

## The other Cabernet

Jon Bonne, Chronicle Wine Editor

Sunday, March 29, 2009

"The profile of a Cab Franc drinker? They usually have a great cellar," says Pam Starr, who makes a smoky, ripe Franc under her Crocker & Starr label. (She's a Joguet fan.) "They get it that life is full of diversity. They can't have the plain box of Crayola crayons. They have to have the mega-box of colors."

## From the notebook

2006 Crocker & Starr St. Helena Napa Valley Cabernet Franc. No green meanies here. A hulking, extracted profile, with gobs of flavor - smoke, coffee, tangy raspberry atop black-fruit undertones, with a slightly aggressive kick at the finish. Plenty of sultry appeal (Starr calls the style "powerful, sexy, sappy") though its Franc roots aren't immediately apparent.



Craig Lee / The Chronicle

Crocker & Starr winemaker makes a smoky Cabernet Franc from grapes grown in a Napa Valley Vineyard.



## Young women winemakers rise to top of Napa Valley

By Mary Milliken

June 12, 2008

Behind that \$150 bottle of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, wine drinkers may be surprised to find a young woman. In the most prestigious and expensive wine region in the United States, winery proprietors are turning their prized grapes and reputations to a new generation of women winemakers hovering around 30 years of age.

Take Sally Johnson, 33, winemaker for Pride Mountain Vineyards. She says many of the women who graduated with her from the famous Viticulture and Enology Department at the University of California at Davis are accomplished winemakers today. "It is a great time for women in this industry because there are no barriers to being successful," Johnson said as she poured Pride Cabernet Sauvignon during Napa Valley's annual wine auction this month.

"The women who came before us really blazed the trail. Now nobody thinks that we won't hop in the tank, or shovel out the grapes or do the cellar work. We've been able to be as successful as the guys."

One of the trail blazing women is **Pam Starr**, who at 47 is winemaker and co-proprietor at **Crocker & Starr** after years as consulting for several top wineries in the region.

"This new generation of women winemakers is rising to the top," said **Starr**, who said there are around 25 notable young women to watch in Napa Valley winemaking.

**Starr** said the young women get the best of both worlds: the breakthroughs of the women winemakers who emerged in the 1980s and the new winemaking technologies.

"I am enthused that these ladies are questioning my techniques and making them better," added **Starr**.

**Starr** believes one of the great advantages of the up-and-coming women winemakers is that they understand the business of wine and can talk about it. That gives them more credibility in the world of wine.

Canadian businessman and Napa vineyard owner Cliff Lede has put his wine production of 15,000 cases in the hands of Michelle Edwards, who, like Johnson, is in her early thirties, studied at UC Davis. She discovered wine while traveling in Europe. "She is incredibly hard-working and makes great wine," said Lede. "That's why I hired her."

There are some in the wine world who believe that women have better palates than men. But the young women winemakers prefer to make no gender distinction. "There is some research that suggests that women have very sensitive palates, but I have met men with incredible palates too," said Johnson.

## FROM THE GRAPES TO THE BARREL, THESE WINEMAKERS SET THE PACE

### **Starr Shines With Bordeaux**

by Kim Severson  
November 1, 2000

There was little doubt Pam Starr would end up doing something that involved taste and smell.

As a child, she assembled a taste panel to judge the spices in her mother's kitchen cabinet. During her years at the University of California at Davis, she worked as a flavor technician for a spice company.

But it took a few more years before she would connect a winemaking career with her fascination with flavor profiles. In fact, most of the wine she tasted in college was the sort of mediocre stuff affordable on a college student's budget. Starr, who was headed to dental school, knew there had to be more to wine than that and took a summer job at Sonoma-Cutrer.

"I finally tasted wines that excited me," she says. Even though her job was turning and stacking barrels, she was hooked. Starr dropped her dental school plans and concentrated on wine.

Much of her early experience in the wine industry involved "slumming in the cellars," which gave her the experience she needed to run her own winery. Some additional schooling and a series of jobs, notably a long stint with what would eventually become the Chalone group and winemaker for Spottswoode, cemented her expertise.

Now Starr is partners with San Francisco businessman and St. Helena grape-grower Charles Crocker and makes wine under the Crocker & Starr label. She also is consulting winemaker for Adastra and makes estate Cabernet Sauvignon for Brunno Ristow under the label that bears his name.

