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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

Where is the best place to store your supply of gourmet cheese?

Which two valleys, in particular, are home to the vineyards that are producing so much great wine in Chile these days?

You're in San Francisco and you need a chocolate fix — and we're not talking Ghiradelli, but real gourmet chocolate — so where do you go?

Which types of fish go with which types of wine?

Can you name the Sonoma County winery (the name of which is an initial) that just hired a legendary wine-maker to help take it to the next level?

You're familiar with Phylloxera, but did you know there's a new vineyard pest that's poised to do some serious damage in New Zealand, Australia and California if it's not contained?

Did you know that all of the answers to these questions can be found in this issue? And did you ever think that an entire column could consist of nothing but questions?

Martin Stewart Jr.

If It's Not One Thing, It's a Light Brown Apple Moth

By Robert Johnson

Every winegrape grower and every vintner knows that the successful completion of any given harvest ultimately rests in the hands of Mother Nature.

That's why a vast majority of the world's vineyard land is found in temperate climates, roughly around the 46th and 47th Parallels. With so many things that can go wrong during a growing season, why tempt fate with undependable weather?

However, even vineyards planted in ideal growing areas are susceptible to other "challenges." History shows that both France and California, among other locales, have had to deal — sometimes unsuccessfully — with various vineyard pests, most notably the root louse Phylloxera. Untold acres of vines have had to be cleansed and then replanted with more resistant rootstocks.

So what's the next big thing in tiny, but destructive, bugs? Some

are saying it's the light brown apple moth, a pest that's native to New Zealand and Australia but has been spotted in eight California counties by the state's Department of Food and Agriculture.

The insects are not picky eaters; they'll gorge on peaches, citrus, tomatoes, avocados and, yes, grapevines.

That's the bad news. The good news is that, as of this writing, most of the moths in California have been found in urban areas.

They're in grape-growing counties, but not in vineyards — at least, not yet.

To be on the safe side, agriculture officials have placed

some 300 traps in Napa County, and they're being inspected every two weeks. Other areas also are keeping a watchful eye.

While the bugs pose no threat from a health standpoint, they can severely damage vines and, consequently, limit a vine's production in any given year. That's why growers, winemakers and ag officials are working together in this newest squabble with Mother Nature.



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"):

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Editor:

Robert Johnson

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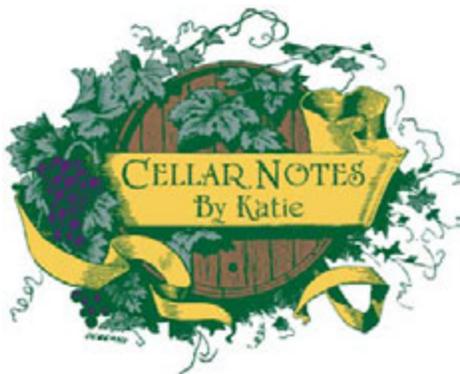
Katie Montgomery

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Homage to Fromage

One of the hottest trends on the restaurant scene actually is a revival of an old dining tradition: cheese.

More restaurants with cheese rooms are opening all the time. Gourmet cheeses are being added to the menus at wine bars, with cheese flights joining wine flights. As we've reported in *The Grapevine* previously, a downtown Chicago hotel has transformed its piano bar into a gourmet wine, cheese and chocolate bar.

Creamy, soft chevres.

Rock-hard pecorinos.

Buttery, washed rinds.

Stepping into a restaurant's cheese room is just as exciting for a cheese lover as hanging out in a winery cellar is for a wine lover. It's olfactory gland overload at its most hedonistic.

For those of us who are true cheese-heads (with apologies to the Green Bay Packers' faithful), having a stash at home is important. After all, not all of us live within easy driving distance of a cheese-focused restaurant or wine

bar. That means we need to know how to properly store, age and ripen cheese at home, just as we need to take care of our wine bottles.

