

# CABERNET FRANC: A WORLD OF **VERSATILITY**

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Wine drinkers owe a big thanks to Cabernet Franc. Not only is it impressively versatile in style, it is easily transplanted to vineyards around the world. Moreover, this generously productive variety has not simply cranked out its own grapes. It has bred actively...more like a stallion than a mare. Cabernet Franc worked its mojo with Sauvignon Blanc to create Cabernet Sauvignon and with Magdeleine Noire de Charentes to produce Merlot. Separate or alone, this triumvirate of black grapes – operating solo or in collaboration – captivates the palates and imaginations of drinkers the world over.

However, Cabernet Franc is rarely heralded as a varietal wine, so the time has come to rectify this injustice.

Cabernet Franc needs some help to elevate its status. After all, this grand, red grape variety predominates in one of the world's most expensive wines, yet there's no mention of grape variety on Cheval Blanc's label.

More broadly, Old World naming conventions have not helped to publicize Cabernet Franc's true importance. On its home turf in France, the grape does not identify the wine. Its appellation of origin does. For example, in the Loire, Cabernet Franc goes by Bourgueil, Chinon, Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil or Touraine. Moreover, regional naming conventions mean Cabernet Franc could be referred to as Breton in the Loire or Bouchet on Bordeaux's Right Bank.

The Italians don't help either. "Cabernet" is often found on labels from Friuli, where Cabernet Franc is effectively indigenous on account of having been cultivated there for centuries. But if a Friulian producer merely labels a wine as "Cabernet" and ships it anywhere (even within Italy), consumers are very likely to assume that the bottle contains Cabernet Sauvignon.

Despite these oversights and indignities, Cabernet Franc is gradually emerging from the shadows, particularly in the New World. Plantings there are on the rise. While this noble variety remains primarily a team player in Bordeaux-style blends, varietally designated versions are increasingly common along with bottlings in which Cab Franc is the main component.

Perhaps the Loire's recent renaissance deserves some credit for refueling interest in the grape, but the New World's Cabernet Franc shows a distinctly different expression. In many instances, these renditions exhibit higher ripeness levels and greater fruit abundance. Still, the Old World makes generous expressions of Cabernet Franc, too. Take, for example, Le Macchiole's Paleo from Tuscany.

The USA leads the New World planted acreage by far, and pricier bottles are the norm. However, Cabernet Franc's strengths aren't going unnoticed in regions that can produce less expensive bottlings. Among other places, it is gaining traction in China, and it is also rising in unexpected outposts like Brazil.



ST. EMILION, BORDEAUX

There are good reasons for experimenting with varietal (or near-varietal) Cabernet Franc in a range of different locations. Its lighter styles from cooler climates can rival the versatility and finesse of Pinot Noir while its richer genres can mimic the breadth and depth of Cabernet Sauvignon. Unoaked, lower alcohol renditions take well to a light chill and are generally pluggable as soon as they hit the retail shelf. By contrast, weightier, barrel-aged versions can – and usually do – benefit from cellaring for several years.

#### CLASSIC CHARACTERISTICS

Cabernet Franc's tendency to produce an abundance of clusters can result in delayed or incomplete ripeness, making it prone to poor color and a lack of well developed fruit flavors. However, most New World climates are warmer than the variety's Old World homelands, greatly reducing the risk of these shortcomings as long yields are held to reasonable levels.

Classic Cabernet Franc scents include raspberry, blueberry, plum and dried twigs. Of course, these classic notes aren't always in evidence due to less-than-optimal conditions. For example, when warmth prevails in the vineyard, flavor ripeness arrives before tannin maturity. Waiting for tannin ripeness can sacrifice varietal typicity, morphing the resulting wine's flavors into stern black fruit characteristics more akin to Cabernet Sauvignon.

By contrast, when cooler climates or lesser vintages rule, Cabernet Franc's intense aromas don't always appeal. Its most undesirable trait tends to be a green bell pepper, pyrazine-driven note. This can also surface in warm-ish growing regions where vintners concerned about over-ripeness may elect to harvest a bit too early.

Fully ripe Cabernet Franc has low-key, finessed tannins. Slightly less-ripe styles, especially along with aggressively toasty new oak, can contribute scruffy tannins, even on riper styles. Examples on this end of the spectrum recall the variety's synonym, Noir Dur, or "hard black".

Hard tannins can be magnified by the variety's usually perky acidity, which resembles that of Cabernet Sauvignon. However, über-ripe versions tend to have lazy acidity more akin to Merlot.

In cooler climates, Cabernet Franc produces lively, moderate alcohol wines. However, in warmer climates, it can make chunky wines clocking-in over 14.5%. Below 13.5%, Cabernet Franc shows its unique identity. Over that threshold, it melds into expressions more reminiscent of its offspring.

