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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

As I looked over the story lineup for this issue of *The Grapevine*, I was struck by what a global phenomenon wine has become.

Lots of the big wine companies are looking with covetous eyes at China as that country's middle class continues to develop, and "disposable income" becomes more than just a theory. For publicly traded companies that depend on growth for profits, there can be no bigger pot of gold.

No wonder winegrapes are being grown in so many locales around the world. In this newsletter alone, you'll read about oak barrels from Slovenia, sparkling wine from France, the wine lands of South Africa and a wine-friendly recipe for Australian Butternut Squash Soup.

It's enough to make me wish I'd taken more foreign language classes when I was in school. Then again, it also could be said that when wine is on the table, we all speak a universal language of friendship.

Martin Stewart Jr.

Over a Barrel: The Great Oak Controversy of 2007

By Robert Johnson

One of the hot topics in the wine world last year involved the overuse of oak barrels by some vintners.

How could oak barrels possibly be controversial? The short answer is that, by an increasing number of winemakers in a growing number of wine-producing countries, wine is being "manufactured" as opposed to "crafted."

What I mean by that is this: Instead of making a wine that is a direct reflection of the grapes and the climate, more and more vintners are blending grape varieties and selecting specific types of oak barrels and embracing certain types of yeast in the fermentation process in order to produce a wine that fits a predetermined model — a model that will appeal to certain critics who have great influence on the marketplace.

Oak barrels play a key role in the scenario because they contribute

an array of aromas and flavors to wine, depending on where the oak trees were grown, how the barrels were toasted and the number of years they've been in use. French oak imparts different nuances than American oak, which imparts different nuances than Slovenian oak and so on. The variables are numerous.

Personally, I like a little oak influence in my wine — a little, not a lot — because it adds another flavor dimension I find pleasing.

But when vintners make big oaky "monster wines" in an attempt to get a big score from an influential critic, they lose me. I want to taste fruit and earth flavors with a mild oak framework; I don't want to feel like I just bit into an oak tree.

Some vintners are going against the grain, using less oak and the critics be damned. Ultimately, it's a matter of personal taste, and another reason wine drinking is so fulfilling. You don't find many people arguing over hot dogs, but it's usually pretty easy to get into a debate about wine.



Read more by Johnson in "Editor's Journal" on VinesseTODAY.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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Chief Operating Officer
(aka "The Buck Stops Here"):
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***E*very time I see a picture of vine-ripened winegrapes encased in ice or kissed with frost, my mouth starts to water.**

I have a sweet tooth, and I love sweet wines. I also love dry wines, but there's something about an "ice wine" that transports me right past the "Hedonism" stop on the bus line and on to a place I can only describe as "Pure Bliss." I'd say, more than anything else, dessert-style wines collectively represent my guilty pleasure.

That said, I've had some less than pleasurable experiences over the years when I've ordered a glass of sweet wine alongside a sweet dessert. It's rare for the wine and the dessert to mesh and complement one another; it's much more common for one to overpower the other, to the detriment of both.

Few people know more about dessert wines than Andrew Quady, who has embraced the Muscat family of grapes and made it his own. In a booklet he published a few years ago, Quady described what could have been one of those unforgettable dining experiences... but ultimately turned out to be disappointing.

"In the mid-1980s," he wrote, "a fellow dessert wine aficionado and I



decided that it would be fun to drink a really famous and wonderful dessert wine, the 1967 Chateau d'Yquem, with a great dessert. We went to L'Ermitage, in its day the top French restaurant in Los Angeles, and ordered two dessert soufflés, one vanilla and one chocolate.

"As I recall, we had a very nice time, but something wasn't quite right with the pairing. Instead of harmony, the desserts seemed to compete with the wine for attention, and both suffered."

That said, amazing dessert wine and dessert pairings are possible. As Quady puts it, "A pairing works if wine and dessert enjoyed together taste better than separately."

An example: Quady's own Essensia dessert wine poured over a slice of simple pound cake. It lifts the perception of the cake without detracting

from the sweetness of the wine.