So, how does one go about keeping that lovely wheel looking and tasting its best? Well, the great news for wine lovers is that a Vinotemp or other wine cooler — set at the preferred wine storage temperature of about 55 degrees — is the perfect place for storing cheese as well.

Even the humidity range for cheese storage is the same as that recommended for wine storage: between 70 and 90 percent.

In other words, if you have a wine cooler — not Bartles & Jaymes, but a refrigerator-like appliance — you also have a cheese cooler.

But what if you don't? No problem. Place the cheese in the vegetable drawer of your refrigerator, as it's designed to be warmer than other parts of the unit, which average around 37 degrees.

Also, take a hint from good cheese shops: Wrap the cheese in butcher paper, not plastic wrap. If you don't

have butcher paper, use wax paper.

Softer cheeses can be stored in plastic wrap or Tupperware containers, but you'll need to air them out once a day to maintain the cheese's proper moisture

level and freshness.

In the best of all worlds, you'll consume your cheese within a week of its purchase. As is the case with most wine, most cheese will not improve with age.

Here are a few of my favorite cheese-and-wine pairings: chevre with Pinot Grigio, brie with Riesling, Mahon with Sauvignon Blanc, and gouda with Zinfandel.





WINE A_{TO}Z

Oily. Quality in some Chardonnay and late harvest wines that refers to a slippery, fat sensation on the palate.

Perfumed. Another word for “floral” in describing the aroma of a wine. It may also infer sweetness in some wines.

Quintessa. A 280-acre wine estate in the Rutherford appellation of the Napa Valley.

Refined. Descriptor for a wine that is elegant, and perhaps unexpectedly so. Example: a (red) Zinfandel (typically big, bold and in-your-face) that is more fruit-forward and food-friendly.

Santa Barbara Winery. A “city” wine estate just blocks from the Pacific Ocean.

Tears. Synonym for “legs,” those streaks of wine that cling to the inside of a wine glass after one takes a sip.

Unfiltered. A wine that has not been put through the standard filtering process.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

COLCHAGUA & MAULE VALLEYS

Historically, Chile has been known for its red wines, and today, red varieties represent about three-fourths of the country’s vineyard plantings.

Producers in regions throughout the country have added Syrah and Pinot

Noir to long-established varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Carmenere with fabulous results.

While all of the country’s regions are now producing world-class wines, most observers agree that the best of the best are being made in the Colchagua Valley and the Maule Valley.

“I carefully searched throughout the world for a vineyard site that would enable me to produce wines of the highest quality,” says Alexandra Marnier-Lapostolle of Casa Lapostolle, “and I immediately fell in love with Colchagua Valley. Here we felt we had everything we would need to accomplish our goals: the climate, the soil, the old vines and the presence of quality Merlot, Cabernet and Carmenere.”



Cecilia Guzman of Haras de Pirque is just as enthusiastic about the Maipo Valley.

“The upper Maipo has very special climatic conditions,” she says. “The grapes from this region have great acid fruit character, as well as mineral and spicy notes.”



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VINESSE STYLE

WINE & CHOCOLATE QUESTS

There are few things better in life than wine and chocolate.

They're not always good together. In fact, no white wine pairs well with chocolate, and even with red wines, you need the right red and the right chocolate to create a great match.

That said, there are millions of people who appreciate these two treats separately. And with that in mind, we've come up with the perfect way to spend a weekend: visiting a fabulous chocolate shop, and then heading out to a nearby wine region.

The following chocolatier recommendations come to us courtesy of *USA Today*.

We've then added information on "wine country" that's within a reasonable driving distance. And depending upon your starting point, know that it's perfectly okay to begin with dessert. After all, life is short.

• **Richard H. Donnelly Chocolates.** Located in Santa Cruz, Calif., Donnelly features small chocolate bars that are wrapped in handmade

rice paper, and truffles with intensely flavored fillings, including lemongrass. (Hmm... since lemongrass is a nuance commonly found in Sauvignon Blanc, could this be that rare white wine-and-chocolate match? Probably not, but you might want to enjoy a glass of Sauvignon Blanc before noshing on the lemongrass truffle.)

