

RED WINE GOES WITH ROAST CHICKEN: HERE ARE 9 GREAT BOTTLES FROM \$10-\$39



2010 Lang & Reed Cabernet Franc "North Coast"

(Bob Chamberlin / Los Angeles Times)

Lang & Reed's 2010 Cabernet Franc has it all – a gorgeous red-violet color, beautiful texture, a taste of cherries, forest and smoke. This one, an assemblage of four vineyards from Lake County to Napa Valley, is refined and subtle, with ripe tannins and a lovely finish.

By S. Irene Virbila / Los Angeles Times

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Here's a scenario: You've got a hankering for roast chicken, either from your favorite takeout, a restaurant, or from your own oven.

Mine would be Judy Rodger's justly famous bird with bread and arugula salad from her masterful "The Zuni Cafe Cookbook: A Compendium of Recipes and Cooking Lessons from San Francisco's Beloved Restaurant."

The beautiful thing about roast chicken is that it pairs with both red and white wines. Nothing too intense and certainly no reds with massive tannins. But other than that, wine choices can cover a broad spectrum.

Here are some reds to break out for that golden-skinned chicken. (Use [Wine-Searcher](#) to find wine shops near you carrying these bottles.)

Delicious and peppery

2010 Lang & Reed North Coast Cabernet Franc (California): Lang & Reed's 2010 Cabernet Franc has it all — a gorgeous red-violet color, beautiful texture, a taste of cherries, forest and smoke. This one, an assemblage of four vineyards from Lake County to Napa Valley, is refined and subtle, with ripe tannins and a lovely finish. From \$19 to \$23. If you can't find this one, look for 2012 Le Paradis Chinon or 2011 Charles Jogue "Les Petites Roches" Chinon.

Delicate and ready to drink now

2012 McKinlay Pinot Noir Willamette Valley (Oregon): A pretty Pinot Noir from a small family winery in Oregon's Willamette Valley tasting of bright, juicy cherries and gentle spices. McKinlay's 2012 Pinot Noir is silky and balanced, ready to drink now, or to tuck away for a rainy day. Winemaker Matt Kinney

works with native yeasts and has a very light touch with oak. He also bottles unfinned and unfiltered. About \$20. If you can't find this one, look for 2012 Argyle Willamette Valley Pinot Noir.

Fresh and vivid

2011 David Sterza Valpolicella Classico Superiore Ripasso (Veneto, Italy): When Sterza inherited the family estate in 1998 he opted not to sell the grapes as his family had done for generations, but to make and bottle his own wine. Good move: Sterza is producing terrific Amarone and Valpolicella, both great values. Fresh and vivid, his Valpolicella tastes of ripe dark berries, earth and smoke. About \$20. If you can't find this one, look for 2009 Masi Campofiorin or 2009 Zenato Valpolicella Superiore Ripasso.

Elegant

2010 J. Christopher Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (Oregon): The winery founded by guitarist Jay Somers really found its focus when German winemaker Ernie Loosen (Dr. Loosen) became a partner a few years ago. Made from grapes grown in four of the Willamette Valley's AVAs -- Dundee Hills, Chehalem Mountains, Yamhill-Carlton and Eola-Amity Hills -- J. Christopher's 2010 is silky and nuanced, tasting of plums, blueberries and forest. An elegant expression of Oregon Pinot Noir. From \$27 to \$30. If you can't find this one, look for one of the winery's single-vineyard bottlings or 2011 Brooks Willamette Valley Pinot Noir.

Voluptuous

2011 Jean Foillard Morgon "Côte de Py" (Beaujolais, France): I could drink a bottle of this Morgon "Côte de Py" from Jean Foillard every week with the greatest of pleasure. It's soft and unctuous, tasting of prunes and dried cherries. A voluptuous cru Beaujolais made with painstaking care. The organically farmed vines from the famed "Côte de Py" range from 10 all the way up to 90 years of age. A very serious Gamay. From \$32 to \$39. If you can't find this one, look for 2012 Domaine Marcel Lapierre Morgon or 2012 Domaine Jean-Marc Burgaud Morgon "Côte de Py."

Beautiful balance

2012 Stolpman Vineyards La Cuadrilla Ballard Canyon red wine (Central Coast, California): A deep garnet in color, this Rhone-style wine tastes of juicy dark berries and sun-baked herbs. It has a beautiful balance, even an elegance that belies its \$20 price tag. The best thing? The profits all go to Stolpman Vineyard's vineyard crew. If you can't find this one, look for 2009 or 2010 Lerner Vineyard Samsara Grenache Santa Ynez Valley or Villa San-Juliette "Fat Monk" Pinot Noir.