Quady discourages people from pairing a sweet wine with an ultra-sweet dessert such as baklava or pecan pie. It's just too much sweetness.

"It is better just to serve coffee or tea with those types of desserts," he asserts. "The bitterness will relieve the palate of the dessert's sweetness."

My suggestion: Keep a couple loaves of Sara Lee pound cake in the freezer. Then you'll always be ready to open a bottle of sweet wine.





WINE A TO Z

Mousse. French term for the bubbles or froth of Champagne.

Nose. The combination of a wine's aroma from the grapes and the bouquet from aging.

Old World. In the world of wine, defined by the early fine winemaking countries — those European nations that ring the Mediterranean basin.

Pomace. What's left over after winegrapes are pressed — skins, stems, seeds and pulp. Can be made into grappa when distilled.

Quintessa. A Napa Valley estate practicing biodynamic farming. (See "Being Green" in this issue for more information.)

Rough. Descriptor for a tannic red wine. Usually applies to very young reds, which typically smooth out with time in the barrel and bottle.

Starter. A commercial yeast that's used to initiate and ensure the fermentation process.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE SOUTH AFRICA

I t's impossible to talk about South African wine without first talking about South African politics.

Before the country embraced a multi-cultural democracy, its wines were, to be kind, unexciting. Not only that, about half of the winegrape production was distilled into Brandy and an array of cheap spirits.

But when Apartheid ended and South Africa was welcomed back to the world community, the new revenue was used to bring winemaking equipment and practices up to global standards. The South African wine renaissance had begun, and one can taste the improvement with each succeeding vintage.

South Africa boasts the only winelands in the world that are sandwiched between two oceans —



namely, the Atlantic and Indian. The roughly 1,800 miles of coastline provide a maritime influence (cooling afternoon and early evening breezes) that grapevines love after long days of absorbing the nourishing sunshine.

Stellenbosch and Paarl are the quality capitals of South African winemaking. The Franschhoek

Valley, a bit farther inland, also has been coming on strong in recent vintages.

Due in part to the country's former political landscape, much of the wine continues to be made by large cooperatives, with multiple growers contributing their fruit

to a single winemaking entity. In recent years, however, the number of private estates has multiplied, and that's where the most talented and visionary vintners have gravitated.

It's a new age in South Africa, and winemaking is one of the industries and crafts that is benefiting.

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VINESSE STYLE

HOLY MOLE!

Mention Mole to most Americans, and they'll recognize it as a Mexican sauce that includes a bit of chocolate flavor.

That would be Mole Poblano, which often is served at festivals or other celebrations. The acclaimed Frontera Grill in Chicago, home of celebrity chef Rick Bayless, serves it atop chicken-filled enchiladas — its touch of sweetness serving to mellow the gentle kick of the dish.

Poblano is not the only type of Mole, however. Others skip the chocolate and incorporate a wide range of ingredients, including chiles of assorted colors and hotness levels, sesame seeds, nuts, spices, garlic and fruit. It's important to know your moles when dining out because, when selecting a complementary wine, one should match it to the dominant flavor of the dish — and when Moles are involved, the dominant flavors will come from the sauce.

As an example, with Chef Bayless' Mole Poblano-topped chicken

enchilada, we'd suggest a wine with rich, dark fruit flavors — Zinfandel, Primitivo or Petite Sirah.

Here are a few other Mole-and-wine pairing ideas...

■ **Mole Amarillo** — This light sauce often is served over fish, and goes well with fruity white wines such as Riesling, Gewurztraminer or Pinot Gris. White wines with just a hint of sweetness also work.

■ **Mole Rojo** — Because it's not too heavy, this sauce often is served with enchiladas, and some chefs use it with lamb dishes. Zinfandel is one wine possibility, but an Australian Shiraz also would match beautifully. The same wines could be used with a pork chop topped with Manchamanteles, a slightly sweet sauce that counts cinnamon, cloves and plantains among its flavors.

