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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

One risk associated with cellaring wine for long periods of time is the possibility, remote that it may be, of a collection being claimed by a disaster.

It happened to one of the world's great wine collections when the Windows on the World restaurant was destroyed along with the World Trade Center building that housed it on 9/11. And it happened to half of the collection at Emeril's restaurant in New Orleans last year in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

"We had tremendous losses," said Eric Linqest of Emeril's. He estimated that 6,000 bottles valued at \$500,000 — and that's just the inventory value, not the retail wine list value — disappeared. Some of the bottles were looted, while others were damaged by heat as there was no power to run the cellar's air conditioners.

So, while aging wine can have its benefits, we'll stick to our oft-repeated mantra here at Vinesse: "Wine — what are you saving it for?"

Martin Stewart Jr.

The Fragile Balancing Act Between Food and Wine

By Robert Johnson

Life is a balancing act. We're always seeking a balance between family life and work, and between making decisions with our brain or our heart.

And so it is in the world of wine as well. Grape growers seek a balance between acid and sugar levels in their fruit at harvest time. Vintners seek a balance between fruit flavors and oak influences in their finished wines. And chefs and sommeliers seek out bottlings that balance nicely with the cuisine in which their restaurant specializes.

Australian winemakers are perhaps more focused on the concept of balance than any other vintners. Aussie ex-pat Daryl Groom, the man who brought Sonoma County's Geyser Peak Winery to worldwide prominence, once told me: "'Balance' is part of our vocabulary every time we make wine. In

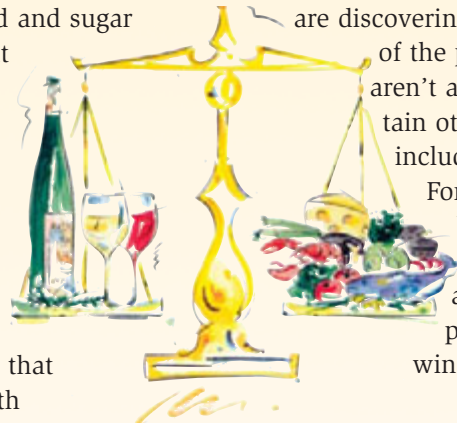
Australia, most wines were consumed at the point of purchase — in restaurants, or at home a few hours after they were bought in a store. The wines had to be good as soon as they were released, and you attain that kind of quality only one way — with balance."

Among gourmets and "foodies," wine-and-food pairing has become something of an obsession, with the "perfect match" being the ultimate goal. What more and more people are discovering is that the flavors of the pairing partners aren't as important as certain other factors — including balance.

For instance, we believe a great dish prepared by a creative chef should be paired with a great wine. Likewise, a more humble dish calls for a more hum-

ble wine. If the entrée is delicate, go with a delicate wine. By extension, match robust with robust.

You don't want the food to overpower the wine, or the wine to overpower the food. It can be like walking a tightrope at times, but when the food and wine are nicely balanced, the meal will be memorable.



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"):

Lawrence D. Dutra

Editor:

Robert Johnson

Wine Steward:

Katie Montgomery

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-  Perfectly matched recipes for featured wine selections



The Down-and-Dirty Truth About Soil & Winemaking

From the time we were kids, we've had a love affair with dirt.

Okay, maybe not dirt, per se, but certainly with soil. We loved to build sand castles, to slosh around in mud, and to get what our parents called "dirt" under our fingernails in the garden.

Our folks may not have liked it — and, now, we may not like it as parents — but we sure spend a lot of money to own as much of it as we can.



When it comes to growing things, farmers have always sought out the most fertile land they could find. They also use natural and chemical fertilizers to optimize a plot of land's ability to produce high-quality fruit and vegetables in the greatest quantities possible.

But it's different with wine grape growing. Among those vintners interested in producing world-class wines with enticing aromas and palate-satiating flavors, quantity always takes a backseat to quality. In fact, limiting a vine's production is a key quality factor, because smaller bunches of grapes, and smaller individual grapes, produce more concentrated aromas and flavors.

