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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

***Since it's the start
of a new year, I
thought we should get
back to basics.***

So, I've asked Editor Robert Johnson to come up with some story themes that touch on some of the basic joys of wine drinking. Because the subject of wine is so complicated, we all could use a little refresher course every once in a while.

I also asked Robert and Wine Steward Katie Montgomery to tap their own experiences — Robert as a frequent diner and Katie as a former restaurant sommelier — and devote their space to topics that follow the “basics” theme. I think you'll enjoy both of their stories.

Yes, wine *can* be complicated, but drinking it doesn't have to be. The more we know about any subject, the more comfortable we are with it. I hope this issue of *The Grapevine* helps you get more comfortable with wine — whether you're talking about it or drinking it.

Martin Stewart Jr.

How, or How Not, to Deal With the 'Cork Ceremony'

By Robert Johnson

***I have a bad habit
of correcting wine
servers in restaurants.***

I don't do it in a pretentious, know-it-all way. I do it strictly to educate them, because the more knowledgeable they are, the more knowledgeable — and the more comfortable with wine — their customers will be.

That said, good intentions aren't always met with positive responses. Take the recent “cork incident” at an outpost of a highly regarded steakhouse chain as an example.

I ordered a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon. The server fetched the bottle, uncorked it, and placed the cork in front of me. I looked at the cork. The server looked at me. I looked at the server. It was a standoff.

Finally, the server asked, “Don't you want to smell the cork?” I could have simply replied, “No, thanks,” but I couldn't help myself. Instead, I politely said, “I'd rather smell the wine.”

Grudgingly, the server poured a splash into my glass. I said, “Thanks,” swirled the wine for a few seconds, and then stuck my nose deep in the glass. “Smells good,” I said, which I figured was

a signal for the server to pour the wine for everyone at the table.

Instead, the server flashed me an incredulous look and, after another pause, asked, “Don't you want to taste it?” Again, I could have politely declined but, again, I couldn't help myself.

“If it smells good, it's going to taste good,” I said. “Wines taste

*The server looked
at me. I looked
at the server. It
was a standoff.*

like the smell, you know.” I wasn't trying to be a smart-aleck. (I can hear the boss now: “You don't have to *try*...”). I was simply offering a little education.

But the look I got back could have burned a hole through a 4-foot-thick stone wall. I had not seen such an expression since my daughter was 16 and we would be talking about... well, just about anything.

Apparently, the “cork ceremony” is part of the training for servers these days, so I really should learn to go with the flow. It's just that my list of New Year's Resolutions is so long already...

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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.

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Sommelier Diaries

I had a love/hate relationship with my former job as a restaurant sommelier.

Obviously, it was a joy to be around wine all the time, and to be able to interact with numerous like-minded people every evening. I also enjoyed tasting each night's menu specials and figuring out which wines from our cellar to recommend to diners.

The only down-side involved dealing with the know-it-alls who didn't really know as much about wine as they thought they did. There was a constant struggle between tactfully correcting misinformation being spouted and adhering to the "customer is always right" mantra.

Over time, my patience did wear thin and, eventually, I knew it was time to find a job in which I could assist people who wanted to learn more about wine.

I'd like to share two stories from my sommelier days. Hopefully, you'll find them both educational and entertaining.

MERITAGE MEMORY

One evening I was helping a table of two couples select a bottle to share with their dinner. Fortunately, each person was having some cut of steak, so at least I could narrow the range of possibilities to reds.

As was my custom, I asked what kind of wine each person liked — another choice-narrowing tactic. One couple was into Cabernet Sauvignon, while the other preferred wines that were a bit more mellow, such as Merlot. I figured I could strike a happy medium by suggesting a few of the Meritage wines we had on the list.

No sooner had I uttered the word "Meritage" than one of the husbands spoke up. "Oh, you mean Mer-i-TAHJ, don't you, dear?" he said, enunciating the common French-sounding mispronunciation of the word.