■ **Mole Verde** — This is perhaps the least complex of the Moles, but no less enjoyable; it simply has a cleaner flavor, often infused with herbal notes. So, select an herbal wine such as Sauvignon Blanc to accompany it. Most California renditions are fine, but the assertive New Zealand style would be even better.

BEING GREEN

The Quintessa Estate in the northeast corner of Napa Valley's Rutherford district has been farming biodynamically since 2000. In 2005, the entire 280-acre property was converted to 100 percent organic and biodynamic farming practices. At the fall equinox, the biodynamic preparation is made from cow manure and fermented in a cow horn buried in the soil until spring. At the spring equinox, it is removed and used as a soil spray to stimulate root growth and humus formation. Biodynamic compost is another fundamental component of the biodynamic method. After harvest, compost is spread across the vineyards, and at the same time, Quintessa begins to prepare compost for the next year, utilizing grape skins and seeds along with yarrow blossoms, chamomile blossoms, stinging nettle, oak bark, dandelion flowers and valerian flowers. Together, the preparations and compost are considered the cornerstone of biodynamics.



California, Here Zin Comes

For eons, everyone in the wine world considered Zinfandel to be a "California native."

(No, we're not talking about some dude named Zinfandel with a dark tan, Moss Lipow sunglasses and a rad sports car; we're referring to the winegrape known as Zinfandel.)

Obviously, ampelographers knew the variety — a member of the vitus vinifera species — had to have originated in Europe. But with its heritage shrouded in mystery, Californians promoted the grape as an indigenous species, sort of like paparazzi on Sunset Boulevard.

All that changed when geneticists found that Zinfandel had an identical twin in southern Italy — the ever so humble Primitivo. At last, the mystery was solved. Rather than an orphan, Zin was every bit as Italian-American as spaghetti and meatballs.

End of story, right? Wrong. Before long, another theory was floated: that Plavic Mali, a variety grown in Croatia, actually was the original parent of both Zinfandel and Primitivo. But, in true Hollywood soap opera style, it was shown that Plavic Mali actually is the offspring of



Zinfandel and Dobricic. Yes, an offspring was confused for a parent — somebody get the writers at "The Young and the Restless" on the phone! Can't you just hear the dialogue when the two parties finally meet? "I'm not your mother. I'm your daughter!"

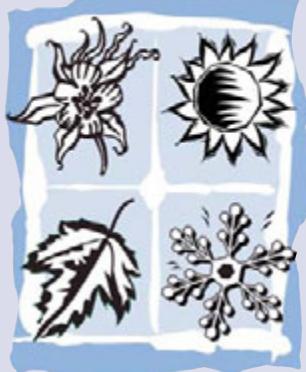
But we digress. The mystery was finally solved... once and for all (or at least for the time being)... when vine geneticist Carole Meredith of the

University of California at Davis — with the help of Croatian scientists Ivan Pejic and Edi Maletic — determined that the genetic parent of Zinfandel is a grape by the name of Crjenak. No, we can't pronounce it, but we *can* sneeze it.

And now that its heritage has been cleared up, Zinfandel is enjoying great success — although it does have somewhat of a split personality. It sometimes goes by the name of White Zinfandel and assumes a pinkish-orange hue. On other occasions, it maintains its inherent red color but becomes very, very sweet — almost raisin-like. And then there's its "dry red wine" identity, brimming with berry and spice nuances.

So, while it may not be a California native after all, Zinfandel certainly maintains a Golden State persona: exotic, lush, spicy... and rich.

