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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

Every year about this time, for obvious reasons, I pass along my thanks to the members of the Vinesse family of wine clubs.

This year will be no different. I just wish there were a way I could put into words how much each and every member of each and every club means to me, as well as to our Vinesse staff.

Lots of businesses claim to be "big families," but at Vinesse, we really are. To a person — from our wine steward to our tasting panel members to our customer service representatives to the men and women who carefully package your wine shipment each month — everyone loves coming to work everyday.

I'll take partial credit for hiring the right people. But those people are the ones who make Vinesse more than a place to work. They make Vinesse a family. And they work hard to make you feel like family, too. So to them... and to you... many thanks.

Martin Stewart Jr.

Tasty Wine Solutions for the Holiday Feast Season

By Robert Johnson

Once school starts, it sure doesn't take long for the holiday season to roll around, does it?

It's my favorite time of the year because it provides numerous opportunities to connect or reconnect with friends and family. And no social gathering — particularly a big holiday meal — is complete without wine.

Of course, it can be quite challenging to select the "right" wines for the holiday table because we're not talking about a standard meat-and-potatoes meal. There simply is no single wine that matches perfectly with turkey, stuffing-and-gravy, green bean casserole and cranberry sauce.

That said, certain types of wine do fare better than others. For instance, it's best to go with lighter and more fruitful wines than heavier and oak-laden bottlings. So, rather than choosing a fine Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay, we'd opt for Pinot Noir, Merlot or a multi-variety blend among reds, or a lightly-oaked Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc or Sauvignon Blanc among whites. And we always suggest opening at

least one red and at least one white so guests will have a choice.

There are two other options that may sound like heresy to wine connoisseurs — but keep in mind that not everyone at the big feed will be as wine savvy as you. Those options: Transform a few bottles of wine into refreshing spritzers or sangria.

The spritzer may have gone out of style by the end of the 1970s, but it's ideal because it can help reduce the amount of alcohol that one ingests over an extended holiday meal. (By the way, consuming a spritzer — wine poured over ice with a splash of seltzer — isn't a social faux pas everywhere. We understand that young adults are enthusiastically reviving the beverage throughout Austria.)

Sangria may also be a wine purist's nightmare, but it also is right at home as part of a multi-dish feast. It, too, limits one's alcohol intake, and many people who don't like wine absolutely love Sangria. You may recognize it as the adult beverage of choice at the Sunday brunches of many Mexican restaurants.

Haven't made Sangria in a while? *¡No problema!* We've included a recipe in this issue's "Cookbook" department.

Robert Johnson can be reached at Robert@vinesse.com.



OUR MISSION:

To uncover and bring you wine gems from around the world, which you're not likely to discover on your own, and which enhance your wine enjoyment.

YOUR GRAPEVINE TEAM:

Intrepid Wine Enthusiast, Chief Taster and Winehound:

Martin Stewart

Chief Operating Officer (aka "The Buck Stops Here"):

Lawrence D. Dutra

Editor:

Robert Johnson

Wine Steward:

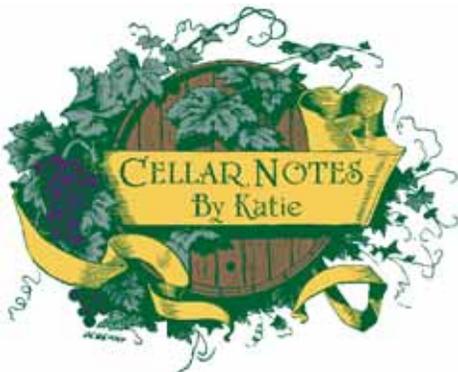
Katie Montgomery

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I didn't do very well in my high school chemistry class. Now, I think I know why.

Throughout history, chemists have had a tremendous impact on our lives — both good and bad. The classic example of chemistry's double-edged sword would be atomic energy... and the atomic bomb.

Although the parallel with wine isn't nearly as explosive, I'm beginning to believe that not all wine chemistry is good wine chemistry.

