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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

If menu terms sometimes seem like a foreign language, it's probably because many of them are.

Unless you have a knack for pronunciation, ordering a meal at some restaurants can be downright embarrassing. That's why I've perfected the art of the point: I simply position my menu so the server can see it, and then point to the dish that I want to order. This works especially well when sitting in one of the two "outside" positions of a booth.

Even common menu items can be challenging to pronounce if, like me, you don't have the foreign language gene. So, whether I'm ordering bruschetta (broo-SKEHT-ah), or foie gras (fwah-grah), or pho (fuh, and pronounced as if it were a question), or kolachy (koh-LAH-tchkey), the art of the point can come in very handy.

At certain fancy restaurants, knowing the word degustation (DAY-goo-STAH-see-ohn) can solve a lot of problems. I just say (or point to) that one word, and the chef takes care of the rest.

Martin Stewart Jr.

Where Does the Time Go? Yet Another Harvest Season Is Here

By Robert Johnson

In late July, as I make a habit of doing each year, I checked in with several grape-growing friends in California's North Coast area to see how the harvest was shaping up.

At that point, they were expecting to pick grapes earmarked for sparkling wines — including Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Pinot Meunier — in early August. Sparkling wine-makers prefer a lesser degree of ripeness than makers of still wines.

Growing conditions can vary greatly across the North Coast, so some of the farmers were still weeks away from picking. But in both Napa and Sonoma counties — and among both sparkling and still winemakers — the countdown had begun.

And so it was in grape-growing regions throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Mother Nature is always the final harvest arbiter, and in Italy, "she" was expected to pro-

voke an early harvest this year — by as much as three to four weeks.

Warm weather in March and April prompted early germination in vineyards across the country. As temperatures remained high, flowering on the vines occurred about 20 days earlier than usual. And the "early" process continued unabated, which meant varieties such as Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio were being brought in during the last few days of July.



Varieties such as Merlot and Trebbiano, which typically are harvested in September, were expected to see August picking dates. And later-maturing varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Nebbiolo, typically picked in mid-October, likely will be brought in during September.

Even with the early harvest, quality is expected to be good because — unless unexpected rainstorms were to hit — the maturing grapes will have had their normal number of days in the sun.

And while the sun — and light, in general — is the enemy when it comes to storing bottles of wine, it is a maturing wine grape's best friend.

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.

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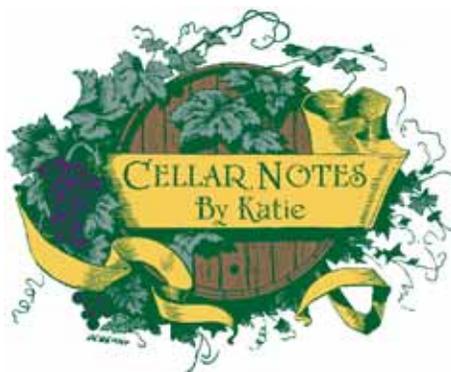
Katie Montgomery

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-  Wine Finders Reward — identify a future wine selection and earn a reward
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It's All About Popping Corks

You can read 'The Grapevine' from cover to cover (which we hope you do each month). You can read books. You can watch TV shows on PBS.

But the best way to learn about wine — and, more specifically, the best way to learn what types of wine you like — is to pop corks. And lots of them.

In a former life, I was a wine buyer for a small chain of specialty grocery stores. Three or four times each week, distributor reps would come by with lists of the latest releases from the wineries and brands they represented. They'd wax poetic about how flavorful this wine was or what a fabulous finish that wine had. And just as they thought they were about to close the sale, I'd throw them a curve-ball. "They sound wonderful," I'd say. "Let's pop some corks."

The good reps always had sample bottles with them. The less-experienced ones learned, after a visit or two, that there was no way they could sell me something that I hadn't tasted

first. It was my job to feature only top-quality bottlings in our wine department, and that meant I wasn't about to stock a wine that I hadn't personally tasted.