Since limiting a grapevine's annual output is seen as a positive, rather than a negative, the most important quality of the soil in which the vine is planted is not fertility, but rather its capability for draining water.

Good drainage is critical in grape growing because it causes the vines to push their roots ever deeper into the ground in search of a stable source of nutrients and water. That's why most of the world's greatest vineyards have soils that are quite rocky. In many cases, wine grapes are the only "crop" that can be grown in such settings.

Specific grape varieties tend to fare better when their vines are planted in specific types of soils. But it should be noted that soil is just one aspect of what the French refer to as *terroir*, even though the words tend to be used interchangeably.

Terroir refers to the growing environment as a whole, which includes slope, sun exposure, annual rainfall, fog and other factors, in addition to the soil.

And while soil definitely influences the flavor of a finished wine, think of it as just one of the voices in a debate club. Depending on its makeup and its location, it may be a vocal and noticeable voice, or a shy and barely intelligible one.



WINE A TO Z

Reserve. A term sometimes found on American wine labels, inferring a wine of superior quality. However, there is no “legal” definition of the term, and some wineries have rendered it virtually meaningless by placing it on all of their labels.

Sauternes. A very sweet white wine from the Bordeaux region of France. Made primarily from the Semillon grape variety, sometimes with a small amount of Sauvignon Blanc blended. Pronounced “So-TAIRN.”

Tannin. A natural compound that comes from the skins, stems and pips of the grapes, and also from the oak barrels in which wine is aged.

Umbria. A relatively small winegrowing region of Italy that neighbors Tuscany.

Vegetal. Refers to the impression given by some wines that is reminiscent of plants and vegetables.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

SONOMA MOUNTAIN

Rising above Sonoma Valley to the east and the Santa Rosa Plain to the west, there is a little known but very important enclave of Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards.

But there’s another line that more precisely defines the growing region known as Sonoma Mountain. It’s a line that does not appear on any map: the morning fog line.

The region’s primarily eastern exposure above that line allows full morning

sunlight to promote a long, even ripening season, without pushing the process along too quickly. Well-drained soils (see “Cellar Notes by Kate” in this issue for more on this topic) and steep slopes enable smaller berries to focus on clear, intensely singular fruit flavors — from black currant to cassis to blackberry — that add to the complexity of the region’s finished wines.

Thanks to the wide variety of slope and exposure, other varieties also thrive there — including Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Zinfandel — but Cabernet Sauvignon always has been and continues to be the undisputed king of Sonoma Mountain.



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VINESSE STYLE

GOURMET HOT CHOCOLATE

It won't be long until the fall and winter weather beckons for a cup of heart-warming and sweet tooth-satisfying hot chocolate.

If your palate has grown too sophisticated for the "instant" variety that comes in powder form — and you seek a more stylish rendition of this liquid treat — here are a few places where hot chocolate is taken very seriously...

• **San Francisco** — At Tartine Bakery, the ultra-rich hot chocolate is made from Scharffen Berger chocolate... a name synonymous with indulgence. 415-487-2600.

• **Los Angeles** — Mexican spiced hot chocolate is the specialty of the house at Guelaguetza restaurant — along with unbelievable moles. Assorted chilies give the beverage a unique kick. 213-427-0608.

• **Portland** — The cioccolato caldo is thick and not too sweet — just as it's made in Italy — at Mio Gelato. And if you're not on a diet, ask for a dollop of homemade whipped cream. 503-226-8002.

• **Las Vegas** — How does a purveyor of hot chocolate stand out in a city

of adult entertainment, superstar lounge acts, over-the-top (and occasionally topless) production shows and restaurants with wine towers? At his self-named Patisserie inside the Bellagio Hotel, Jean Philippe Maury does it with a 27-foot fountain of cascading hot chocolate. It's almost as much fun to watch as it is to drink. 888-987-3456.

• **Chicago** — At the NoMI restaurant inside the Park Hyatt Hotel, five types of hot chocolate are offered. Our favorite: Truffles a Trois — truffle-filled liqueur glasses, topped with steaming hot milk. 312-335-1234.