Young and supple

2010 Cune Rioja Crianza (Rioja, Spain): A classic young Rioja from one of the region's historic estates. Aromatic, easy-drinking and supple, with just the right weight for a roast chicken. One of Spain's great values. About \$10. If you can't find this one, look for 2005 López de Heredia Viña Cubillo Crianza or 2008 Luis Cañas Rioja Crianza.

Inexpensive but vibrant

2008 Allegrini "Palazzo della Torre" Veronese (Veneto, Italy): Allegrini's "Palazzo della Torre" has long been a favorite of mine for its depth and complexity. The fruit is ripe and vibrant accented with sweet

spices, licorice, chocolate and tobacco. Pay attention to how this Valpolicella develops in the glass, opening up and showing new layers over an evening. About \$15.

If you can't find this one, look for 2009 Masi Campofiorin.

All around geniality

2011 Château Thivin Côte de Brouilly (Beaujolais, France): Still run by the Geoffray family, which purchased the estate at the end of the 19th century, Château Thivin has vineyards planted with mostly 50-year-old Gamay vines, one reason their wines have such character. With its bright fruit, luscious texture and all around geniality, Thivin's Côte de Brouilly goes down very easy. About \$23.

If you can't find this one, look for 2011 Georges DuBoeuf Château de Nervers Brouilly.

CABERNET FRANC WINES FROM FRANCE, NAPA AND COLUMBIA VALLEY



MINERALITY: Cabernet Franc vineyards in France's Saumur-Champigny region are planted on dense limestone deposits that are also home to prehistoric cave dwellings like those above. (Troglodyte Village / Rochemenier)

By Patrick J. Comiskey / Los Angeles Times
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Sometimes the gallery of Bordeaux varieties resembles a dynamic trio of comic-book heroes: Cabernet Sauvignon is the beefy, muscle-bound brute -- Lord of the Medoc, as well as of Napa Valley and points beyond. Merlot is rather willowy by comparison but pleasingly so, a relative lightweight that gets by on finesse, sometimes at the expense of character. Somewhere between Cabernet Sauvignon's intestinal fortitude and Merlot's all-purpose weeniness a third variety lurks, a tween called Cabernet Franc.

Cabernet Franc is the Great Insinuator. When inserted into the classic blends of Bordeaux, California and Washington State, the variety is a subtle and fascinating addition. On its own, particularly in varietal bottlings from the Loire Valley, it's a wine with oomph, but with a tender side too. In the right circumstances, few varieties on Earth are as recognizable as Cabernet Franc with its fine texture, its mid-level depth and pungent, characteristic herbaceousness.

Cabernet Franc is believed to be one of the genetic parents of Cabernet Sauvignon (the other is Sauvignon Blanc). It is grown all over the world in diminutive parcels, but aside from relatively new plantings in Italy, its most consistent and devoted expression is in the Loire and Bordeaux regions in France, with significant plantings in California and Washington.

In the Loire Valley, its reputation is centered in and around the Touraine area, and in particular the appellations of Saumur-Champigny, Bourgueil and Chinon. These villages lie among a tangle of river branches and confluences, making the geography and the soil content of each place complex and distinct, and each appellation's expression of minerality slightly different. Most of these are ancient alluvial river deposits; the great exception is Saumur-Champigny, whose vineyards rest on a deposit of limestone so dense that centuries-old troglodytic (prehistoric cave) dwellings are still in use.

In Bordeaux it is most commonly planted on the right bank of the Dordogne River in the vineyards of Pomerol, St.-Émilion and Fronsac. Blended in many right-bank wines, it's not usually the dominant player but is prized more for its middleweight contribution, its bright core of red-tinged fruit and its firm but nimble texture. Aside from Cheval Blanc, one of Bordeaux's most famous wines, you would be hard-pressed to find a single wine in which Cabernet Franc consistently represents the majority of the blend.

Bordeaux may be guilty of a fear of commitment, but that's no longer true in the U.S. In California and Washington, Franc is being planted more widely than ever, and in better places. Though the number of 100% Franc bottlings remains low, the grape is contributing to blends in ever-greater percentages.

In wines made with Cabernet Franc an herbal aromatic imprint is common. The Loire Valley has been thought of as the edge of where Cabernet Franc can successfully ripen, and that cool climate lends a distinct herbal top note. Its expression has a variety of iterations, including dill, olive, saddle leather, tobacco leaf and floral scents reminiscent of lavender and violets, as well as a vast bouquet of peppers.

