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# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

## Valentine's Day Survival Guide

- ♥ Choosing the Perfect Wine
- ♥ Gifts for Chocolate Lovers
- ♥ Lobster Mac 'n' Cheese Recipe

A Vinous Vacation in  
Niagara-on-the-Lakes

The Thrill of the Chill:  
3 Wine Cooling Tips

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### OUR MISSION:

To uncover and bring you wine gems from around the world, which you're not likely to discover on your own, and which enhance your wine enjoyment.

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## EDITOR'S JOURNAL

# This Valentine's Day, Don't Forget the Wine

By Robert Johnson

**N***on-romantics may refer to it as a "Hallmark holiday," but Valentine's Day is an occasion that one ignores at their own risk.*

Expectations can be high when February rolls around. "How much does he (or she) really love me?" one might ruefully ponder as the big day draws near. "We'll find out soon enough..."

Couples on more stable ground may approach Valentine's Day a little differently. For young parents, it could be a rare "date night" away from the kids. For older couples, it may be an opportunity to relive days gone by, and perhaps rekindle feelings from their courtship.

The cynic may add that in addition to a great day for greeting card sales, it's also a wonderful way to kick-start the restaurant business after the inevitable post-holiday lull.

Whether you're a romantic or a cynic, the fact that you are a wine lover makes Valentine's Day worth celebrating. The wines of romance come in various varieties, so as long as you're not irrationally focused on finding "just

the right bottle," you're bound to have an enjoyable vinous experience.

Red is the color of romance, so that's a good hue with which to start when selecting a Valentine's Day wine. If you're planning to have a nice, thick, juicy steak for dinner... or perhaps Chateaubriand for two... a red wine is definitely the way to go.

If you'll be eating a bit lighter — a meat dish off the grill, or some kind of meat-based stew — a nice rosé-style wine can be a very enjoyable pairing.



Seafood? Shellfish? Sushi? Raw oysters? If that's your Valentine's Day cuisine of choice, chill down a bottle of sparkling wine and add some bubbles to the occasion.

As you can see, the options are plentiful. Whether you're dining out or staying home, Valentine's Day provides a wonderful excuse for opening a good bottle of wine.



## Wine 101: The Chill Factor

***We are not in England. Here in America, we like our beer cold. And that goes for most other beverages as well.***

Soft drinks. Iced tea. Milk. Milkshakes. Fruit juices. Energy drinks. Smoothies. Iced coffee (particularly in the summertime). You name one beverage served hot or warm, and we can name two or three that are served cold.

So it should come as no surprise that a good number of wine drinkers opt for white wines over reds mainly because whites typically are served cold, or at least somewhat chilled. And, if they weren't concerned about what others might think, they'd also prefer that red wines be chilled down.

True, such an assertion might send chills down the spine of an oenophile. But here at Vinesse, we simply want people to enjoy wine — whatever the color, whatever the sweetness level, and whatever the temperature.

While it's true that precision in the serving temperature for specific varieties or types of wine can add to one's drinking enjoyment, it's

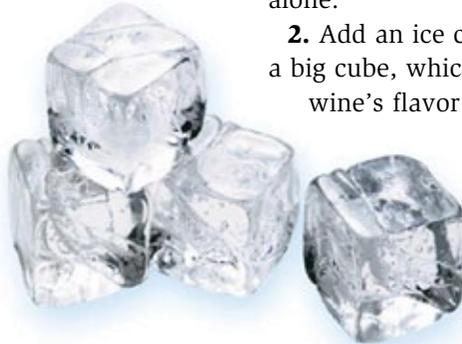
also true that everyone is not the same. We've featured numerous temperature-related articles in *The Grapevine* through the years, but this month "Cellarmaster" is dedicated to those who prefer their wine cold.

Here are three tips to help you add some thrill to the chill...

**1.** If you need or want to chill down a bottle quickly, get a big bucket, fill it half-full with ice, and then fill it to the top with water. Then submerge the bottle of wine for a few minutes. Ice water works much more quickly than ice alone.

**2.** Add an ice cube to your glass of wine. And make it a big cube, which will chill the wine without diluting the wine's flavor too much.

