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# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



## MARTIN'S JOURNAL

*As I sit down to write this column, the first Sunday game of the NFL season is about to begin.*

All across America, people are popping tops off bottles of beer in preparation for kickoff. Yet here I sit, with a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon at hand.

Does this make me (and perhaps you) “better” than the beer-drinking football fans? Of course not. But it does make me wonder why “wine” and “football” aren’t normally found in the same sentence. Could it be the food we tend to eat while watching games? Hot dogs may not have a vinous match made in heaven, but brats go great with Zinfandel, and burgers are wonderful with Merlot.

No, I’m guessing it has more to do with tradition. So, I’m suggesting you make your own (perhaps new) tradition this season, and enjoy some wine while watching the games. At the very least, if you’re like me, you won’t have to make as many “pit stops!”

*Martin Stewart Jr.*

## A Whirlwind Trip 'Round the Wonderful World of Wine

By Robert Johnson

*From California to New Zealand, and from Spain to Australia, this issue is packed with fascinating information of a vinous variety.*

Let’s begin with California. Among other things, you’ll read about spottings of Elton John and multiple Elvisses at a wine auction, as well as early harvest reports from all around the Napa Valley.

New Zealand? That’s the subject of this issue’s “Being Green” report. In the land of the kiwi, they also take their wine-growing and land stewardship very seriously.

Spain is the subject of our “Wine Touring Tips” feature — specifically, the region known as Castillo y Leon. It’s a true gastronomic capital, and we had locals recommend some of their favorite dining destinations, including one restaurant with more than 600 wine selections.

And our “Appellation Showcase” feature takes you to the Barossa

Valley, the home of esteemed winemaker Rolf Binder, whose “Halliwell” blend of Shiraz and Grenache is currently being showcased by the Elevant Society.

But that’s just the beginning. One column that’s sure to generate plenty of discussion is “Cellar Notes by Kate,” in which she tackles the always-sensitive question of who holds the power when it comes to buying wine in restaurants. Should

the diner be able to “test drive” a bottle of wine before agreeing to buy it, as one wine writer recently suggested? Or is there another option that’s fair to consumers and restaurateurs alike?

In our “Vinesse Style” department, we

go back to Australia for one of the great sushi-and-Champagne experiences on earth. And our “Wineries of Distinction” feature puts the spotlight on three family wine estates in California’s San Luis Obispo County.

You’ll find all of that... and a whole lot more... in this issue of *The Grapevine*. So pop the cork on a bottle of Vinesse wine, pour a glass, and swirl, sniff and sip while you read.



Robert Johnson can be reached at [Robert@vinesse.com](mailto: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.

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## Wine service in restaurants has long been a subject of debate — primarily involving diners and restaurateurs.

The topic heated up again recently when *Chicago Tribune* columnist Bill Daley suggested that diners should be allowed to “test drive” a bottle of wine and, if they don’t like its flavor, decline it.

That’s an easy way to endear oneself to the general public, but is it practical?

There’s plenty of fodder on both sides of the issue.

As a consumer, when I buy a product such as a flashlight or a stereo system or an automobile, I have the reasonable expectation that it will work.

Many manufacturers stand behind such products with guarantees that are honored for a specific period of time.

However, manufacturers and retailers will not allow a flashlight, stereo system or car to be returned simply because the consumer decides he doesn’t like the color or the design. Those are personal preferences, not things that can be unconditionally guaranteed.

Wine is particularly tricky because even if it’s expertly made and then stored under perfect conditions, it will be perceived somewhat differently by each person who tastes it.

With wine, one person’s bitter is another person’s tart. One may “experience” a particular wine as engagingly sweet; another may consider it cloying.

Professional judges and experienced wine drinkers can tell if a wine is well made and devoid of noticeable flaws, but they can’t guarantee that anyone

else will like it.

No product involves greater subjectivity than wine.

And that’s why I can’t agree with Mr. Daley’s recommendation, consumer-friendly though it may be.

Here’s the problem: Providing quality wine service requires a considerable investment by a restaurateur. Expenses include inventory, storage space (square footage within the restaurant, storage racks, and the refrigeration needed to maintain the proper temperature within the storage area), and glassware.