Starr is known for her attention to site-specific wines and her exciting Bordeaux-style blends. Her passion is for terroir -- she wants drinkers to taste the earth and the sun in a wine and connect it to a particular place.

"When you do get it right, it's very exciting," she says.

*Wine she would serve to an important guest: The 1997 and the soon-to-be-released 1998 Stone Place Cuvee.*

# Wine Spectator

## **New Wines, New Faces: From Baking Spices to Cabernet Franc** **The new Crocker & Starr label gives Napa winemaker Pam Starr a chance to play with Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc.**

*By Daniel Sogg*

May 24, 2002

Talk about precocious. Even at the age of 11, Napa-vintner-to-be Pam Starr was already holding blind tastings. Not of wine, of course, but of baking ingredients. She and her friends would mix chocolate, brown sugar and spices with water, then try to guess the blend.

Some might consider that no more than a childhood diversion. But it definitely demonstrated an aptitude for focusing on flavors, a talent that serves her well as the winemaker and co-owner of Crocker & Starr Wines in Napa, a project she began in 1997 with San Francisco—based electronics executive Charlie Crocker. The partners have three current bottlings: a 1999 Cabernet Franc, a 1999 Bordeaux blend called Stone Place Cuvée and a 2001 Sauvignon Blanc. All of their grapes (except for half of the Sauvignon Blanc) come from Crocker's 50-acre vineyard in southern St. Helena, east of Highway 29. Crocker, 63, whose family started San Francisco's Crocker Bank, bought the land in 1972, at which time it had just a 2-acre vineyard, the remnants of a ghost winery that was founded in the 1880s but didn't survive Prohibition.

Before Starr, 41, met Crocker, she didn't think her own label was in the cards. Although she had 12 years of California winemaking experience, including stints at Sonoma-Cutrer, Carmenet Winery in Sonoma Valley and Spottswoode Vineyard in St. Helena, the financials looked too daunting. But a friend of a Spottswoode colleague convinced her to check out Crocker's land. "In the early '90s, Cabernet Franc had really set my hair on fire," said Starr. "And then I saw [Charlie's] beautiful plot of Cab Franc waiting for me to pluck."

The two have made ideal partners. Crocker wanted nothing to do with tending the vines, making the wines or running the business. And Starr, who concentrated on replanting the vineyard while working at Spottswoode from 1991 through 1996, actually welcomed the fact that much of the site was rather dilapidated. "The conditions gave me an opportunity to design from the ground up," said Starr, who makes the wines at a custom-crush facility in St. Helena. "The vineyard was in need of replanting and retrellising, but walking around I saw very good soils."

The variety of soil types -- heavier clay and loam in the eastern plots toward the Napa River, and more pebbles and gravel further west -- led her to replant with five different rootstocks intended to get the most from the site. Those rootstocks were matched with eight vine clones, five of Cabernet Sauvignon, two of Cabernet Franc and one of Sauvignon Blanc. Cabernet Franc may have been the hook, but Starr also sees great potential in their Sauvignon Blanc, made with a blend of estate fruit and grapes purchased from the Hyde Vineyard in southern Napa. The 2001 (89 points, \$20, 400 cases) has impressive depth and concentration to its intense citrus, melon and grass flavors.

Only 20 of Crocker's 50 acres currently supply the Crocker & Starr label, but another 13 acres should be online next year. By 2008, Starr expects to make about 4,500 cases, including 2,000 cases of the Stone Place Cuvée, named after the old winery on the property that Crocker now uses as a weekend home. Starr calls the Stone Place Cuvée their "best of vineyard, best of vintage blend," and the supple, intense 1999 (89, \$48, 636 cases) is already drinking well. But it's Cabernet Franc that really seems to inspire her. The 1999 is already sold out, but past vintages, such as the supple, floral 1997 (89 points), demonstrate her knack with the variety. She likens the flavor to very ripe blueberries, and believes that the combination of silkiness and intensity supplies both great early drinking and a capacity to age.

For Starr, that's the best of both worlds. She said, "Cab Franc puts the lace on Cabernet Sauvignon."

# Napa Valley *Register*

## **Starr shines in Napa Valley**

By JACK HEEGER  
November 23, 2006

About this time last year Pam Starr received a telephone call from a staff member at Wine Spectator who asked if she wanted some extra copies of the new edition of the magazine. "I didn't understand it," she said. "It didn't register with me."

