

Cabernet Franc

Thirteen centuries of Franc cultivation

The “original” Cabernet with a very long history going back at least to the 800’s. Most likely native to the Bordeaux region, it was taken to the Loire valley in the 17th Century by Cardinal Richelieu and planted in the abbey of St-Nicholas-de-Bourgueil. Taken to Italy in the early 19th century, it spread into Eastern Europe from there, where it is still common in Slovenia. It is now widely distributed throughout the wine-growing regions of the New World, although it has only about a tenth of total acreage that Cabernet Sauvignon does worldwide. (see back page for details)

The ‘cool weather Cab’

Although similar to Cabernet Sauvignon, it both flowers and ripens slightly earlier and is more productive, and it does tolerate cooler growing conditions. For this reason it can be successful in areas such as the Finger Lakes in New York and in New Zealand. In its home terroir of Bordeaux, it will produce quality wines in the cooler soils of St. Emillion and Pomerol. In the Loire valley, one of the more northerly growing regions in France, it makes lighter, highly aromatic reds, doing especially well in Saumur, Anjou and Chinon.

Aromas forward, tannins to the rear

Typically lighter in color and less tannic than Cabernet Sauvignon, it shares many flavor characteristics, with brighter red-fruit flavors (raspberries and cherries) and an appealing leafy note in the finish. Highly aromatic, it can show notes of roses, violets, wood shavings, Asian spice, and herbs. As it finishes with a much smoother texture, it can be enjoyed at a younger age, often showing well after a very short time after bottling. It is amazingly versatile and pairs well with a wide variety of foods, complementing salmon, roast pork, pastas and Mediterranean fare.

2006 Yorkville Cellars Cabernet Franc, our Rennie Organic Vineyard

Winemaker Tasting notes

Aromatic with rich fruit flavors. Notes of mocha, herbs, jalapeno and violets on the nose. Red fruit flavors; currant and cherry with a very smooth velvet finish and a hint of lemon thyme. Serve with pork roast, turkey or pasta dishes.

Technical Specs	
Alcohol	13.4%
Total Acidity	62 gms/liter
pH	3.78
Residual Sugar	0.5%
Barrel Aged	20 months

Cabernet Sauvignon

New king on the block

‘King Cab’ is typically the top grape in the top wines of the world. Or is it? Merlot appears in far more bottles of Bordeaux, as there is nearly two and half times as much of it. Also, Cabernet Sauvignon is a newcomer to this great stage of wine. A long debated history was concluded by a paternity test of sorts; Cabernet Franc is one parent, Sauvignon Blanc the other. Considering the name, it seems likely an intentional cross was done as is first described in the late 18th Century.

The Grape that became a brand

Cabernet Sauvignon took very little time to make its mark on the world of wine. Highly favored in Bordeaux when vineyards were replanted following the devastation of the phylloxera (sap-sucking insects that feed on the roots of grapevines to the point of complete destruction), it is the main grape in Médoc, largely due to the enthusiastic promotion of Baron Hector de Brane of Ch. Mouton in the 1830’s. Given a decently warm growing season, Cabernet Sauvignon produces consistently robust and structured wines, with the ability to age gracefully. With thick skins and a late bloom, it has fewer problems with rot and a more consistent set at flowering. All this adds up to make Cabernet Sauvignon one of the most widely planted wine grapes in the world.

OK now, but how will it age?

Highly colored with lots of acidity and tannin, Cabernet Sauvignon makes a powerful wine, perhaps only lacking in aromatic complexity. Typical flavors and aromas include blackberry, blackcurrant, tobacco, olives and cedar wood when ripe, but tend to green bell pepper and herbaceous aromas when less than fully ripe. Classic food pairings include beef-based dishes, or strong cheeses.

2006 Yorkville Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon, our Rennie Organic Vineyard

Winemaker Tasting notes

Aromas of blueberry and chocolate with a hint of brown spice and toasted nut. Rich fruit flavor; blueberry/dark cherry with a milk chocolate note. Robust finish with bright fruit flavors and medium-strong tannins. Try with beef stew.

Technical Specs	
Alcohol	13.4%
Total Acidity	65 gms/liter
pH	3.56
Residual Sugar	0.5%
Barrel Aged	20 months

Merlot

Little blackbird of Pomerol

Merlot is thought to be native to the Bordeaux region, but was apparently not held in high regard for much of the time it was grown there. The earliest mention is 1784, when a local official named Faurveau recommended it for planting in the Libournais area. The name is perhaps derived from merle, French for blackbird, as the birds love the sweet, plump berries. It may be related to Cabernet Franc. Merlot found its way to Italy and Eastern Europe in the 19th century, but generally produces wines of little interest in those regions. Other significant plantings are found in California, Washington and Chile. It was of little favor in California until the 1990's; with only 2,000 acres planted in 1985. It is now the #2 red grape in California. And despite negative comments in the movie "Sideways" still sells very well.