For as long as I've been involved with wine, vintners have run chemical analyses to measure grape ripeness, control alcohol levels and weed out impurities in wine. Such tests are absolutely necessary to help assure quality in the finished product.

That said, the 2006 meeting of the American Chemical Society has me just a little bit worried. The meeting took place in San Francisco, just a stone's throw from California's North Coast wine country, and one of the hot topics involved how chemistry could be used to make wine production more profitable.

There's certainly nothing wrong with making a profit. Every business, Vinesse included, must meet certain margins or risk going under.

My concern is that chemistry is

being used by some vintners to tweak wine as it ferments, in the hope of producing a specific style that will appeal to influential wine critics such as Robert Parker and *Wine Spectator* magazine. The idea is if Parker or the *Spectator* award the wine a high score, demand will increase and the price can be raised, thus increasing profits.

There's a company in Sonoma County that consults with more than 60 wineries each year, every one of which covets those 90-plus scores for their wines. I have two problems with this:

1. It threatens to diminish the artistic aspect of winemaking. I've always been amazed at how two winemakers using the same batch of grapes can produce two very different wines, from a stylistic standpoint. I like the fact that a vintner can put his personal stamp on a wine.

2. When style and creativity go out the window, sameness ensues. We've already seen it happen to a great

extent with aged-in-oak California Chardonnay, and this chemical analysis approach threatens to do the same with every other variety.

Do we really want a bottle of Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel to taste identical to a Zin from Amador County or the Cucamonga Valley? Why would we even need different brands if one bottling were to smell and taste the same as another?

At least one of the conference attendees said that while great strides have been made in chemical analysis, the likelihood of all wine evolving into a mass-produced, non-distinctive product is remote.

Such an idea "is a gross injustice to the complexity of the grape," he said. "Grapes are too complex and no two vintages are the same. It's very difficult to bring a Budweiser approach to winemaking."

I sure hope he's right.

Grapes are too complex. It's very difficult to take a Budweiser approach to winemaking.



WINE A_{TO}Z

Big. A word used to describe a wine that is robust, full bodied and, often, high in alcohol.

Clone. Plants of the same species that have identical physical characteristics and can be traced to a common mother plant. Clone selection is very important when planting a vineyard because two clones of the same grape variety can taste very different.

Demi-Sec. A sparkling wine or Champagne that is moderately sweet.

Extract: Soluble particles that would remain in wine if all the liquid were drawn off.

Fining. A process of clarifying wine by adding gelatin, egg whites, bentonite and/or isinglass to the wine. While clarity is a positive, the process may also strip the wine of some of its flavor.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

(Editor's Note: We continue our region-by-region series on the wine-making families of California.)

The winemaking heritage at Bargetto's Santa Cruz Winery began with brothers Phillip and John Bargetto, who emigrated from Castelnovo Don Bosco, a small town in the Piedmont region of northern Italy.

The Bargetto family winemaking heritage continued with John's son Lawrence during the 1960s and '70s. He introduced modern technology — stainless steel fermentation, barrel aging, etc. — and added new Santa Cruz Mountains varietals such as Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The third generation of Bargetto family members now directs the operation.

Founded by Bill and Brenda Murphy in 1992, Clos LaChance in Saratoga has grown from its backyard roots into a 60,000-case-per-year

wine business. As the business has grown, the Murphys have enlisted the help of their two daughters, Cheryl Murphy Durzy and Kristin Murphy. Cheryl manages sales and marketing for Clos LaChance and its subsidiaries, while Kristin manages the events portion of the business, and a vineyard management company.

Founding winemaker George Cooper of Cooper-Garrod Estate Vineyards in Saratoga planted the first Cabernet Sauvignon in 1972 with his nephew Jan Garrod, thinking of it as a hobby for when he'd retire from test piloting at NASA/Ames. In the ensuing 22 years, Chardonnay and Cabernet Franc were added on lands farmed by the family since 1893.