While it’s true that some restaurants mark up their wine prices more than they should, those margins sometimes can make the difference between profitability and bankruptcy.

And let’s not forget that nobody forces a diner to buy wine. If the price for a glass or bottle is perceived as too high, there’s always iced tea or a soft drink.

If a restaurant were compelled to allow customers to decline perfectly good bottles, already thin margins would be pushed to the limit.

Lest you think I’m in the pockets of restaurant owners, I’d like to suggest a reasonable middle ground. How about if restaurant owners allowed customers to “test drive” wines that are sold by the glass? A small sample could be poured from an already-opened bottle, and the customer could then say yeah or nay to an entire glass.

If the answer is “nay,” the restaurant would be out an ounce of wine, rather than a full bottle. And the diner could try another by-the-glass selection — perhaps one that he’d end up liking and ordering.

That makes a lot more sense than a restaurant being expected to “eat” a \$50 or \$75 bottle just because it wasn’t to a diner’s liking.

Such a policy would be good for diners and good for restaurateurs — and it might even encourage more restaurants to offer wine service.

Ultimately, diners need to be more reasonable when declining a particular wine, and restaurateurs need to offer more by-the-glass choices that diners can try before they buy.



## WINE A TO Z

**W**inzergenossenschaft. German word for an association or cooperative of wine producers. Also believed to be the longest word ever published in this newsletter.

**X**eres. The old name for the town of Jerez (a.k.a. Jerez de la Frontera) in Spain, and for its wine, now known as Sherry.

**Y**ield. A measurement of the production of a grapevine or vineyard, typically quantified by tons per acre. Generally speaking, the lower the yield, the greater the concentration of aromas and flavors in the grapes.

**Z**ucco. A famous wine of Switzerland, produced near Palermo and made from the Muscat family of wine grapes.

**A**peritif. A before-dinner drink served, traditionally, to stimulate the appetite and conversation. Commonly, sparkling wines and chilled white wines are used for this purpose.

## APPELLATION SHOWCASE

### AUSTRALIA'S BAROSSA VALLEY

*Some of the oldest Shiraz vines on the planet, nurtured by early settlers from the Old World, still produce grapes for local wineries in the Barossa Valley of Australia.*

The Barossa, just an hour's drive from Adelaide, has become one of the most famous wine regions in the world, with more than 50 wineries offering samples at their tasting rooms, known Down Under as cellar doors.

South Australia produces half of Australia's wines and 70 percent of the nation's wine exports. Each year, nearly a million people visit the state's cellar doors, and 60 percent of those tourists visit the Barossa, making it South Australia's most popular wine region.

Settled in 1842 by Silesian and

Prussian refugees, on the invitation of local English landowner and entrepreneur George Fife Angas, Barossa townships today retain an audible trace of their heritage with a form of German called Barossa Deutsch, still spoken in some circles.

Local restaurants and cafes reflect this heritage, and butchers and bakers offer traditional wursts, breads and German-style cakes. Few Australian regions boast a food and wine culture to rival the Barossa's.

And much of that heritage is owed to the venerable Shiraz vines mentioned at the outset. These century-old vines are treasured not only for their age, but also because many of Australia's original grapevine plantings

were wiped out by phylloxera during the 1800s.

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**VINESSE STYLE**

**SUSHI & CHAMPAGNE**

*People who say they don't like sushi fall into two basic categories: 1) those who have never tried it, and 2) those who have an aversion to eating raw fish.*

To those who fall into the first group, all we can say is: You don't know what you're missing. To those in the second camp, you get a pass from us; nobody can tell anybody else what they should and shouldn't eat.

Because sushi comes in many flavors and nearly as many levels of spiciness, wine pairing can be a challenge unless you



know exactly what you're ordering, and stick with it throughout the meal. But that defeats the purpose of going to a sushi bar, which at least partially involves trying new things and introducing your palate to a variety of flavors, spices and textures.

So, what wine to pour with sushi? If you're taking the (recommended)

smorgasbord approach, we suggest Champagne, as it's known in France, or sparkling wine, as it's referred to elsewhere around the world. Sparkling wine typically is bright and refreshing, but more importantly, it lacks the kind of assertive flavors that would clash with the flavors of sushi.

