lead. There is a bit of forest and a mixed bouquet of herbs. It is very lifted with dark red cherry. It is easy on the palate, has good length and is a little bit sassy with good fruit acidity, and there is just a bit of lingering vanilla and chocolate from the wood.

GRINDLEY: There is definitely an overall style to these wines from Napa. I think a lot of technique from the Cabernet Sauvignon has filtered over to the way they make Cab Franc, especially with the oak and extraction regimes. This has a nice balance with no peaks and troughs. The oak and tannic structure panders more to Cabernet Sauvignon than Cab Franc to some extent, but the fruit quality that shines through is definitely Cab Franc. I can see that it would be successful in the commercial world, but I find it a bit too clean. Where does the interest come from?

CARLSON: I find this one a bit leaner and lighter with a touch more red fruit than the others in this flight. You see more drying tannin toward the end of this. There is some cranberry and red cherry here. Very pleasant wine.

GRACE: There is dense raspberry and cherry on the nose. It is very complex with spice and red fruit, along with some slight coffee character. It is slightly astringent and coats the mouth but not in any obnoxious way. It is well-structured and long-lasting.

HILDEBRAND: Very pretty floral, spice nose, which carries nicely onto the palate with some pepper and even deeper spices. I get red cherry more than black cherry and cranberry on the finish. It is a very pretty wine, probably my favorite of the flight.

BUSH: It has a wonderfully complex bundle of characteristics that makes it hard to differentiate where one started and another ended, framed with a dark cherry, vanilla spice characteristic that is very enticing in the nose. It has big tannins. It has that cherry, berry character on the fruit, and it is super intense. I did find this to be the most drying on the palate of all the wines. I think it would be great with food.

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La Jota Vineyards

2012 HOWELL MOUNTAIN CABERNET FRANC, 14.5% ALC., 355 CASES, \$75, 100% CABERNET FRANC

Laura Díaz Muñoz received a Master of Science in viticulture and enology from the **Polytechnic University of Madrid**. She worked in La Mancha, Spain and then in New Zealand and Chile before settling in Napa as assistant winemaker for La Jota Vineyards, where she has worked very closely with her mentor, **Chris Carpenter**, winemaker for **Cardinale**, **Lokoya**, La Jota and **Mt. Brave**.



Laura Díaz Muñoz



Chris Carpenter

According to Diaz Muñoz:

We try to capture the pure expression of Howell Mountain Cabernet Franc, which presents lighter tannins and more floral character, along with some natural mineral character. We produce this wine similar to our Cabernet Sauvignon, but we wait longer for ripening. We want as much concentration as possible with soft tannins.

This Cabernet Franc comes from both the La Jota Winery Block and the nearby **W.S. Keyes Vineyard**. The winery block goes back nearly 40 years. It is planted on St. George rootstock. Soil consists of deep layers of loam. Vines are spaced 12x8 feet with two cross-arm trellising. Elevation is above 1,500 feet, and nearby pines and other trees lend a floral note to the fruit. The vineyard is sustainably farmed and brings in about 1.5 tons per acre. The W.S. Keyes Vineyard sits at 1,825 feet. The soils are a combination of white, volcanic rock and red clay. Rootstocks are varied as are clones. Vines are spaced 6x3 feet or 11x6 feet. Trellising is mostly VSP with the older vines on Geneva double curtain. We farm sustainably and get 2 to 3 tons per acre. We will pull fruit and leaves, usually getting to one cluster per shoot.

We determine when to pick almost totally by flavor although we do test and look for softening of the skins, along with browning and crunchy seeds. Mostly we want the pyrazine flavors to move to red fruit character. Then we wait longer for mouth-filling flavors. Usually we end up harvesting around 26° Brix.