Nearby wine country: Santa Cruz Mountains.

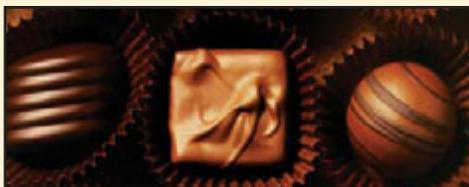
• **Recchiuti Confections.** This San Francisco chocolatier makes small batches of blissful confections with unusual flavors. To die for: the

Bergamot, a luxurious blend of cream, Keemum tea and bergamot oil.

Nearby wine country: Livermore Valley, or Monterey County.

• **Jacques Torres Chocolate Haven.** Make sure you're hungry when you visit this Big Apple shop, which attracts chocophiles from around the world. The filled chocolates take center stage, with cinnamon praline and passion fruit among the most requested. Also worth a try: the Gingerettes, which are disks of candied ginger coated in dark chocolate.

Nearby wine country: Long Island.



BEING GREEN

Like permaculture and sustainable agriculture, biodynamics emphasizes a self-sustaining ecosystem within which plants seemingly take care of themselves. Mike Benziger of Sonoma County's Benziger Vineyards described biodynamics to *Sunset magazine* as "the highest form of organic farming." And at his family winery, it's taken very seriously because Benziger believes it creates wines possessing a sense of place. It's a domino effect, as the health of the landscape helps protect the grapevines from diseases, and disease-free vines produce grapes of higher quality. In a nutshell, the process involves attracting pollinators, using natural controls, and recycling water and waste. In the case of Benziger Vineyards, the proof is in the bottle.



There's Something Fishy Going On

Most of us tend to eat lighter when the weather heats up. In addition to “summer salads,” we also eat more fish.

Which brings up the question: What kind of wine goes best with fish?

You may recall the groundbreaking book, *Red Wine With Fish*, which basically debunked the red-wine-with-beef, white-wine-with-fish dictum that had been in place for virtually all of the 20th century. While we didn't agree with all of the ideas presented in the book, we do give its authors credit for getting more people to think and talk about food-and-wine pairing.

The classic red-wine-with-fish pairing, of course, is Pinot Noir with barbecued salmon. It's not only an exception to the long-held “rule,” it's

probably the perfect wine to serve with salmon. Another “rule breaker” would be Zinfandel with a classic crab cioppino.

Generally speaking, however, you're better off uncorking (or unscrewing) a bottle of white wine with most fish dishes.

But which white with which fish? Glad you asked. We polled members of the Vinesse tasting panel and came up with a number of pairing possibilities — some classic, others a little

“out there,” but all palate-proven...

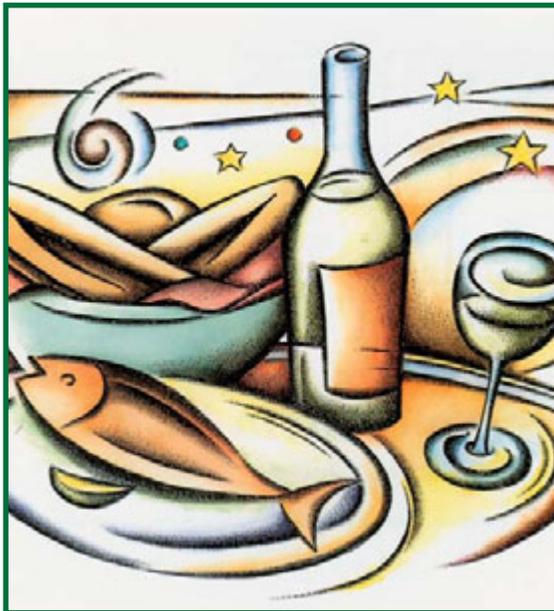
- **With Chardonnay** — lobster, crab, tuna, swordfish or shark. Also, almost any fish with a creamy white sauce.