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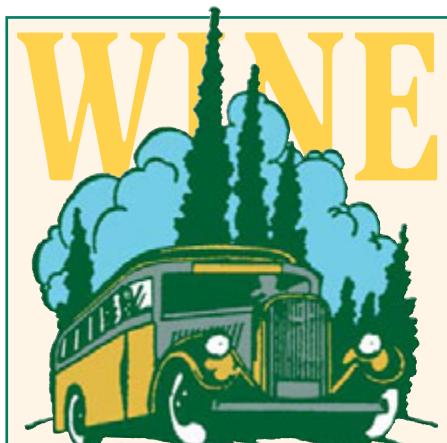
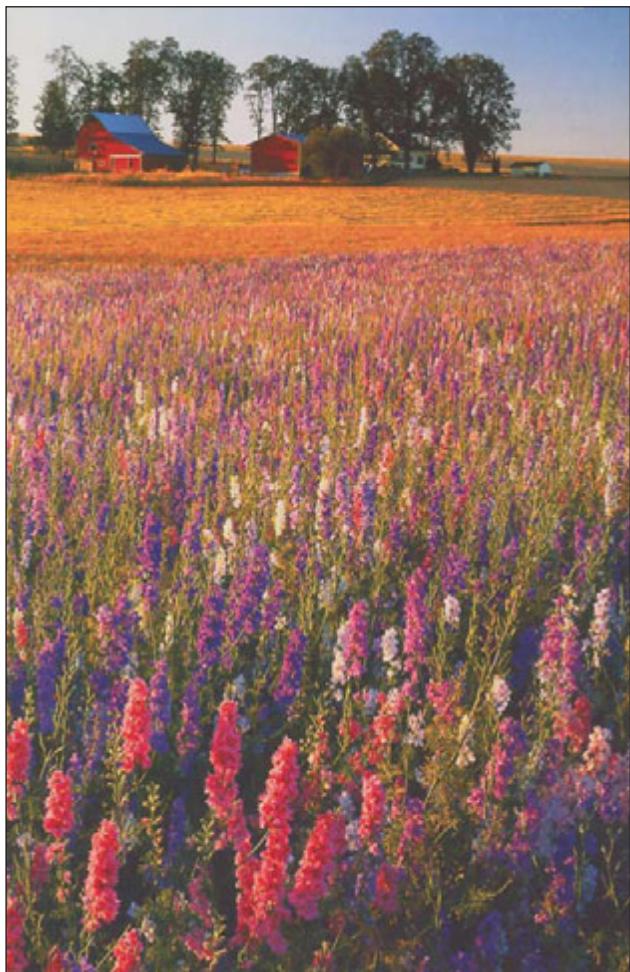
Clap Your Hands for the Wines of Clackamas

Those in charge of promoting Oregon's Clackamas County describe it as "a feast for the senses."

That's no mere marketing hype. At seemingly every turn, there's something to tempt the taste buds, delight the eyes and invite discovery.

There are parks, campsites and wild places. There are farmers' markets, acres of tulips, cascading waterfalls and vineyards. Fine arts and forests. Extreme sports and quiet leisure. Culture and agriculture.

All of the things that make Oregon such an alluring place can be found in and around the communities of Clackamas County — in particular, obvious reverence for the land.



TOURING TIPS

The forefathers of today's Clackamas County residents worked the land. Their communities sprang up around mills, railways and rivers. Now, old country roads provide a connection — and a subtle boundary — between the old and the new, the urban and rural.

The local forests offer a bounty of wild harvests, from tart summer huckleberries to succulent mushrooms. A variety of mushroom species can be picked from spring through fall, but be aware that forms must be filled out at the Clackamas River Ranger Station in Estacada. While in the woods, be sure to watch for black-tail deer and bald eagles.

Rather have someone else do the driving? Cross the scenic Willamette River aboard the Canby Ferry. Established in 1911, the ferry's prices remain old-fashioned: free for people, \$1.25 for cars. For vistas of the river

and the city, ride the non-profit Willamette Shore Trolley between Portland and Lake Oswego.

A three-quarter-mile loop through a flower farm is provided on the private Phoenix and Holly Railroad. For more railway adventure, visit the Pacific Northwest Live Steamers train park, featuring 1/5-scale trains, in Molalla.

At local cafes and country inns, field-fresh produce is the star attraction. And you can work up an appetite by exploring an array of museums, historic homes and landmarks, and antique stores. In Lake Oswego, oversized hanging flower baskets adorn every street light during the summer months.