Grapes are picked into 30-pound lug boxes and then hand-sorted before a gentle destemming and light crush, plus a 30 ppm SO₂ addition. Grapes come in cold and are given a three- to four-day cold-soak at 55° F, hoping to intensify red fruit aromas. We use firehose pump-overs during cold-soak; but once fermentation starts, we move to pump-overs with sprinklers. We will warm the wine to 70° F to help start fermentation, which usually takes about a week



to get going. This wine used native yeast for the fermentation and fermented at a peak temperature of 85° F. We shorten or lengthen pump-over times, depending on taste and tannin build-up. We may also use some extended maceration.

The wine is pressed when we feel the balance of fruit and tannin is right. We look for a pleasant mouthfeel with some weight. When that is achieved, we press, usually around dryness, to a tank, separating the press juice, settle and then go to barrel for native malolactic fermentation. After ML, we rack the wine and make an SO₂ addition. We rack the wine two to three times a year, five times in total, to help with clarity because we do not filter. We use 100 percent French oak with 80 percent new. The wine ages 18 to 20 months. The wine is bottled unfiltered and unfiltered, and then held for 12 months before release.



LA JOTA VINEYARDS



Tasting Notes:

DÍAZ MUÑOZ: It has a very dark color with a lot of ripe mountain fruit like ripe plum. I get a lot of violets, bay leaf and some earthy, mineral notes.

There is some coffee bean.

The oak is well-balanced. There is a lot going on with the taste. There is some salty/sweet character coming from the oak with the coffee and red fruit. I get a lot of floral character. The wine is full-bodied. The oak is present without hiding the fruit. It needs some time in bottle.

OJEDA: It is the darkest wine of the flight. I get a lot of black forest fruit and some chocolate. I can see the mountain fruit holding the new oak. The oak and fruit are integrated and go really well. On the palate I got chocolate, vanilla and red fruit. There is a slightly hot finish but not alcoholic. It is a big wine that gets softer on the palate.

SKUPNY: Really inky color but it is bright and brilliant. It is a little briary and smoky in the nose, savory with a lot of dark fruit and a little bit of herbaceousness, like in Southern France when the herbs are flowering. Really beautiful. The mouth is deep and intense with plum, and that savory herb comes up. It has really nice balance with good lift from the acidity. I got some of that salted chocolate on the tail end. I think it is beautiful wine.

GRINDLEY: This has a great natural sweet fruit flavor up-front, not to be confused with a sweet wine. It is nicely structured. The Cab Franc comes through on the finish, but it seems to have that Cabernet Sauvignon influence again in the thinking and expression of the wine.

CARLSON: I think this has the most extraction and richness, along with darker fruit in this flight. I think you get some Howell Mountain character in the richer, sweeter fruit impact. There is definite Cab Franc character with hints of pyrazine character. There is some mint character, but the wine is elegant and balanced.

HILDEBRAND: I am getting baking spices upfront with a lot of French oak, too much for my taste. In the mouth, the wine is more strawberry and raspberry with some very aggressive tannin on the finish.

BUSH: I also got the new oak on the nose, which seems to overpower the wine. It does have some of that pencil shaving character, but I think it is more from the oak than the fruit. You get some berry fruit character—blackberry raspberry—but all on the riper side of things. There is a bit of spice to it but lots of oak. There is nice balance on the palate. It is lean with a lingering cherry finish until the oak takes over again.

GRACE: I would definitely say it is oak-dominated. It is well-extracted. You get vanilla, mocha and cedar, probably from the barrels. It has blackberry, plum and dark fruit in there, as well, but definitely heavy on the oak. It's tannic and may do better with food.