"It actually rhymes with heritage," I politely replied. "It's 'merit' and 'heritage' put together."

"Oh, I don't think so," the know-it-all said. "Everyone I know pronounces it Mer-i-TAHJ."

What to do? Engage in an argument with a customer? Not a good idea. So I quickly thought of two Merlots to recommend, and everyone was happy.

A SUCCESS STORY

Another time, a very nice woman ordered barbecued ribs and asked me for a wine suggestion.

"That's easy," I said. "Zinfandel."

"I love Zinfandel," she said. "I'll have a glass with my dinner."

When I saw that her ribs were up, I poured a glass of Dry Creek Vineyard Zin and brought it to her table.

She took one look at the glass and said, "That's not Zinfandel — Zinfandel is pink."

She thought I'd meant White Zinfandel, and wasn't so sure about this dark red/purple liquid sitting before her.

"Tell you what," I said. "Give it a try, and if you don't like it, I'll bring you a glass of White Zin."

She tried it. She liked it. And she became a regular customer, ordering a different wine each time she visited. Because she kept an open mind, a whole new world opened up to her.

Unfortunately for me, she was far outnumbered by the know-it-alls.



WINE A_{TO}Z

Pinotage. A cross of Pinot Noir and Cinsaut that makes a very popular red wine, primarily in South Africa.

Quincy. A tiny appellation in the Loire region of France, where the best wines are made from Sauvignon Blanc.

Refosco. A variety that's made into tasty, everyday wines that are served in the wine bars and restaurants of Italy's Friuli-Venezia Giulia region.

Shoot. A new green stem that sprouts from the grapevine as it begins to grow in the spring. Shoots ultimately sprout leaves and clusters of grapes.

Tenuta. Italian term for estate. The word is found in the name of numerous Tuscan wineries, in particular.

Ue. A soft, light type of Grappa.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

LIVERMORE VALLEY

Less than an hour east of San Francisco, Livermore Valley wine country welcomes visitors with its picturesque canyons, lush vines and convivial tasting rooms.

One of California's oldest wine regions, Livermore played a pivotal role in shaping California's wine industry. Robert Livermore planted the first commercial vines in the 1840s. C. H. Wentz, James Concannon and Charles Wetmore recognized the area's wine-growing potential and founded their own wineries in the early 1880s. International recognition followed when Livermore captured America's first international gold medal for wine in 1889 at the Paris Exposition, putting California on the world wine map.

Livermore Valley boasted more than



50 wineries prior to Prohibition, and contributed significantly to the state's enology and viticulture. Innovations developed in the valley include overhead irrigation, mechanical harvesting and roller crushing in the vineyard.

Livermore Valley wineries were the first to bottle varietal-labeled Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Petite Sirah. Nearly 80 percent of California's Chardonnay vines trace their genetic roots to a Livermore clone.

Attracted to the rich winemaking tradition, climate, soil and geography, new vintners and growers are working alongside fifth-generation winegrowers to create a Livermore Valley wine renaissance. The region now has 26 wineries, with several more about to open, and more than 5,000 acres of vineyards.

Today's wineries vary in size from limited-release, 100-case labors of love to 400,000-case industry heavyweights, and grapes range from the familiar Merlot and Chardonnay to Italian, Rhone and Spanish varieties. And welcoming tasting rooms showcase award-winning wines and offer year-round activities.



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VINESSE STYLE

WINE GLASSES

In the spring of 2004, the wine world, almost without notice, lost one of its most important contributors.

But the work of Claus Josef Riedel, a ninth-generation glassmaker, continues to enhance the enjoyment of wine for millions of people worldwide.

Prior to 1973, wine glass companies made their glasses in a number of sizes, but only a single shape. Riedel (rhymes with needle) began tinkering with shapes in the 1950s, ultimately rolling out his handmade Sommelier series in '73. Among those who appreciate fine glassware, the Sommelier series is the Rolls-Royce, although other companies have borrowed from Riedel's work and now offer similar quality at lower price points.