**3.** Unless you're planning to keep a bottle around for several months, it's perfectly okay to keep it in the refrigerator. Just take it out at least 10 minutes before serving so you'll be able to taste its unique flavors.



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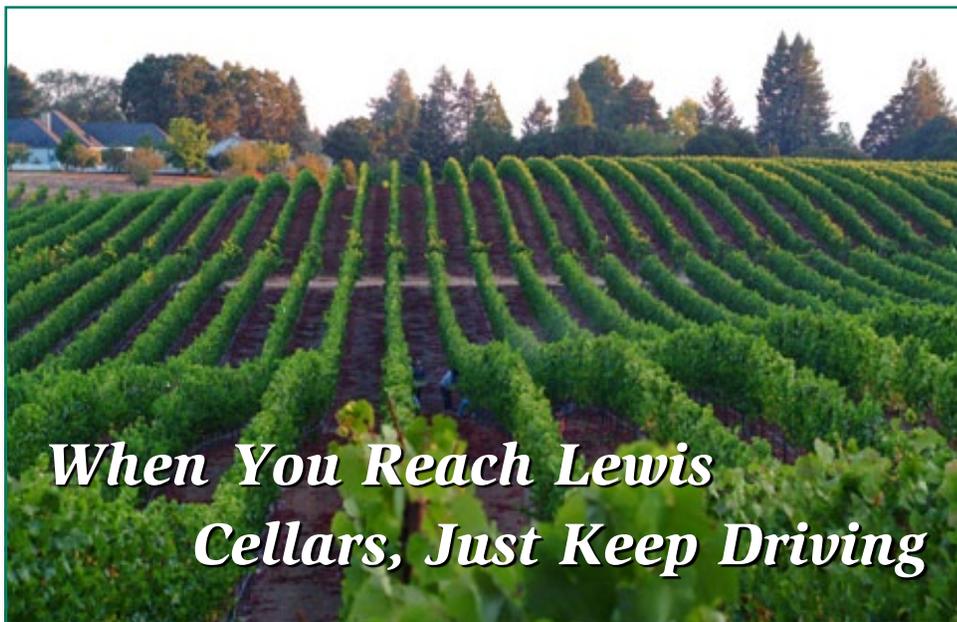
**FREQUENCY:**

Approximately Monthly

**PRICE:**

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*When You Reach Lewis Cellars, Just Keep Driving*

**You can't stop by the Lewis Cellars tasting room to sample the winery's current releases of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.**

That's because there is no tasting room. Lewis Cellars also does not welcome guests by appointment, as many tasting room-less estates in wine country do. The family addresses this matter on its website with this note: "We appreciate your interest in visiting with us. Unfortunately, we are not open for tours, tastings, or visits at the winery."

When Debbie and Randy Lewis established their small family winery in the Napa Valley in 1992, they weren't seeking the limelight or public adulation. Randy had experienced plenty of that during his career as a race car driver. Rather, they were seeking to make a small business out of one of their passions: wine.

And the emphasis from day one has been on small. Even after their son Dennis joined the family business in 1999, there were no visions of grandeur. There would be no castle on a hill. There would be no guided tours through the cellars. There would not even be a tasting room.

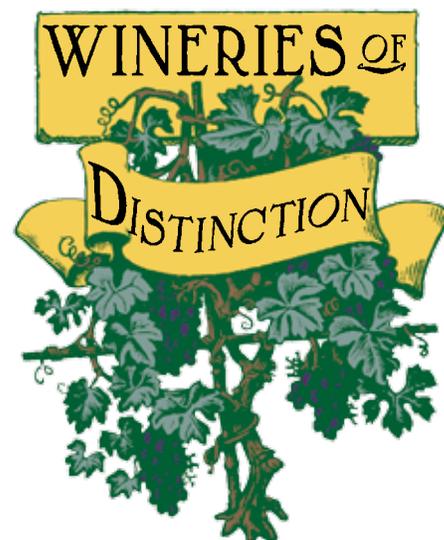
All the family wanted to do was make wine and get it in the hands of people who appreciated it. Much of it would be sold direct. Some of it would be sold to restaurants. And a small

amount would be allocated to wine businesses such as Vinesse to share with club members.