We take that same approach here with the wine clubs of Vinesse. Each bottle we feature in each club not only has been tasted and approved by me (in my role as wine steward), but it

also has been given a seal of approval by our tasting panel. Because so many experienced palates are involved in the evaluation process, we can ship bottles to club members like you with full confidence.

That said, nobody is going to fall in love with every bottle we send them.

That's because each of us has a unique palate, which means each of us will have unique preferences in terms of aromas, flavors and winemaking styles.

So, how does one develop a sense of the types of wine he or she is most likely to enjoy? The same way our tasting panel narrows down the hundreds of monthly choices to just a handful. Taste. Experiment. Take notes, whether written or mental. Compare.

It's all about popping corks.





WINE A TO Z

Body. The effect on the palate resulting from the combination of alcohol, glycerin and sugar content. Often described as full, meaty or weighty.

Creamy. Refers to the “silk-like” mouthfeel of wines subjected to malolactic fermentation, as opposed to the “tart/crisp” impression of wines lacking the procedure.

Doux. The French word for sweet. Typically refers to the sweetest category of sparkling wines.

Elevage. French term (with no direct English equivalent) for the wine-maturing processes involved between fermentation and bottling.

Fleshy. Refers to a wine’s body and texture. A fleshy wine tastes “fatter” than a “meaty” wine, often exhibiting some excess oiliness. Suggests great smoothness and richness.

Grenache. A red wine grape of the Rhone Valley of France and elsewhere (particularly Spain). In the southern Rhone, Grenache replaces Syrah as the most important grape (Syrah being more important in the north).

Hogshead. A wine barrel that holds approximately 239 liters (or 63 gallons).

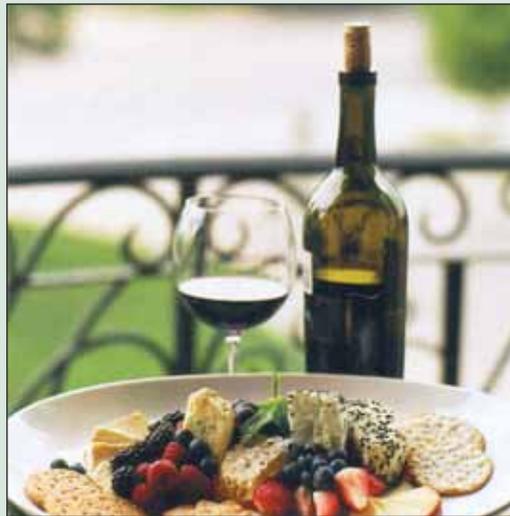
APPELLATION SHOWCASE

THE MAREMMA, ITALY

Italy’s most beautiful coastal winegrowing region, the Maremma, is located in southern Tuscany.

And that, as those who have traveled in Italy know, makes it extremely different than northern Tuscany.

While the north boasts spectacular cities such as Florence, Siena and Lucca, it also attracts hordes of tourists, which can make it difficult to get around town or land a table at a popular restaurant. You also can run into crowds at the various wine estates, most of which are open to the public.



The Maremma, on the other hand, is far more exclusive. The region is noticeably less touristy, and many of its cellars require advance reservations.

The Maremma is often referred to as “The Wild West,” and that applies both to its landscape and its wine-making. The Etruscans were making wine in northern Tuscany thousands

of years before the first vines were planted in the Maremma, and it wasn’t until the 1980s that anyone outside of Italy had even heard of Maremman wines.

Today, the region is known as one of the early sources of the so-called “Super Tuscans,” which typically combine Sangiovese with Cabernet Sauvignon.



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VINESSE STYLE

THE RESTAURANT 'HOT LIST'

Popularity does not necessarily render something stylish, but when it comes to dining out, popularity and stylishness can go hand in hand.

Each year at the National Restaurant Association Show, attendees look forward to the release of the



association's "hot list" for the coming year. Members of the American Culinary Foundation — the premier chefs' organization in North America, with 19,000 members — are polled prior to the show, and the results are transformed into a "Top 20" list of culinary trends (see accompanying box).