Speaking of flowers, opportunities to soak in beautiful sights and aromas abound in Clackamas County. There's the Welches Garden Center in Welches, where visitors can learn about and purchase native plants. The Barn Owl Nursery in Wilsonville specializes in landscaping using herbs, and has fragrant display gardens. Swan Island Dahlias in Canby is the world's largest dahlia grower.

While a plethora of Willamette Valley vineyards beckon to the south, Clackamas County offers its own unique vinous experiences.

"Unique" is a good way to describe Wasson Brothers Winery in Sandy, operated by twin brothers Jim and John Wasson. That's because production is split almost 50/50 between traditional grape wines and fruit wines. As is the case at most Oregon wineries, Pinot Noir is the star vinifera variety, and the brothers also do a good job with Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Muscat and Merlot.

Berries seem to grow everywhere in Oregon, so it's no surprise that the fruit wines would be highlighted by blackberry, raspberry and



loganberry flavors. A tart rhubarb wine also is made, as is a fun sparkling rhubarb.

St. Josef's Wine Cellars in Canby is one of Oregon's pioneering wineries, as its first vintage was produced in 1978. Because it was founded by European immigrants, it focuses on making nice wines that go well with meals — Gewurztraminer, Riesling, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir. For serious wine drinkers, St. Josef's also makes a selection of Reserve wines, as well as a Late Harvest Pinot Gris.

A feast for the senses? It hardly seems like an adequate description for Oregon's Clackamas County.

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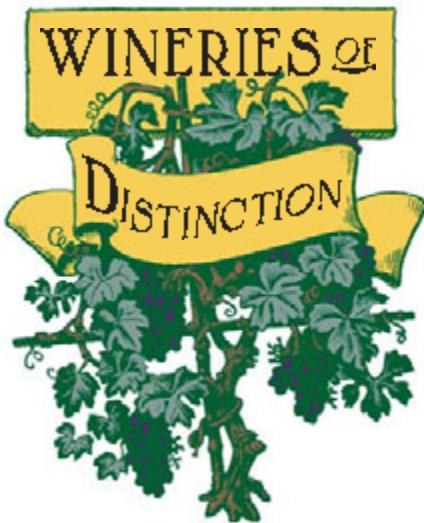
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Bubby Perfection Is Ongoing Goal at House of Salon

The House of Salon began in the late 19th century when its founder, Eugene-Aime Salon, set out to realize his dream of making "the perfect Champagne."

At that time, Champagne was produced from a blend of 75 percent black grapes (Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier) and 25 percent white grapes (Chardonnay). Aime felt that black grapes added a cumbersome heaviness to Champagne, but were necessary according to conventional wisdom to add body and structure to the wine. He also believed that he could achieve this structure by carefully selecting the finest Chardonnay grapes that produced the world's greatest still wines.



To realize his goal of making the best possible Champagne, Amie knew he had to find the best area, the best vineyards in the area, the best grapes in those vineyards — and to use only the best juice in the ripest years.

He enlisted the support of his brother-in-law (a cellarmaster), and together they began experimenting with Chardonnay grapes from many villages in the Champagne region. They ultimately chose Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, a small village south of Epernay in the Cote des Blancs. Aime purchased approximately 12 acres of Grand Cru vineyards and entered into long-term contracts with nearby growers for additional grapes. He selected vineyards from three distinct microclimates, which together provided the fruit, acid, sugar, perfumed nose and exquisite balance he was seeking.

By the early 1900s, Aime had created, for his own consumption, what was simply known as a Blanc de Blancs ("white from whites"). When World War I ended, he was encouraged by friends to profit more fully from his wine, and in 1921 the House of Salon was created.

The House was headed by Aime until his death in 1943, when the enterprise was left to his nephew. It was bought by Dubonnet-Cinzano in 1963, which was absorbed into the Pernod-Ricard group in 1978. In 1988, Champagne Laurent-Perrier became the majority shareholder of Champagne Salon.