The theory behind the development of different glass shapes revolved around the taste zones of the tongue — bitter in the back, sweet on the front, salt on the outer edges, and acid just inside the perimeter. By altering the diameter of the opening

of a glass, Riedel found that he could influence where the wine landed on the tongue. And by doing that, he could perfectly balance how a given wine type's sugar, acid, alcohol and tannins were perceived, so no single component dominated. In other words, he could help assure that a wine in a glass tasted just as it had in the barrel — just as the vintner had made it.

Here's how the four most popular glasses designed by Riedel work their magic:

- The Montrachet is designed for dry white wines, such as Chardonnay, that exceed 14 percent alcohol, with medium to low acidity. The shape of the glass targets the tongue's acid receptors so sourness can balance the fruit and oak.
- The Sauvignon Blanc glass, with its narrower opening, is for dry, aromatic white wines that are below 14 percent alcohol, with high acidity. In addition to its namesake variety, the glass is excellent for Riesling, Gewurztraminer and dessert wines.
- The Bordeaux is designed for red wines that are high in tannins and alcohol (12 percent and up), such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The

glass directs the wine to the tip of the tongue, and emphasizes the sweetness of the fruit while tempering the bitterness of the tannins.

- The Burgundy glass is for medium-to full-bodied reds (such as Pinot Noir or Barolo). It funnels the wine onto the tip and center of the tongue, helping to downplay the acidity.





The Bread & Wine Connection

Bread and wine are united by chemistry, as well as history.

Before the advent of purified yeast, such as we buy in small packets at the supermarket, sometimes bread rose and sometimes it didn't. Naturally-fermented breads (meaning those leavened without added yeast) depended on a strong starter dough, the environment of the bakery, the weather and a healthy portion of luck.

Later, breadmakers customarily went to the local brewhouse or winery to borrow active beer or wine yeast in order to make their loaves rise. In California's North Coast wine country, a few bakers have revived this tradition. If you get a chance to taste grape-yeast bread, look forward to experiencing an unusual, tangy and delicious flavor.

Today, winemakers and breadmakers alike open packages of Red Star dried yeast — although different strains — to start their work. Yeast converts the starches in flour to simpler sugars and then metabolizes these to alcohol and carbon dioxide gas.

Wine yeasts also convert sugars — grape sugars — to alcohol and carbon dioxide. But because the conditions of fermentation differ in bread and wine, the end results also differ.

Wine, never exposed to high temperatures, retains the alcohol created, while the carbon dioxide escapes into the air.

In both bread and wine fermentations, numerous byproducts are produced which are responsible for some of the flavors and aromas. In white wines, for example, the yeast produces many esters that provide fruity aromas. Likewise, esters are produced by the yeast in a bread fermentation and are responsible for many of the "bread-like" flavors.

If bread dough ferments too rapidly (due to too much yeast or too high a temperature), most of the carbon dioxide will be released before the loaves are baked, and the bread will be heavy, compact and have fewer of the desirable flavor components.

Similarly, if a white wine ferments too rapidly at a too-high temperature, fewer esters are produced, and they evaporate quickly during the fermentation, thus affecting the wine's flavor.

BEING GREEN

New Zealand has long been famed for its unspoiled landscape. Its small population, isolated location and agricultural economy have earned the country a "clean, green" image. New Zealand grape growers and winemakers are aiming to keep it that way by protecting the environmental integrity of their wine production. To this end, a pioneering set of industry standards has been developed, known as Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand. SWNZ provides the framework for wineries to continually improve all aspects of their performance in environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Four Seasons



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A 3-Day Wine Country Shopping Spree

Unless you appoint a designated driver, a trip to California's North Coast wine country must include more than bouncing from one tasting room to another.

One also must eat, of course, and another way to avoid overimbibing at the wineries is to spend some time shopping — or, at the very least, window shopping.

