

THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

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# THE SOMM JOURNAL



*At the Dominus Estate in Yountville, French proprietor Christian Moueix stands in the open-air area overlooking the historic Napanook Vineyard.*

## THE *French* CONNECTION

PHOTO: ALEXANDER RUBIN



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{ cellar view }

# Cabernet Franc

## *in the Spotlight*

story and photos by Karen Moneymaker



Marilyn Snee, Sommelier at *Upstairs 2*, Los Angeles; Alexandra Fondren, Account Supervisor/Director of Media Strategy at Charles Communications Associates; Anthony Dias Blue, Editor-in-Chief of *The Somm Journal*; Pam Starr, Owner/Winemaker at Crocker & Starr; Karen Moneymaker, Senior Editor at *The Somm Journal*.

WHAT IS NOW KNOWN AS THE CROCKER ESTATE has been growing wine grapes in Napa Valley since 1870. Charlie Crocker, of the pioneering San Francisco family, bought the run-down vineyard and its historic winery in 1971. He undertook a refurbishment program to bring the property back to life. After selling fruit to others for years, Charlie partnered with Pam Starr, a talented winemaker who had made the wine at Spottswoode for the previous six years, and established Crocker & Starr in 1997. This year a brand new, state-of-the-art winery was completed on the property.

The Estate Vineyard comprises 85 acres planted to all five red Bordeaux varieties as well as Sauvignon Blanc. One of the best products of this meticulously tended vineyard, located in St. Helena, is Cabernet Franc, harvested from 20-year-old vines. Early on, Pam decided to give this exceptional fruit its own bottling.

On November 9, members of our Los Angeles panel of tasters sat down with Pam Starr in Pacific Palisades, California, and tasted through ten vintages of this remarkable Cabernet Franc. What follows are the results of this amazing vertical tasting.





### CROCKER & STARR 1998 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Lovely floral and spice nose; leather and earth; spice and toast; juicy and smooth with lovely complexity and bright acidity.

**Marilyn Snee:** Earthy, spicy and old school! Layered with dark fruit, cedar and silky tobacco, with integrated tannins and great acidity.

**Alexandra Fondren:** Deep garnet with a spicy, tertiary nose that still has plenty of generous red and blue fruit. Medium-bodied on the palate, with good iron tones, deep florals and a rounded finish of earth and tobacco.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Tart cranberry and plum drive the palate on this elegant and well-balanced wine. Well-integrated with fine, tealeaf tannins.

Group rating: **96**

### CROCKER & STARR 2001 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Earthy and floral with ripe fruit and a touch of spice. Smooth, dense and rich with a long and elegant finish.

**Marilyn Snee:** Big, rich and ripe, with an elegant long finish. Tannins still a little tight.

**Alexandra Fondren:** Really masculine and sophisticated, with tightly wound berry, pepper and chewy tannins.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Fresh blackberry, dense red and purple fruit, with dusty and structured tannins. The oak is more pronounced on this than the '98.

Group rating: **94**

### CROCKER & STARR 2003 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Lush and rich, layered with aromas of violets, berries and vanilla. Elegant, flavorful, with a lush and juicy mouthfeel.

**Marilyn Snee:** Big, brooding and right with a spicy and candied nose. Round, sexy and juicy!

**Alexandra Fondren:** Lots of cherry and violet on the nose, with a load of delicious chocolate, blueberry and raspberry on the palate. Very well balanced and lithe.

**Karen Moneymaker:** This wine tips into the realm of fleshy, ripe purple fruit. Not as structured or as focused as the previous two wines. Very giving, layered, complex, juicy and savory.

Group rating: **96**

### CROCKER & STARR 2005 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Toasted vanilla nose leads away to a juicy huckleberry palate. Spicy, rich and ripe, with cinnamon and toast.

**Marilyn Snee:** Bright ripe fruit, plum, tobacco and black cherry on the nose and palate. Juicy mouthfeel, with a spicy, silky finish.