Some of the trends deal with "green" issues, which are becoming more important among the general populace and certainly within the wine industry. Others have to do with population shifts and cuisine preferences within certain groups. Still others touch on cooking and/or baking techniques.

Every industry seeks out "the next big

thing," and so it is in the restaurant business. People go to McDonalds because they can reliably obtain the same products and a consistent quality level at a known price. "Foodies," on the other hand, seek out new or "unusual" restaurants in the hope of experiencing new flavors, new textures or new

combinations of favorite ingredients, and seldom are daunted by the prices charged.

This year's "hot list" is extremely wine-friendly, as all but a few of the listings can be applied to the pursuit of wine pairing. And is there any more noble pursuit?

Top 20 Culinary Trends

1. Bite-size desserts
2. Locally grown produce
3. Organic produce
4. Flat bread
5. Bottled water
6. Specialty sandwiches
7. Asian appetizers
8. Specialty coffees
9. Whole grain bread
10. Mediterranean cuisine
11. Pan-seared items
12. Fresh herbs
13. Latin-American cuisine
14. Exotic mushrooms
15. Salts
16. Grilled items
17. Pomegranate
18. Grass-fed items
19. Free-range items
20. Pan-Asian cuisine

BEING GREEN

Now that Marimar Estate in Sonoma County has been certified organic, its namesake owner is taking the next step: she's moving into biodynamics. "This is a really big step up from organic viticulture," Torres says, "where the approach is to see the vineyard as an ecological whole — not just rows of grapevines, but the soil beneath them... an organism in its own right... and the other flora and fauna in the area. To enhance biodiversity, special 'compost teas,' prepared from herbs like yarrow and nettle, are also sprayed in minute quantities over the vines." Torres describes biodynamics as "a leap of faith," because "it's impossible to quantify the success of the practices." But because the estate's wines have been rounder and more reflective of their terroir since becoming certified organic, she believes biodynamics "may further improve the health of our vineyards."



Aging Wine? You Need a Plan

It's the age-old question (pardon the pun): Does wine get better with age?

The answer is yes... and no. Now that we've cleared that up, allow us to expound.

Red wines, in particular, need more time in the barrel and in the bottle than white wines before they're ready to drink. That's why the red wines in release at any given time often are a year older than the white wines in release. For instance, we're only

now seeing a good number of 2004 reds in the marketplace, whereas whites from that vintage have been available for the better part of a year.

But those are mere generalities. The truth is that every type of wine is different, and each variety, each vintage, each individual cuvee and even each individual bottle will age at its own pace — gracefully or otherwise. That's why we at Vinesse always say that it's much better to drink a wine a little bit early than a little bit too late.

Still, the prospect of aging special bottles over an extended period of time is part of the intrigue and romance of wine. And it's certainly true that certain bottlings will evolve in a positive way over several years and, in rare cases, over several decades.

Knowing exactly when to uncork

those special bottles is the challenge. There's nothing worse than cellaring a prized bottle for more than a decade, only to open it and find vinegar inside. Likewise, there's nothing better than savoring a glass of perfectly-aged wine.

How does one attain perfection — or as close to perfection as possible — in wine cellaring? It requires a plan.

Let's say you have six bottles of a particular wine that you want to age. Begin by asking the winemaker or other winery employee this question: "In what year do you expect this wine to be in its prime?" Make a note of the answer.

Store all of the bottles — on their sides so the wine comes in contact with the cork — in a cool, dark place. Exactly one year before that "prime time" estimate, place a note on your calendar to open one of the six bottles.

This is where your own preferences come into play. If you thought that wine was the best you've ever had, you may want to open the remaining bottles on an every-month or every-other-month basis until they're gone. If you think the wine still has room for improvement, wait another year until opening the next bottle.

Each time you open a bottle, take notes and make a new assessment about the "life expectancy" of those remaining. Then schedule the uncorking of those bottles within a time frame that seems to make sense.