Santa Rosa is the “big city” of Napa and Sonoma counties, and you can find outposts of many chain department stores and “big box” retailers within its boundaries. But if you'd like a more intimate shopping experi-



TOURING TIPS

ence, visit the area's small towns, where you'll find refuge from the long lines and the “same old same old.”

Three of the more shopper-friendly communities in North Coast wine country are Sonoma, Healdsburg and St. Helena. We asked members of the Vinesse tasting panel to share some of their favorite shops and restaurants in each, and their recommendations comprise the following three-day itinerary.

Travel tip: You may want to stay at one of the chain hotel/motels in Santa Rosa to save a few bucks, and have more to spend on shopping and dining.

DAY 1: SONOMA

Sonoma Plaza is a tree-studded eight acres surrounding the stately City Hall building. Among the places you might want to explore is The Pantry, where you can pick up a taste of wine country for ice-bound relatives in the Midwest — everything from pasta flour to picnic baskets.

For gifts or holiday decorating, The Candlestick is a wonderful shop.

Explore the atmospheric alleys that lead to quiet courtyards with fountains and shops. Los Milagros Gallery features affordable Mexican folk art, characterized by bright colors, along with wrought iron and hand-pounded tin.

Amber Rouge offers a world of style in clothing, jewelry and scarves. At L'Olivier, you can watch shopkeepers stir up olive oil soaps. And Aphrodite has cute little rice-box purses.

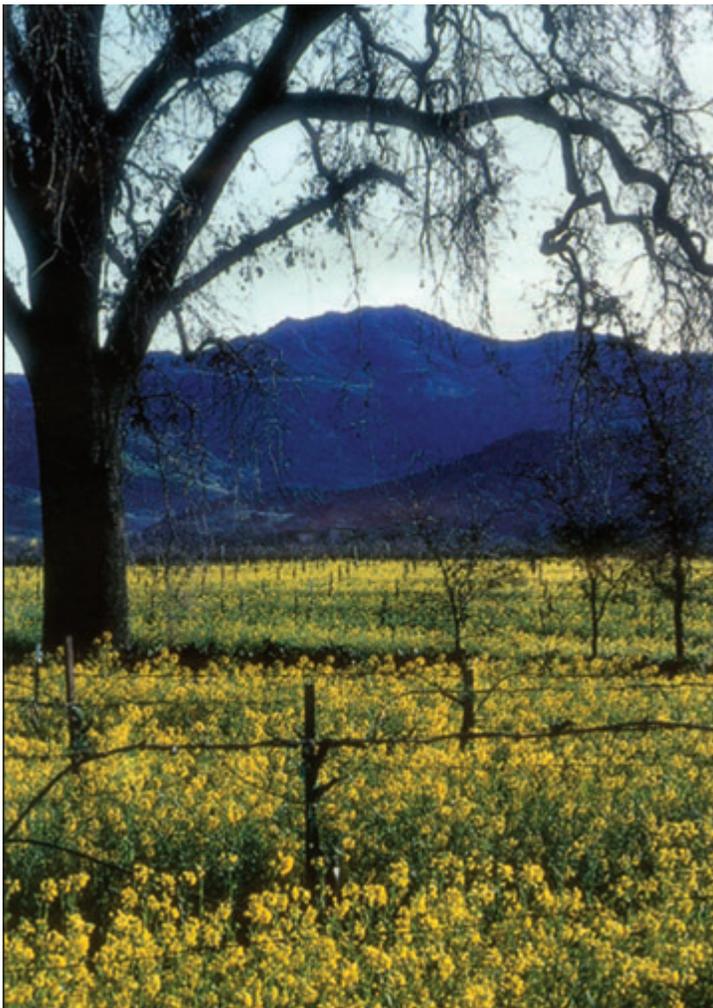
Where to eat: The Red Grape features East Coast-style thin-crust pizza with great toppings, classic clam chowder and bruschetta, and tasty pasta dishes. But it's the pizza that's the star, complemented by a decent wine list.

