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# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

## **Vinous New Year's Resolutions for 2010**

### **Dog-Friendly Wineries of Mendocino County**

### **North American Wine Destinations: The Top 5**

### **Getting to Know the Marlborough Region**

### **Score a TD With Guests on Super Bowl Sunday**



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## EDITOR'S JOURNAL

# 3 New Year's Resolutions I Truly Intend to Keep

By Robert Johnson

*Yes, it's that time of the year again — time to make resolutions that we hope to keep well into the month of February.*

If we work really, *really* hard at them.

Here are my wine resolutions for 2010...

**1. I resolve to try new food-and-wine pairings.** One of the best pairing experiences I had in all of 2009 happened purely by accident. I was dining in a restaurant that described its cuisine as "Asian fusion," and had a hankering for some good old-fashioned avocado rolls — fresh avocado chunks wrapped in sticky white rice. Selecting a wine to have from the restaurant's by-the-glass list would have involved nothing more than a guess, so I asked my server to choose. She asked the sushi chef, and he recommended an off-dry Riesling — the kind of wine featured in the Light & Sweet Wine Club. It was a match made heaven — a place where there apparently is Asian fusion cuisine and some very tasty wines.

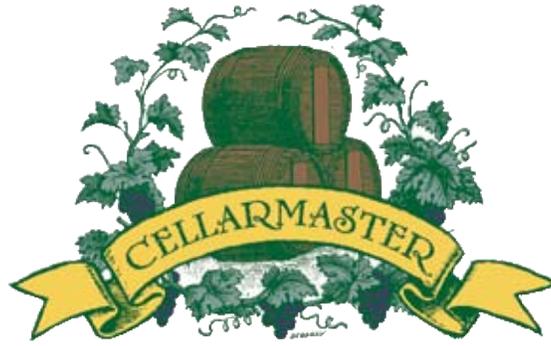
**2. I resolve to do something with the corks I save.** A friend recently paid a visit to the humble Johnson abode and asked, "What are all those corks doing in that basket?" My first instinct was to reply, "Just sitting there," but in my life away from wine I had resolved to quit being such a smart-a--, so I instead offered:

"I just like to collect corks." Years ago I took corks from some of my favorite wineries and made a framed cork board, so perhaps it's time to put together a new one... or seven. I could even give some as gifts next Christmas, although I fear the cork board may be the vinous equivalent of the fruit cake.

**3. I resolve to be more green.** Wine bottles can be recycled. So can some of the shipping materials used in the world of wine. In 2010, I will take advantage of every recycling opportunity available...

... which will help assure that there's a 2011 for all of us to enjoy.





## Poof! 5 Tips to Attain Bubbly Bliss

*If you're like most wine lovers, you toasted the new year with a glass of bubbly — whether it was an expensive Champagne from France, or a sweet Asti Spumante from Italy.*



And if you're really lucky, you may have received a bottle of sparkling wine as a Christmas present.

But if you're one of those people who simply sips bubbly and never has the opportunity to serve it, a few tips are in order. The advice that follows will help assure bubbly bliss... and avoid a sticky mess.

**1. Resist the urge to pop the cork.** Forget what you've seen in Super Bowl and World Series locker rooms. A flying cork can take an eye out, and Champagne shooting out of a bottle will be wasted. A bottle of Champagne should be opened by placing a towel over the cork, and slowly twisting it out. The preferred sound is not a pop; it's a poof.

**2. Pay attention to the temperature.** The ideal serving temperature for sparkling wine is between 45 and 49 degrees. Any warmer, and carbonation declines — and it's

that carbonation that separates sparkling wines from still table wines.

**3. Use a flute.** Tall, narrow glasses are designed specifically for Champagne; they help the bubbles last longer.

**4. Drink up.** Some sparkling wine improves with age, particularly French Champagne that's vintage dated. But even with the best bubbly, we recommend drinking it within five years of its release date. Younger equates with fresher.