Then she received a call from one of her distributors in the east who told her that her 2004 Crocker & Starr sauvignon blanc had just been named the No. 12 wine in the world on Wine Spectator's annual top 100 list.

"I never dreamed I'd be on a list like that," Starr said. "Sauvignon blancs from Napa Valley had never been celebrated as top wines, but Jim Laube (Wine Spectator's West Coast senior editor) liked it.

"Do I believe that mine was the 12th best in the world? I think I've got a lot of work to do to get to 12th place, but thank you," she said.

She can't forget the honor, either. A friend gave her a giant poster featuring the page listing the top 100 wines, with the Crocker & Starr name highlighted, and it hangs on a wall in her home.

### **No fluke**

But those who know Starr don't think being on that list was a fluke.

For the past 10 years she has made wines for Adastra, a small vintner in Carneros. "She makes no compromises," said owner Chris Thorpe. "Our objective is to make the best wines we can, and she fits right into that."

Co-owner Edwin Richards added, "She's always willing to do what it takes. She's not chasing (rating) points but is interested in making wines that express the sense of place — true to what the wine should taste like."

Paul Frank of Gemstone, one of Starr's former consulting clients, said, "She's not only qualified as a winemaker but she has a great sense of style. She doesn't make a recipe wine. Pam's equally at home in the vineyard as in the winery, and on top of that, she's a super nice person."

Her Crocker & Starr wines are consistently highly rated — the sauvignon blanc that ranked 12th received 94 points from Wine Spectator and her two previous vintages also scored in the 90s.

Like many in the wine industry, Starr didn't start out with a wine career in mind. She grew up in Rainier, a logging town in Oregon, where her father, an orthopedic surgeon, had bought a small practice to support his large family. "I was number two in a gaggle of four girls," she said. They moved to Missouri where they lived for three years, then to Palos Verdes Estates in Southern California.

"I was always an independent spirit," she said, "so when it came to college, I went to UC Davis. It was eight hours away from Southern California." She was interested in science and planned to go on to dental school.

### **The Peterson sisters**

At Davis Starr met Heidi Peterson (now Barrett) and Holly Peterson (now Mondavi) and they interested her in some of the science options available. She chose fermentation science. She also took a job with a spice company — "I tell people I'm one of the original Spice Girls," she said — and credits that with helping her develop her palate.

An internship at Sonoma Cutrer Vineyards in Sonoma County changed her mind about dentistry as a career, and Starr went to work in the cellar at Edna Valley Vineyards in San Luis Obispo County, rolling and stacking barrels and handling other cellar duties. There she met some folks from Carmenet Winery in Sonoma and they convinced her to join them.

She spent six years there, working in every position involved with making wine, from working in the lab to her final title of assistant winemaker, "but titles didn't mean anything there," she said. "We had a guy who had a Ph.D. who was rolling barrels." She had an opportunity to conduct "hundreds of experiments," and honed her winemaking skills.

She came to Napa Valley in 1991 to join Spottswoode Estate where she worked with Tony Soter and David Abreu and helped to plant portions of the vineyard. Her experience at Spottswoode gave her an appreciation for the winery's customers. "They had such a love for Spottswoode — it was like being a part of the family and it was like I was working for them," she said. She has maintained that appreciation for customers throughout her career.

The Spottswoode estate had no sauvignon blanc, so she started looking around for a source. One of the vineyard workers at Spottswoode had a friend who worked in the vineyard at the Crocker estate in St. Helena, and he nagged Starr to come to the Crocker vineyard and look at the sauvignon blanc grapes there.

"He pestered me so much that I finally went to look and found that it was the same vineyard where I got the grapes for my homemade wine," Starr said. She and a friend had made some gewürztraminer wine one year, but it was a one-time event. "As a professional winemaker it's hard to make your own (homemade) wine during harvest."

### **When she looked at the Crocker property, she felt that it had potential.**

"I received a call from Charlie Crocker," she said. "He thought I wanted to buy the property, but something got lost in the translation from Spanish to English. Then he told me he was interested in seeing estate wine come out of the place, and told me of some of the history."