A tasting room would really be unnecessary considering that the annual case production would top out at 9,000 — and that's not just for the Cabernet or just for the Chardonnay, but for all five varieties made... total.

Choosing first to be and then to remain small is how the Lewises guarantee quality in every bottle.

"We are literally hands-on in every aspect of vineyard management, winemaking, sales and distribution," says Debbie Lewis. "We thrive on





this challenge and the relationships we cultivate in the process. It is our continuing goal to create world-class wines.”

She does not add that it is not their goal to run a tasting room. It is unspoken, and obvious.

Randy Lewis says it was when he was on the Formula Three circuit in Europe that he fell in love with the local wines and the wine-focused lifestyles of the local people. After racing, wine became his second love.

But it's Debbie who brings practical experience in the wine world to Lewis Cellars. Before the winery was founded, she was involved in the wholesale side of the business, and also managed San Francisco's oldest wine bar. This gave her a clear understanding of what consumers want, as well as what wholesalers and retailers need.

Son Dennis enjoyed wine at a young age around the family dinner table, and spent childhood summers in the orchards of his grandparents' ranch in Sacramento, developing a healthy respect for the land and what it offers. He joined Lewis Cellars after a 12-year career in human resources management and consulting.

Throughout the year, the family works with growers to

help assure that they have exceptional grapes with which to work during the harvest season. Of course, finding the right grower-partners to begin with is a big part of the quality equation.

“We source the finest fruit from Calistoga, St. Helena, Rutherford and Oak Knoll for our red varietals,” Debbie says. “Our Chardonnay comes from Oak Knoll, Carneros, and Russian River Valley.

“Each site was selected for a specific varietal character, with many of the vineyards being planted exclusively for us,” she adds. “We've chosen low-vigor rootstocks and a selection of clones to give us balanced vines and modest yields, producing maximum flavors.”

From pruning to bud break, bloom to set, and veraison to harvest, the Lewises can be found in the vineyards during every phase of the growing season.

“We learn more every year about each unique vineyard, and strive to make better wine as a result,” Randy notes. “There's also a certain satisfaction in driving a really dirty Jeep.”

That Jeep may not go nearly as fast as Randy's old race cars, but there's still a rush associated with crafting exceptional cuvees that the wine-drinking public embraces.



## Four Seasons



### WINES THAT MATCH THE SEASON

Summer — wines for barbecues, picnics or just for sipping. Fall — wines for hearty, harvest-time dishes. You get the idea. All wines are selected by our Tasting Panel to pair beautifully with the foods you love.

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### WINE COLOR MIX:

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### FREQUENCY:

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## A Wine Trip to Canada's Niagara-on-the-Lake



***The 18th annual Niagara Icewine Festival has come and gone, but that doesn't mean you must wait a year to start planning a trip to the Ontario township of Niagara-on-the-Lake.***

In fact, the seasons other than winter offer more abundant scenery and, of course, more comfortable temperatures for walking around what has been voted the “Loveliest Town in Canada.” It’s also easier to get to sans snow and ice, a quick 30-minute drive north of Niagara Falls.

One could spend an entire vacation in this welcoming hamlet, learning about its connection to the War of 1812 and the Underground Railroad, strolling through meticulously landscaped parks, and enjoying the Victorian-era storefronts.

Book a stay at the Harbour House, and you’ll start each day with a full breakfast; then after a day of touring, you’ll return to a room with a whirlpool tub and fireplace.

There’s no shortage of dinner destinations, either. Among the restaurants recommended by locals are Bistro Six-One (the Grilled Maple Salmon is outstanding), the Cannery at Pillar and Post (specializing in comfort food with a twist, such as a Modern Vegan Cassoulet and

Cornmeal Encrusted Pickerel) and Stone Road Grille (the Roasted Root Vegetable Risotto and the Short Rib Pot Pie are favorites, and the wine list features numerous local bottles).

Day trips to the local wineries are very convenient, with 28 nestled below the Escarpment from the Niagara River Parkway to the shores of Lake Ontario.