DAY 2: HEALDSBURG

Beyond its coffee shops and bistros, Healdsburg, in northern Sonoma County, is brimming with off-beat, funky gift stores.

Periwinkle carries hand-painted salt and pepper shakers, oil dipping bowls and cloth bread baskets. Next door, The Brown Bag has sturdy tablecloths and kitchen towels, as well as retro paper dolls.

For the flower-lover in your life, the Sonoma Flower Co. overflows with unusual vases and festive swags for the table. Bowdon Designs will please the fashionista with fun gifts such as



velvet gloves, hand-woven silk scarves, funky purses and jewelry.

For all kinds of home accessories, visit Friends in the Country. For artistic gifts, Options offers a wide array of “contemporary artifacts” and folk art, culled from local and international sources.

St. Helena looks as if it could have come from a Norman Rockwell painting.

Where to eat: If it’s local and fresh, it’ll probably find its way onto the menu at Dry Creek Kitchen, developed by Charlie Palmer of Aureole fame in Manhattan.

The urbane atmosphere of the Healdsburg Hotel provides the setting for Palmer’s five-star dishes, creative sides and delectable desserts.

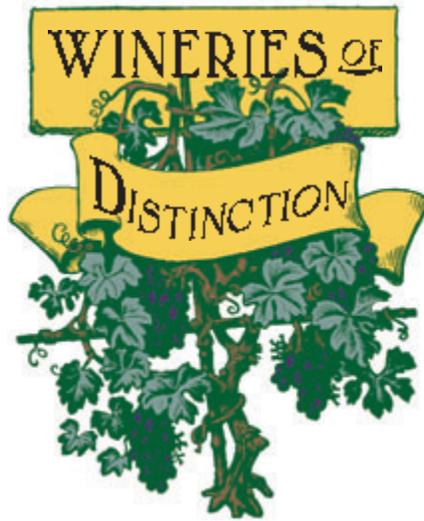
DAY 3: ST. HELENA

If you like to take your time when shopping, St. Helena provides an ideal setting. Its business district looks as if it could have come from a Norman Rockwell painting.

Vanderbilt & Co. has a nice selection of cookware, chic table settings, linens, Italian and French pottery and cookbooks. At St. Helena Antiques and Collectibles, you can find everything from French chandeliers to Chinese hope chests.

Tapioca Tiger is a great place to shop for children’s gifts, including costumes. And at David’s, the specialty is handcrafted jewelry.

Where to eat: A great cheese board, a 34-page (at last count) wine list, world-class entrees and luscious desserts await you at Martini House. And the décor delights the senses with each glance around the room.



How Stag’s Leap Changed the View of California Wine

In 1964, Warren Winiarski left his position as a lecturer in the liberal arts at the University of Chicago and moved his family to California, where he would fulfill the destiny of his family name: In Polish, “Winiarski” means “winemaker’s son.”

While Italian wines were Winiarski’s introduction to winemaking, French wines became his inspiration. Winiarski sensed that the Cabernet Sauvignon grape was uniquely suited to the Napa Valley, and believed that the right combination of soil and microclimate could produce a supple yet firm-textured version of the varietal.

In 1969, Winiarski tasted home-made Cabernet from Nathan Fay’s vineyard on the eastern side of the

Napa Valley, and knew he’d found a place capable of producing wines as classic and expressive as France’s greatest vintages. In 1970, Warren and his family established their S.L.V. vineyard on land next to Fay’s and founded their winery, Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars, in early 1972.

The Winiarskis soon brought international recognition to California and Napa Valley winemaking when their 1973 S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon bested some of France’s greatest Bordeaux at a blind tasting in Paris in 1976. Today, the area around Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars is designated as the Stags Leap District, renowned for elegant Cabernets.