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Cabernet Franc

E L D O R A D O C O U N T Y

WINERY	Grace Patriot Wines	Narrow Gate Vineyards	Madroña Vineyards
Wine	2012 Lewis Grace Cabernet Franc	2011 Estate Cab/Cab Franc	2011 Signature Cabernet Franc, East Block
Blend	100% Cabernet Franc	50% Cabernet Franc, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon	98.4% Cabernet Franc, 1.4% Cabernet Sauvignon
Winemaker	Tyler Grace	Frank Hildebrand	Paul Bush
Style Goals	Produce a wine with bright, mature fruit with firm mouthfeel while avoiding excessive astringency. Minimize "green" flavors and maximize dark fruit components while excluding bitterness.	We aim for a wine that expresses vintage and the vineyard foremost. Fruit from this block is always fruit- and spice-forward with good concentration and soft tannins.	Retain the subtle, floral and complex notes of Cabernet Franc while showcasing the elegance of the variety. Big structure is the norm from our vineyards with minerality and earthiness. Balance is my indication of success.
AVA	El Dorado	El Dorado	El Dorado
Vineyard	Bycroft Road Vineyard	Narrow Gate Estate Vineyard	La Madroña Vineyard
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (Soil Type)	Vineyard at boundary between volcanic and granitic bedrock. Intergrades between relatively deep, reddish clay-rich soil and grey, thin, rocky soils of granitic layer	Josephine silt loam with well-drained soils underlain by vertically-tilted schists, slates and contact metamorphic rock	Aiken clay loam
Elevation	2,750 feet	2,550 feet	2,915 feet
Vine Spacing	6x11 feet	6x10 feet	7x12 feet
Rootstock	Own-rooted	3309C	Vinifera (Gewürztraminer)
Exposure	South to east	South-facing	Slight northern exposure
Clones	Cab Franc 1	332	FPMS (Clone 1)
Irrigation or Dry-farmed	Drip irrigation, practicing deficit irrigation	Drip irrigation	Overhead irrigation; one at veraison, one post-harvest depending on season
Farming (Organic, Biodynamic, Traditional)	Traditional	Biodynamic	Organically farmed, non-certified
Production	2 tons/acre	1.5 to 2 tons/acre	1.5 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	Spur-pruned with VSP; some leaf-pulling and cluster-thinning; vines mostly self-regulated	We use VSP and thin our canopy and shoot-position to 2 buds per spur. Will drop fruit at veraison if green clusters lag behind and pull leaves on morning sun side post fruit-set	Cane-pruned with excess shoot removal in spring; pull leaves on eastern side just after veraison; trellis is two-wire California sprawl; green harvest, if necessary, to even out ripening
WINEMAKING DATA			
When to Pick	Combo of Brix, pH and TA analysis, along with seed maturity/color, taste of sample and physical appearance; prefer riper flavors so pick on later side	Pick primarily on pH and acid once sugars are above 22° Brix and any green flavors have vanished	First look for even coloring; cluster sample once dark cherry character develops; watch pH levels of soaked-out samples; wait for pH to get to 3.6 and pick below 24.5° Brix
SO₂	50 ppm at crusher; as needed during racking and topping; 35 ppm free before bottling	44 ppm once ML is complete; adjust to 15 to 20 ppm prior to bottling	20 to 35 ppm at destemmer; 40 ppm post-ML; keep free at 25 ppm
Crush Format	Hand-harvest, machine-destem and lightly crush with 50 percent individual berry breakage	Field-sort in vineyard as buckets come to 1/2-ton bins; destem with spread rollers to keep as many whole berries as possible	Sorted in field and again at destemmer
Cold-Soak	One day below 60° F	Pick at sunrise so fruit arrives 50° F to 60° F; hold off inoculating from 2 to 3 days	2 days
Yeast	BDX	D 21	Lalvin D 254
Fermentation Temperature	Peaked at 85° F	Starts in mid-60s then to low or mid-70s over 14- to 17-day fermentation	Topped out at 76° F
Fermentation Technique	Fermented in half-ton bins with three punch-downs daily	Punch-down twice daily, up to pressing down at 0° Brix; gravity only to press, holding back seeds as much as possible	Manual punch-downs twice a day until below 5° Brix then one a day until pressing
Nutrients	Yeast rehydration nutrient with yeast; DAP after lag phase; yeast food 1/3 through fermentation	Cover crop provides enough nitrogen, but in drought years Fermaid O has been helpful	2 lbs/1,000 Fermaid K added below 20° Brix
Acid Addition	pH adjusted to 3.63 and TA to .64 g/L	Usually not necessary; pre-fermentation after 1-day cold-soak if necessary	None
Malolactic	Inoculate in barrel	Inoculate once wine is pressed into barrel, just before dryness is complete	Inoculate in barrel
Racking	Pressed to tank and racked after settling; racked twice more before bottling	Three rackings total: January, June and August prior to bottling	Every six months, four times total
Oak Program	Half French and half American with 33 percent new	All French oak in a combination of new, 1-year and neutral barrels; 15 percent new	This vintage 67 percent one-year-old French oak with balance neutral oak
Barrel-aging	22 months in barrel	11 months	26 months
Filtration	0.45 micron	Sterile-filter to bottle	One pass through coarse pad (3 micron) filters
Bottle-aging	11 months	3 years	6 months