**5. Drink it with food.** Most sparkling wine is consumed solo. It's the wine of celebration, used for toasting special occasions. But a little known fact is that it's perhaps the most food-friendly of all wines, pairing beautifully with everything from Sunday brunch fare to sushi. You can even drink sweet sparklers, such as Asti Spumante, with dessert — just about anything except chocolate dishes.

You now know everything you need to know about serving Champagne. So, "poof" the cork on that gift bottle tonight!



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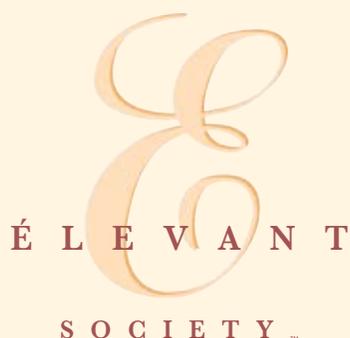
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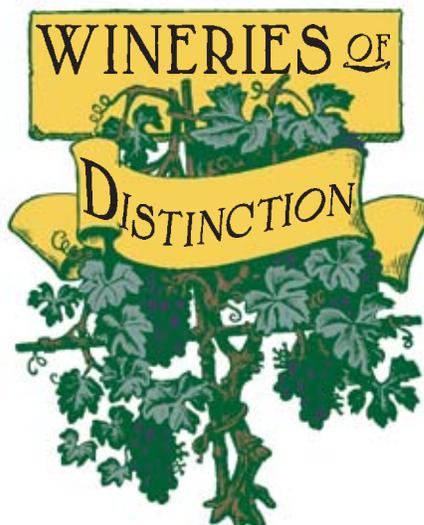
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## Mendocino County Estates That Welcome Tail-Wagging Friends

*Vincent Arroyo, the founder of California's Vincent Arroyo Winery, once wisely observed: "You can't make wine without a dog."*

We're not sure *exactly* what Arroyo meant by that, but we do know that dogs can serve a number of useful purposes on a wine estate.

They can be trained to chase away

birds and other animals that like to munch on grapes at harvest time.

They can announce the arrival of guests to an otherwise quiet winery tasting room.





*Hairy Putter*

And, of course, they can serve as companions to grape growers and winemakers in the vineyards and cellars of the wine world.

Because so many winery owners have dogs, a number of wine estates welcome visits by those of the canine persuasion. Particularly in Mendocino County's Anderson Valley, there is a large concentration of dog-friendly wineries.

Foursight Wines is home to a dog named Ozzie, and if he happens to be roaming the grounds or is otherwise occupied, visiting dogs are welcome to relax on his bed while you sample the estate's wines. 707-895-2889.

Dogs are welcome inside the relatively small tasting room at Husch Vineyards. But an even better option, when the weather cooperates, is the deck behind the tasting room, where there's more room for sniffing around. 800-554-8724.

Well-behaved pups also are welcome at Maple Creek Winery, where they'll be welcomed by the owners of the estate as well as their dogs. There's also a dog-friendly picnic area on the property. 707-895-3001.

There's plenty of room for dogs to roam at Toulouse Vineyards (home of Hairy Putter), including the large tasting area and the outside loading dock. 707-895-2828.

Yorkville Cellars allows dogs in the tasting room if it's not too busy, but they're always welcome on the big front porch. 707-894-9177.

But if there's one place in the Anderson Valley that could be described as "dog heaven," it's Navarro Vineyards, where you'll find a reflecting pool with a dog sculpture, built in honor of one of the estate's gone but not forgotten residents. There are several picnic tables on the grounds, and the winery even has a fenced-in exercise area for our four-legged friends. But that's not all. Navarro also keeps a bowl of fresh water and doggy treats in the tasting room. 800-537-9463.