Today, the House of Salon is directed by Didier Depond, who still crafts Salon out of Chardonnay grapes from the same vineyards and in the same proportions determined by Aime Salon early in the 20th century. It is a measure of his judgment and discrimination that there have been no changes in the methods or principles of making Champagne Salon that Aime laid down so long ago.

Quotes Du Jour

■ *Walter Schug of Schug Carneros Estate on the 2007 harvest in the Carneros region:*

"Growing conditions were good, with balanced weather during the summer. There were plenty of grape bunches, but the small berries led to a less than anticipated crop level. I'm excited about the wines."

■ *Karl Wente of Wente Family Estates on the Livermore Valley harvest:*

"The color, flavors, tannins and acidity all matured together beautifully, and early tasting reveals beautiful wines."

■ *Bill Cooper of Cooper-Garrod Estate on the harvest in the Santa Cruz Mountains:*

"The season's overall moderate temperatures were punctuated by only a few brief temperature spikes, enabling full berry development as well as an orderly harvest."

■ *Kevin Sass of Justin Vineyards and Winery on the Paso Robles harvest:*

"The vintage should be one of the best of the decade, with ripe flavors, good acid and flavorful fruit."

Q AND A

I've heard that it's illegal for wineries in Alsace to use Chardonnay. Is this true?

Partially. Although there have been some changes in recent years, France still has very strict laws governing many aspects of winemaking. Chardonnay is grown in Alsace, but not in any great quantity. By French law, it may not be used to make what we think of as "typical" Chardonnay. Rather, vintners may use it only to make Cremant d'Alsace, which is a sparkling wine.

What grapes are used in making Sherry?

Sherry's home is the Jerez region of Spain — an area along the sea in the southwestern province of Andalusia. In Jerez, all of the winegrape varieties are white. The most widely planted is Palomino, which is used to make all styles of Sherry, from bone-dry to extremely sweet. Moscatel is used primarily as a blending grape, but also is made

into a varietal wine by a handful of vintners. The Pedro Jimenez variety also does double-duty — as a blending grape, and to make the ultra-sweet Sherry of the same name.

I got a bottle of Beaujolais for Christmas, and was told that it should be chilled before uncorking. This isn't Beaujolais Nouveau — just "regular" Beaujolais. How long should I chill it?

Beaujolais is that rare red wine that benefits from being served cool (not cold). Generally speaking, very fruity reds such as Beaujolais should be placed in a bucket half-filled with ice and half-filled with cold water for about 15 minutes.

Have a question about wine? Submit it online at VinesseTODAY.com. Previous questions and answers are archived in the "Wine FAQ" area.



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BRANDON SWITCHES FROM NEWSROOM TO THE CELLAR

The Great White North has another celebrity in the wine business, joining comedian/actor Dan Aykroyd and hockey legend Wayne Gretzky. It's Jason Priestley, the actor who portrayed Brandon Walsh on the 1990s teen television hit, "Beverly Hills 90210." Priestley is an investor in Black Hills Winery, located in the province of British Columbia, which specializes in a Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend dubbed "Nota Bene." He also hosts a wine-focused program called "Hollywood & Vines" on Canadian television. No word on whether any of "The 3 D's" (David, Donna and Dylan) also will be involved in Brandon's new (ad)venture.

THE NAKED TRUTH ABOUT 'MAMETAGE'

You've heard of Marilyn Merlot? Now, Armida Winery in Sonoma County is making a wine called "Mamietage," depicting actress (and one-time pin-up girl) Mamie Van Doren on the label. But it's not just any label; it's a "peel-away" label that enables one to see Ms. Van Doren sans clothing. How good is the wine? As one (male) member of the Vinessse tasting panel put it: "Who cares?"

AMERICAN CONSUMPTION OF WINE IS ON UPSWING

More American adults than ever are drinking (and, presumably, enjoying)

wine than ever before, according to a new survey by the Wine Market Council. The poll found that between 2000 and 2005, the wine-drinking population in the United States increased by 31 percent among adults in households with income exceeding \$35,000. At the same time, the number of people drinking beer and/or spirits — to the exclusion of wine — decreased by 25 percent. Some credited wine's upsurge to the development of a more sophisticated American palate, while others pointed

to the explosion in very cheap (uh... affordable) wines in the marketplace, such as "Two-Buck Chuck." While some decry the cheap wine phenomenon, others in the industry welcome it because it's

introducing the wonderful world of wine to millions of people — many of whom will step up within the quality spectrum over time.