- **With Sauvignon Blanc** — shrimp, oysters, clams, mussels (all served cold),

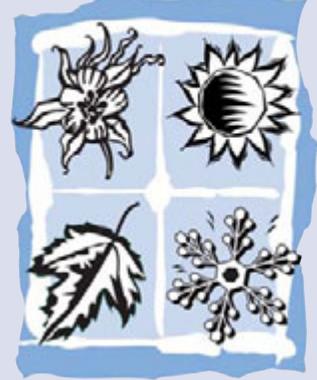
or light fish (cooked) such as halibut.

- **With Riesling** — scallops, clams, Pollock, grilled shrimp, calamari, trout or baked oysters.

- **With sparkling wine** — raw oysters, crab cakes or sushi.



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Apulia: This Boot Is Made for Touring

Apulia, the heel of Italy's boot, is a long, relatively level region with 25 DOC quality zones.

It can be divided roughly into two viticultural sectors by a hypothetical line crossing the region between Brindisi and Taranto. To the north, the terrain is rolling to hilly and the climate is temperate, even relatively cool at certain heights in the Murge plateau.

Dry wines from there tend to have moderate strength with impressive fruit, good acidity and ample bouquet. Red wines generally derive from the native Uva di Troia or Bombino Nero, as well as Montepulciano and Sangiovese. White wines are dominated by the Verdeca variety, though Bianco d'Alessano, Malvasia, Trebbiano and Bombino Bianco also are evident.

Vines share the countryside with an array of Mediterranean plants, including prickly pears and olive groves. It's still quite common to see mixed cultivation, especially on the smaller family farms.



TOURING TIPS

When visiting Apulia (a.k.a. Puglia), one might be tempted to stay at one of the numerous luxury resorts, particularly if a round of golf or a few spa treatments are on the “to-do” list. But for a more authentic taste of this special place, opt for an accommodation known as an *agriturismo*.

One of the better known is *Masseria Il Frantoio*, which is part of a working farm that has more than 4,000 olive trees. Although the rooms are not big, they are comfortable, and the nightly rate includes a lavish breakfast spread each morning.

More moderately priced is

Agriturismo Montepaolo, where proprietor Niny Bassi treats guests to authentic, rustic, regional cooking. Breakfast is included, and dinner is a bargain at around \$26 per person. Three words of warning: no air conditioning.

You've probably noted that food received significant verbiage in each of the *agriturismo*'s descriptions. That's because dining is an important part of Italian culture — although it should be noted that there really is no such thing as “Italian cooking.” Rather, all cooking in Italy is regional in style.

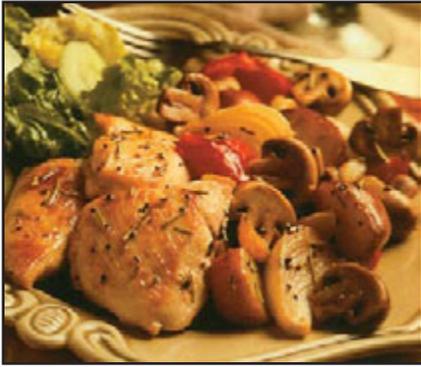
It may be Piedmontese or Tuscan... Ligurian or Sicilian. In Apulia, seafood is the culinary star, often grilled or cooked just minutes after it has been hauled from the sea, and with minimal, subtle seasoning. Among the choices are sweet red shrimp, sea urchins, squid, octopus, clams, mussels and oysters.

Countless family-run restaurants offer an abundance of seafood, fresh crispy bread, artisan cheeses and locally-made wines. One of our favorites is *Da Tuccino*, located right on the coast and completely lacking in atmosphere; all you get is great food. For meat lovers, *Arrosteria del Vicoletta* is a good choice. It should be: It's adjacent to a butcher shop, and offers wonderful sausage links, pork rib chops and lamb riblets.