## ***4 Books Are Devoted to Wineries and Their Dogs***

Allen Jacoby and Andrea MacNamara Jacoby are the co-founders of Winery Dogs Publishing, which has published four beautiful books about wineries that are home to canine companions. They decided to merge two of their passions — wine and dogs — with a third passion of Andrea's: photography. Other family members also pitch in, and the resulting books make great gifts for people who share the same passions as the Jacobys. Currently available titles deal with winery dogs in New York, Sonoma, Napa Valley and Central California.

**For ordering information, visit:**  
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## *Four Seasons*



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# The Countdown Concludes: North America's Top Wine Destinations

*We conclude our countdown of the "Top 10 Wine Destinations in North America."*

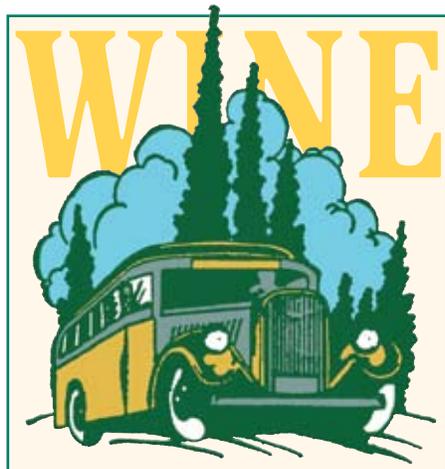
**5 Dundee Hills, Oregon** — Until about 10 years ago, Dundee Hills was a distant outpost even for the most adventurous of wine explorers. But as Oregon Pinot Noir grew more popular across the country and around the world, it was inevitable that "wine tourism" would engulf the area.

Today, Dundee Hills is home not only to some two dozen tasting rooms, but also to luxurious B&Bs, world-class dining destinations, and even tour guides. Guests at Dundee Manor love the gardens, the fountain area and the front porch — complete with rocking chairs. Red Ridge Farms is a specialty plant nursery and herb farm by day, but at night, its country inn apartment is available for guests in quest of real peace and quiet. Seeking quiet but not total solitude? Then check out the Black Walnut Inn and Vineyard, which has nine suites and oozes European elegance.

**4 St. Helena, California** — For the ultimate wine country experience in California, there is only one place



*Mount St. Helena and Robert Louis Stevenson State Park.*



## TOURING TIPS

to stay: the Meadowood resort in the Napa Valley town of St. Helena. But there is one problem with staying at Meadowood: You may never want to leave. And that would make exploring the area's wineries problematic.

St. Helena is a history-steeped area, home to the oldest continuously operating winery in the valley: Beringer Vineyards. The Beringer grounds are beautifully landscaped, and the estate offers the best tour program of any winery... anywhere. A bit off the beaten path, Burgess Cellars is in a unique mountain setting and produces stunning renditions of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah.

Dining options also abound, and PRESS has emerged as one of the top-tier stars. The custom wood-burning grill and rotisserie turns out flavorful preparations of Kobe ribeye, chicken, veal and seafood. For French culinary flair, Etoile Restaurant at Domaine Chandon features regional and seasonal cuisine with adventurous ingredients.

**3 Las Vegas** — Yes, you read that correctly. As Vegas imploded old-school casinos and replaced them with mega-resorts over the past decade, it was able to attract some of the world's most acclaimed chefs. Those chefs created destination restaurants, and a big part of their focus is wine.

A case in point: Aureole restaurant at the Mandalay Bay Resort, the namesake of Charlie Palmer's exclusive New York eatery. As one approaches Aureole's entrance from the vast lobby area of the resort's "restaurant row," the eyes immediately focus on a 42-foot-high tower of glass and steel, within which are stored some 10,000 bottles of wine.

Las Vegas also hosts one of the top annual wine tastings in the country, a fundraising event for the University of Nevada at Las Vegas (UNLV) known as UNLVino. It's held each April, and close to 3,000 different bottlings are uncorked for sampling.