George took courses at U.C.-Davis and learned from fellow winemakers in the Santa Cruz Mountains and on visits to France. Spring of 1994 heralded the first commercial release for Cooper-Garrod, and in 1996, son Bill completed a career in the Foreign Service to return to the ranch where he grew up and join his father in winemaking. Bill's cousin Jan also is part of the second generation of family members now involved.



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VINESSE STYLE

HAUTE DOGS

The hot dog is going upscale. Is nothing sacred anymore?

There's a new chain of restaurants in the Miami area, dubbed Franktitude, that is serving hot dogs made from imported salmon. Among the 25 toppings from which dog-diners can choose are Wasabi mayonnaise and banana chips.

Imported salmon and banana chips on a whole grain bun. Oh, the humanity!

The menus developed by Franktitude and other purveyors of gourmet sausage on a bun have been referred to as the "Starbucking" of the hot dog. And there's no turning back.

According to German historians, the frankfurter was invented in the city of Frankfurt some 520 years ago. The Austrian city of Vienna (a.k.a. Wien) also claims to be the birthplace of the wiener.

In 1893, hot dogs were introduced at American baseball parks. That same year, vendors sold large quantities of dogs at Chicago's Colombian Exposition.

Over time, Chicago became one of America's hot dog capitals, its version including toppings of mustard, minced onion, relish, tomato, sport peppers, celery salt and a pickle spear. If you want to be identified as a tourist, ask for catsup.

One can only imagine what Chicago's hot dog lovers think about those imported salmon dogs or another Miami "innovation," Dogma Grill's Tropicale dog, topped with crushed pineapple, bacon, mozzarella cheese and "special sauce." Ditto for the \$25 Wagyu beef dog at The Laundry restaurant in East Hampton, New York.

Because The Laundry's pricy dog is all about the meat, toppings are kept to a minimum or skipped altogether. That makes wine pairing a snap, and some customers have spent as much as \$250 on a bottle to accompany their dog.

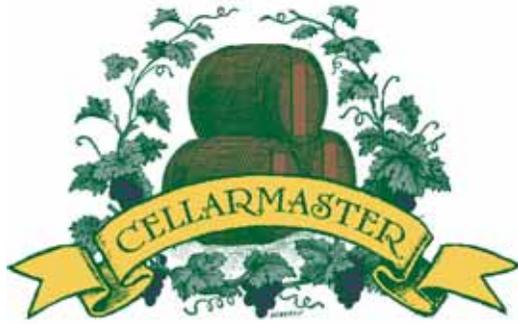
So, what should one serve with a hot dog? The toppings, of course, are the wild card, but among the wines that can work are Syrah/Shiraz, Sangiovese, Chianti, Barbera, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and even the white variety Gewurztraminer. The latter goes best with milder dogs made from chicken or turkey. In all cases, wines with bright fruit impressions fare the best.

The Chicago hot dog presents a real dilemma, however. We've yet to find a wine that can stand up to those sport peppers. That leaves you with two choices: hold the peppers and pour the wine, or keep the peppers and skip the wine.

Hmm... come to think of it, who needs those peppers, anyway?

BEING GREEN

Biodynamic farming isn't so much about the list of "no-can-do" items associated with organic farming as it is about creating a self-sustaining ecosystem. That calls for crop rotation, and at Ceago Del Lago in California's Lake County, the grapevines are surrounded by such rotating crops as fava beans and strawberry clover. Ceago Del Lago is owned by Jim Fetzer, a man who helped start the organic/biodynamic movement in winemaking when he owned Fetzer Vineyards.



The Politics of Wine

When you please someone with an act or action, you may anger or alienate others.

Nobody knows that better than a politician, particularly in an election year.

And so it was that California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger risked losing a few votes during the months leading up to the November elections with a pair of decisions that directly impacted the wine business.

First, Schwarzenegger vetoed Senate Bill 1235, sponsored by Senator Carole Migden, which would have designated Zinfandel as the official “historic wine of California.”

Then, just over a month later, Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill 1380 into law, restricting the use of the word “Sonoma” on wine labels to wines that consist of at least three-quarters Sonoma County-grown grapes.