For total culinary immersion, plan to spend a week at The Awaiting Table, where Pugliese cuisine is taught in English. Fees, including accommodations, start at \$2,363. The facility also offers day classes for around \$460.

If you'd rather wander, be sure to visit Altamura and ask a local for directions to the Di Gesu Bakery, which has been run by the same family since 1838. There, you'll be treated to some of the best bread on the face of the Earth, let alone in Italy. For a once-in-a-lifetime treat, venture around the corner (the bakers





will direct you) to the Dicecca Cheese Shop and pick up some sheep's milk ricotta to accompany the bread.

There are so many tiny towns, so much historic architecture, and so many wining-and-dining opportunities in Apulia that it would require months to take it all in. At a minimum, you should plan one full week, exclusive of flight days, for an enticing sampling.

When you spend a week in Apulia, you'll want to return for two next year.

For Further Information

Masseria Il Frantoio
011-39-0831-330276

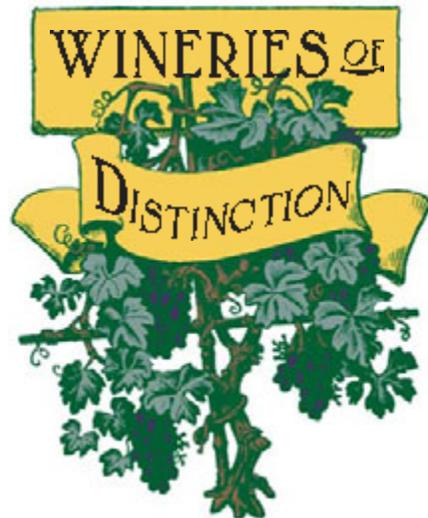
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The Awaiting Table
awaitingtable.com

Italian Tourist Board
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J: Out of This World & Shooting For the Moon

J *Vineyards & Winery's winemaking philosophy is grounded in founder Judy Jordan's sense of place and commitment to quality.*

Located in Healdsburg, California, in the heart of Sonoma County's Russian River Valley, J began as a small, *methode champenoise* project. Today, the winery produces site-specific still wines as well, with a focus on estate-grown Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

J's diverse hillside and valley floor vineyards — eight in all — are located throughout the middle reach of the

Russian River Valley. Each offers distinctive flavors to the wine, and each growing season is unique, lending further "sense of a place."

The diversity of locations, soils, trellises, rootstocks and clones gives the winemaking team a tremendous range of flavor profiles with which to work in crafting the various wines. Because J focuses on cool-climate winegrowing, very little interference is made in the 274 acres of vineyards so as to allow the true expression of the Russian River area to materialize. And to preserve the unique flavors of the fruit, harvesting is undertaken at night so the juice temperature is as low as possible.

While J's wines have been stellar from the outset, they figure to get even better moving forward with the hiring of winemaking legend George Bursick. From his first post-college job of assembling Christmas gift packs at Beringer to his 21-year stint as winemaker for the acclaimed Ferrari-Carano estate, Bursick knows the wine business inside-out. But he's most at home in the cellar, and when he heard about Jordan's desire

to ratchet things up and "shoot for the moon," he knew he wanted to be involved.

"I realized I had the chance to shake things up a bit and be a part of something special," Bursick explains. "The timing for me was right."



If his work at J is to be his swan song, Bursick intends to soar with the eagles.

Quotes Du Gour

■ *A Latin saying, providing several “excuses” for popping a cork:*

“It is well to remember that there are five reasons for drinking: the arrival of a friend; one’s present or future thirst; the excellence of the wine; or any other reason.”

■ *“The Country Life,” on why we should choose wine over love:*

“Wine gives us liberty, love takes it away. Wine makes us princes, love makes us beggars.”