**2 Healdsburg, California** — There are two reasons the northern Sonoma County town of Healdsburg earns such a lofty ranking: 1. You can use the quaint town as a home base for exploring the wineries of no fewer than four acclaimed viticultural areas — Russian River Valley, Dry Creek Valley, Alexander Valley and Chalk Hill. 2. You can opt to stay downtown and explore the neighborhood on foot, concentrating on the historic Healdsburg Plaza. We like option No. 2 because numerous wineries have opened satellite tasting rooms around or just off the plaza.

For a Napa-like experience, stay

at Les Mars Hotel, a three-story, 16-room inn that's just one block off the plaza. While the rooms are tastefully appointed with both antique and modern touches, the best reason to stay at Les Mars is the easy access it provides to Sonoma County's best restaurant: Cyrus.

A close second to Les Mars is the Healdsburg Inn on the Plaza. It has just a dozen rooms, but it's big on perks. Each afternoon, guests may head to the upstairs lounge and enjoy complimentary wine, cheese and fruit. And for a mere \$5 extra per person, guests may enjoy breakfast in bed.

From classy and comfy accommodations to world-class dining, and from eclectic boutiques to well-stocked tasting rooms, the Healdsburg Plaza has it all.

**1 Rutherford, California** — Frankly, we could easily have included five or six Napa sub-appellations among our top 10. But ultimately, we decided to include two Napa districts on our list: St. Helena in the No. 4 position, and Rutherford at No. 1.

Why Rutherford? Because, quite simply, its vineyards produce grapes that are transformed into some of the greatest red wines in the world. Of the 6,840 acres planted to vineyards in the Rutherford district, 71 percent are devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon.

And look at some of the famous names that call Rutherford home: Beaulieu Vineyard, Flora Springs, Pine Ridge, Quintessa, Rubicon, Sullivan



*Auberge du Soleil*

and William Harrison.

There are several excellent restaurants in Rutherford, but we always find ourselves returning to an old favorite: the Rutherford Grill. While it's part of a national restaurant company, the Rutherford Grill manages to exude wine country atmosphere. It's a favorite among Napa Valley vintners because it charges no corkage fee — even though it has a fabulous wine list, heavy on local bottlings.

Where to stay? If your goal is to “do Rutherford right,” there's only one choice: Auberge du Soleil. The resort's spacious rooms dot a terraced hillside and provide sweeping views of the Napa Valley. Prepare to be spoiled by the Italian linens, down bedding, plush robes and custom-made bath amenities.

But, hey, you deserve it. After all, you're in town to explore the No. 1 wine destination in all of North America.

# VINESSE

## Hot LIST

**1 Hot Wine Cruise.** The Pinot Passions Wine Cruise will take place June 17-27, combining Mediterranean scenery with American-made Pinot Noir. The cruise is presented by Food & Wine Trails Epicurean Tours, in cooperation with the Russian River Valley Winegrowers. On-board seminar topics will include, “From Cultivation to the Glass: A Pinot Primer,” and, “Russian River Valley: A Picture of Pinot Paradise.” 800-367-5348

**2 Hot New Winery.** Mendocino County has a new wine estate. Breggo Cellars is located in the Anderson Valley, so Pinot Noir, naturally, is the specialty of the house. But the winery also makes exceptional Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer. The winery is located on Highway 128 (707-895-9589), and Breggo also maintains a satellite tasting room in the coastal community of Mendocino (707-937-9900). [breggo.com](http://breggo.com)

**3 Hot Wine Bar.** New Orleans needs as many reasons as possible for people to visit and help rebuild the city's hurricane-devastated economy. The Wine Institute of New Orleans (WINO) is a good one. WINO features a wine bar with a state-of-the-art debit card system, as well as a school where folks can learn about the wonders of wine. Cheese pairings are offered to accompany the self-serve wine pours. 504-324-8000

*Rutherford, California*





**T**hunderbird. A cheap wine created by Ernest Gallo during the aftermath of Prohibition. Although the winery now makes many upscale bottlings, it never completely shed its “downmarket” image because of its association with Thunderbird.