**Alexandra Fondren:** Smokey creosote, blue fruit, with violet and lavender. Round sexy palate with serious tannins that hold for a long finish. Dark chocolate dust with a lifted fruit core.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Floral (violets and lilac) and perfumed. Beautifully structured, saucy and brooding.

Group rating: **97**

### CROCKER & STARR 2006 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Feminine and luscious; seamless, generous, graceful and gorgeous.

**Marilyn Snee:** Nose bursts with rich cherry cola, sweet fruit and purple flowers. Long finish, great acidity with a round finish.

**Alexandra Fondren:** So much generous fruit leaps from the glass! Red and blue fruits dusted with brown spice and lifted with a brilliant acidity and rounded tannins.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Sweet red fruit, ladylike and refined with a nose of spice cake and lilies. Brambly and rich with a long round finish.

Group rating: **98**

### CROCKER & STARR 2008 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Deep color, rich and chewy; super smooth with structure that is light on its feet.

**Marilyn Snee:** Really deep, dense fruits; leather, graphite, eucalyptus and a slight bit of vanilla.

**Alexandra Fondren:** Dense ruby color belies a very lithe floral nose. Oolong tea aromas from stems, chewy tannins, but still young.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Fleshy, minty, and chewy with worn leather and just a touch of green. Graphite and green herbs on the palate with a finish that brings to mind Earl Grey tea.

Group rating: **93**

### CROCKER & STARR 2009 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Generous fruit, spice and tobacco. Deep and dense mocha with a smooth and elegant finish.

**Marilyn Snee:** Full-bodied, spicy with an elegant, long finish. Sweet fruit with beautiful structure.

**Alexandra Fondren:** Fresh red berry aromas with hints of blueberries. Violet, mocha and cola spice.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Dark plum and lavender; dense tannins and bright acidity. This wine is stylish, velvety and exotic.

Group rating: **96**

### CROCKER & STARR 2011 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Black raspberry, floral and earthy on the nose. Generous and ripe on the palate, bursting with warm berry compote and baking spice.

**Marilyn Snee:** Warm chipotle pepper on the palate; ripe fruit is well integrated with the tannins, with a floral, long beautiful finish.

**Alexandra Fondren:** Lovely, elegant and so feminine. Classic Cabernet Franc. Seamless and almost hauntingly restrained. Beautifully earthy on the finish, with sophisticated tannins, chipotle pepper and briny minerality on the finish.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Boysenberry and seared meat dominate the nose, followed by red earth, crushed black peppercorn and bright acidity on the palate.

Group rating: **97**

### CROCKER & STARR 2012 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Youthful and generous with ripe red fruit and cocoa. Finishes strong with dense layers of red and purple fruit.

**Marilyn Snee:** Big, juicy and opulent; cedar and eucalyptus with a sexy, long finish.

**Alexandra Fondren:** Fresh, red fruit core leading out to cassia spice and a vibrant, floral finish.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Plum skin, cranberry and cinnamon stick on the nose. Palate is layered with cocoa, tobacco and dense red fruit. Powerful and spicy finish.

Group rating: **96**

### CROCKER & STARR 2013 CABERNET FRANC, NAPA VALLEY

**Anthony Dias Blue:** Ripe berries (raspberry, blackberry and blueberry), layered with chocolate and hints of tobacco. Velvety, generous and luscious.

**Marilyn Snee:** Floral notes hit you right on the nose, followed by Mexican spices. Rich and dense finish.

**Alexandra Fondren:** Violet, lavender, red and blue fruits interspersed with ancho chile spice. Expansive fruit-driven mid-palate with fine tannins and a balanced, long finish.

**Karen Moneymaker:** Bursting with purple fruit and flowers (huckleberry, lavender and purple iris), followed by sandalwood, bitter-sweet chocolate and mole spices. Long and lingering, with a finish that goes for days.

Group rating: **97** SJ