

Cabernet Franc



By George Parkinson

In the modern-day wine industry, Cabernet Sauvignon is king. While Chardonnay in America is the number one consumed varietal wine, Cabernet Sauvignon holds the world record for highest-priced wine sold consistently, most sought after, best age-worthy wine on the planet. A debate may ensue after this statement; however, no other fine wine varietal can make all these claims in the modern day. Whether from one of Bordeaux's first growth châteaux or from one of the 16 American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) in California's Napa Valley, Washington State's Red Mountain AVA, Chile's Great Central Valley, Australia's Coonawarra region, or Argentina's Uco Valley, Cabernet Sauvignon leads the way.

It is this varietal's parentage I want to investigate here. That being Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc but more specifically the former has a long and storied history in fine wine production. While presently being overshadowed by its offspring, Cabernet Franc has a solid cult following and for good reason. Today much of the world's Cabernet Franc is blended into Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot, and, while one can find single varietal production of the grape as in the Loire Valley's Chinon, the wine may be harder to find from other regions.

The grape has a thinner skin than its offspring and generally produces a lighter-colored pigment in certain areas. Cabernet Franc will bud earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon and also ripen earlier. Growers located in Bordeaux planted this grape as insurance against Cabernet Sauvignon's sensitivity to cold weather at harvest when the crop might not be as good. Cabernet Franc doesn't mind the cold as much, and early ripening means a harvest before the cold rains of autumn set in.

Cabernet Franc also has a benefit in color and aroma, adding layers of flavor to Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon as a blending partner. It is in the top 20 most widely planted wine grapes worldwide and is known by as many as two dozen synonyms in more than a dozen wine-producing countries. It is believed to have originated in the Southwest of France and propagated by Cardinal Richelieu who brought cuttings to the Loire Valley.

As a single varietal wine, Cabernet Franc is wonderfully perfumed with notes of black currants, Bing cherry, and peppercorn. The color can range from red garnet to onyx depending on where it is grown. While it will thrive well in warmer regions, the vine likes granite and limestone soils and, as noted earlier, doesn't mind the cold. As a food partner, Cabernet Franc has all the same range of foods as other Bordeaux "cousins"—roasted red meats, perfumed cheeses, and rich sauces. The wine is an immediate crowd pleaser at the dinner table and a great selection for the holiday affairs we attend throughout December and January. Locally, you can find wine made from this grape all over Pennsylvania. Prices are attractive since it will not always command the hefty sums charged for a California Cabernet Sauvignon or Bordeaux wine.

This holiday season, look for some of these selections in your fine wine store. Have a Happy and Peaceful Holiday Season. Cheers!



Zuccardi Q Cabernet Franc Uco Valley \$13

Bodega Garzón Cabernet Franc Uruguay \$17

Wagner Vineyards Estate Winery NY Finger Lakes Region \$20

Domaine Charles Joguet Chinon France \$30

Stony Run Winery Lehigh Valley 2017 Reserve \$29

Alexander Valley Vineyards Estate Cabernet Franc 2016 \$18

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