• **Philadelphia** — Make your own hot chocolate at the Swann Lounge inside the Four Seasons Hotel. You'll be brought two teapots, one filled with steamed milk and the other with house-made chocolate syrup. 215-963-1500.

• **New York** — There ought to be a law against combining Chef Maury Rubin's homemade marshmallows with his intense hot chocolate at The City Bakery. But we're glad there isn't. 212-366-1414.

• **Washington, D.C.** — The Mexican hot chocolate shooter is the star of the show at Ceiba (pronounced "SAY-bah"). It's served with warm, cinnamon-sprinkled churros. 202-393-3983.

BEING GREEN

Cline Cellars, a family-owned winery that's located in the Carneros district of the Sonoma Valley, recently made the switch to solar power. The Cline family wanted their winery operation to become energy independent — an easy-to-understand goal in California, where increasing demand on the energy grid has made power outages more frequent. A loss of air conditioning in the cellar is not something a winery can afford, so Cline Cellars hired SolarCraft Services Inc. to design and build a large commercial solar electric system for the facility. In addition to relieving stress on the energy grid, the winery is saving an estimated \$92,000 per year — a factor which helps it hold the line on price hikes for its wines.



Speaking in Tongues

When it comes to assessing and appreciating wine, there is no body part more important than the tongue.

We're not talking about the ability to verbalize one's impressions and opinions. Rather, we speak (figuratively) of the tongue's ability to identify various taste sensations in both wine and food.

Prominent acidity in wine — typically interpreted as somewhat sour — is picked up by the sides of the tongue. Acidity can help enliven creamy, rich foods, and is most commonly noticeable in wines such as Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay and Sangiovese.

Salt is experienced on the very edges of the tongue, and salty foods can be challenging to pair with wine. That's why it's rare to find complementary wines for salt-sprinkled peanuts

or corn on the cob, which tend to be much better with a refreshing glass of beer.

The very back of the tongue is the

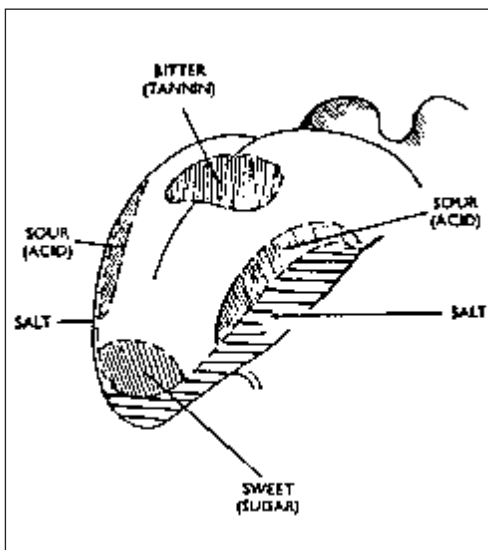
detector of bitterness which, in wine, comes from naturally-occurring or oak barrel-induced tannin. Although "bitterness" sounds like a negative quality, it actually adds full flavors to varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Brunello, and lengthens their finish.

Sweetness is detected by the very tip of the tongue, and that's why fruit-forward wines — which offer an impression of sweetness even in the absence of sugar — are so appealing to newcomers to wine. It's almost impossible for the tongue to miss sweet flavors.

While some self-proclaimed connoisseurs stick their noses up at them, sweet wines actually can serve a very useful purpose. Semi-sweet or off-dry renditions of varieties such as Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Moscato can moderate strongly-seasoned foods, making them ideal for consuming with certain ethnic fare.

Now you can see why a pro-

fessional judge holds wine in his mouth — allowing it to completely coat his tongue — as an important step in the assessment process.



Four Seasons



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Wine Tasting Along the Old Mission Trail

The Old Mission Peninsula is a long way from just about everywhere in Michigan, which explains why the tasting rooms of the region's wineries are seldom crowded.

In fact, if you're looking for a peaceful "wine country" experience — away from the hustle and bustle of 21st century Napa Valley — the area has plenty of allure.