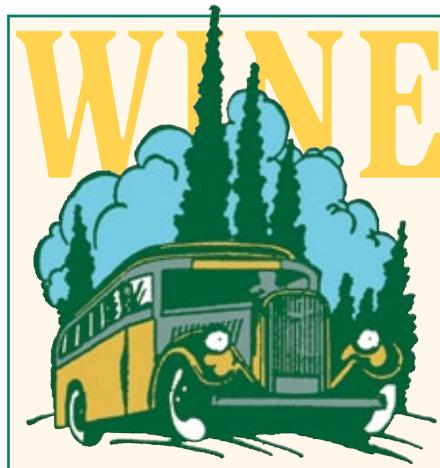
The estates are renowned for making “terroir” wines that fully express

the grape varietal and vineyard from which they came. Within the designated viticultural area known as the Niagara Peninsula, Niagara-on-the-Lake has been classified by Vintners Quality Alliance Ontario as a distinct area.

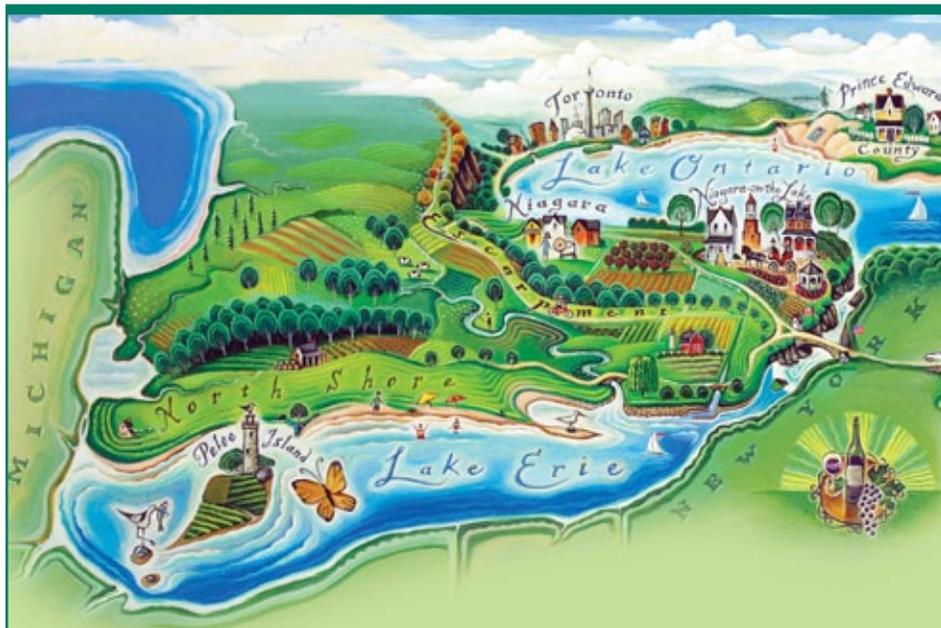
Niagara-on-the-Lake is bordered by three unique geographical features: the Niagara Escarpment, Lake Ontario and the Niagara River. The wineries share a climate moderated by the unique relationship among those geographical factors.

Yet, across this expanse of fertile land, the wine estates are differentiated by geology, soils, elevation, and variations in temperature and precipitation. These distinct growing conditions are responsible for the four sub-appellations of Niagara-on-the-Lake: Niagara River, Niagara Lakeshore, Four Mile Creek and St. David’s Bench.

While a great many varieties are grown in the region, Icewine is what put Niagara-on-the-Lake on the world



## TOURING TIPS



wine map. Elegant... silky... lush... decadent. It has been said that wine critics wear out their thesauruses when describing Icewine.

And little wonder: Year after year, the Icewines made by Niagara-on-the-Lake estates take top awards at competitions around the globe — something that no doubt warms the hearts of the local vintners when the winter weather turns frigid.

A true Icewine can be made only from grapes that have naturally frozen on the vine, and then are picked when the thermometer dips to  $-8^{\circ}\text{C}$  (or lower). The solidly frozen grapes are hand-picked and pressed immediately in order to gently release the drops of thick, rich, yellow-gold liquid, highly concentrated in natural sugars and acidity. The yields are miniscule, but the results are sumptuous and perfectly sweet wines that can function as desserts themselves.