Four Seasons



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Roblar: A Destination Winery for Santa Ynez

The Santa Ynez area, north of Santa Barbara, has been “wine country” for a long time.

It's home to dozens of wineries, most of them family-owned, that make world-class wines in very small quantities. In some cases, their bottlings are available only in their tasting rooms. In other cases, Vinesse obtains small allotments for its wine club members.

Great wine. Friendly winery owners. Exclusivity. Santa Ynez has had it all... except for one thing: a destination winery.

North Coast wine country has had such estates for years. Think of Beringer Vineyards with its beautifully landscaped grounds, history-steeped winery buildings, fabulous tours, informative seminars and two tasting rooms. Or Ferrari-Carano, with its stunning formal gardens. Or Ledson Winery, the 16,000-square-foot French Normandy winery known to locals in Sonoma as “the castle.”

The Santa Ynez Valley didn't have



TOURING TIPS

such a destination — until now. On April 28, Roblar Winery — located at the corner of Roblar Avenue and Highway 154 — opened its doors to the public. The reception has been nothing short of phenomenal.

“Roblar was designed from the ground up to offer our visitors the most unique wine country experience possible,” says General Manager Richard Foster. “We start with great wines, of course, but go further to indulge visitors in our one-of-a-kind culinary arts program, our artisan foods and gourmet gifts marketplace,

and the preferred access and amenities of our Top Floor Members Lounge. We think of it as immersion therapy.”

Thanks to the vision of owners Steve and Denise Adams, who live nearby in the community of Montecito, the winery offers ultra-modern, “good life” amenities while retaining the rustic charm that long has defined the Santa Ynez Valley.

Part of the “country” feeling is accomplished by the setting of the tasting room and winery: right in the heart of the estate vineyard.

Renowned architect Bob Easton also earns a bow, as he incorporated numerous design features that seamlessly meld “rustic” and “class.”

Obviously, even a destination winery is only as good as the wine it produces, and Roblar delivers in that area as well. Current releases include a 2001 Cabernet Franc, a 2004 Syrah, a 2005 Sauvignon Blanc and a 2005 “Great Oaks Vineyard” Syrah.

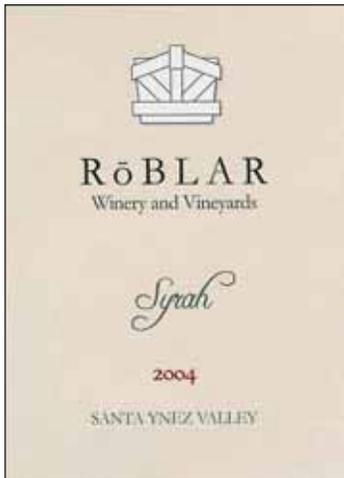
Combined, production amounts to a mere 4,000 cases, which accommodates the Roblar mantra of artisan winemaking. In the vineyard, sustainable farming is practiced.

There are plenty of places on the estate for visitors to enjoy a glass of Roblar wine. A 2,500-square-foot covered porch is adjacent to the tasting hall, oak-studded picnic lawns are a short stroll away, and several vista terraces have been incorporated into the terrain.

Back inside, the Gourmet Marketplace specializes in foods from local farms, orchards, dairies and gourmet purveyors, as well as local and international artisan cheeses. For those who can't decide on what to pack for a picnic, the Marketplace offers “Epicurean to Go” picnic packs. Visitors also can shop for gourmet cooking accessories, house wares and wine-related gifts.

And those who join Roblar's exclu-





sive club receive preferred access to the winery's Top Floor Members' Lounge, which overlooks the vineyard and offers oversized leather chairs, a cozy fireplace, a private tasting bar, food-and-wine pairings and a dedicated staff.

Regularly scheduled cooking classes also are held, featuring top local chefs. After each class, students adjourn to the barrel room to enjoy their culinary creations along with Roblar wines.