One of the world's great Champagne-and-sushi restaurants is Azuma, located in Sydney, Australia. It's where local chefs go when they want a true sushi experience, and Azuma does not disappoint with its extensive menu.

It's highlighted by a 10-piece meal that includes tuna, salmon, salmon belly, salmon roe, prawn, scampi, scallop, oyster, eel and white fish.

The Champagne list has a couple of modest selections that come in airline-sized bottles. But we suggest skipping those and opting for a truly stylish experience with full bottles of Moët Chandon Nectar Imperial, Veuve Clicquot or Gosset Grande Reserve Brut.

Yes, sushi and Champagne can make for an expensive meal, especially in Sydney. But aren't you worth it?

**BEING GREEN**

New Zealand has long been famed for its stunning and unspoiled landscape. Its small population, isolated location and agricultural economy have earned the country a "clean, green" image. New Zealand grape growers and winemakers aim to keep it that way by protecting the environmental integrity of their wine production. Toward this end, a pioneering set of industry standards were developed, known as Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand. SWNZ provides the framework for growers and vintners to continually work at improving all aspects of their policies in terms of environmental, social and economic sustainability in both the vineyard and the winery. SWNZ was established by volunteer grape growers in August 1995 as an industry initiative. The program was commercially introduced in 1997, and has been adopted by growers from all of the grape growing regions. The introduction of a winery program in 2002 has been a significant development, which further substantiates the industry motto of, "New Zealand wine: the riches of a clean, green land."



## Napa Valley's Early Harvest Reports Are Very Encouraging

***B**y the time you read this, the California grape harvest of 2006 will be history — with the exception of some fruit earmarked for “late harvest” dessert wines.*

However, as we're writing this, the harvest had just begun. Still, the first few days of any harvest season can be telling, because a good start portends a good finish. With that in mind, we called upon some of our Napa Valley dwellers to provide reports on the early days of harvest in that very important region of California wine country...

- **Howell Mountain** — Ripening had been going at a snail's pace up until a month or so before the traditional beginning of harvest. Then a near-total lack of fog allowed the vines to soak in lots of sunshine and catch up quickly.

- **Spring Mountain** — Harvest had not yet commenced at the time of this writing, but early signs pointed to possible record-size crops of Chardonnay and Merlot.



- **St. Helena** — Favorable weather was boding well for a smooth harvest and slightly above-average tonnage.

- **Oakville** — In an area known for Cabernet Sauvignon, the Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc vineyards were among the first to be picked.

- **Yountville** — Sauvignon Blanc also got out of the gate first here, with Chardonnay following close behind. Very even ripening in the Chardonnay bunches was noted, which should enhance overall quality.

- **Stags Leap** — The Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon vines in this area were running four to

five weeks behind other parts of the valley, based on early sugar level readings. That said, prolonged hang time could result in some very complex fruit and wines.

- **Mt. Veeder** — A mid-October harvest was being anticipated, which should have allowed plenty of time for full ripening.

- **Los Carneros** — Chardonnay and Pinot Noir picking began early, per usual, among sparkling wine makers, who don't want to see high sugars in their fruit. The maturing of grapes for still wines was running about a week behind “normal,” which means no problems were being anticipated.

### Four Seasons



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# A Feast for the Senses in Castilla y Leon

**P**ast and present meet with a host of sensory delights in Castilla y Leon, now the largest region not only in Spain, but the entire European Union.

Until 1983, Castilla and Leon were separate regions, both having been centers of Medieval Spanish history. Their union 23 years ago brought together centuries of cathedrals, monasteries, castles, fortified towns and amazing architecture in a single, fascinating tourist destination.

Castilla y Leon is situated on an elevated plain that is bordered by the Sistema Iberico mountain ranges to the east, Cordillera Central to the south, Cordillera Cantabrica to the north and the Duero River toward Portugal. It is home to countless natural parks that are dominated by oak trees and cork-oaks.