Don't tell that to the chefs in the area, however. Many will serve Icewine as an aperitif, alongside soft cheeses and rich pates or foie gras. Icewine also can be a tasty companion to spicy Thai fare and curry dishes.

The grape growers and vintners of Niagara-on-the-Lake also are leaders in sustainable practices. They have built LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)-

certified wineries and winemaking facilities; implemented integrated pest management methods in the vineyards to reduce and eliminate the need for pesticides, herbicides and insecticides; begun using lightweight glass for wine bottles; started using grape pomace, stems and leaves as compost in the vineyards; and even introduced lambs to the vineyards to thin leaves on the vines and create compost.

The winery owners of Niagara-on-the-Lake prove that North American "wine country" is not limited to California or even to the United States. Less than an hour from the honeymoon capital of America, a truly unique vinous experience awaits.

### For Further Information

**Harbour House**  
866-277-6677

**Bistro Six-One**  
905-468-2532

**Cannery at Pillar and Post**  
905-468-2123

**Stone Road Grille**  
905-468-3474

**Trip Planning Help**  
[www.niagaraonthelake.com](http://www.niagaraonthelake.com)

# VINESSE

## Hot LIST

**1 Hot Wine Festival.** Massimo Bottura and Enrique Olvera will debate the future of cuisine. A gourmet tasting village will feature the 20 best restaurants of Cancun and Riviera Maya. Celebrity chefs will conduct cooking demonstrations. Opportunities to sample wines from around the world will be numerous. It's all happening at the Cancun-Riviera Maya Food & Wine Festival, which is set for March 14-17 in Cancun, Mexico.

[www.crmfest.com](http://www.crmfest.com)

**2 Hot Wine Country River Cruise.** Ships have been cruising the Rhine, Rhone and Danube rivers for years. Cruising on the Douro River is a relatively new tourist offering, but it offers plenty of memorable experiences for those wishing to soak in the wine and food culture of Portugal and Spain. Ten-night trips on the Queen Isabel begin in Lisbon. 800-733-7820

**3 Hot Jukebox Joint.** Waitsburg is about 25 minutes from Washington's Walla Walla wine country, and it's home to the Anchor Bar, where music is in the air and four different kinds of hot dogs are on the menu. You wouldn't expect the wine to be a top priority at this type of establishment, but since the owner is star vintner Charles Smith, the house wine is pretty darn good. [www.theanchorbar.net](http://www.theanchorbar.net)



**Oenophile.** A wine aficionado — one who enjoys studying wine almost as much as drinking it.

**Pinotage.** Iconic winegrape of South Africa, developed when French grapes Cinsaut and Pinot Noir were cross-pollinated. It matches beautifully with *braai* — barbecue.

**Qupé.** One of the top wineries of California’s Central Coast region, founded by Bob Lindquist.

**Rutherford.** One of the prestigious American Viticultural Areas of California’s Napa Valley, known primarily for Cabernet Sauvignon.

**Structure.** Term used interchangeably with “body” to describe a wine’s mouthfeel and overall impression. A “firmly structured” wine, for example, is high in acid.

**Terroir.** French term for the “total environment” of a vineyard, including its site and the makeup of its soil.

## VINESSE STYLE



### Chocolate

**A**t least once per year, readers of *The Grapevine* request — no, make that demand — that we devote a “Style” column to chocolate.

With Valentine’s Day just around the corner, we figured February would be the perfect month. Here are a few options if chocolate is on your shopping list — be it a gift... or a gift for yourself...

■ **Dandelion Chocolate.** When it comes to chocolate, we’ve always associated San Francisco with Ghiradelli. Now, there’s another reason to love the City by the Bay. Much like a winery may craft a single-vineyard wine, Dandelion makes artisanal single-origins chocolate bars, then wraps them in what could easily pass as gift-wrapping paper.

[www.dandelionchocolate.com](http://www.dandelionchocolate.com)

■ **Hudson Valley Chocolates.** Order a mixed box of bonbons from this chocolatier, and the flavors may

include peppermint tea or candied tangerine. It makes our favorite, the almond butter, sound downright “normal.”

