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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

***T*'is the season for drinking great wine with great friends. With that in mind, here are a few toasts for those special occasions...**



■ Here's to mine and here's to thine! Now's the time to clink it! Here's a flagon of old wine, and here we are to drink it.

■ Here's to the man who owns the land that bears the grapes that makes the wine that tastes as good as this does.

■ A warm toast. Good company. A fine wine. May you enjoy all three.

Giving credit where credit is due, those toasts were originated by Richard Hovey, Omar Khayyam and Paul Dickson, respectively.

All I can add is: They go double for me. Cheers!

Martin Stewart Jr.

So Many Reasons to Be Grateful, and Not Just During the Holidays

By Robert Johnson

It's the season of giving... and the season for giving thanks.

One of the great lessons I learned in life was to be grateful for what I have. That lesson came in particularly handy when I was a young, single parent — at the time, a recipe for lots of macaroni-and-cheese dinners, cheap wine and not much of a social life.

While being the sole bread winner in a single-income household wasn't easy — especially during my daughter's pre-school years — I learned to take great pleasure in life's seemingly little things. I now look back on those long father-daughter walks... those games of catch in the back yard... those shopping expeditions for a new piece of Barbie clothing... those attempts in the kitchen to make mac-and-cheese taste a little bit less like mac-and-cheese... with great relish.

Hmm... I wonder how relish would have tasted on mac-and-cheese...

It took a lot of years to get on firm financial footing, but I wouldn't trade those years for anything. I swore off mac-and-

cheese as soon as it became economically feasible, and I have not had it since.

The years go by so quickly, and now it's my daughter and her husband and their two children who are learning to be grateful for the little things. They still eat mac-and-cheese, but because there are two incomes in their family, they also mix in some Hamburger Helper on occasion. These days, if you live in Southern California, you almost need three incomes to comfortably manage a household.

In a few weeks, I'm going to get to spend some cherished time with my daughter, with no son-in-law or grandkids around. It's going to be great, and I can't wait.

In fact, this might be the time to end my mac-and-cheese strike and whip some up to share with my daughter — for old time's sake. Only this time, I think we'll also share a nice bottle of Chardonnay.



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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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Will 'A Good Year' do for the Luberon area of France what 'Sideways' did for Santa Barbara County?

It's an intriguing question, and it goes to the heart of the influence that the media has on our lives. Yes, even our wine lives.

Remember that "60 Minutes" story that Morley Safer did back in 1992? Safer's report looked at the men and women of France, who love their foie gras and rich butter sauces and many other culinary delights that aren't necessarily heart-healthy, yet have an amazingly low rate of heart disease. Citing a variety of experts, Safer concluded that drinking wine apparently mitigated the harmful health effects of fat-laden food.

Almost overnight, bottles of mostly red wine and primarily Merlot began to disappear from supermarket shelves. Americans believed that if a report appeared on "60 Minutes," it had to be true. (Or, at the very least,

they found it to be a ready-made "excuse" for drinking more wine.)

Merlot became the red wine of the moment because it was "smoother" than Cabernet Sauvignon, less expensive than Cabernet, and plentiful. For the next few years, thanks to that single "60 Minutes" story, wineries had no reason to market their Merlot bottlings; they sold themselves.

A little more than a decade later, a small-budget movie titled *Sideways*, set in Santa Barbara County's bucolic Santa Ynez Valley, had an equally significant impact on the world of wine. Only this time, Merlot was the victim rather than the benefactor, as one of the movie's main characters decried its sameness and lack of personality. His wine variety of choice was Pinot Noir, and his eloquent description sent Pinot sales skyrocketing and Merlot sales plummeting.

The Merlot being made at the time was no worse than that made in 1992, and the Pinot Noir wasn't any better. But the perceptions had changed because of the media crush, prompting Pinot makers to celebrate and Merlot makers to dust off their marketing tools.

A Good Year, based on the book by Peter Mayle, is set in one of the lesser-known corners of Provence known as Luberon, where it's not unusual to see grapevines surrounding a castle. You can read more about Luberon and its environs in this month's "Wine Touring Tips" feature.

This movie is much less about wine than *Sideways*, but the scenery is just as stunning, and I can definitely see wine enthusiasts making the trek to walk in the steps of Max Skinner, the character played by Russell Crowe. At the very least, I can see couples waiting for the DVD to come out, and playing it at home on a Friday or Saturday night with a nice bottle of wine — Merlot, Pinot Noir or otherwise.





WINE A_{TO}Z

Luberon. An area of Provence, in France's far southeastern corner, where "A Good Year" — the book by Peter Mayle and the movie by Ridley Scott — are set. Provence, as a whole, is known for its blended wines using multiple grape varieties, as well as its zesty Rosés.