■ *Oliver Goldsmith, in “She Stoops to Conquer”:*

“I love everything that’s old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wines.”

■ *Filmmaker/winemaker Francis Ford Coppola on the main difference between his two professions:*

“Today’s winemakers still worry about quality.”

■ *The incomparable entertainer and noted imbiber, W.C. Fields, at midday:*

“What contemptible scoundrel stole the cork from my lunch?”

Q AND A

I know wine has less alcohol than hard liquor and more than beer. My guess is that a higher alcohol level makes a wine “hotter” and less pleasant to drink. Is this true?

Not necessarily. But before we get into why, a little history...

For many wineries, 13.9 percent is the highest level of alcohol they’ll allow in their wines. That’s not an arbitrary figure. The federal government collects \$1.07 per gallon for wines with an alcohol content of less than 14 percent. Once the level reaches 14 percent, the tariff climbs to \$1.57 per gallon. Not a big deal if you’re producing high-priced wines, but if you’re trying to combine quality and value, a nearly 50 percent jump in federal tax collected is huge. The

big wine factories also pay close attention to the alcohol level. That one-tenth of a percentage point between 13.9 and 14.0 can translate into millions of dollars in lost revenue. Especially for publicly-traded companies, which must be more focused on growth than almost anything else, millions lost or saved can make a big difference in share price and overall profitability of the company.

How does alcohol level impact wine quality? It’s not so much about the alcohol as it is about balance. A 14.5 or 15% alcohol wine can be wonderful, as long as the right degree of fruit intensity and acidity is present. Lack of balance can create the “hotness” trait you described, but good balance simply makes a higher-alcohol wine “big.” And big can be beautiful.

Good balance makes a higher alcohol wine ‘big’.



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A VINOUS OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

Francis Ford Coppola, the filmmaker turned winemaker (quoted in this issue's "Quotes du Jour," incidentally), recently hit the road to introduce his newest line of wines. But rather than participate in the typical series of retailer tastings and restaurant wine dinners, he developed a one-man stage show. The presentation included songs, dance and even magic tricks, prompting Coppola to teasingly taunt, "Eat your heart out, David Copperfield." The presentation was called, "Wine, Daydreams and Memories."



GALLO: WINE SHOULD NOT BE OVER THE TOP

Gina Gallo, now the driving force of the famous Gallo winemaking family, says she grew up with an appreciation for food. "Even our chores often had to do with food, whether it was going out and picking walnuts or tasting the grapes," she told *USA Today*. "That love of food made me feel early on that wine should never be an over-the-top experience, but rather something delicate on the palate."

THE GREAT BRAT & WINE CHALLENGE

Milwaukee may be known for beer, but the lakeside city has been undergoing a renaissance, complete with modern art, trendy neighborhoods and new culinary destinations. But during the summer months, the official food of Milwaukee remains the brat. Sometimes bratwurst is made out of pork and veal, and sometimes

it's all-pork. When served solo — i.e., sans sauerkraut — the brat matches beautifully with (red) Zinfandel. Throw it on a bun and load it up with extras, and Milwaukee's most famous brew is the better match. However, if you're a wine fanatic and absolutely insist on seeking a successful vinous pairing, we'd recommend a nice, chilled Rosé.

GET MORE THRILL OUT OF THE GRILL

It's the heart of the grilling season, and if you're not getting the best results when you fire up the barbee, here are a few tips from 'cue experts:

1. Clean the grill. It seems obvious, but it's something you should do after each use.
2. Determine the heat level. You want the temperature to be at its peak before you start cooking.
3. Trim excess fat off the meat. This prevents charring.
4. Don't stab the meat. Stabbing releases the juices and dries out the meat.
5. Use a thermometer to determine when the meat is cooked. Chicken requires more cooking — it needs to reach 180 degrees, compared to 160 degrees for burgers.
6. Let the meat settle. After removing it from the grill, let it sit for five minutes so it will retain its juices.