[www.hudsonvalleychocolates.com](http://www.hudsonvalleychocolates.com)

■ **The Grown Up Chocolate Co.** Ganache. Gianduja. Those are just two of the ingredients you may encounter in the sophisticated chocolate bars from this company. Don’t let the fun names (Crunchy Praline Wonder Bar... Glorious Coconut Hocus Pocus) dissuade you.

[www.chelseamarketbasket.com](http://www.chelseamarketbasket.com)

■ **H.S. Chocolate Co.** Pretzels. Peanut butter. Dark chocolate. Three of the basic food groups are nicely covered in the crunchy, salty and sweet treats from this company.

[www.hschocolate.com](http://www.hschocolate.com)

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### WINE COLOR MIX:

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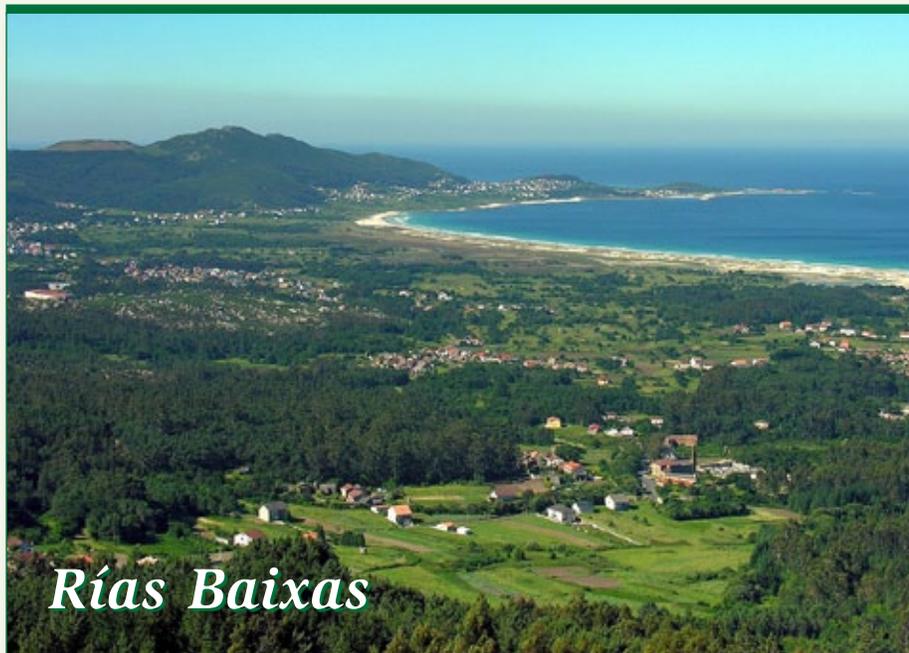
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## APPELLATION SHOWCASE



### *Rías Baixas*

***Imagine a wine region being granted official “appellation” status for a single grape variety. Actually, you don’t need to imagine.***

That is the story of Rías Baixas (ree-ahs-buy-shuss), generally considered the most important Denomination of Origin in the Galicia region of northwestern Spain. The DO was formally established in 1988, and owes much of its acclaim to the white Albariño (al-ba-ree-nyo) grape. In Spain, Albariño is held in the same high esteem as Cabernet Sauvignon in California or Bordeaux.

The history of the DO dates to 1980, when an official denomination was created specifically for the Albariño variety. When Spain entered the European Union in 1986, however, the name was changed to Rías Baixas because EU wine laws did not recognize a DO named for a single grape variety. (Since 1988, the DO has complied with all Spanish and EU wine regulations.)

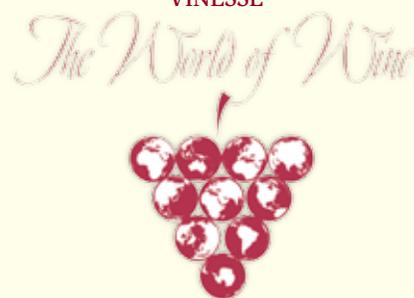
A beautiful green area, Rías Baixas has been likened to a vision of the Garden of Eden. The lush land is characterized by rías — deep, wide inlets of water that encroach many miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean.

The southern group of these rías is known as Rías Baixas (the lower estuaries).