Cabernet Franc

C E N T R A L C O A S T

WINERY	Carlson Wines	Brecon Estate	Happy Canyon Vineyard
Wine	2012 Cabernet Franc	2013 Estate Cabernet Franc	2010 Piocho Reserve
Blend	80% Cabernet Franc, 20% Petit Verdot	95% Cabernet Franc, 5% Petit Verdot	70% Cabernet Franc, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 3% Malbec, 3% Petit Verdot
Winemaker	Chuck Carlson	Damian Grindley	Sean Pitts/Ken Margerum
Style Goals	I hope to have a wine that has varietal character with richness and balanced structure that showcases the Curtis Estate Vineyard.	Produce a fruit forward Cabernet Franc with plenty of varietal character. We want no pyrazines and a full mid-palate that avoids drying tannins. We want a wine that has a framework of fine French oak but one that is not dominated by it.	A wine that has both structure and balance, is smooth and plush with soft tannins, fruit-forward with spice character and verve. It exists in the sweet spot between big and rich Napa style and Old World classic style.
AVA	Santa Ynez Valley	Paso Robles, Adelaida sub-district	Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara
Vineyard	Curtis Estate Vineyard	Estate Vineyard	Piocho Ranch
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (Soil Type)	Ballard sandy loam "BbC"	Calcareous shale	Mixture of loam and clay loam with red and yellow chert and serpentine cobbles
Elevation	1,100 feet	1,300 to 1,400 feet	400 to 800 feet
Vine Spacing	8x5 feet, 1,090 vines per acre	5.5x12 feet	10x5 feet
Rootstock	101-14	Chardonnay	5BB
Exposure		South	Southwest
Clones	214	Unknown (37 years old)	332
Irrigation or Dry-farmed	Drip irrigation	Dry-farm, except in extreme drought years like 2015	Drip irrigation
Farming (Organic, Biodynamic, Traditional)	Traditional sustainable	Sustainable	Organic, sustainable
Production	5 to 5.25 tons/acre	2 tons/acre	3 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	Shoot-thinning, cluster de-congestion, open windows on south side of vines, moderate leaf-pull on north side, green-drop at 50 to 70 percent veraison	Pull leaves on north side; green-drop most years; raise wires on north side only most years	Shoot-thinning and a green-drop
WINEMAKING DATA			
When to Pick	Monitor Brix, pH, acid, taste of berries and weather	Sugars stabilize around 24° to 25° Brix; let hang until acid and flavor come into balance; skins soften, seeds become crunchy, eucalyptus flavor diminishes	Watch Brix, TA and pH, crushing a sample of grapes to watch fruit flavors and pyrazine.
SO₂	25 ppm at crusher	60 ppm post-ML	Yes
Crush Format	Destem and crush	Hand-pick, destem, sort and crush	Destem, sort then crush
Cold-Soak	Typically 3 to 4 days at 45° F to 50° F if possible	Most years one fermentation is cold-soaked	At 55° F for up to 3 days
Yeast	BDX Bordeaux Red and D-254	Wild to 3° to 5° Brix then add BM4X4	Commercial
Fermentation Temperature	75° F to 80°F	Peaks around 82° F	Unknown
Fermentation Technique	Bins punched down twice daily; open top fermentors get combo of punch-downs early and pump-overs at peak fermentation; ferment on oak segments M+ in bags	Up to three punch-downs daily at peak but may end up with just one per day as cap drops	Hand punch-downs 3 to 5 times a day during fermentation
Nutrients	DAP two times early in fermentation	SY33 yeast hulls day after yeast addition; DAP only if low YAN or stinky fermentation	N/A
Acid Addition	Add after cold-soak up to 1 g/L	None	N/A
Malolactic	Start in fermentor at 1° to 2° Brix; completes in mid-December	Pressed dirty to barrel, not inoculated, possible lees stirring	After settling for 24 hours; in barrel
Racking	Rack post-ML then once in the summer; racked and fined prior to bottling	Post-ML and at blending/bottling	Three times over 22 months
Oak Program	80 percent French with 20 percent new and 20 percent American, 2- to 4-year-old wood	French barrels with 33 percent new	All Taransaud French oak with 50 percent new
Barrel-aging	18 to 20 months	15 months	22 months
Filtration	Fined and rough pad-filtered	Bug catcher only	Unfined and unfiltered
Bottle-aging	10 to 12 months	3 to 5 months	At least one year