In fact, the herbal marker is so unique that when it goes missing, as it does in warmer sites, the wines can seem generic and sullen. Too much and the wine can be green and weedy -- "flavors [that are] better on your plate than in your glass," says Cadence Winery's Ben Smith, who grows Cabernet Franc in Washington state.

A signature herbal note

In the Loire, those herbal notes are central to the variety's expression, almost like an antidote to the fruit bomb, but such flavors have been considered anathema in most California reds. Nevertheless, certain California winemakers strive for an herbal edge to their Cabernet Francs and blends; without it, they feel, the variety has lost something.

"The most interesting wines will have a hint of [herbaceousness] -- but not have it be distracting," says Tony Soter, who, as a consultant and with his own labels, Etude and Soter Vineyards, has grown and made Cabernet Franc primarily for blending for 20 years in California.

Winemaker John Skupny would be another Cal Franc "herbalist." As an assistant winemaker in the Napa Valley, Skupny worked with Cabernet Franc in a number of winery cellars, mostly as a blending component. Then, in 1992, an arresting barrel of 100% Cabernet Franc at Niebaum Coppola Winery alerted him to the possibility that the grape might have a future in Northern California. "We were used to putting about 5% Franc into our blends and leaving behind several barrels. I started to wonder what it would be like to make one from the ground up."

Cab-Franc winery

IN 1996, Skupny and his wife, Tracey, founded their Cab-Franc-centric winery, Lang & Reed Wine Co. Like its chosen grape variety, Lang & Reed remains an anomaly in Napa, which is Cabernet Sauvignon country. Its two principle Cab Francs -- a North Coast cuvée composed primarily of Lake County fruit,

and a Napa-based bottling they call Premier Étage -- have had a distinctly cool Loire palette of flavors (albeit the Loire in a warm year).

Lang & Reed wines in the best vintages have always retained a mildly herbal edge. "With the proper volume of fruit," Skupny says, "that herbaceous quality is an adjunct, instead of a negative."

About half a dozen years ago, Skupny began to consider making a Franc-based wine that possessed more of the attributes of St.-Émilion, in Bordeaux. "It was a slow-percolating thing," he says. "I figured I'd learned enough about the grape to take it in another direction." Their new bottling, called Right Bank, debuts this week with the 2004 vintage. A pre-release tasting reveals a wine that's much more firmly structured than his Loire-inspired wines but still lightly tannined, still fresh and still possessing a texture that points to Cab Franc's inherent tenderness.

One of Skupny's mentors in Napa was Soter, who has moved most of his winemaking efforts to Oregon, where Soter Vineyards is based. Soter retains a small vineyard called Little Creek in Napa, which is largely planted with Cabernet Franc. The 2004 Little Creek, blended with Malbec and a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon, is as supple as Lang & Reed Right Bank, and has a poise that's rare in your average Bordeaux-style red from Napa. It's a wine that plays to the Cab Franc's strengths -- a fine-tuned, red-fruited wine built on poise, not power.

Washington State might have the climate that can best steer Cabernet Franc to its sweet spot. Columbia Valley is justly praised for its Merlot, which ripens during the long hot days of a Washington summer and eases into maturity in the cooler, darker days of autumn. Cabernet Franc's growing habits fall comfortably into this vector. Two of the region's more successful stylists, Cadence's Ben Smith and Chris Camarda of Andrew Will Winery, have planted significant portions of new vineyard projects with the varietal.

"It grows amazingly well here," Chris Camarda says. "People who don't even have a golden hand grow respectable Cab Franc." Camarda has been making Bordeaux-style blends since 1994, purchasing Franc from some of the great vineyards in the state, including Champoux Vineyard in Horse Heaven Hills, and Ciel du Cheval, in Washington's hot new appellation, Red Mountain. More than a third of his new Yakima Valley vineyard Two Blondes is devoted to Franc, which composes the core of his Champoux and Ciel du Cheval Bordeaux-style blends.

When Ben Smith got the chance to plant on Red Mountain, he knew he'd plant Cabernet Franc. It now constitutes half of his young vineyard, Cara Mia. Cab Franc has always played an important role in his top wine, Bel Canto, a wine that personifies the elegance that Washington achieves in its Bordeaux-style reds.

"I'm just not a fruit bomb kind of guy," Smith says. "I prefer some savory notes." A green edge, he admits, is not for everyone, but in Washington, the grape's growth cycle naturally ripens past that point. "After that green goes away you get tobacco, some cedar, some cigar box -- that's when it really pings for me."