The region is a crossroads of cultures, and as such, each period of history has left its mark on the people. Folklore, traditions and handicrafts have left their legacy, as reflected in the customs of each village. Each valley, each town and each city has the ability to surprise visitors with its charm and its tales of historic adventurers.

Gastronomy also helps to define Castilla y Leon and its towns. What visitors encounter on the table is the reflection of a territory's food and agricultural



## TOURING TIPS

diversity, ranging from traditional recipes — through which original dishes and ingredients are preserved — to nouvelle cuisine. The plentiful and extremely varied range of recipes is due, in large part, to geographical factors as well as the aforementioned cultural diversity.

It's not uncommon to find cakes, pastries and other festive dishes whose presentation and ingredients

have remained unchanged for more than 300 years. But that has not stopped the introduction of new types of cuisine, which meld traditional flavors with modern cooking techniques in order to appeal to ever-changing culinary preferences.

Castilla y Leon also has gained prominence among the wine-growing regions of Spain. Five *Denominaciones de Origin* — or D.O.s — and eight areas producing *vinos de la tierra* can be found within the vast region. There are some 400 D.O. producers and about half as many bodegas specializing in *vinos de la tierra*.

Wine types run the gamut from simple table wines (*vinos jovenes*) that match beautifully with the diverse local cuisine, to more costly *Reservas* that require three years in barrel before release. Between the two extremes, one can find dozens and dozens of wonderful sipping and food wines, crafted from both indigenous and international grape varieties.





The awakening of interest in Castilla y Leon winemaking has resulted in substantial growth in the number of bodegas that welcome visitors. As more and more wine estates have upgraded their equipment and facilities, they have become magnets for visitors seeking an authentic Spanish wine experience.

The marriage of food-and-wine is evident at the region's restaurants, many of which have garnered multiple Michelin stars for their quality and ambience. Among them:

- *Pedro Mario Alonso's Restaurante El Ermitano* in Zamora, set within an orchard and 17th century chapel.
- *Restaurante Vivaldi* in Leon, guided by well-known cookbook author and culinary lecturer Carlos Domingo Cidon.
- *Restaurante Victor Gutierrez*, located in the oldest part of Salamanca.
- *El Rincon de Antonio* in Zamora, which is run by a master chocolatier and boasts a 600-selection wine list.

All of the better restaurants are happy to help diners select local wines to complement the cuisine, thus assuring a satisfying and memorable end to a day of sightseeing and cultural immersion.

To learn more about Castilla y Leon, and for suggestions on where to stay in the region, visit:

[turismocastillayleon.com](http://turismocastillayleon.com)



## Many Wineries Continue to Be in a 'Family Way'

***Family-owned businesses account for more than 90 percent of U.S. businesses, responsible for half of the country's gross domestic product and about three-quarters of America's new jobs.***

Most of California's 2,000 wineries also are owned by families. They collectively represent a major economic engine that has an impact of \$45.4 billion on California's economy.

In many cases, the family name can be found on the bottles of wine produced. This usually means that the family has chosen the path to quality in business or production decisions because the family name, and thus the family's reputation, is at stake.

Family members tend to be loyal and dedicated to the family enterprise, and the family presence in winery jobs pro-

vides continuity in passing institutional knowledge on to others. Also, family members work to keep the business viable, valuable and reputable so it can be passed on to their children.

California's wine families become versed in all aspects of the wine business, learning grape growing, winemaking, marketing and hospitality in the tasting room and at events. Throughout California, wine lovers can meet the interesting personalities behind their favorite wines.

Over the next few months, we'll introduce you to some of these special wineries and special people, beginning with a few families that call San Luis Obispo County home...

When visiting wineries in SLO County, you're bound to meet a family member of the winery who may be harvesting fruit or pouring a glass of wine in the tasting room.

The Niven family is now into its third generation in the industry, growing wine grapes since the 1960s for their Baileyana Winery and Edna Valley Vineyard in San Luis Obispo. The Nivens' third generation is taking the business to the next level with a new brand, tangent (with a lower-case "t"), which focuses solely on alternative white wines — including one that has

been featured by Vinesse.