For those who have time to visit only one winery, or for wine lovers in search of a "total immersion" wine country experience, the Santa Ynez Valley finally has its own destination winery. Roblar has arrived.

Roblar Winery 4-1-1

Location

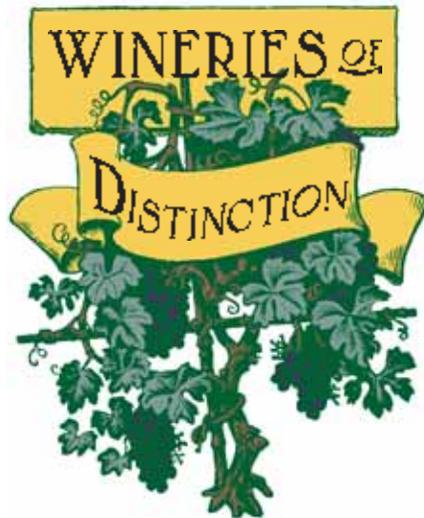
3010 Roblar Avenue,
Santa Ynez
(Corner of Roblar & Hwy. 154)

Amenities

Tasting Hall
Top Floor Members' Lounge
Picnic Facilities
Gourmet Marketplace
Food & Wine Pairing Seminars
Weekly Cooking Classes
Expansive Gardens

Contact Information

805-686-2602
robblarwinery.com



Chateau Montelena: Each Year Shows Bo Knows Wine

The rich history of Chateau Montelena began on a chilly fall morning when Alfred L. Tubbs spaded over and inspected the soil where he thought of planting estate vineyards.

Tubbs had heard that California's Napa Valley was the best place to grow grapes in America. A deal was struck, and in January of 1882, the San Francisco entrepreneur owned 254 acres of rugged land two miles



north of Calistoga at the base of Mount Saint Helena.

Within a decade, Tubbs had turned his dream into a reality. He began by planting his vineyards in the well-drained, stony soil. Then he built his chateau. And in 1886, he engaged the services of a French-born winemaker. Tubbs' name for the winery is a contracted version of Mount Saint Helena.

The modern (post-Prohibition) era of Chateau Montelena began in 1972 when Jim Barrett released his first wines after replanting the original vineyards and modernizing the winery. Four years later, a 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay was ranked the best wine in a blind tasting by French judges — beating out several white Burgundies — and just like that, California wines had credibility around the world.

Today, Jim's son, Bo, is the winemaker, a position he has held since the original vintner departed in 1981. The decision to accept the position did not come instantly.

"When I told my dad I would think about it, I was concerned about what it would do to our relationship," Bo says. "I thought about it for two days, and finally told him that I would need to have the freedom and professional respect he had shown the previous winemaker. He agreed, and that's the way it has been ever since."

The trust was well placed. Chateau Montelena consistently is ranked

among California's top makers of Cabernet Sauvignon year in and year out. And that's the result of Barrett's vision of "bringing the vintage and the vineyard to the table in a wine that is elegant, balanced and enjoyable."

Quotes Du Jour

■ *The late, great Dean Martin, on "limiting" one's intake of wine:*
"You haven't drunk too much wine if you can still lie on the floor without holding on."

■ *Linda Johnson-Bell, writing in Pairing Wine and Food:*
"Like human beings, a wine's taste is going to depend a great deal on its origins and its upbringing."

■ *Alexis Lichine, in the New Encyclopedia of Wine and Spirits, on the marriage of food and wine:*
"A fine meal is a delight in itself. Add a glass of wine — gleaming red or translucent greenish gold — and delectation will be doubled."

■ *Yoshida Kenko, from Essays in Idleness:*
"On a moonlit night, after a snowfall, or under cherry blossoms, it adds to our pleasure if, while chatting at our ease, we bring forth the wine cups."

■ *Homer, in The Iliad:*
"Whenever a man is tired, wine is a great restorer of strength."