While both decisions had their detractors, Schwarzenegger cited seemingly logical reasons for them.

In vetoing the Zinfandel bill, the governor said he meant no disrespect

to the versatile variety that is used to make everything from dry table wines to sweet blush wines (known as White Zinfandel) to ultra-sweet, raisiny dessert wines.

“It would be a shame,” he wrote, to effectively snub the numerous other star-quality wine grapes grown in the state. Not even the “historic” designation added to the original bill could sway him.

In signing SB 1380 into law, Schwarzenegger took the side of truth-in-labeling advocates.

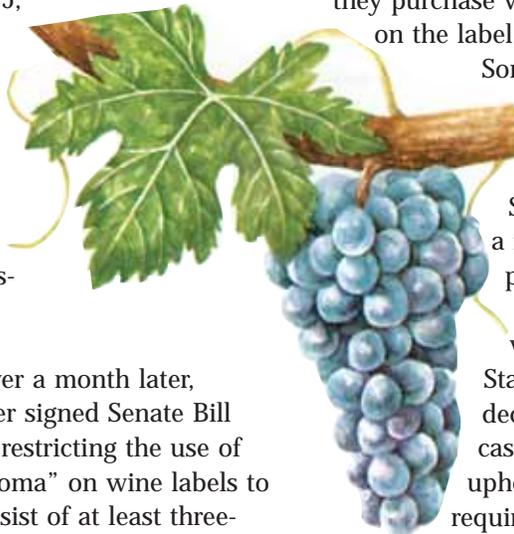
“Sonoma is a premier appellation known around the world,” he said, “and consumers expect that the wine they purchase with that storied name on the label actually comes from

Sonoma. This bill will help ensure that consumers are not misled by labeling.”

Seven months earlier, a fierce battle over the proper use of the “Napa” name ended when the United

States Supreme Court declined to hear the case. The law that was upheld, as a result, requires “Napa” wines to be made from Napa grapes.

A few of the larger wine companies that had been, in effect, misrepresenting their products were not happy with the labeling decisions, but it’s difficult to argue against the benefits they provide for wine drinkers like us.



Four Seasons



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Torino Beckons Your Mind, Body & Soul

Escaping to Italy is as much a seduction of the senses as it is a vacation for the mind and body.

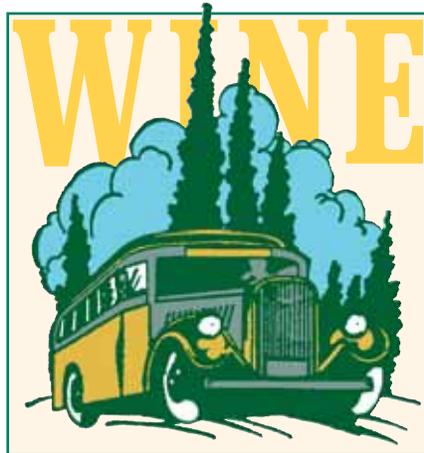
Infusing everything is a passion, a deeply-rooted desire to live life with a personal sense of joy and contentment that fortifies one's spirit. And nowhere is this truer than in Torino, Italy's oldest — and newest — world-class city. New because Torino transformed and redefined itself for the 2006 Winter Olympic Games.

Nestled in the Piedmont region of northwestern Italy, Torino offers natural beauty year-round. For connoisseurs and gourmands, fall is the favorite time to visit as the world famous white truffle of Alba can be found during October and November. Chefs and foodies alike travel thousands of miles to taste the earthy, ethereal, incomparable flavor of the white truffle.

While savoring the flavors of the region, one can be overwhelmed by the vistas of the snow-covered Alps behind the dramatic skyline of Torino and the grapevine-covered hills of the Langhe/Roero and Monferrato regions.

Piedmont's passion is most obvious in its meals, made of impeccably fresh ingredients. Cheeses subtle and sharp, creamy and dense are crafted in equal parts by the glory of nature and human ingenuity.

