

WINE ENTHUSIAST

M A G A Z I N E

CHAMPIONS OF UNEXPECTED GRAPES - JUNE 2017



Cabernet Franc John & Tracey Skupny Lang & Reed Wine Company

Winemaker John Skupny worked at Caymus, Clos du Val and Niebaum-Coppola (now Inglenook) before he founded Lang & Reed Wine Company in 1996 with his wife, Tracey. His focus was on Cabernet Franc in the Napa Valley, as he took inspiration from the Cab Francs of the Loire Valley and Bordeaux. They've never wavered from that vision.

"Though probably not the first, Robert Mondavi began utilizing Cabernet Franc when creating his first Reserve and Unfiltered bottlings in 1966," he says.

"It wasn't until the release of Joseph Phelps's Insignia in 1974 that the winemaking community jumped in, trying to figure out what each of the pieces of the puzzle meant. What one discovers is that Cabernet Franc brought distinct aromatics, fruit scents and flavors to its progeny, Cabernet Sauvignon, without adding to the density or tannin load, gave it lift and dimension."

But, Skupny says, most winemakers avoided Cabernet Franc because of its supposed propensity to show green bell-pepper notes.

"I believe this was a combination of lesser clones, less-than-great soil, standardized farming and a lackluster intellectual winemaking process," says Skupny. "New plantings with better clones and selections, combined with better technique, totally makes Cab Franc worthwhile in the Napa Valley."

He loves that Cabernet Franc is comfortable and expressive in a broad range of regions, from Bordeaux and the Loire to Friuli, Tuscany, Washington State, South Africa and, of course, California.

"Specific to Napa, it's an interior coastal region with dynamic diurnal and nocturnal temperature shifts, combined with hugely diverse soil types," he says. "Specific to Cabernet Franc, it likes rocky sparse soils more than dense fertile ones and can handle cooler regions than Cabernet Sauvignon."

At Lang & Reed, he takes a "less is more" approach to the variety. Skupny coaxes it to express floral violet and high-toned fruit like cherry and raspberry, complemented by accents of dried herb and slight, earthy aromas of mushroom and sous bois.

"There's still a bit of a love-hate with the variety, similar to what we find with Sauvignon Blanc," he says. "Both are ancient varieties and probably express themselves more transparently than many other grapes."

91 Lang & Reed 2013 Two-Fourteen Cabernet Franc (Napa Valley).

Named for a Loire Valley clone, this New World wine achieves an Old World sensibility with its floral invitation and bright, peppery overtones. Coiled within its thickness of tannin and dense cherry are ethereal, earthy whispers of intrigue and acidity. This is a lively, lovely wine.

abv: 14.5%

Price: \$48