To experience another family-run and operated estate, stop by Kynsi Winery in Arroyo Grande, where Don and Gwen Othman have had their hands in the wine industry for more than 25 years. Two daughters run the tasting room, which is

located in a renovated dairy built during the 1940s.

And at Ortman Family Vineyards, Chuck Ortman (*above*) has been making wine for more than 20 years in SLO County, and recently teamed up in that endeavor with his son, Matt Ortman. They specialize in limited-production Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah and Sangiovese.



# Q AND A

**I know this may sound like a silly question, by my fiancé and I love to taste wines together and make a night of it. Is there a particular type of wine and accompanying wine-pairing treats that enhance a more romantic atmosphere?**

— Sonja LaVoie

Dear Sonja:

Everyone has their own definition of “romantic,” and there’s no question that men and women approach the subject differently. So, we asked Vinesse Wine Steward Katie Montgomery and *Grapevine* Editor Robert Johnson to both give their thoughts, with tape rolling. Following is a transcript of their conversation...

**Katie:** The traditional wines of romance are Champagne and Cabernet Sauvignon.

**Robert:** But what if Sonja and her fiancé don’t like Champagne or Cab? I think they should go with a wine — whatever kind it may be — that they both like.

**Katie:** That actually makes a lot of sense. Who are you, and what have you

done with Robert?

**Robert:** Oh, you’ll know it’s me soon enough. What about those “wine pairing treats” she mentioned?

**Katie:** It may sound like a cliché, but oysters have certain romantic “powers,” and they’re great with Champagne. With Cabernet, a few pieces of bittersweet chocolate would be good, and so would a slice of flourless chocolate cake... with two forks.

**Robert:** No whipped cream?

**Katie:** You mean on top of the cake?

**Robert:** Well, I guess that’s one place you could put it...

**Katie:** Okay, you’re definitely Robert.

**Robert:** Told ya. But I do have another idea.

**Katie:** I’d better sit down...

**Robert:** These two sound like they’re really into wine, so I’d suggest they open two or three bottles — different wines — and do their own side-by-side comparisons. Each should write down their own impressions of each wine in their own words, and then compare notes. The language of wine can be very romantic, and I bet they’d learn something about each other. They may even come to an agreement about the wine to serve at their wedding reception.

**Katie:** Another good idea; will wonders never cease? Good wine, good nibbles, maybe a fire in the fireplace or flickering candles...

**Robert:** And don’t forget the whipped cream!

**Katie:** Robert!

## Quotes Du Gour

■ *Actress Bette Davis, known for her fondness for red wine:*

“Never, never trust anyone who asks for white wine. It means they’re phonies.”

■ *Professional violinist Young Uck Kim, on the personal pleasure he derives from wine:*

“At least once a day, you should do something purely for enjoyment, and wine is my way of relaxing.”



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### AN EVENT WITH SOLE

An event dubbed “The Sip & Shop Fashion Show” was held recently in Chicago. The concept: pairing wines with shoes. Yes, you read that correctly. As an example, one participant suggested matching silvery sandals with Sauvignon Blanc. The women at Vinesse headquarters thought this made perfect sense, while the men are still scratching their heads. However, there was uniform agreement that the event was worthwhile, since it raised funds to support UNICEF girls’ education programs.

### CAB CROP LOOKS GOOD

One harvest prediction coming out of Napa Valley in late August and early September was that the



Cabernet Sauvignon crop would be somewhat small, but of exceptional quality. The small clusters and berry sizes being seen figured to equate with less tonnage but more intense fruit. For more on the harvest, see “Cellarmaster” in this issue.

### GLASSWARE CARE

A wine glass should be washed immediately after use with hot water and a mild detergent. This prevents staining, and gets the glass completely clean for its next use. After being dried with a clean cloth, the glass

should be stored upright so stale air doesn’t become trapped in the bowl.

### ALL IN THE FAMILIES

Francis and Kathleen Mahoney have sold their southern Napa wine estate — formerly known as Carneros Creek — to Michael Mondavi and his family. The Mahoneys will continue to make wine at the facility, however.

### WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Earlier this year, all the legal maneuvering finally ended and it was decreed that wineries that use “Napa” in their name must make their wine from Napa Valley fruit. It was considered a landmark truth-in-advertising case. Now, a similar brouhaha is brewing — or, perhaps that should be fermenting — in Sonoma County. One of the Sonoma County wineries that is against the measure is F. Korbel & Brothers, which shouldn’t be surprising since Korbel labels its sparkling wines as “Champagne” — which, technically, is a word reserved for sparkling wines from the Champagne region of France.

### ELTON & THE ELVISSES

More than \$700,000 was raised for local charities at the 2006 Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction. Among the highlights of the event: Joe, Mike, Chris and Bob Benziger showing up in full Elvis regalia. Another: Bruce Cohn of B.R. Cohn Winery impersonating Elton John, sequins and all. Proceeds benefited the Sonoma Land Trust, Vineyard Worker Services and the Sonoma Valley Education Foundation, among other local groups.

### THE SKINNY ON SKINS

The main difference between making white wine and making red wine involves the skins of the grapes. In the making of red wine, the skins are kept in contact with the fermenting juice. That’s what gives the wine its color.

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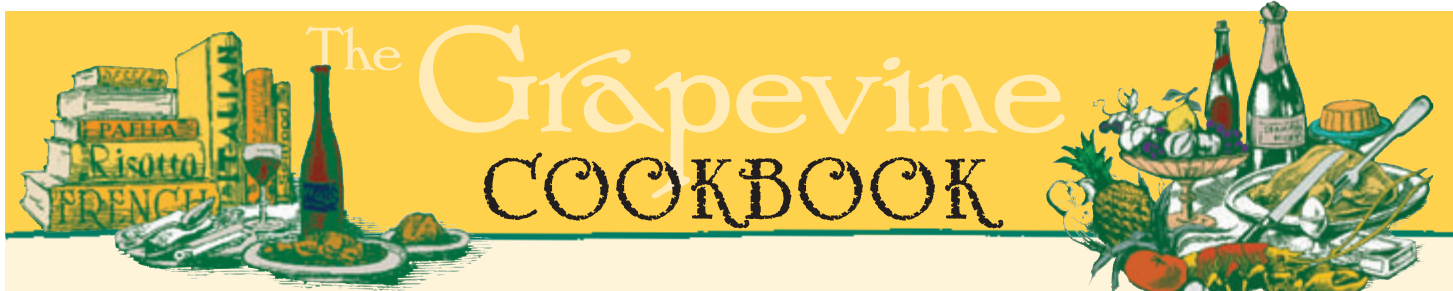
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## VEAL CHOPS

This recipe is easy to make, serves 4, and matches beautifully with Syrah, Syrah/Shiraz and Grenache blends, or other red wines.

### Ingredients

- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- Dash pepper
- 4 veal loin chops, about 3/4-inch thick
- 1/2 cup fine dry bread crumbs
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 slices Mozzarella cheese
- 1 green bell pepper, cut in strips
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 can (8-oz.) tomato sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon dry leaf oregano, crumbled

- 1/2 teaspoon dry leaf basil, crumbled

### Preparation

1. Combine flour and seasonings; coat veal chops. Mix crumbs with Parmesan cheese. Dip chops in beaten egg, and then in the crumb mixture.
2. In a large skillet, brown in olive oil over medium-low heat. Add sliced onions and green bell pepper for the last 5 minutes of browning.
3. Pile sliced vegetables over the veal chops. Place a slice of Mozzarella cheese over each chop. Pour tomato sauce over chops, and sprinkle with oregano and basil.
4. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 45 minutes, or until meat is tender.

## PASTA WITH WHITE CLAM SAUCE

This recipe pairs well with almost any white wine, including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Spanish blends. It makes 2 servings.

### Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 tablespoons chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 4 tablespoons white wine
- 1 1/4 cups white clam sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 8-oz. pasta of your choice

### Preparation

1. Begin preparing pasta. Meanwhile, saute onions and garlic in olive oil. Add all ingredients except can of clam sauce.
2. Heat on medium. Once mixture is heated, reduce heat to medium-low and add clam sauce. Continue heating slowly.
3. Once pasta is done, combine with sauce mixture and garnish with Parmesan cheese.

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