Piedmont's divine



TOURING TIPS

hazelnut is the centerpiece of Nutella, the nutty chocolate spread that has become a worldwide favorite, as well as the key ingredient in the regional hazelnut torte, ice creams and other confections.

And, of course, the earth also nurtures the grapes that give Piedmont its rightful place as one of the world's best wine producers. This is the home of bold Barolos and

Barbarescos, complex Gattinaras and Ghemmes, and sweet, lighthearted Astis.

Between meals, there is plenty to do in Torino, including a jaunt to the Mole Antonelliana, which dominates the skyline and houses the National Cinema Museum. The captivating Egyptian Museum, housed in a vast Baroque palace, houses the world's second most important collection of Egyptian artifacts.

Simply walking the streets and piazzas of Torino, beneath arched porticos and next to royal palaces, will take you back in time. A great way to savor the scenery is to sip on a local concoction known as bicerin — a sublime blend of coffee, chocolate liqueur and heavy cream — while lounging in a streetside café. Later, you can enjoy the free-flowing nightlife in the Quadrilatero Romano while savoring a glass of local vino.

The massive investment and preparation for the Olympics has left many sparkling new hotels throughout the





region. In Torino, check out Le Meridien's properties in the Lingotto, a former FIAT factory that has been completely transformed into a combination hotel, shopping mall and convention center.

For contemporary comfort just a block away from Cattedrale di San Giovanni Battista Duomo, where the Holy Shroud is housed, try the NH Santo Stefano.

And for a total food-and-wine immersion experience, plan to go next October, when Salon del Gusto, a celebration of gastronomy, once again shines the spotlight on small-scale food and artisan wines.

Your mind, your body and your soul will thank you.

Torino Planner

National Cinema Museum
museonazionaledelcinema.it

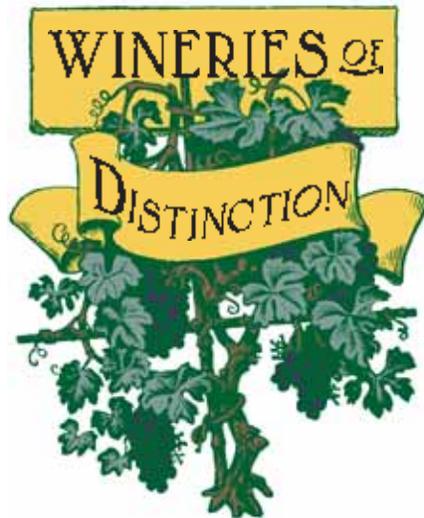
Egyptian Museum
museoegizio.org

Le Meridien Properties
lemeridien-lingotto.it

NH Santo Stefano
nh-hotels.com

Salone del Gusto
salonedelgusto.it

General Tourism Info
seeyouinpiemonte.com



Amazing Cabernet Sauvignon from an Unexpected Source

***In** may seem hard to believe, but year in and year out, one of the finest bottlings of Cabernet Sauvignon — world class in every way, including its price — comes from Chile.*

In a red wine world largely dominated by California and France, Chile's Vina Concha y Toro produces Cabernet Sauvignon that receives raves from wine lovers and strong endorsements from the most influential wine critics.

Vina Concha y Toro proudly bears the name of its founder, Don Melchor de Concha y Toro, a 19th century politician, historian and vintner. In 1883, Don Melchor and his wife, Dona Emiliana Subercaseaux, founded the Concha y Toro vineyard. They brought the finest varieties of Bordeaux to Chile,

and over the years, the winery gradually increased production and gained widespread acclaim.

In 1923, the family made the decision to sell shares on the Santiago stock market, and the influx of cash enabled them to begin exporting their wares to Europe. Toward the end of the 1950s, they began acquiring additional vineyard land, and in 1987, they partnered with Banfi Vintners in order to modernize their production facilities. Since 1994, shares of Vina Concha y Toro have been traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

Today, the family's vineyard holdings span 11,200 acres, and their products range from everyday table wines to the signature bottling of Cabernet Sauvignon named after Don Melchor.