### **The Crocker estate**

The estate is more than 100 years old, it's the site of an old abandoned winery, and much of the original stone walls remain. It covers 60 acres, 10 of which are taken up by the old winery named Stone Place, a Victorian home and a chapel, along with one of the few commercial walnut orchards remaining in Napa Valley, plus numerous varieties of fruit trees. The remaining 50 acres are all planted to cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon and merlot, and some malbec and petite verdot have recently been planted.

About half the grapes are now used for the estate wines; the remainder are sold, but Starr said that as re-planting continues, the new grapes will be used for estate wines. In 1997 Starr decided to join with Crocker, who is a descendant of the Crocker family, one of the "Big Four in San Francisco," and heads a venture capital firm. He

provided the grapes and whatever was needed in the vineyard, and she handled all the other duties, including winemaking and marketing.

The first year they produced 200 cases of Stone Place, a red blend, and 100 cases of cabernet franc. Current production of Crocker & Starr totals 2,400 cases, about half of which is sauvignon blanc. It's the only wine that is not 100 percent estate; about half the grapes are sourced from Larry Hyde's vineyard at Trancas and Silverado Trail.

### **'Only the translator'**

Starr spends a considerable amount of time in the vineyard and is quick to acknowledge its role in the wine. "I'm only the translator," she said. "We're sustainably farmed, but the cab franc is organic," she said, adding that it's not certified.

She has experience with certified organic vineyards, though. Adastra, which is certified organic, produces about 500 cases each of chardonnay and merlot and 200 cases of pinot noir.

Starr came to Adastra through an introduction by Tony Soter, whom she knew at Spottswoode. When they met her, Thorpe and Richards said she was a natural, not only because of her winemaking abilities, but because of her name — Adastra means "to the stars."

As if she doesn't have enough to do, she has joined with winemaker Drew Nieman to create a red wine blend called "Bridesmaid." "It's really a negociant label," she said, explaining that it's a combination of several wines picked up from several different wineries after their blends are complete. The label features a woman without a head — "You can't tell what's in it," Starr whimsically said. "It's sexy and available, but still the bridesmaid. She'll never wear the white dress."

Starr is fiercely loyal to her clients. A small vintner once was told by his winemaker on the day before harvest was to begin that he had too much work and would be unable to handle the crush. Starr, who had served the vintner as consulting winemaker, had a full plate, too but said she would take care of it. She did, from start to finish.

### **Passion for winemaking**

In conversations, her passion for making wine is evident.

"For me, the inspiration lies in the constant change during fermentation and the slow change in the barrel. I'm very strict about what I want to put into the bottle," she said.

She is one of a growing number of female winemakers in Napa Valley, but one of a smaller number of winemakers/owners. She offers this advice to women who want to get into the business:

"Don't be just a winemaker. Become a winery owner, too. Find a wine you love, understand it, and grow it (the business) from there."

Where does Starr go from here?

"There's so much more that I want to do," she said. "My middle name is 'Joy,' but it should be 'More.' More time. More wine. More character (in the wine). And more friends."

That shouldn't be difficult for her.

# Wine Spectator



## A Rising Tide

California Sauvignon Blanc continues its turnaround By Daniel Sogg

As recently as five years ago, California Sauvignon Blanc looked as if it were going nowhere, floundering in a flood of dull, uninteresting wines. But what a difference a few years can make. The batch of current releases, mostly from the excellent 2004 and 2003 vintages, attests to the revival of this distinctive varietal. To top it off, prices remain some of California's most attractive, and many of the top-scoring wines and best values are relatively easy to find.

AUG. 31, 2005 • WINE SPECTATOR 49

### Recommended Sauvignon Blancs From California

**CROCKER & STARR** Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley 2004  
Intense fig, yellow apple and hay flavors give this a rich mouthfeel and impeccable balance.

94

# Robb Report

FOR THE LUXURY LIFESTYLE™

## **Best Of The Best 2006: Something Old, Something New**

By Brett Anderson

June 1, 2006

Crocker & Starr came about when innovative winemaker Pam Starr was hired as a consultant to replant the Crocker Vineyard, a site in St. Helena, Calif., that has been planted to vines since the late 19th century. The partnership produces a full range of varietals, including its proprietary red wine, Stone Place Cuvée, a Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blend that is named for the winery where it is made. The partnership's Crocker & Starr Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley 2004 is a fresh, joyous white that pours forth from the bottle like a summer celebration. Made from separate lots of Sauvignon Blanc from the Hyde Las Trancas and Crocker vineyards, this fun 2004 dances with tropical scents, while rich, mellow honeydew, exotic blossoms, and jubilant acids swathe the palate.