**U**llage. Unoccupied space in a wine bottle between the cork and the wine. Although some wine will evaporate over time in all bottles, a low ullage is considered a warning sign of a wine that may have spoiled.

**V**igner. French term for a winegrower.

**W**augh, Henry. One of the best known English wine writers during the 1950s. Not the least bit pretentious, Waugh once was asked when he’d last mistaken a fine Bordeaux for a fine Burgundy. His reply: “Not since lunchtime.”

**Y**quem. French chateau that makes one of the world’s greatest sweet wines.

## VINESSE STYLE

### MOZZARELLA

**W**e’ve all enjoyed mozzarella cheese on a pizza, or perhaps melted over roast beef as part of a submarine sandwich.

But once you’ve had the opportunity to taste fresh buffalo-milk mozzarella, you’ll be tempted to say, “Hold the tomatoes and basil,” when you order your next Caprese salad. The real thing is *that* good.

Take a drive around the outskirts of Naples, and you’ll be bombarded by signs for dairy outlets that specialize in mozzarella — they’re just as common as the winery signposts around Sonoma County.

And just like wineries, the best dairies make sure they qualify for a European Union designation of quality. On mozzarella packaging or in display cases, look for the letters “DOP,” which stand for *denominazione*

*d’origine protecta*.

In 2008, about 32,000 tons of DOP mozzarella was produced in Campania. But you probably never saw even a slice of it at your local

cheese purveyor because it has a shelf life of only a few days. Reason: It’s made from non-pasteurized milk.

The best of the best should be consumed within two days of production, and never should be refrigerated.

Just as no two wines are exactly the same, there are subtle differences in mozzarella styles.

Some are densely textured and slightly salty, while others are softer and runny with a somewhat soft impression.

Ether way, when you taste the real thing, you’re in for a culinary treat.



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## APPELLATION SHOWCASE

# Marlborough, New Zealand



**A**ll wine drinkers experience it at some point: boredom with the same-old same-old.

The cure for this affliction: a glass of wine with a ton of personality. And nothing fits that description better than Sauvignon Blanc from the Marlborough region of New Zealand.

Marlborough is New Zealand's largest and best known winegrowing region. It's located in the northeast sector of the South Island, with the small city of Blenheim at the center.

The adjacent Marlborough Sounds are known for their beauty and aquaculture farms, and also as the stopping off port (at Picton) for the ferry to the nation's capital across Cook Strait, which separates the two main islands.

The first Marlborough vines were planted in 1973, and Sauvignon Blanc wines from the region soon attracted global interest due to the pungent, zesty fruit aromas and flavors of the wine. Interest has continued to grow, and New Zealand's Sauvignon Blanc from the Marlborough region is in demand

worldwide.

There now are three distinct growing areas, all with interesting, identifiable characteristics. The free-draining, alluvial loams over graveled sub-soils in the area provide ideal growing conditions.

Land in the Wairau River Valley, the neighboring Awatere Valley and the gravels of the lower Wairau River in the Rapaura Road area was formerly used for orchards and pastoral farming, but over the last decade has been in high demand for conversion to vineyards.

Sauvignon Blanc is the most planted variety in the region, followed by Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Riesling, in that order. Pinot Noir produced in the region is claiming attention and looks likely to become the second most popular variety over time.



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**Q** I enjoy vinegar dressings on my salad. What's a good wine to serve?

**A** When wine goes bad, it turns to vinegar. So, good matches are few and far between.



Fortunately, better restaurants recognize this problem, and add ingredients to their salads that are more wine-friendly — nuts, meats and/or cheeses. But if you're eating just

a salad with dressing, opt for a high-acid wine such as Sauvignon Blanc or Chianti.



growers, who don't like to see their vineyards receive too much rainfall. One of the many important topics discussed involved how to assure vines get the right amount of water — no more and no less. “We all need to conserve water,” noted Nick Frey, president of the Sonoma County Winegrape Commission. “This one thing — watering just to the bottom of the root zone and not beyond — is critical to put into practice.”