Old Mission Peninsula juts north between the azure arms of Lake Michigan's Grand Traverse Bay. It's the bay that makes winegrowing possible in the area, as it moderates the weather and the temperatures of the otherwise cold northern climes. The lingering warmth of the bay's water in the fall helps stave off early frosts, while its cooler spring temperatures prevent premature budding in the vineyards during a warm spring.

Then during the winter months, the lake-effect snow keeps the vines well insulated and protected from the aforementioned cold temperatures. And in the summer, just the right balance of warm weather, sunlight and rainfall provide near-perfect ripening conditions for the grapes on the vines.



TOURING TIPS

Old Michigan Peninsula truly is a unique microclimate in a seemingly unfriendly region for grape growing. And the vintners of the peninsula regularly win awards for their European varieties and stunning ice wines.

Let's take a tour of the peninsula's

five wine estates...

- **Bowers Harbor Vineyard** — This family-run boutique winery overlooks the panoramic beauty of Lake Michigan's historic Bowers Harbor. The Stegenga family's informal tasting room provides a friendly, relaxed atmosphere for sampling and good conversation.

- **Brys Estate Vineyard & Winery** — Situated on an 80-acre former cherry farm, this is the latest addition to the Old Mission Peninsula Wine Trail. The Brys began planting their 23-acre vineyard in 2001 with an eye toward producing estate-grown and bottled red, white and ice wines. En route to the brick tasting room, visitors wind past a renovated 1890s farm house, pump house-turned-playhouse, barn-turned-guest cottage and colorful gardens.

- **Chateau Chantal** — Another former cherry orchard, this 65-acre

estate produces both still wines and stunning sparklers. There's a bed-and-breakfast inn on the property, ideal for hosting the winter-time wine seminar guests and the summertime "Jazz at Sunset" concert attendees.

- **Chateau Grand Traverse** — This is the oldest and, with 80 acres of vineyards, largest winery in northern Michigan. The O'Keefe family offers guided winery tours, and is known for producing tasty fruit wines in addition to traditional grape wines. The Inn at



Chateau Grand Traverse, with its six guest rooms, overlooks the vineyards and Grand Traverse Bay.

• **Peninsula Cellars** — Located on a portion of the 150-year-old Kroupa Farm, this winery was established in 1994 by cherry farmers David and Joan Kroupa. Its Port-style cherry wine is a favorite among tasting room visitors, but we were most impressed by the family's dry Gewurztraminer. As for the tasting room itself, it's situated in a renovated 19th century schoolhouse.

A number of outstanding restaurants dot the Old Mission Peninsula landscape. Three of them — the Peninsula Grill, The Boathouse and Bowers Harbor Inn — are located quite close to both Bowers Estate and Brys Estate. Another well-regarded eatery, the Old Mission Tavern, is just

north of Chateau Chantal.

Traverse City offers a number of hotel and motel choices, but we suggest immersing yourself in "wine country" by staying in one of the guest rooms at Brys Estate, Chateau Chantal or Chateau Grand Traverse. After all, it's much more fun to taste than it is to drive.

For Further Information

Bowers Harbor Vineyards
231-223-7615

Brys Estate
231-223-9303

Chateau Chantal
800-969-4009

Chateau Grand Traverse
231-223-7355

Peninsula Cellars
231-933-9787

General Information
wineriesofoldmission.com

Note: Tasting room hours vary by season. When planning a visit, be sure to call ahead.



Chilean Terroir & French Style Unite at Casa Lapostolle

When it comes to making world-class wines, nothing beats experience.

And that's the "secret" behind the success of Casa Lapostolle, which is located in the Colchagua Valley of Chile — an area that has garnered worldwide acclaim because its soils and cool coastal climate enable wine grapes to mature under the most natural conditions.

Red varieties thrive in Colchagua Valley, most particularly Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Carmenere, Syrah and Cabernet Franc.

So when members of France's Marnier-Lapostolle family began seeking winemaking opportunities in Chile, they headed directly to the Colchagua Valley. By pure luck, they happened upon the Clos Apalta Vineyard, where a preponderance of venerable vines caught their collective eye.