TROPICAL WINE COMES TO SOUTH FLORIDA

World-class beaches. International fashion designers. Hot Latin sounds. This is South Florida. And to that eclectic cultural mix you now may add: tropical fruit wine. Not far from the community of Homestead, Peter Schnebly is making a splash at his Redlands Winery with wines made out of lychee, carambola and other tropical fruits. Schnebly got into the wine business because anywhere from 20 to 40 percent of the fruit he grows in his orchards can't be sold, the result of it being blemished or too ripe. Rather than throwing that fruit away, he now turns it into wine.

"Does it really matter what you made the wine from?" he asks rhetorically. "Isn't it more important that you made a good wine?"



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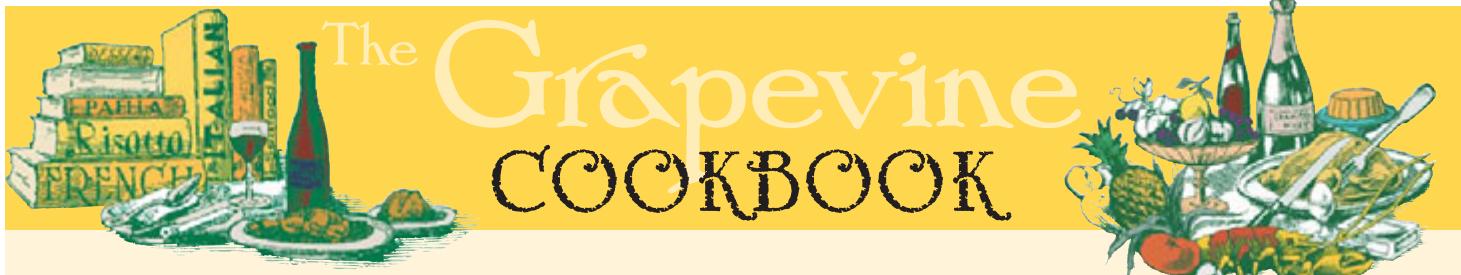
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AUSSIE-STYLE BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

Try this tasty recipe from Down Under, which makes 8 servings, with a glass of Chardonnay.

Ingredients

- 8 cups chicken broth
- 1 large butternut squash, cut into 1-in. cubes
- 1 white onion, chopped
- 1 piece ginger root, 1-in. long, finely minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 T curry powder
- 12.3-oz. package firm organic tofu, cut into 1-in. cubes
- 3 T to 1/4-cup light or yellow miso
- Finely chopped chives

Preparation

1. Combine vegetable stock, squash, onion, ginger, garlic and curry

powder in a Dutch oven. Heat to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce heat to medium. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until squash softens (about 30 minutes). Let cool 10 minutes.

2. Puree the soup mixture, in batches, with some of the tofu and miso in each batch, in a blender or food processor until smooth and no white bits of tofu remain. Strain soup through a medium-mesh strainer, then return to the pan. Heat over low heat until hot (about 5 minutes). Divide among bowls, then garnish with chives and serve.

MUSHROOM BARLEY STEW

A fruity red wine is the perfect match for this hearty recipe, which serves 4 to 6.

Ingredients

- 1 T olive oil

- 2 carrots, chopped
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 5 cups vegetable broth
- 1 cup uncooked pearl barley
- 1 cup dried shiitake mushrooms, broken into pieces
- 1 t salt
- 1/2 t freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 t dried thyme

Preparation

1. Heat oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add carrots, onion and garlic, and cook, stirring until tender (about 5 minutes).
2. Place in a slow cooker. Add broth, barley, mushrooms, salt, pepper and thyme. Cover, and cook on low for 6 to 7 hours.



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