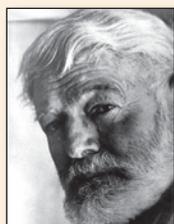
**B**ecause most cheese is salty and/or acidic, it can be challenging to pair successfully with wine. The answer: Add some fresh pear slices, figs, glazed walnuts and/or roasted almonds to the cheese plate. These added ingredients will help make the overall pairing more enjoyable.



**Y**ou can turn used corks into a handy — and eye-catching — trivet for the kitchen. Here's what you need, according to TV host Sean Conway: a 6- to 8-inch metal hose clamp (sold at hardware stores), enough corks to fill the inside of the clamp (about 20), two thick rubber bands and a screwdriver. “Gather the corks, standing on end, into a circle slightly smaller than your hose clamp,” Conway advises. “Stretch the rubber bands around the bundle, one at the top edge and one at the bottom edge, to hold it in place. Slide the clamp over the bundle and

position it between the two rubber bands. Tighten the clamp with the screwdriver until it has compressed the corks together so they won't fall out.”

**C**an you tell from a wine label whether a wine is light-bodied or full-bodied? Yes. Generally speaking, wines lower in alcohol (in the 12% range) are lighter bodied than wines higher in alcohol (14% or higher). Wines with around 13% alcohol tend to be medium-bodied.



“This wine is too good for toast-drinking, my dear. You don't want to mix emotions up with a wine like that. You lose the taste.”

— Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

**A**ttendance was high at last summer's Water Conservation Field Day, which was held in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley. Among the 200 attendees were vineyard owners, irrigation specialists and conservation groups such as the National Fisheries Service. Water is a precious commodity in California, even for winegrape

20

Number of minutes a red wine should be placed in the refrigerator before serving. It's a common myth that reds should be served at “room temperature,” but that advice was first offered prior to the advent of modern home heating systems, when homes typically were 10-15 degrees cooler. Virtually all wines benefit from a slight chill.

## FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

### SUPER BOWL SUNDAY

**A**t a vast majority of Super Bowl parties, the adult beverage of choice will be beer.

And not even *good* beer, but rather the mass-produced stuff that people buy because they like to watch Clydesdales high-step their way along a snowy trail. What a horse has to do with beer is one of the great quandaries of humankind.

But your Super Bowl party need not be blighted by bad beer. Your party can rise to the occasion and offer attendees both good food and quality libations.

Here are a few Super bowl-worthy food possibilities, along with suggested wine varieties with which to pair them...

#### ■ Ham and Cheese

**Sandwiches With Melted Onions.** You'll find the recipe when you turn the page, and the ideal pairing partner would be Chardonnay.

■ **Bratwurst.** The king of tailgate parties, brought indoors and offered with a smorgasbord of condiments for those so inclined. We prefer the pure flavor of the

brat, sans spicy mustard, and would serve it with a nice, peppery Zinfandel or Petite Sirah.

#### ■ Cream of mushroom soup or clam chowder.

Nothing warms the soul on a cold Super Bowl Sunday like a rich, hearty soup. With a creamy soup, the wine to offer is a rich and creamy California Chardonnay.

■ **Fried chicken.** If you're letting the Colonel do the cooking, a good Pinot Gris or Pinot Grigio would match nicely with those 11 herbs and spices. For a side dish, opt for macaroni salad or potato salad; the brown gravy that accompanies the mashed potatoes is challenging to match, as is cole slaw.

■ **Burgers.** If you live in a region where outdoor grilling is not possible this time of year, do not fret. Broil those burgers, and enjoy the juicy quality you don't always get with

grilling. We take the same approach to condiments with burgers as we do with brats; we prefer to let the meat speak for itself. And if you're using prime beef, opt for a prime wine such as Cabernet Sauvignon or a Merlot-based blend from Bordeaux.