With a little investigation, they

learned that these vines were ungrafted, which meant they were protected from the Phylloxera louse that has decimated so many vineyards in so many winegrowing regions around the world. Better still, the vines had been propagated from French rootstock, so their production patterns and the characteristics of their fruit were predictable.

Another plus: The area had a climate that was kept relatively dry by the Andes Mountains to the east.

The family had found the perfect location from which to base its Chilean winemaking operations, an effort they were determined would emulate the attention to detail that accompanies the making of their flagship Grand Marnier — a delicate blend of fine Cognacs and the distilled essence of wild tropical oranges, slowly aged in French oak casks.

Next, they struck an agreement with the Rabat family, which had vast grape-growing experience in the region. And, finally, they brought in renowned French vintner Michel Rolland to consult on the winemaking, working with another Frenchman, Michel Frión.

It's quite a team, and each Casa Lapostolle wine is made with great care. The flagship

bottling is known as Clos

Apalta, named for its vineyard of origin. Vintage after vintage, Clos Apalta offers stunning purity, concentrated fruit flavors, muscular tannins for aging, and a long, elegant finish. It retails for around \$55.

Some partnerships are destined for failure, as philosophies and egos often get in the way of the business at hand. However, the marriage that created Casa Lapostolle seems to have been made in vinous heaven — a successful union of Chilean terroir and French style.



Quotes Du Jour

■ *Bill Daley, wine columnist for the Chicago Tribune, after suggesting that consumers should be able to “test drive” a wine in a restaurant:*

“When something like wine is sold at such a high mark-up, the customer is entitled to be happy, even if he or she isn’t very wine savvy.”

■ *Rebecca Courtright of Courtright’s Restaurant in Willow Springs, Ill., responding to Daley’s comment:*

“If the public were to follow your advice, and ultimately reject (several wines) simply because they didn’t like the taste, it would literally put us — and every other restaurant that’s serious about wine — out of business, in which case everyone would lose.”

■ *Richard Thaler, a behavioral economist and author, echoing the oft-stated Vinesse advice that it’s better to drink a wine “too soon” than “too late”:*

“I buy wine that tastes good. Statistically, anybody’s ability to predict what will be a good wine a decade from now is limited.”

■ *From the Hallmark Gallery:*

“To take wine into our mouths is to savor a droplet of the river of humanity.”

Q AND A

What is the optimal serving temperature for red wines? I like to cool mine in the fridge for about two hours before drinking.

— Victoria Lane

Dear Victoria:

The standard answer is “room temperature,” but that calls for some explanation.

For as long as we can remember, we’ve been urged to chill white wines and drink reds at room temp. But that advice originated in Europe, BCH — Before Central Heating. In those days, room temperature was in the 60-65 degree range, and in many cases, the bottle would be brought up from a cellar with an air temperature that hovered in the low-to mid-50s.

Today, “room temperature,” particularly in the United States, is quite a bit warmer — probably too warm for most reds to “show” perfectly.

For this reason, with most reds, we suggest placing the bottle in a bucket that’s filled half-and-half with ice and

water for about five minutes. Alternately, you could put the bottle in your refrigerator for 15-20 minutes.

Be careful not to over-chill the wine. Just as a red wine that’s served too warm can taste overly alcoholic and rough around the edges, one that’s too cold can seem “thin” and lacking in flavor. Serving the wine at between 55 and

65 degrees gives it the opportunity to reveal all of its distinctive aromas and flavors.

Try to avoid over-chilling. A red wine that is too cold can seem ‘thin’ and lacking in flavor.



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THE WIZARD OF WINE

Wine is a recurring theme in the comic strip, “The Wizard of Id,” drawn by Brant Parker and written by Johnny Hart. In a recent strip, the wizard was dining out, and directed his attention to the waiter. “We’ll have an order of tripe and the pickled pig’s feet,” he said, then inquired, “Can you recommend a wine to go with that?” The waiter’s reply: “Why ruin a fine wine?”

WINE TIMES THREE

Floyd Dixon, a singer and jump-blues pianist who dubbed himself “Mr. Magnificent,” passed away in late July. He was 77. Among Dixon’s better known recordings was “Wine, Wine, Wine.”