Q AND A

Can you give me any tips on how to order wine at a restaurant? Am I better off ordering a glass or a full bottle? How do I choose between a domestic wine and an import? Should I look for a "young" wine or an older vintage?

Hey, one question to a customer! (Just kidding.) Let's take your questions one by one...

Glass or bottle? If you and your date have ordered the same kind of food, share a bottle. If you've having a steak and your date's eating chicken, it's best to select wines by the glass to complement your individual dishes. This is where a sommelier or well-trained server — someone who is very familiar with the restaurant's list — can be very helpful.

Domestic or imported? American vintners — especially those in California, Oregon and Washington — are making world-class wines these days. Generally speaking, ordering a domestic wine is a safe choice. If you're in the mood for

adventure, try an import from one of the emerging wine countries — Chile, Argentina or South Africa.

New or aged? It's a matter of personal preference. Newer wines tend to be fresher, brighter and more fruit-forward in flavor. Aged wines, particularly reds, tend to be elegant and refined, with their flavor elements melded and more subtle.

After reading "Sommelier Diaries" in a recent issue of The Grapevine, which dealt with the correct pronunciation of "Meritage," I have a question: What is the correction pronunciation of Pinotage?

— Tom Thyer

The signature red wine of South Africa is pronounced Pee-noe-tahj. And for those who may not remember, Meritage rhymes with heritage.

*Have a question about wine?
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ATTENTION: THIS IS NOT A 'HARRY POTTER' SPOILER

By now, if you're a fan of the Harry Potter books, you know whether Harry survived in the final installment of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Even so, we'll avoid all of the "spoiler" urges and simply tell you that the actor who plays Professor Severus Snape in the Potter movies, Alan Rickman, has been cast in the upcoming film, *Bottle Shock*. Rickman will play Steven Spurrier, the British wine merchant who organized the fabled Paris Wine Tasting of 1976, at which California wines fared better than their French counterparts in a blind judging. *Bottle Shock* is one of two films in development dealing with that seminal event. The other is titled *Paris Tasting*.



WHICH CAME FIRST, THE OLIVE OR THE GRAPE?

Quite a few wineries in Napa Valley and Sonoma County have added olive oil to their repertoire in recent years. But only one (that we know of) olive oil maker has added winemaking to its business description. That would be Round Pond Estate in the Napa Valley town of Rutherford. Round Pond, which produces both Italian and Spanish varietal olive oils, had been growing winegrapes and selling them. Now, Ryan MacDonnell and her brother Miles MacDonnell also are making Round Pond wines.

CONTINENTAL BLENDS IN EUROPE'S FUTURE?

The European Commission is framing new wine laws to help vintners

on the continent compete on a more even playing field with their Australian and American counterparts. Most European nations have long had extremely restrictive rules regarding varietal makeup, place of origin and other verbiage that may be placed on wine labels. This has made regional blending very difficult, and that, in turn, has made the production of value-priced wines next to impossible. Under the proposed change, a winemaker in the Czech Republic, as an example, could blend

his grapes with those grown in Spain or Portugal. The resulting wine would include the grapes used and the vintage on the label, but no country of origin would be indicated. Elitists,

without even tasting such a concoction, have already labeled the proposed multi-country blends as "Europlonk."

NEW CALIFORNIA WINERY GUIDEBOOKS AVAILABLE

Two new wine country guides have hit book store shelves: *The California Directory of Fine Wineries* (Wine House Press, \$19.95) and *California Wine Country* (Sunset, \$19.95). The former focuses on 60 selected wineries in Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino counties, while the latter covers more territory (although in not as much detail), with info on wineries, lodging and sightseeing opportunities from Napa Valley to Baja.

DINING DESTINATIONS IN NAPA VALLEY & VIENNA

For the first time, the French Laundry and Palais Coburg restaurants in California's Napa Valley and Vienna, Austria, respectively, have earned Grand Awards from *Wine Spectator*. The restaurants were cited for their superb cuisine and expansive wine cellars.

