

A red for right now

This new Cab—a great friend to food—is perfect for spring

BY SARA SCHNEIDER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANNABELLE BREAKEY

UNTIL JUST RECENTLY, I thought of Cabernet Franc as a sort of Tour de France supporting team member to its front cyclist, Cabernet Sauvignon. The grape was almost always hiding in a classic Bordeaux blend, added to make the king of reds look better with its beautiful aromatics—violets, fresh herbs—and fine tannin structure. But this past year, I've noticed Cab Franc coming to the table solo more often. To be honest, I wasn't sure this was entirely a good thing. When the grapes miss the mark—that is, fail to get thoroughly mature—those fresh herbs smell more like stinky green peppers.

After tasting a healthy cross section, though, I can report a happy conclusion: Cabernet Franc is becoming an exciting wine all on its own. Vintners are clearly doing the work of managing this finicky grape to ripeness in the vineyard. The best (see my picks on the next page) pop with delicate florals and resinous herbs. And they're light bodied and lively enough to take on spring's hard-to-pair, vegetable-rich foods. This is the Cab for leaving winter behind. >82

{ COOLEST CAB FRANC TRIVIA } Genetically speaking, Cabernet Franc is actually one of Cabernet Sauvignon's two parents. The other? Sauvignon Blanc—yep, a white. }



Wine in the West



Our picks

Andrew Will 2009 Cabernet Franc (Columbia Valley; \$28).

A textural wine with an intense core of cherry fruit set off by resiny herbs, eucalyptus, and spice.

Lang & Reed 2009 Cabernet Franc (North Coast; \$24).

A juicy wine full of cherries and berries underpinned with violets, foresty underbrush, and a little leather, from a label devoted to Cab Franc. The winery's 2008 "Two-Fourteen" bottle (\$40) is a velvety, complex treat, worth the extra dollars.

Titus 2009 Cabernet Franc

(Napa Valley; \$36). A dark purple, minty wine, its juicy core of plums and berries edged with fresh sage, leafy tobacco, and rose petals.

Chappellet 2008 Cabernet Franc (Napa Valley; \$65).

Sweet vanilla against savory aromatics and red earth. The power and complexity of a mountain wine show under tangy plum flavors.

Cooper-Garrod 2007 Francville Vineyard Cabernet Franc

(Santa Cruz Mountains; \$25). Violets pretty up a wet-stone character, with red plums, strawberries, and licorice ropes carrying through a long, bright finish.

PAIR IT

To set off the pine-forest aromatics, fresh herbs, and fine tannins of Cab Franc, we slather pork loin with resiny rosemary and set it on a bed of fennel. The wild card: green olives. Trust us.

Rosemary pork roast with fennel and green olives

SERVES 8 | ABOUT 1½ HOURS

3 tbsp. chopped fresh rosemary leaves

2 tbsp. minced garlic

1 boned pork loin roast (about 3 lbs.), strings removed, rinsed, and dried

Kosher salt and pepper

½ lb. thinly sliced prosciutto

2 tbsp. olive oil

3 lbs. fresh fennel, bulbs stemmed, cored, and cut into wedges, plus ½ cup chopped fronds

2 cups dry white wine

1 cup pitted green olives, halved

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Mix rosemary and garlic in a small bowl. Sprinkle one side of roast lightly with salt and pepper. Spread with half the rosemary-garlic mixture, pressing it on. Drape half the prosciutto lengthwise over loin. Holding the prosciutto on the roast, turn it over. Sprinkle with more salt and pepper, spread remaining rosemary mixture over the top, and drape with remaining prosciutto. Tie roast at 1½-in. intervals with heavy cotton string, tucking prosciutto into place.

2. Pour oil into a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Add roast and cook until prosciutto is crisp and beginning to brown on the bottom. Turn roast and cook until other side is crisp and browned, about 5 minutes total. Transfer to a plate.

3. Add fennel bulbs to frying pan and cook, stirring often, until beginning to brown, about 5 minutes. Spread in a large roasting pan. Add wine to frying pan and bring to a boil, stirring to scrape up browned bits. Pour over fennel. Set pork loin on top.

4. Bake until a thermometer inserted in the center of roast reaches 135° for medium, about 45 minutes. Transfer roast to a board and let rest in a warm place 15 minutes (temperature will rise to 140°).

5. Meanwhile, set roasting pan over 2 burners on high heat, and cook, stirring often, until liquid is almost evaporated, 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in olives and fennel fronds.

6. Cut string from roast, slice, and serve with fennel mixture.

PER SERVING 336 CAL., 33% (110 CAL.) FROM FAT; 43 G PROTEIN; 12 G FAT (2.7 G SAT.); 12 G CARBO (4.6 G FIBER); 930 MG SODIUM; 120 MG CHOL. ■