THE HEAT IS ON

The summer heat wave did not spare Sonoma County’s inhabitants, but it did spare its vineyards. Several days of triple-digit temperatures made things mighty uncomfortable for those without air conditioning, but it did no damage to the county’s most important agricultural product: wine grapes. Most vineyards are planted to provide sufficient shade during extremely hot periods, and many are equipped with irrigation systems to prevent damage to vines or their roots. Some wine grapes, such as Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon, handle extreme temperatures better than others, and Sonoma County is a hotbed — if you’ll pardon the pun — of those varieties.

ARNIE’S WINE ARMY

There isn’t a Tiger Woods line of wines. Not yet, anyway. But several golfers now dabble in wine, typically

teaming with established estates to create their own brands. The latest dufer to join the fray: the legendary Arnold Palmer, whose wines are made at Luna Vineyards in California’s Napa Valley. “This is one of the few jobs where I can drink and do business,” Palmer observed with a smile and a wine glass in hand.

TWIST AND SHOUT

Add New Zealand’s Stoneleigh to the growing list of wineries that are utilizing screw caps instead of corks as bottle closures. As Stoneleigh’s public relations department pointed out, the advantages of screw caps are that they preserve wine quality and freshness, reduce oxidation, are more convenient and easier to open, and don’t require a special tool (i.e., a corkscrew) to open. “You might as well get used to it,” the P.R. rep said. “Screw caps are here to stay.”

AHEAD OF THEIR TIME

The very first nation to use appellation labeling on wines was not France, Germany or Italy. It was Greece.

TRUTH IN LABELING

Wineries no longer may use the word “Napa” in their brand names unless the grapes they use to make their wine are grown in the Napa Valley. Bronco Wine Co. had been making its Napa Ridge, Napa Creek and Rutherford Vintners brands primarily out of grapes grown in California’s Central Valley. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling ended five years of litigation on the subject, and is seen as a victory for Napa growers and vintners.

WE’LL DRINK TO THAT

Between 2000 and 2005, the number of American wine drinkers increased by 31 percent — primarily among younger adults, who previously had preferred beer.

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RAINBOW PEPPERS PASTA

Try this tasty dish, which serves 6, with a dry red wine, such as Sangiovese or Bordeaux.

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 yellow bell peppers
- 3 red bell peppers
- 3 green bell peppers
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 1 cup beef broth
- 1 lb. bucatini
- 1/2 cup shaved Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons Italian parsley

Preparation

1. Thinly slice the bell peppers, break the strands of bucatini in half, and finely chop the parsley.
2. Heat oil in a large frying pan over medium heat, add peppers, and stir frequently. Add salt, pepper, sugar and a spoonful of water, and lower heat. Continue to cook until peppers turn tender. Add broth and cook until peppers are very tender and broth is mostly evaporated.

3. Bring a large saucepan of salted water to a boil. Add pasta. Cook until al dente, then drain.
4. Return cooked pasta to saucepan, then add peppers and 1/4 cup water. Crush Parmesan shavings over pasta. Add parsley, toss all ingredients, and heat on high for 1 minute before serving.

WARM BEEF SALAD

This recipe makes 2 entrée-size servings, and matches well with lighter red or white wines.

Ingredients

- 8-oz. ribeye steak
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- Pepper

For Vinaigrette & Greens:

- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 8 oz. fresh salad greens

For Avocado-Mango Salsa:

- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 avocado, diced
- 1 mango, diced
- 1/4 red onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon cilantro, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
- Juice of 1 lime
- Hot red pepper sauce

Preparation

1. Season steak with salt and pepper, then cook to medium-rare. Remove from heat and let rest 10 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, for the vinaigrette, whisk vinegar, mustard and salt in small bowl. Whisk in a few drops of oil. Add remaining ingredients while continuing to whisk. Toss vinaigrette with greens.
3. Combine salsa ingredients in medium bowl, and set aside. Divide dressed greens on plates, and mound salsa in center. Slice steak into thin strips, and place on top of salsa.

Light & Sweet

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