{ DESSERT }

**COLOR ME YUMMY** The rainbow cake is totally making a comeback. Customize yours by selecting hues that mesh with your decorative scheme; \$8 per slice, ninecakes.com. Plate, \$78, Haviland Limoges; 800-993-2580.



{ FAVOR }

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{ WINE }

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*October* stokes the flames with spicy vintages, fiery party palettes, and homespun treats galore.

{ 1 COLOR, 4 WAYS }

**red hots** The color of confidence, this strong shade makes an impact no matter what it's paired with.

**western fab**



**« TURQUOISE // RED**  
Best enjoyed in the light of day, this cheerful twosome lends a southwestern feel to any party—so pass the shrimp tamales!

**mod 'n' formal**

**BLACK // RED »**  
The perfect marriage of avant-garde and after-six, this duo works well with trendy touches (Lucite chairs!) and a swank setting.



**ultra-opulent**



**« GOLD // RED**  
Black tie is not optional when you choose this very Versailles palette, which belongs in a gilded ballroom that sparkles with chandeliers.

**cocktail chic**

**PLUM // RED »**  
Informal enough for an afternoon affair, this gem-toned pair exudes romance and is ideal for vows in the woods or wine country.



{ PEN }



This **GUEST-BOOK PEN** looks both mod and antique—and comes in a range of cool hues to boot. Calligraphy pen and inkwell, \$30, Campo Marzio Design; [katespaperie.com](http://katespaperie.com).

# Wine

## A Sip of "Starr" Quality with Crocker & Starr Wines



Delicious Crocker & Starr wines!

Crocker & Starr Wines  
700 Dowdell Lane  
St. Helena, CA 94574  
(707)967-9111  
[www.crockerstarr.com](http://www.crockerstarr.com)

While the beautiful and bright fruit, exotic spices and lush flavors are evident when enjoying Crocker & Starr wines—it's the intrigue of a stunning collaboration between an extraordinary winemaker and legendary family estate in the Napa Valley that enhances the wine with every sip.

In 1997, Winemaker Pam Starr founded a partnership with Charlie Crocker, with the goal of crafting a small production of exquisite wines on his family's historic estate and vineyards, which spans more than 100 acres of the gorgeous St. Helena Appellation. This unique collaboration marked the significant resurrection of an 1870s winery in the small town of St. Helena.

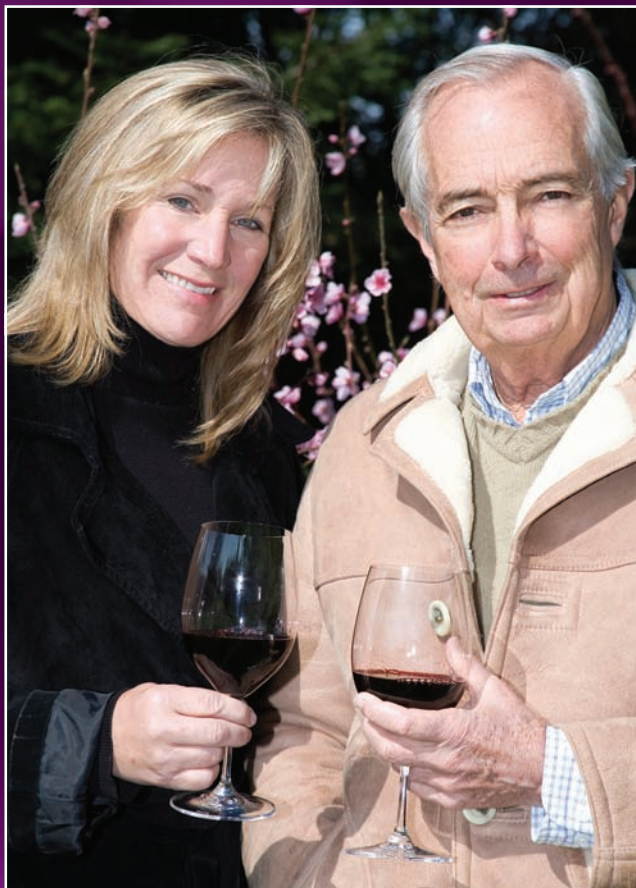
Honing her craft for more than 26 years at the likes of Carmener, Spottswoode, Gemstone, Adastra and Garric Cellars, Pam follows organic and sustainable farming practices and strives to translate the soil, land and grapes from the Crocker Estate into a glass. No winemaking voodoo—just a pure expression of the grape!