EXPLORING CABERNET FRANC WINES

By Patrick Comiskey / Los Angeles Times

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French Cabernet Franc comes mostly from Bordeaux and the Loire Valley. For Bordeaux Cab Franc blends, the wines from St.-Émilion and Pomerol are the best regarded. Most imported Loire reds are 100% Cabernet Franc; the wines below are just a small sample of what's available at your local retailer. The domestic wines selected here contain a significant percentage of Cab Franc in their blend, in most cases more than half, and show the herbaceous Cab Franc character.

In addition, many wineries sell 100% varietal Cab Franc in their tasting room or online wine club. (That leftover blending wine has to go somewhere!) I've tasted some delicious examples from Robert Sinskey, St. Supéry, Chateau St. Jean and Niebaum Coppola. These are Napa wines, so they don't come cheap, but they're nearly always cheaper than Cabernet Sauvignon.

2006 Domaine de la Pépière Cabernet Franc "La Pepie." Delightfully fresh and light, this entry-level Loire Valley Franc leads with aromas of violets and dried plums. Its flavors are clean and mildly smoky -- and it's mercifully light in alcohol (12%). About \$12 at K&L Wine Merchants, Hollywood, (323) 464-9463, www.klwines.com.

2004 Couly-Dutheil Chinon "Clos de l'Echo." Very dry, very firm and layered, this elegant Chinon leads with animal-leather scents and violets. It's lean and very mineral on the palate, with a dark plum and cassis tinge, and mineral finish. About \$23 at Du Vin Wine & Spirits, West Hollywood, (310) 855-1161, www.du-vin.net; and at K&L.

2005 Yannick Amirault Bourgueil "La Coudraye." All meat and black cherry at the moment, with a nervy edge to the wine that calls for food. With its scents of roasted meat, the flavors are more driven by the core of plum and spice. About \$20 at Wine Exchange in Orange, (714) 974-1454, www.winex.com; and the Wine House in West Los Angeles, (310) 479-3731, www.winehouse.com.

2005 Château du Hureau Saumur-Champigny. From producers Philippe and Georges Vatan, this deeply colored wine is all plum and pepper in the aroma, at once ripe and edgy. Its flavors -- salted plum with just a hint of olive -- show a fine depth of flavor, brought to a firm close by a brisk mineral note. About \$15 at Mission Wines, South Pasadena, (626) 403-9463, www.missionwines.com; and Wine Exchange.

2005 Château Vieux Clos St. Emilion. Soft and fruity with a fine mineral grounding, this blend of Merlot and Cab Franc, with a hint of Cabernet Sauvignon, has a plummy scent, black currant flavors and mildly cedary tannins. About \$22 at Duke of Bourbon in Canoga Park, (818) 341-1234, [dukeof](http://dukeof.com); Red Carpet Wine Merchants, Glendale, (800) 339-0609, www.redcarpetwine.com; Woodland Hills Wine Co. in Woodland Hills, (818) 222-1111, www.whwc.com; and the Wine Exchange.

2006 Lang & Reed North Coast Cabernet Franc. Youthful plum and black cherry scents lead in this wine, the herbaceousness coming through with some air. A white pepper adorns the flavors along with a note of dried herbs. Widely available for about \$20, including at Larchmont Village Wine (323) 856-8699; the Colorado Wine Co., Eagle Rock, (323) 478-1985, www.cowineco.com; and Wally's Wine & Spirits in Los Angeles, (310) 475-0606, www.wallywine.com.

2004 Soter Vineyards Napa Valley Little Creek. With Right Bank, below, this wine gets at the heart of what American Cab Franc can accomplish. Composed of 75% Franc, with the balance Malbec and a dollop of Cabernet Sauvignon, its aromas are a fine bright red cherry and currant, with just a hint of cigar box and saddle leather. On the palate it's elegant and bright, plainly in the middle spectrum, with a finely wrought texture that finishes with bracing acidity and light tannins. About \$80 at John & Pete's Fine Wines & Spirits in West Hollywood, (310) 657-3080, www.johnandpetes.com.

2004 Lang & Reed Napa Valley Right Bank Red Wine. This blend of Cabernet Franc and Merlot with a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot leads with creamy scents of plum and black cherry, showing the barest hint of herb. The texture is as smooth as polished stone, with soft fruit accents and fine-grained tannin; with excellent length and just a hint of herb on the finish. About \$80 at Manhattan Fine Wines in Manhattan Beach, (310) 374-3454, manhattanfinewines.com; and Wine House.