A rather delicate workhorse

Merlot is considered a workhorse grape in California, planted heavily in the hot inland valleys, producing large crops, and making rather unremarkable wines. It is in fact a somewhat particular grape, preferring moist clay soils, not happy with very high temperatures, and prone to large crops. It must be carefully tended to produce high quality wines, and does best in areas with warm days and cool nights, which allow the grape to fully ripen to plummy richness, without losing the acidity that balances such a round wine. It is also thin skinned and an early starter, so can suffer from rain, both during flowering and at harvest time.

Voluptuous, round and perfumed... mmm

Merlot makes wines of such roundness and fruitiness that some consider them too nice to be good. Ruby red and velvet textured, with plum, cherry and blueberry fruit flavors, lower tannins, and fruitcake spice aromas, these are wines for drinking, not for "laying down and avoiding" as John Cleese once quipped. Additional aromas of gunshot, game, mint and herbs can add complexity to varietal Merlot, but traditionally small amounts of Cab add spine to Merlot's Rubenesque roundness. Very versatile in food pairing, Merlot goes with roasts, sausage, pizza, cheeses and hearty soups.

2006 Yorkville Cellars Merlot, our Rennie Organic Vineyard

Winemaker Tasting notes

Lighter bodied and very aromatic, showing aromas of cherry, spice, brown sugar, and a leafy note. Robust cherry fruit mid-palate, finishing with medium tannins.

Technical Specs	
Alcohol	13.4%
Total Acidity	60 gms/liter
pH	3.51
Residual Sugar	0.4%
Barrel Aged	19 months

Malbec

The grape of a hundred names

Pierre Galet, father of modern French ampelography (classification of grapevines), was the first to officially identify and record Malbec. According to him, the variety was once grown in as many as 30 different areas in France, with Bordeaux, Madiran, Cahors, and Loire the best known ones. The name Malbec is said to be the surname of the Hungarian peasant who spread the grape around France and beyond. It is known by hundreds of different names, including Cot, Auxerrois, and Pressac. It was first brought to Argentina from Bordeaux in 1852 by Miguel Pouget, where it became their signature grape. There it survived a vine-pull scheme in the early 1990's and bounced back to be the widest planted red grape in Argentina.

Dark Skinned Grape with a Few Faults

Malbec fell out of favor in Bordeaux after a severe 1956 freeze killed many of the vines and they were replaced by later blooming varieties, primarily Merlot. It is the susceptibility to shatter or 'coulure' that presents the greatest difficulty in Malbec production, as it blooms earlier than any other red grape of the Bordeaux. It can be an abundant producer, although some have noted its tendency to 'flip-flop', and produce small crops in alternate years. It ripens quickly, and in hot areas, care must be taken to harvest before the acidity drops too much. Late rains can cause berries to swell and split, even with the fairly sturdy skins that give Malbec such great color.

Dark color, deep fruit

Malbec can make a wine of great structure, with lots of tannins, especially the 'Black wine of Cahors'. The yields there are quite low, and the grape is grown in tough limestone hillsides. Typically wines made from Malbec have a rich fruit quality; plums, boysenberries and even pomegranate flavors. The aromas can be somewhat floral, especially a violet note, but more often have brown spice and tobacco character. Even though the cuttings in Argentina came from Bordeaux, the wines, especially from Mendoza (where it is grown at high altitude), are similar to Cahors: very dark and tannic, needing time to smooth out the big finish.

2006 Yorkville Cellars Malbec, our Rennie Organic Vineyard

Winemaker Tasting notes

Aromas of tomato chutney, nutmeg, and whipped chocolate with a hint of tobacco. Raspberry hard candy and pomegranate fruit flavors. Smooth, full mouthfeel with a nice soft finish. Try with duck or lamb that have fruity or spicy sauces.

Technical Specs	
Alcohol	13.7%
Total Acidity	71 gms/liter
pH	3.41
Residual Sugar	0.4%
Barrel Aged	19 months

Petit Verdot

The little mean greenie

Petit Verdot, roughly translates to 'little green one', a telling name for this late ripening grape. More ancient and at one time more widely planted than Cabernet Sauvignon in Bordeaux, it is now found primarily in the Médoc, especially Margaux. There, the soils produce light colored wines, even the Cabernet, so Petit Verdot's thick dark skins add color to the blend. In the 19th century some 30% of the vineyard at Chateau Margaux was planted to Petit Verdot, but now it is a rare estate that has more than 10% in the mix. The largest plantings outside of France are in Australia, where a long warm growing season favors consistent ripening of Petit Verdot. Elsewhere, in California, Washington and Chile, it rarely is seen outside of blends.

Farmers dislike the risk

Petit Verdot ripens very late, often a week or more later than Cabernet Sauvignon. In Bordeaux it is only one vintage in three that sees this grape fully ripen. On the plus side, it is a late bloomer, so suffers less from spring rains and frost. It is susceptible to shatter, and rain at flowering can dramatically affect fruit set. Add this to the scarcity of plantings and the demand for at least a small amount to deepen the character of Cabernet, and you can understand why during the last several years it has been commanding the highest average price of any grape in the Napa Valley. As difficult as it is to properly ripen, Petit Verdot plantings are on the rise, as it does add an extra layer of depth and mystery to a properly blended Bordeaux-style wine.