Rías Baixas vineyards are all located within the province of Pontevedra in Galicia. There are 8,650 acres under vine, with more than 6,500 growers and almost 20,000 individual vineyard plots, ranging from 330 feet to 985 feet above sea level in altitude. Almost 100% of the wine produced in the region bears the DO designation.

The cool, damp climate is defined by its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. However, there are varying microclimates within the five different designated sub-zones of the region: Val do Salnés, the birthplace of the Albariño grape; Condado do Tea, located in a fairly mountainous area along the Miño; O Rosal, known for its granite bedrock and alluvial topsoil and terraced vineyards; Ribeira do Ulla, the newest sub-zone; and Soutomaior, the smallest of the sub-zones.

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### WINE COLOR MIX:

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**Q** I recently received a shipment of wines from Spain — thank you, The World of Wine club! — and noticed that all of the bottles had the word bodega on them. Is that the common name for a Spanish winery?

**A** Yes. But there's more to it than that. In Spain, the word is used to describe all kinds of wine-related entities, including wineries, wine stores and anywhere wine is made. Even less specifically, it's also used to describe grocery stores and convenience stores.

**O**n Inauguration Day last month, President Barack Obama and invited guests attended a luncheon at which Korbel sparkling wine from California and two wines from New York — Tierce Dry Riesling and Bedell Merlot — were served. You can read about those wines in our Vinesse TODAY blog:



<http://blog.vinesse.com/what-theyre-drinking-in-dc-today#more>. Wine has been a part of federal government celebrations since the writers of the U.S. Constitution

celebrated the completion of their document with a party for which 54 bottles of Madeira, 60 bottles of Claret and 22 bottles of Port were ordered.

“ I beg you to come tonight and dine. A welcome waits you, and sound wine. ”



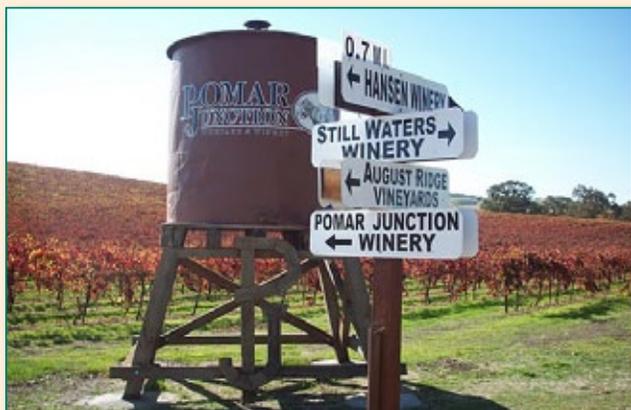
— 19th century American poet and novelist  
Thomas Bailey Aldrich

**I**n America's never-ending “burger wars,” some people are in the In-N-Out camp, while others are passionate supporters of Five Guys. In the Pacific Northwest, Burgerville reigns supreme. But The Counter Burger chain has something on its menu that you won't find at any of those burger joints: wine shakes. Potent potables of various kinds have been finding their way into milkshakes for years, so it was only a matter of time until someone tried wine. Last we checked, three flavors were offered: 1. Pinot Noir, with cherries, chocolate and vanilla ice cream; 2. Sweet Peach, with sweet white wine, fresh peach nectar and vanilla ice cream (said to taste like a peach bellini); and 3. Mimosa, with orange juice, vanilla ice cream and a splash of white sparkling wine. You can learn more about The Counter Burger at [www.thecounterburger.com](http://www.thecounterburger.com).

2.4

Number of pounds of grapes, on average, that it takes to make one bottle of wine.

**T**he 2012 harvest marked the 100th since Ernest Wente planted cuttings from the south of France in his vineyard in Livermore, Calif. In a way, that makes him the father of California Chardonnay. Wente's place in American winemaking history becomes even more compelling when you consider that about three-fourths of all Chardonnay grown in the Golden State today comes from some version of what came to be known as the Wente clone.