The Melchor Cab is crafted from grapes grown in the vineyards of Puente Alto in the heart of Chile's Maipo Valley. There, poor soil, perfect climatic conditions and the proximity to the Andes Mountains combine to produce fruit of unsurpassed quality.

The vineyards receive expert care year-round, the grapes are harvested by hand at their peak of ripeness, and the fermented wine is aged in French oak barrels for 14 to 16

months before being transferred to bottles for another year of aging prior to release.

The 2003 vintage, which carried a suggested

retail price of \$47 upon release (and increased as supplies dwindled), is another in a long string of aromatic, layered, powerful wines of which Don Melchor would be rightly proud.



Quotes Du Jour

■ California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, on his state's wine heritage:

"Whether it is a Cabernet from Napa or Sonoma, a delicate Pinot Noir from the Central Coast, or a Zinfandel from the San Joaquin Valley or Sierra Foothills, California produces some of the finest wines in the world."

■ Henry G. Bohn, a 19th-century British publisher, died long before Vinesse introduced the Four Seasons Wine Club, but based on the following observation, he would have understood the concept perfectly:

"Drink wine in winter for cold, and in summer for heat."

■ Wine writer Oz Clarke, with an observation that applies perfectly to holiday meals:

"The pleasures of eating and drinking operate on so many levels that hard and fast rules simply make no sense."

■ Another wine writer, Matt Kramer, is not employed by Vinesse, but his philosophy does coincide with our club's "What are you saving it for?" mantra:

"I've had many wines that have been cellared 10, 20 years. The only thing that happens is that they just smooth out; they don't become jewels."

Q AND A

How do you serve Claret?

— Jenny Hughson

Dear Jenny:

"Claret" is the name traditionally used in England for red Bordeaux wines, which typically include Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and a handful of other varieties.

The term is somewhat misleading in that it comes from the French word *clairet*, which originally was used to describe a light red wine. As you know, the red wines of Bordeaux are anything but light in either color or intensity.

In the United States, some vintners hijacked the name and used it for bottlings of non-descript red blends, often made from mass-produced, lesser-known

varieties grown in California's Central Valley. A handful of American wine-makers take the name seriously, using it only with high-quality blends, but because there is no "legal" definition of the word, it's a case of buyer beware.

Claret, whether from Bordeaux or the United States, should be served like most other red wines: in wide-mouthed glasses, so the aroma can waft to the deepest recesses of your nose. If your wine is vintage dated 1998 or earlier, you may want to decant it in order to separate any sediment that could be in the bottle from the wine.

Also, if the wine has been kept in a closet or wine rack near your kitchen, cooling it down in the refrigerator for 15

minutes to a half-hour before uncorking is recommended.

Because there is no 'legal' definition of 'Claret' in the U.S., it's a case of buyer beware.



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WINE CENTER OPENS

The New York Wine & Culinary Center has opened in New York's Finger Lakes region, dedicated to showcasing the state's agriculture, food and wine. If you're planning a trip to the area, the center is a must-see. Call ahead for tasting and class schedules at 585-394-7070.

CHINA'S WINE ROOTS

The historic origin of wine was questioned recently in an article that appeared in *USA Today*. Conventional theory in China was that wine arrived from the Middle East in the seventh century, via traders plying the Silk Road trade route. Two years

ago, archaeologists at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences came up with a new theory, based on the discovery in



northern China of evidence of fermented wine made from rice, honey and fruit. They pegged the find at 9,000 years old. Wang Jihuai, a professor at the academy, says the discovery isn't conclusive. "I won't dare say if China invented wine first — there isn't enough evidence," he says. "But we can say China had an advanced winemaking culture, either cereal- or fruit-based, at least 5,000 years ago." The real mystery, Wang says, isn't when wine arrived in China. It's why winemaking and drinking died for a thousand years

before being reintroduced in recent years by foreigners.