TEXSOM INTERNATIONAL WINE AWARDS **WINNING CABERNET FRANC**

12	Barrister Cabernet Franc Columbia Valley Washington 2011	Bronze
18	College Cellars Cabernet Franc Clarke Vineyard Walla Walla Valley Washington 2012	Bronze
10	Cornerstone Cellars Cabernet Franc Stepping Stone Napa Valley California 2012	Gold
20	Cosentino Winery The Franc, Cabernet Franc Lodi California 2013	Bronze
14	Darioush Cabernet Franc Napa Valley California 2012	Gold
11	Domaine de la Chevalerie Galichets Bourgueil AOC France 2011	Bronze
17	Domaine de la Guilloterie Tradition Saumur-Champigny AOC France 2012	Bronze
5	Hearst Ranch Winery Lone Tree, Cabernet Franc Paso Robles California 2010	Bronze
3	Kontokosta Winery Cabernet Franc North Fork of Long Island New York 2012	Bronze
1	Macari Lifeforce, Cabernet Franc Unfiltered North Fork of Long Island New York 2013	Silver
2	Maquis Cabernet Franc Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley Chile 2011	Silver
6	Messina Hof Cabernet Franc Barrel Reserve Texas Texas 2012	Gold
21	Messina Hof Cabernet Franc Double Barrel Private Reserve Texas Texas 2013	Bronze
15	Oveja Negra Cabernet Franc-Carmenere Estate Bottled Reserva Maule Valley Chile 2013	Silver
22	Pearmund Cabernet Franc Toll Gate Vineyard Virginia, Fauquier County Virginia 2013	Bronze
23	Peter Franus Cabernet Franc Napa Valley California 2012	Bronze
16	Pollak Vineyards Cabernet Franc Estate Grown Monticello Virginia 2012	Bronze
9	Revelry Vintners Cabernet Franc Weinbau Vineyard, Block 13 Wahluke Slope Washington 2012	Silver
7	Ridgeback Wines Cabernet Franc Paarl South Africa 2012	Gold
13	Tabor Hill Cabernet Franc Lake Michigan Shore Michigan 2012	Bronze
4	The Infinite Monkey Theorem Cabernet Franc, Grand Valley Colorado 2013	Bronze
19	Three Knights Cabernet Franc Sonoma County, Knights Valley California 2011	Bronze
8	Villa San-Juliette Cabernet Franc Small Lot Reserve Paso Robles California 2012	Bronze

CHRISTY CANTERBURY'S  
**REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES**

Tired of serving the predictable Pinot Noir for the table split between fish and steak entrées? Tired of seeing too many bottles of your perfectly priced \$93 Cabernet Sauvignon on too many tables during the same service? Consider some diversity via Cabernet Franc. In addition to TIWA awards winners, these are suggestions in all sorts of styles from around the globe.

Pulenta Estate Gran XI Cabernet Franc  
Agrelo Luyán de Cuyo Mendoza Argentina 2011

Salton Cabernet Franc e Malbec Intenso  
Campana Gaucha Brazil 2014

Inniskillin Cabernet Franc Icewine  
Niagara Peninsula Ontario Canada 2013

Valdivieso Cabernet Franc Single Vineyard Sagrada Familia  
Curicó Central Valley Chile 2010

Bernard Baudry Chinon Les Grézeaux  
Chinon Loire, France 2012

Quintarelli Alzero Veneto Italy 2005

Crossroads Cabernet Franc Winemakers Collection  
Hawke's Bay New Zealand 2012





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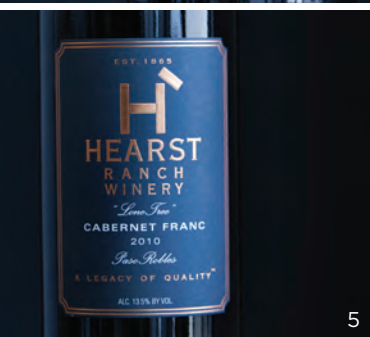
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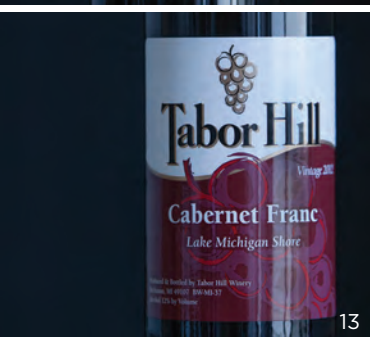
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## GEEKY POINTS ABOUT GROWING CABERNET FRANC

Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon bear many resemblances to their parent, Cabernet Franc. Here's a run-down on some family traits.

Between Cabernets Franc and Sauvignon, the physical differences are quite clear, especially in their clusters. Franc's are smaller and more compact due to heavier berry set. Also, Franc's leaves are less dramatically indented than Sauvignon's.

Cabernet Franc buds early like Merlot. Earlier budding means it may suffer poor fruit set. However, this can actually be a positive trait, helping to thin-out the variety's naturally generous crop, which in turn helps the vine ripen the fruit fully.

Cabernet Franc grape skins are sturdier than Merlot's but thinner than Cabernet Sauvignon's. This gives the variety greater durability than Merlot during a rainy harvest.

Franc ripens between Merlot and the later budding and maturing Sauvignon. This allows winemakers to count on it as "insurance" in case cool temperatures don't permit Cabernet Sauvignon to fully ripen.

During the growing season, Cabernet Franc is finicky. It needs just enough water and sun, yet not too much. Otherwise, its tart, malic acid remains high while its sugar, color and tannin remain underdeveloped.

In the off-season, Cabernet Franc has a hardier immune system. It is more freeze resistant than both Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. New York State Agricultural Experiment Station research shows Cabernet Franc can resist temperatures as low as -16° F., whereas Cabernet Sauvignon gives up at -10 F°.

Wherever it grows, Cabernet Franc prefers moderately fast-draining sand or limestone soils. Cabernet Sauvignon works best in poorer gravel-laden soils while Merlot performs better in colder, wetter clay.