**T**he decision to go solar was an easy one for Dana Merrill of Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery in Templeton, Calif. Receiving grant funding from the USDA's Rural Energy for America Program, authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill, was just a bonus. Energy efficiency already had been of paramount importance at the winery, where the main energy expenditure involved running the chiller that keeps the barrel storage warehouse cool. Installing solar panels just seemed like a natural extension of the Merrill family's sustainable practices in the vineyard.

## FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS



***Selecting the “right” wine to serve with a particular dish often has more to do with how the dish is prepared than what the dish is.***

Take chicken, as an example. A piece of original recipe KFC would pair nicely with one type of wine, but a chicken breast smothered in mozzarella and marinara sauce would fare best with different type (not to mention color).

And so it is with lobster, one of the most popular dishes offered by restaurants each Valentine’s Day.

Normally, California Chardonnay — made in a style that leans toward rich and buttery, with a rather low acid level — works best as an aperitif or sipping wine. But pour a glass alongside a lobster tail served with drawn butter, and you have a pairing made in heaven.

Even better: that style of Chardonnay served with lobster mac ‘n’ cheese, a recipe for which may be found on page 12.

Chop up pieces of lobster and put them in a salad — perhaps with shrimp and crabmeat added — and the wine pairing partner switches to Sauvignon Blanc. Another option: Vinho Verde.

Then there’s garlic. What if that melted butter you’re using for dipping is infused with the wonderful flavor of garlic?

Interestingly, the wine-pairing possibilities multiply. Sauvignon Blanc would still work nicely, but so would several other wines. Among them: Italian Vermentino, Spanish Rosado (rosé-style) and the little-known but very tasty French Picpoul de Pinet (recently featured in The World of Wine club).

And what about “surf and turf” — lobster, paired with a nice, thick, juicy steak? Well, truthfully, there is no perfect pairing partner for that combination.

One solution would be to order a rich, buttery Chardonnay to accompany the lobster, and a full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon to accompany the steak... and then eat the lobster and steak separately (lobster first, since the progression when drinking wine should always be from white to red).

Another would be to enjoy a few bites of lobster, pack up the rest for a Day-After-Valentine’s-Day celebration, and then cut into that steak, accompanied by a nice glass of red.

Sometimes with food and wine, as in personal relationships, compromise can lead to win-win solutions.

## Light & Sweet

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## LOBSTER MAC 'N' CHEESE

A rich, creamy Chardonnay makes a perfect pairing partner for this decadent dish. This recipe yields 6 servings.

### Ingredients

- Kosher salt
- Vegetable oil
- 1 lb. elbow macaroni
- 1 quart milk
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, divided
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 12 oz. Gruyere cheese, grated (4 cups)
- 8 oz. extra-sharp cheddar cheese, grated (2 cups)
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1½ lbs. cooked lobster meat
- 1½ cups fresh white bread crumbs

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Drizzle oil into a large pot of boiling salted water. Add the pasta and cook according to the directions on the package, about 6 to 8 minutes. Drain well.
3. Meanwhile, heat milk in a small saucepan, but don't boil it.
4. In a large pot, melt 6 tablespoons of butter and add the flour. Cook over low heat for 2 minutes, stirring with a whisk. Add the hot milk, still whisking, and cook for 1-2 minutes more, until thickened and smooth.
5. Off the heat, add the cheese, 1 tablespoon salt, pepper and nutmeg. Add the cooked macaroni and lobster, and stir well.
6. Place the mixture in 6 individual gratin dishes.

7. Melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter. Combine with the fresh bread crumbs, and sprinkle on the top.
8. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the sauce is bubbly and the macaroni is browned on top.

## RACK OF LAMB

The last thing you want to do on Valentine's Day is deal with a complicated recipe. This one is easy, and the dish matches beautifully with Cabernet Sauvignon or Syrah.

### Ingredients

- 2 8-rib lamb racks
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- Garlic powder

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Salt and pepper the lamb racks, to taste.
3. Heat a skillet over high heat.
4. Add a little bit of olive oil, and sear the racks (fat side down) until browned.
5. Place the racks in a lightly-oiled roasting pan (bone side down). Sprinkle the racks all over with garlic powder.
6. Roast racks, uncovered, in a 350-degree oven for 20 minutes.
7. Remove racks from the pan, cover with foil, and let rest 10 minutes before slicing.

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