HELLO, NORMA JEAN; HAPPY '21st' BIRTHDAY

Marilyn Merlot turns 21 this year. What started out as a fun project to perpetuate the memory of actress Marilyn Monroe has turned into a collectible obsession for Norma Jean fanatics. Even though the wine would rank only in the middle tier as far as quality is concerned, past vintages fetch big bucks. You can get a bottle of the inaugural 1985 vintage for \$3,800. A vertical set of vintages 1985-1996 will set you back \$8,000. And this for a wine that now sells for around \$23 on release.

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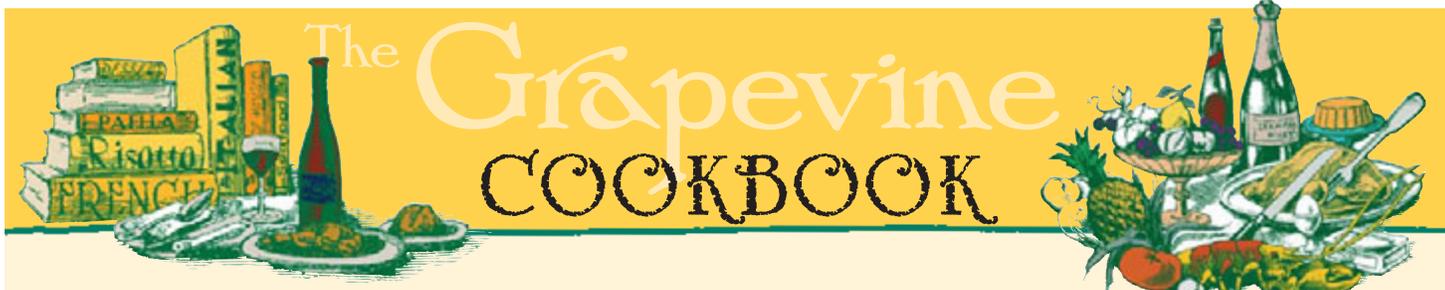
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HERB-RUBBED PORK ROAST

Member Sari Hartmann provided this recipe, which serves 8 to 10. She recommends uncorking a crisp Chardonnay, but adds she also has enjoyed it with Shiraz.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 teaspoons ground sage
- 2 teaspoons dried marjoram
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon celery seed
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- A 5-lb. (or larger) boneless pork loin roast
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

Preparation

1. In a small bowl, combine the first 7 ingredients.
2. Thoroughly rub the roast on all sides with the mixture. Wrap tightly in aluminum foil and let stand at least 4 hours or overnight in the refrigerator.

3. Place on grill over a pan of water with indirect medium coals around for about an hour, or until the meat thermometer registers 142 degrees. Roast should be barely pink in center. Do not overcook.
4. Let stand wrapped in foil for 5 minutes before carving. If you wish, sprinkle with parsley for garnish.

CHICKEN TANGINE

Try this flavorful dish, which serves 6 or 7, with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Sangiovese or red blends.

Ingredients

- 6 to 7 chicken thighs, boneless and skinless, cut into 2-inch chunks
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons minced gingerroot
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 cup dry white wine

- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup dried apricots
- 1 cup whole blanched almonds
- 1 cup pitted green olives

Preparation

1. Place chicken in a small glass bowl and add flour. Toss chicken to coat.
2. In a large pot over high heat, heat olive oil. Place chicken in olive oil, and brown on all sides.
3. Reduce heat to medium-low; add onion, garlic and ginger. Sauté about 5 minutes.
4. Stir in coriander and cumin; sauté until aromatic, about 30 seconds.
5. Add wine. Increase heat to high. Boil until wine has been reduced by half.
6. Stir in chicken broth, apricots, almonds and olives. Bring to a simmer; reduce heat to low, cover pot and simmer for 45 minutes.

Serving suggestion: Serve over cous cous.

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