The winery continually strives to set the bar high for St. Helena Appellation Cabernets, as would a First Growth Bordeaux Chateau. With that said, they craft three ultra premium wines in very limited amounts: Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon.

For collectors who keep track of wine scores, 2007 will be a year to remember. Crocker & Starr has been a leader in very limited productions of world class Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon. These two wines represent the best of Crocker & Starr and are available directly through the winery or through their website at [www.crockerstarr.com](http://www.crockerstarr.com).

Now in its fifteenth year, Crocker & Starr's commitment to sustainable and organic farming techniques, coupled with cutting-edge winemaking tools guided by expert hands, have combined the best of both "old world" philosophy and "new world" fruit. The winery's very limited production of wine is delicious straight out of the bottle, with the ability to cellar for over 15 years.

And for the latest news and information on the winery, be sure to become a fan of Crocker & Starr Winery on Facebook!



Pam Starr and Charlie Crocker enjoying their very own wine.



*The Independent Consumer's Guide to Fine Wines*

**2006 Crocker And Starr Cabernet Franc**

Rating: 91  
Drink: 2008-2018

Pam Starr always does a terrific job with Cabernet Franc, and her 2006, from a St. Helena Vineyard, reveals an exceptionally fragrant perfume of subtle mint intermixed with red and black currants, raspberries, and new saddle leather. With sweet tannins, admirable ripeness, and excellent fruit as well as purity, it can be enjoyed over the next 7-10 years.

Tel. (707) 967-9111; Fax (707) 967-9611...

- Robert Parker (December, 2008)

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*The Independent Consumer's Guide to Fine Wines*

**2005 Crocker And Starr Stone Place Proprietary Red Wine**

Rating: 94  
Drink: 2008-2028

The stunning 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Stone Place exhibits a dense ruby/purple color, a sweet kiss of licorice, black currants, bay leaf, and spring flowers, stunning fruit, full body, a powerful style, and beautiful equilibrium and sweet tannin in the finish. Already approachable, it should evolve for 15-20 years.

Tel. (707) 967-9111; Fax (707) 967-9611...

- Robert Parker (December, 2008)

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*The Independent Consumer's Guide to Fine Wines*

**2007 Crocker And Starr Sauvignon Blanc**

Rating: 90  
Drink: 2008-2010

This producer's impressive offerings include a steely, crisp, dry, pure 2007 Sauvignon Blanc. It reveals Sauvignon's tell-tale fig, melon, lemon grass, and lemon oil characteristics, along with a richly fruity, nicely textured, dry, medium-bodied personality. Enjoy it over the next 1-2 years.

Tel. (707) 967-9111; Fax (707) 967-9611...

- Robert Parker (December, 2008)

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**2009 CROCKER & STARR  
SAUVIGNON BLANC, NAPA VALLEY**

California Sauvignon Blancs are another ball of wax. When they're bad or average, they can be annoyingly fat and fruity, but when they're great, they can be downright hedonistic, while remaining crisp and dry. Forgive me, Father, for I have fallen under the spell of Crocker & Starr's obvious charms: its billowing, exotic, tropical arboretum of a note more like a pealing Megan Fox than a lean and taciturn Noomi Rapace; its voluptuous layering of peaches and cream on the palate suggesting Marilyn Monroe rather than Katharine Hepburn. What's not to like, especially with snowy white veal or roasted chicken in plush sauces?



**2006 CROCKER & STARR  
CABERNET SAUVIGNON  
STONE PLACE, NAPA VALLEY**

As the rehabilitated vines in this St. Helena estate (dating back to the 1870's) have evolved since winemaker-partner Pamela Starr's arrival, the Stone Place bottling has become 100% Cabernet Sauvignon for the first time in its 10-year history. The nose is an intriguing mix of shriveled plum, blackcurrant, rope tobacco, and roasting espresso, translating into black-chocolate-covered blueberry with dashes of cinnamon and clove on the palate. As always, the textures are perfectly scaled, seamless, sumptuous, and sinewy.

RANDY CAPAROSO  
Contributing Editor  
Sommelier Journal