Cabernet Franc

N A P A V A L L E Y

WINERY	Lang & Reed Wine Co.	Clos Du Val	La Jota Vineyards
Wine	2013 "Two-Fourteen" Cabernet Franc	2013 Cabernet Franc	2012 Howell Mountain Cabernet Franc
Blend	100% Cabernet Franc	96% Cabernet Franc, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon	100% Cabernet Franc
Winemaker	John Skupny	Kristy Melton	Chris Carpenter
Style Goals	Expose delicate aromatic and flavor profiles of variety. Favor subtlety and nuance over extraction and power. Gentle hand through fermentation and seasoned oak for minimal flavor impact.	Bring out classic Cabernet Franc character of plum, black cherry and anise, elevated and enhanced by a velvety tannin structure.	Capture the pure expression of Howell Mountain with minimal intervention to maintain the natural mineral expression and mountain fruit character.
AVA	Napa Valley	Stag's Leap District	Howell Mountain
Vineyard	Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard	Estate	W.S. Keyes Vineyard and La Jota Winery Block
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (Soil Type)	Hambright rock (basaltic igneous)	Sandy loam	Keyes is white, volcanic rock and red clay
Elevation	275 to 350 feet	50 to 100 feet	1,825 feet (Keyes)
Vine Spacing	5.75x3.28 feet	7.5x5 feet	La Jota: 12x8 feet, Keyes: 6x3 feet, 5x4 feet
Rootstock	3309	3309 MIX	La Jota: St. George AXR-1, 420A, 3309, Riparia, 10114, 5C Keyes
Exposure	Southwest	Northeast to southwest	Varies
Clones	ENTAV 214	Clone 1	Varies
Irrigation or Dry-farmed	Regulated deficit irrigation	Drip irrigation	Unknown
Farming (Organic, Biodynamic, Traditional)	Sustainable	Traditional	Sustainable
Production	3.75 tons/acre	4 tons/acre	La Jota: 1.5 to 2 tons/acre, Keyes: 2 to 3 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	VSP, moderate leaf-removal; selective fruit-thinning pre- and post-veraison	Fruit-thin and leaf-pull	Organic compost, cover crops, organic controls, like ladybugs, to control pests
WINEMAKING DATA			
When to Pick	First by Brix, TA and pH, then elasticity of skin, maturity of seed and finally by taste	Phenolic testing, Brix and sensory evaluation	Row by row evaluation; taste for flavor, tannin development and "crunch" of seeds
SO₂	35 ppm at destemming then same at completion on ML	35 ppm post-ML	30 ppm after gentle and light crush
Crush Format	Ramp-sort and destem/no crushing	Sorting table and destem	Hand-sort, destem and light crush
Cold-Soak	Minimal, usually based on yeast lag time	2 days at 55° F	3 to 4 days
Yeast	Laffort RB2	Laffort FX-10	Native yeast
Fermentation Temperature	72° F to 78° F	85° F to 88° F	Peaked at 85°F
Fermentation Technique	Firehose pump-over to start followed by 5 minute/ton pump-over with sprinkler until first negative Brix reading; tub and screen pump-over if it lags or off-odors	Two pump-overs daily	Pump-overs
Nutrients	Laffort Nutristart O on occasion but minimal	Two doses of Nutristart at beginning and 1/3 of fermentation	N/A
Acid Addition	Rarely, never more than 0.5 at 1/3 fermentation	None	N/A
Malolactic	Sometimes inoculated at pressing, sometimes an act of God	Natural malolactic fermentation	Natural malolactic fermentation
Racking	Aged on lees 10 months, one racking at blending just prior to next harvest	Two rackings	Two to three times a year – five total
Oak Program	100 percent French oak in a mix of one- and two-year-old barrels	100 percent French oak, 37 percent new	100 percent French with 81 percent new
Barrel-aging	16 months	18 months	20 to 22 months
Filtration	Polish-filtration only	Cross-flow filtration	Unfined and unfiltered
Bottle-aging	12 months	8 months	12 months average