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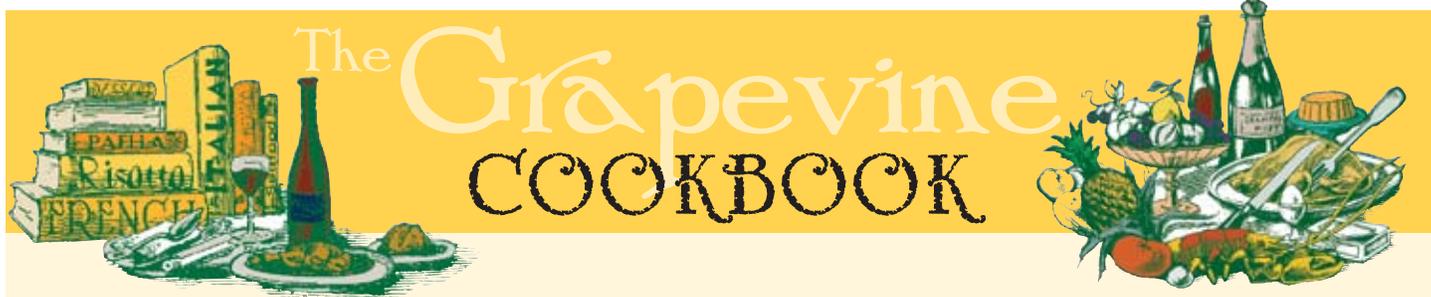
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## HAM & CHEESE SANDWICHES WITH MELTED ONIONS

A slightly chilled Pinot Noir would match nicely with these sandwiches — tasty, easy-to-make treats on Super Bowl Sunday. If you prefer white wine, opt for a well chilled Chardonnay. This recipe yields 12 servings.

### Ingredients

- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/3 cup chili sauce
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 loaves Italian bread, 1-lb. each
- 1/2-lb. Gruyere cheese, thinly sliced
- 1 cup melted onions from ham (*see accompanying recipe*)
- 2-lbs. beer-braised ham, thinly sliced (*see accompanying recipe*)

### Preparation

1. Up to several hours before serving, cut tops off bread loaves, about one-third of the way down the bread. Use fingers to hollow out bottom of the bread and to remove a little of the inside top bread.
2. Mix mayonnaise, chili sauce and cilantro in a small bowl.
3. Smear mayonnaise sauce on inside bottoms and tops of the breads. Arrange a layer of the cheese slices on the bottoms.
4. Top each with half of the onions and a thick layer of ham slices.
5. Top with another layer of the remaining cheese.
6. Place the tops of the bread in place, and wrap each loaf in heavy-duty foil. You may refrigerate up to two hours, if desired.

7. Shortly before serving, heat oven to 375 degrees. Put wrapped bread loaves on a baking sheet. Bake until thoroughly heated and cheese is melted (about 40 minutes).
8. Cool slightly in the foil. Cut into large wedges and serve.

## BEER-BRAISED HAM WITH MELTED ONIONS

Prepare this recipe in conjunction with the Ham and Cheese Sandwiches.

### Ingredients

- 3 large sweet onions, halved and cut into wedges
- 1 bottle (12-oz.) pilsner-style beer
- 3 tablespoons spicy brown mustard
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1 small fully-cooked ham (about 8 to 9-lbs.)

### Preparation

1. Heat oven to 325 degrees. Mix onions, beer, mustard, brown sugar and pepper in bottom of a large roasting pan, spreading onions in an even layer over the bottom.
2. Place the ham, cut side down, over the onions. Cover tightly with heavy-duty foil, and bake until heated through (about 2 hours).
3. Remove ham to a cutting board, and cover with foil.
4. Place roasting pan over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring regularly, to reduce pan juices and glaze the onions (about 25 minutes). Set aside and cool.
5. Thinly slice the ham, to be used with the onions in preparing the sandwiches (*see accompanying recipe*).

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