Mainly added to Cab

Petit Verdot is notable for two reasons: outstanding aromatic qualities, often showing violet and spice notes; and also a deep purple-black color. Often too tannic and tart on its own, a small portion in a blend can add both structure and exotic aromas and flavors. Most growers in California blend it into Cabernet Sauvignon to add color and structure. It also has a charming fruit character, often Bing cherry to blackberry fruit. It can also have a peppery or woody aromatic note, which seems to come to the forefront as the wine ages. It does have more aromatic complexity in the areas that have a long cooler growing season, so rewards rise with risk for this unique grape.

2006 Yorkville Cellars Petit Verdot, our Rennie Organic Vineyard

Winemaker Tasting notes

Typically aromatic with spice, sandlewood and a blackberry note. Good fruit mid-palate showing cherry and blackberry with a smooth rich finish And medium tannins. Complements smoked meats, roasts, and spicy cuisines.

Technical Specs	
Alcohol	13.4%
Total Acidity	66 gms/liter
pH	3.79
Residual Sugar	0.5%
Barrel Aged	20 months

Carmenère

“Chilean Merlot”

Before the 19th century's ravages of phylloxera, Carmenère was a very important grape in the Bordeaux region, especially in the Médoc. During the era of replanting, it was the odd grape out, as it did not take well to being grafted, so much of its former territory was replanted to Cabernet Sauvignon. Before that happened, vine cuttings had traveled across the ocean, as the South American vineyards were rapidly expanding in the 1850's. Fast-forward to 1994 in Chile, where ampelographer Jean Michel Bourisiquot discovered the truth: Most of Chile's Merlot vineyards were a mix of Merlot and Carmenère, and usually 60-90% Carmenère! For nearly 150 years Chilean viticulturists struggled with vineyards that had two distinct grapes interplanted, ones that often ripened three weeks apart! They had assumed that their clone, nicknamed 'Chilean Merlot', was just a difficult grape to work with. Outside of Chile, Carmenère is nearly extinct, with a mere 59 bearing acres (out of nearly 500,000 acres) in California, for example.

What little is known

Carmenère requires more heat to ripen than the other varietals planted in Bordeaux. It is still in the process of being examined using the tools of modern viticulture, but this much seems clear: It can produce outstanding grapes given eight to nine months of sun, but not too much daily heat, if it gets some rain, but not during ripening, and if the vines are well established in soils that have an even balance of clay, loam and sand. Whew! Oh, and it is particular about what rootstock it's grafted to. Other than that, no problem!

Like a brooding Merlot

Wines made from Carmenère show a depth of color, and complexity of flavor that can range from herbal to gamey and show elegance and balance. In the best conditions it is said to produce wines that resemble the blends of Bordeaux, all from a single grape. Lower acid and rounder fruit than Cabernet, more structured and exotic than Merlot, often showing hints of roses and smoky, even tarry notes.

2006 Yorkville Cellars Carmenère, our Rennie Organic Vineyard

Winemaker Tasting notes

Blueberry fruit on nose and palate, some cherry/cranberry notes mid-palate. Roses, anise, smoky, leafy note on nose. Somewhat lighter and succulent, with boysenberry fruit and moderate tannins to finish. Complements roasted meats, medium cheeses and baked pasta.

Technical Specs	
Alcohol	13.4%
Total Acidity	72 gms/liter
pH	3.57
Residual Sugar	0.6%
Barrel Aged	20 months

Comparison of Grape Acreage (Red Bordeaux Varietals)

	CAB	MER	MAL	C.F.	CARM	P.V.	TOTAL
Bordeaux	72,000	172,000	<1,000	33,590	<1,000	<1,000	277,590
Chile	94,421	31,831	N.A.	2,033	13,335	N.A.	141,620
California	74,643	48,648	1,216	3,422	59	1,544	129,532
Argentina	38,880	17,040	50,880	720	N.A.	N.A.	107,520
Australia	68,935	26,651	963	1,497	N.A.	3,426	101,472
WA State	5,959	5,853	196	1,157	N.A.	131	13,296
TOTALS	354,838	302,023	53,255	42,419	13,394	5,101	771,030
	46%	39%	7%	6%	2%	1%	

N.A. = So few acres they are reported in misc. category.

Acreage Sources:

California: Grape Acreage 2007 Crop, CA Dept of Food and Agriculture, Sacramento, CA (bearing acres)

Bordeaux: Wine Bureau 2006 Report

Washington: 2006 Vineyard Acreage Report USDA/ National Ag Statistics Service, Washington Field Office

Australian: Bureau of Statistics 1329.0 (2007 year)

Chile: SAG (2003)

Argentina: Argentinawineguide.com

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Each grown side-by-side in
the same vineyard.