2005 Cadence Red Mountain (Wash.) Bel Canto. Cab Franc makes up half of this blend from Washington, with the balance Merlot and Petit Verdot. Franc, though, carries the wine with its aromas of violets and red cherry and hint of pipe tobacco with a note of cherry. Its palate is light and fresh, with notes of red cherry and herbs. It has a lightness to its texture, driven more by acids than by tannins. About \$60 at K&L Wine Merchants; and at Vendome Liquors, various locations.

2004 Andrew Will Red Mountain (Wash.) Ciel du Cheval. This blend of mostly Merlot and Cab Franc from the vineyard Ciel du Cheval in Washington leads with powerfully ripe cherry and plum aromas, but settles down in the glass; with air, scents of earth and dried flowers emerge. It's a deep red experience on the palate -- plums and cherries, informed by an earthy, vinous structure, and fine tannins. About \$55 at Manhattan Fine Wines.

SIX LUSCIOUS WINES FOR THE THANKSGIVING FEAST

By S. IRENE VIRBILA / Los Angeles Times
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Pairing wine with the Thanksgiving meal should be a question on the Master Sommelier exam. The usual feast has so many elements and so many of them are sweet and/or tart, it is notoriously difficult for wine pairings. Really, there is no one wine that will go with your Aunt Rita's sweet potato casserole, your uncle Howie's sausage and oyster stuffing and the experimental elBulli-inspired side dish your cousin Elena insists on bringing.

OK, you could just throw up your hands and serve just one wine throughout the meal, whether from a box or a magnum. You could set up a bar with a dozen bottles so guests can pick and choose. Or you can do something in between, i.e., pick one or two whites and at least one red and let the wines duke it out with the flavors on your plate. That's my usual plan.

This year I've picked out half a dozen wines I might serve with the meal.

Depending on how many people you're having for the Thanksgiving feast, better buy at least two bottles of each wine. I don't know about your family, but the members of my tribe aren't at all shy about pouring themselves more wine. Since this is not a one-hour meal but more of an all-day event, plan accordingly. And if you're really worried about the wine matches, do a test run to make sure the bottles fit the flavor profile you have in mind.

Of course, no wine shop is going to have all of these picks. That's why they invented wine-searcher.com. You simply go to the site, plug in the wine and your ZIP code and up comes the shop or shops that carry it. No luck? Not every wine shop lists their wines on the site.

The other option: Do it the old-fashioned way. Simply walk into your local wine shop and ask if they have anything along the lines of a Rhone-style white, an elegant Chardonnay with just a touch of oak, or a Mosel or Alsace Riesling. And so on.

You'll do fine.

A FRAGRANT RIESLING

2011 Robert Eymael Mönchhof Estate Riesling (Mosel, Germany).

A lovely floral Riesling from a Mosel estate that goes back to 1177 and has been owned by the same family since 1804. The 2011 Mönchhof Riesling's honeyed sweetness is balanced by a racy acidity and an earthy minerality. About \$12 to \$16.

A SPICY CABERNET FRANC

2010 Lang & Reed North Coast Cabernet Franc (Lake County and Napa Valley).

The 2010 from Lang & Reed has it all — a gorgeous red-violet color, beautiful texture, a taste of cherries, forest and smoke. An assemblage of four vineyards from Lake County to Napa Valley, this red is refined and subtle, with ripe tannins and a lovely finish. From \$19 to \$23.

A VIVACIOUS DOLCETTO

2011 Elio Grasso Dolcetto d'Alba (Piedmont, Italy).

What can I say? This Dolcetto from Elio Grasso is just so pretty and vivacious, it should do equally well with the turkey and stuffing and the myriad side dishes. Easy drinking, a wine that novices and experts will enjoy. About \$20.

A SUPPLE TINTO

2010 Venus La Universal "Dido" Montsant (Montsant, Spain).

A beautiful, supple blend of Garnacha, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot from husband-and-wife vintners Sara Pérez and René Barbier, whose families pioneered Spain's Priorat region. About \$20 to \$24.

AN EXOTIC RHONE-STYLE WHITE

2011 Tablas Creek Vineyard Esprit Blanc (Paso Robles).

Esprit Blanc is a Rhone-inspired blend of Roussanne, Grenache Blanc and Picpoul Blanc from the Perrin family of Chateau Beaucastel in Chateauneuf-du-Pape. Certified organic, this rich white wine has a scent of honeysuckle and a lovely minerality. An exotic choice with *dinde*, French for turkey. About \$32.

A FINELY HONED CHARDONNAY

2011 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay (Napa Valley).

Silky on the palate, the 2011 has aromas of pear, citrus and honeysuckle. A bright acidity and a discreet touch of oak gives the ripe fruit flavors a lift. A wine to savor. From \$40 to \$50.