Cabernet Franc

		EL DORADO COUNTY			CENTRAL COAST		NAPA VALLEY	
A standard analysis of these wines by ETS Laboratories.		Grace Patriot Wines	Narrow Gate Vineyards	Madroña Vineyards	Carlson Wines	Brecon Estate	Lang & Reed Wine Company	Clos Du Val
		2012 Lewis Grace Cabernet Franc	2011 Estate Cab Cab Franc	2011 Signature Cabernet Franc East Block	2012 Cabernet Franc	2013 Estate Cabernet Franc	2013 'Two-Fourteen' Cabernet Franc	2013 Cabernet Franc
free sulfur dioxide	mg/L	5	2	9	11	10	12	14
molecular sulfur dioxide	mg/L	<0.10	<0.10	<0.10	0.21	0.14	0.15	0.27
total sulfur dioxide	mg/L	35	16	68	44	63	96	68
titratable acidity	g/L	6.1	5.9	5.7	6	6.2	5.4	5.8
pH		3.63	3.69	3.76	3.53	3.66	3.72	3.52
volatile acidity(acetic)	g/L	0.72	0.87	0.8	0.68	0.84	0.65	0.6
L-malic acid	g/L	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	0.11	<0.05	<0.05
glucose + fructose	g/L	0.7	0.7	<0.1	0.7	0.7	1.1	0.3
ethanol at 20° C	% vol	15.42	13.3	13.94	14.5	15.25	14.47	14.1
ethanol at 60° F	% vol	15.37	13.26	13.9	14.45	15.2	14.42	14.05
4-Ethylphenol (GC/MS)	µg/L	13	26	636	30	26	22	16
4-Ethylguaiacol (GC/MS)	µg/L	6	13	57	5	<4	4	<4
catechin	mg/L	23	11	9	21	16	13	16
tannin	mg/L	890	533	461	800	546	843	634
polymeric anthocyanins	mg/L	60	28	30	52	43	56	43
total anthocyanins	mg/L	112	60	90	137	131	202	148
catechin/tannin index		0.026	0.021	0.02	0.026	0.029	0.015	0.025
polymeric anthocyanins/ tannin index		0.067	0.053	0.065	0.065	0.079	0.066	0.068
3-isobutyl-2-methoxypyra- zine GC MS/MS	ng/L	6.9	<1.0	3.3	8.3	<1.0	<1.0	6.2
oak volatiles panel	µg/L	299	159	<100	280	636	278	168
5-methylfurfural (GC/MS)	µg/L	67	48	<20	23	84	<20	72
trans-Oak lactone (GC/MS)	µg/L	81	28	181	98	144	99	103
cis-Oak lactone (GC/MS)	µg/L	183	94	345	155	291	186	184
guaiacol (GC/MS)	µg/L	12	9	10	9	9	5	10
4-methylguaiacol (GC/MS)	µg/L	6	4	4	4	4	2	8
eugenol (GC/MS)	µg/L	29	14	37	23	34	18	20
isoeugenol (GC/MS)	µg/L	3	<1	<1	<1	1	<1	1
vanillin (GC/MS)	µg/L	210	154	282	149	288	166	202

*Happy Canyon Vineyard & La Jota Vineyards were unable to participate in this portion of the Varietal Focus.