In 1986, the Winiarski family acquired the Fay vineyard. The distinctive terroir of Fay and S.L.V. includes both the “water” of alluvial soils (contributing rich, soft fruit and voluptuous perfume), and the “fire” of weathered volcanic rock (yielding concentration and structure). Thanks to their vibrant “water and fire” balance, the winery’s three estate-grown Cabernets — Fay, S.L.V. and Cask 23, its proprietary blend drawn from

these two vineyards in exceptional years — are among the most highly regarded wines in the world.

Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars was known only in the Napa Valley until the now-famous 1976 Paris Tasting, which landed

the estate squarely among the ranks of the world’s most noteworthy Cabernet producers and placed Winiarski among the ranks of world’s most respected winemakers.

It also fundamentally transformed how Californian wines were viewed worldwide.



Quotes Du Jour

■ *Author Charles Dickens, on the influence of wine:*

“Wine in moderation — not in excess, for that makes men ugly — has a thousand pleasant influences. It brightens the eye, improves the voice, imparts a new vivacity to one’s thoughts and conversation.”

■ *Bettina Rousas, managing partner of Napa’s Angele restaurant, on the renaissance that the city of Napa is experiencing:*

“There are new restaurants opening left and right. I grew up here, and never would we go out to Napa. Now, at night, you’ll see people walking around. They’re dressed up. They’re going to the opera.”

■ *Wine critic Robert Parker, on the French perception of Napa Valley:*

“Ask a French wine producer in Bordeaux what wine region in the world has the best chance of competing qualitatively with his, and the answer will not be the Napa Valley, but Spain.”

■ *Sam Aaron, owner of Sherry-Lehman Wine and Spirits, assessing his own place in the wine world:*

“What Freud was to psychoanalysis, I was to wine.”

■ *The philosophy of author and critic Alexis Lichine:*

“There is no substitute for pulling corks.”

Q AND A

How did the “Clef du Vin” suddenly appear in so many catalogs? How long has it been around? Does it actually work as advertised? Thanks.

— Thomas C. Braly

Dear Thomas:

The product has been around for about 10 years, but only now is it being aggressively marketed in the United States. That’s why you’re seeing it in so many catalogs. Does it work? That’s another question. We have no idea. The product supposedly provides information on how long a specific bottle of wine can be aged, or whether it needs to be consumed soon. To be honest, there are so many other ways of gauging a wine’s “ageability” that we’ve never given this product a try. Also, we are strong believers in drinking wine a little bit “too early” in its life than a little bit “too late.” So, long-term aging really isn’t even on our radar. That’s more for collectors.

I’m new to the whole wine world. What kind of wine is good for marinating a turkey. Thanks for your time.

— Daniel Molina

Dear Daniel:

Use this recipe, originally formulated for basting a chicken. It should work just fine on a turkey. For the wine, choose any lighter-style red — in other words, one that does not have a great deal of oak influence. Skip Cabernet Sauvignon, and opt for Syrah, Zinfandel or Merlot.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups dry red wine
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup soy or teriyaki sauce
- 4 scallions, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon fresh ginger, grated

Preparation: Combine all ingredients in a medium saucepan. Boil for 10 minutes.



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Illinois has its first American Viticultural Area. It's known as Shawnee Hills, and it's located in and around the southern Illinois communities of Carbondale, Marion and Harrisburg. To learn about the area's wineries, visit: ShawneeWineTrail.com.

ANGELE'S SPECIALTY

What's the specialty of the house at Napa's Angele, restaurant, whose managing partner is quoted in this issue's "Quotes du Jour"? As far as we're concerned, it's the Steak Bordelaise — melt-in-your-mouth delicious. The restaurant practices French "country" cooking, and guests never feel rushed. Reservations: 707-252-8115.



WINE AND AIR

There may have been no more passionate advocate of wine than French writer Marcel Ayme. Here's what he had to say about the place wine should take in one's life: "One may dislike carrots, spinach beetroot or the skin on hot milk. But not wine. It is like hating the air one breathes, since each is equally indispensable."

Now, that's passion.