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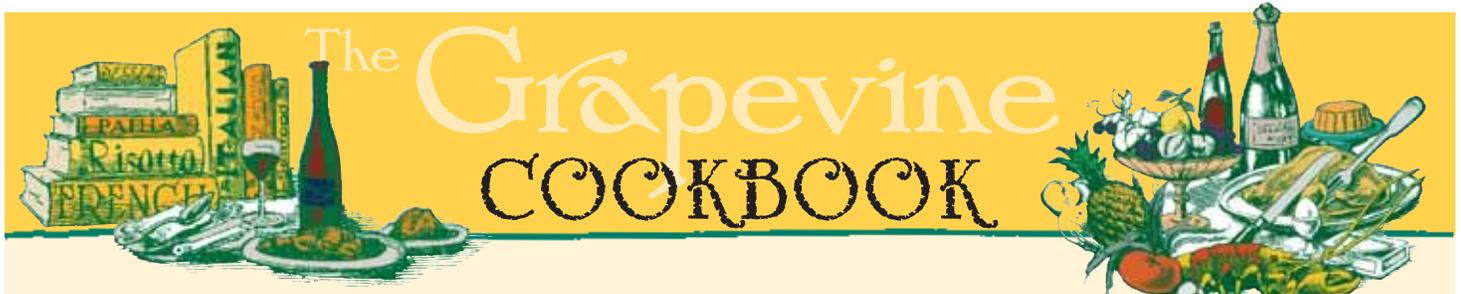
WINE COLOR MIX:
Reds, Whites, or Mixed

FREQUENCY:
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PRICE:

\$99 Per Shipment
Plus Shipping

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CHICKEN SALTIMBOCCA

This recipe, which matches beautifully with Merlot, makes 4 servings.

Ingredients

- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
- 8 fresh sage leaves
- Salt and pepper
- 8 paper-thin slices of prosciutto
- 1/3 cup flour
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1-2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1 cup chicken broth
- Squeeze of lemon

Preparation

1. Rinse and pat dry chicken breasts. Lay out chicken between sheets of plastic wrap, and pound to 1/3-inch. Sprinkle both sides with salt and pepper. Place 1-2 sage leaves on top of each breast. Wrap 1-2 prosciutto slices around the middle of each piece, securing sage. Press prosciutto into flesh of chicken breasts.
2. Spread flour in shallow bowl or plate, and dredge chicken lightly to coat both sides. Tap off excess.

3. In a large, nonstick skillet, heat butter and oil over medium-high heat. Once foam has subsided, add chicken — prosciutto side down — and cook for 4 minutes. When breast has developed a golden brown crust, turn over and cook for another 3-4 minutes.
4. Transfer to a baking dish and cover with aluminum foil to retain heat. Reserve skillet for sauce.
5. Add wine and broth to skillet. Scrape browned bits off bottom with a wooden spoon. Cook over high heat until reduced to about 1/2 cup of liquid. Season with lemon juice, salt and pepper. Drizzle sauce over saltimbocca and serve immediately.

SHRIMP ESCABECHE

This Spanish recipe makes 12 servings (call your friends!) and matches nicely with Chardonnay (call Vinesse!).

Ingredients

- 2 cups tangerine juice
- 1 cup lemon juice
- 3 garlic cloves, minced, divided

- Pinch salt
- 2 lbs. shrimp, cooked, deveined, peeled, and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 cups red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 1/2 cups celery, finely chopped
- 1 cup red onion, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup cilantro, chopped
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Pinch cayenne

Preparation

1. In a medium saucepan, combine tangerine and lemon juices, along with 2 minced garlic cloves and pinch of salt. Bring to a boil and simmer until reduced to 1 cup of liquid, about 15-20 minutes. Allow to cool.
2. Mix shrimp, bell pepper, celery, red onion, cilantro and olive oil in a large bowl. Toss with juice mixture and remaining garlic, and season with salt and a pinch of cayenne.
3. Cover and chill overnight, or for at least 2 hours, before serving.

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