CULINARY GOLD

Whether starting in the northern sector of California's Gold Country, near Placerville, or in the southern sector, near Murphys, visitors can chow down in style between winery visits. In downtown Placerville, Café Luna offers eclectic cuisine and a good selection of local wines. And in Murphys, the Alchemy Market & Wine Bar serves up great sandwiches and soups to complement the home-grown wines. For hours of operation, call Café Luna at 530-642-8669, and Alchemy Market at 209-728-0700.

MARTIN COMES ALIVE

We're continuing to gather names of "wine songs" and song lyrics that include references to wine, and the latest submission comes from Vinesse founder Martin Stewart himself.

Perhaps providing a glimpse at his deep, dark past, Martin offered this lyric from Peter Frampton: "Whose wine, what wine, where the hell did I

dine?" (We think Martin may be spending a little too much time with his iPod...) P.S.: Send your wine-related song titles and/or lyrics to Robert@vinesse.com.

CAROLINA REBOUNDS

Prior to Prohibition, North Carolina produced more wine than any other state. The industry has rebounded in recent years and, today, there are more than 50 wineries there. Furthermore, the Yadkin Valley has been recognized as an official American Viticultural Area.

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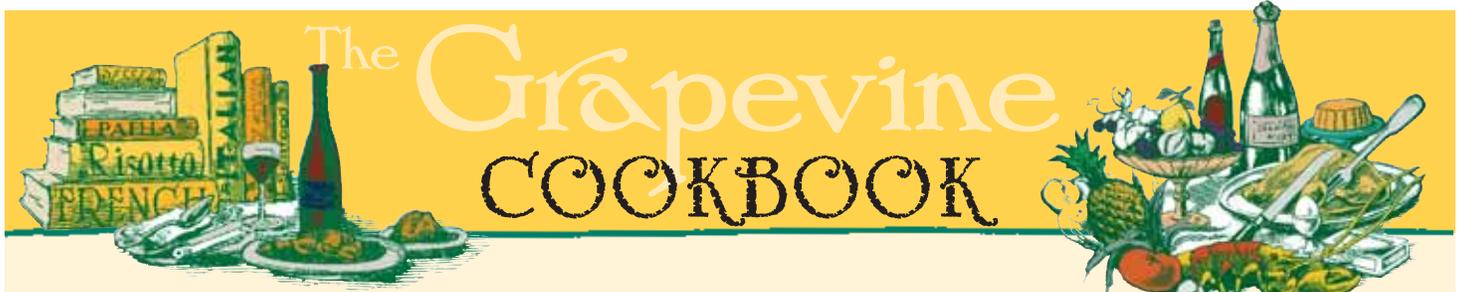
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TURKEY TACOS

This tasty dish can be made with lean ground turkey or with cut-up pieces from your leftover holiday turkey. It makes 6 servings, and pairs well with Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay or Merlot.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, diced
- 1 seeded plum tomato
- 1 seeded red bell pepper, cored
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Dark and white meat turkey, cut into small pieces
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 12 flour tortillas

Preparation

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onions, and cook until soft.
2. Add tomatoes and garlic, and cook for about 1 minute.
3. Add water and stir occasionally until liquid has been reduced, about 8 minutes.
4. Add bell pepper, and cook for about 2 minutes.
5. Stir in cumin, salt and pepper, and cook for about 1 minute.
6. Meanwhile, warm tortillas separately in a nonstick skillet over low heat.
7. Assemble by placing each tortilla on a flat surface and spooning in turkey pieces, skillet mixture and (if desired) shredded romaine lettuce, grated cheddar cheese and/or chopped fresh cilantro.

RED SANGRIA

This recipe makes 10 servings, and is a great way to extend wine for holiday parties.

Ingredients

- 3 ripe plums, halved and pitted
- 2 oranges, peeled
- 1 apple, halved and cored
- 1 pear, halved and cored
- 1 bottle Shiraz or other fruity red wine
- 1 quart fruit punch
- 1 1/2 cups lemon-lime soda
- 1 cup apple brandy

Preparation

1. Cut the fruit into small pieces and place in a large punch bowl.
2. Add remaining ingredients and stir.
3. Chill until ready to serve.

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