THE NUMBERS GAME

In order for a California wine to be labeled by its varietal name, at least 75 percent of the cuvee must be that named variety. The same holds true in South Africa. However, other wine-producing areas have more stringent percentage requirements. In France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain, it's 85 percent. And in Oregon, it's 90 percent.

POP ANOTHER CORK!

Although wine consumption has been on the decline in France in recent years, that country's residents still drink a lot of vino. In fact, the residents of France and Italy combined consume one-seventh of the world's wine each year.

DOING THE MATH

How can you tell if the wine is fairly priced at a restaurant? Well, the truth is, wine prices will always seem high when eating out, as the accepted markups are quite high.

However, as a general rule of thumb, fair-minded restaurateurs will feature quality bottles that cost about twice as much as the average entrée. In other words, a couple eating out and sharing a bot-

tle of wine should expect to pay about the same as two couples eating out with no wine.

EAT YOUR VEGGIES!

Do wines pair well with vegetarian dishes? Yes. Generally speaking, red beans and darker starches and vegetables go nicely with red wine. With lighter or greener foods, go with whites.

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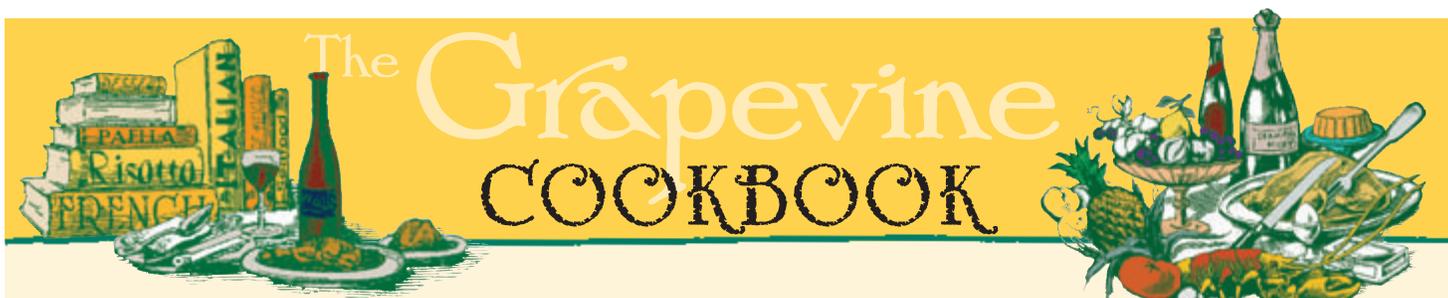
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WINTER VEGETABLE SOUFFLE

Try this tasty dish, which serves 4, with Grenache, or a similarly concentrated red wine.

Ingredients

- 8 oz. cooked potatoes
- 8 oz. cooked cauliflower, carrot, parsnip or Brussels sprouts (or a mixture of any of these)
- 4 dessert spoons cream
- 3 eggs, separated
- 4 oz. grated cheese
- Salt and black pepper

Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. Mash together the cooked potatoes with the other cooked vegetable(s).
3. Beat the cream, egg yolks, grated

cheese and salt and pepper into the vegetable mixture.

4. Whisk the egg whites until stiff, then fold them lightly but evenly into the vegetable mixture.
5. Spoon the mixture into a greased 7-inch souffle dish.
6. Bake for 20 minutes until the souffle has risen well and is lightly browned on top.

SALMON WITH TERIYAKI GLAZE

Serve this delicious recipe, which serves 4, with Syrah or other fruit-forward red wine.

Ingredients

- 4 6-oz. salmon fillets
- 1/2 cup teriyaki sauce
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch, mixer

with 1 teaspoon water

- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- Juice of 1 orange, or 1/4 cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon orange zest

Preparation

1. Into a small sauce pan, add the teriyaki sauce, honey, crushed red pepper, and orange juice. Bring to boil, and cook for one minute.
2. Add the orange zest and the cornstarch mixture, and cook for 30 seconds.
3. Spoon the sauce over grilled salmon fillets, and serve with rice and baby vegetables.

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