Cabernet Franc is versatile, complex and adaptable to many different winemaking styles. As evidenced in Bordeaux's Right Bank, with wines like Cheval Blanc, Chateau Ausone and Chateau Figeac, Cabernet Franc has been shown to be a valuable primary component in great wine blends capable of nuanced complexity and longevity. In the Loire Valley, Cabernet Franc can produce lighter-bodied, less tannic wines that are ready to drink, soon after bottling, yet capable of aging for many years.

In general, Cabernet Franc can thrive where Cabernet Sauvignon has problems. Several areas too cold to ripen Cabernet Sauvignon have had good success with Cabernet Franc. Wherever it is planted, it tends to do best in limestone, volcanic and sandy soils. Keeping pyrazine character in check seems to be a unanimous goal among our winemakers although one winemaker's vegetal is another's graphite complexity. The grape also seems very adaptable to a wide variety of styles, from being picked ripe, worked for high extraction and spending a good amount of time in oak barrels, to a more delicate regimen of earlier picking, gentle handling and minimal oak.

When we first started the Varietal Focus series, we expected that the terroir of each region would stand out and that the three wines from each region would be easily distinguishable from the other regions. That turned out not to be the case. While terroir certainly had some influence, we realized that it was not shown to be the primary one with most varieties. Regional differences were often overwhelmed by stylistic winemaking choices. The exceptions were Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc. With both of those varieties, the regional differences were pronounced and easily recognizable, and Cabernet Franc was the strongest example of this phenomenon.

The Cabernet Franc wines from El Dorado County were characterized by a complex herbaceousness in addition to red and black fruit character. They exhibited bright acidity and lighter body (but were in no way thin). This character showed through in all three wines even though the Grace Patriot wine was picked at much riper sugars and the Narrow Gate was farmed biodynamically and blended with Cabernet Sauvignon.

The Central Coast covers an enormous amount of area, so the selected wines come from a wide variety of climates and soil types. Yet all three wines were well-extracted, (though not as much as the Napa Valley wines) and full of rich, ripe fruit and berry flavors, along with hints of herbaceousness. The wines were laden with lush, soft tannins, pretty unique and universal to the area.

The Napa Valley Cabernet Francs were big, intense and well-structured. In general, they were more extracted, showed heavier body and higher alcohols, and were finished with more time in oak. Though these Cabernet Francs were not as muscular as Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons, they seemed to share a similar winemaking style. Even given the similar winemaking style, the complex, subtle charms offered by Cabernet Franc shined through.

Cabernet Franc is one of those "winemaker wines." The variety is versatile, capable of making a wide variety of wines in very different styles. It is influenced by terroir in a major way. A winemaker can select a vineyard and work with it for a period of years until he/she learns the best way to draw out the characteristics desired for the wine. Done right, Cabernet Franc can be a very nice signature wine for any winemaker. For consumers willing to seek out good examples of the variety, there is a never-ending variety of charming, complex wines waiting to be discovered. Not only that, but Cabernet Franc goes really well with food.

There is one problem, though. Cabernet Franc doesn't sell. Even people who make Cabernet Franc don't make much of it. Of the nine wineries selected for this Varietal Focus, only Lang & Reed produces more than 400 cases. The wines in this Varietal Focus were unique, well-made and reflective of whence they came. The wines were interesting when sampled in these tastings, but really shined when served one at a time with a good meal. Hopefully, winemakers will continue to challenge themselves with this adaptable varietal. If they do, this writer hopes consumers will support those efforts by buying these wines and turning Cabernet Franc into the major player it deserves to become. [WBM](#)