Mosel-Saar-Ruwer. Perhaps the greatest wine-growing region of France, named for three rivers that flow through it. Recently-passed legislation will shorten the name of the region to what wine lovers have been calling it for eons: simply, the Mosel.

Neuburger. An Austrian grape variety used to make some average dry wines and some quite tasty sweet wines.

Oregon. Important Northwest winegrowing state known especially for Pinot Noir. No other major wine-producing state is impacted as significantly by weather as Oregon, where ill-timed rainstorms can wreak havoc during the harvest season.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

PASO ROBLES

We conclude our series on the family wineries of California...

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Paso Robles wine country, as many family-owned and operated wineries prepare for the next generation to move the industry forward.

From viticulture to winemaking, and from sales and marketing to operations, the second generation is stepping up in all aspects of the business. Working hand-in-hand with their families, they're already making an impression.

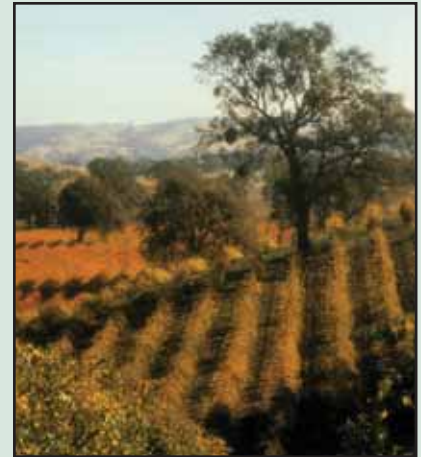
At J. Lohr Vineyards and Winery, the second generation — Steve, Cynthia and Lawrence — work in vineyard development, sales and marketing. Steve Lohr is spearheading the winery's expansion in both Paso Robles and Monterey.

At Peachy Canyon, both sons — Josh and Jake — are active in wine-making and sales. At Steinbeck Vineyards, three generations actively

work with the vineyard: father Howie, daughter Cynthia and grandson Ryan.

Austin Hope is another example of the second generation leading the winemaking and overseeing all aspects of the business at the Treana and Austin Hope wineries. And at Tablas Creek, Jason Hass serves as general manager, learning the business from his father.

In all cases, the next generation is taking leadership roles that will help Paso Robles — long a favorite area among the wine clubs of Vinesse — achieve its full potential on the national and global fronts.



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Vinesse created the Elevant Society to meet members' demands for super-premium wines. While virtually all members of the original American Cellars Wine Club were very satisfied with their monthly selections, some wanted more, and they were willing to pay for it.

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VINESSE STYLE

WINE COUNTRY RESTAURANTS

If ever there were a reason to venture to wine country specifically for a fine meal, Cyrus may be it.

Located in Les Mars Hotel in the Sonoma County community of Healdsburg, Cyrus recently was ranked among the top 40 restaurants in the United States, as selected by *Gayot* in its restaurant issue.

Here's what *Gayot* had to say about Cyrus:

"This sophisticated restaurant exhibits a rare combination of world-class dining matched with impeccable service that steers diners into an easy-going wine country frame of mind. As guests enter the intimate dining room, a call is placed to chef-owner Douglas Keane in the kitchen, signaling him to begin preparing the table's canapés.

"Most likely, famed maitre d' Nick Peyton will charmingly wheel up the swoon-worthy Champagne and caviar cart, presenting at least four kinds of caviar, measuring them on the scale against petite gold bars.

"Diners craft their own prix-fixe meal, choosing three to five courses off Keane's extensive menu of contemporary cuisine with French, seasonal and global influences.

"The foie gras selections are truly transporting, especially the silky salt-cured torchon with petite warm crumpets that beg to be slathered with the accompanying rhubarb compote and finished with Riesling gelee. Another standout is the silky black sea bass resting in a savory dried scallop broth with tender little shiitake caps.

"The cheese cart has close to two dozen artisanal varieties of the creamy, the runny and the moldy. Desserts are innovative, like the pineapple-and-mint ravioli, resembling an Ettore Sottsass architectural model.

"The lengthy and impressive wine list understandably contributes to the convivial and celebratory air that permeates the well-appointed and timelessly decorated room."

Getting hungry? The number to call for reservations — an absolute must on weekends — is 707-433-3311.

Gayot also named The French Laundry in the Napa Valley town of Yountville to its list, as well as a favorite among Vinesse tasting panel members: Manresa in Los Gatos. Situated near both the Monterey and Santa Cruz Mountain wine regions, Manresa serves creative French cuisine paired with sommelier-recommended fine wines. Reservations: 408-354-4330.

BEING GREEN

California's Lake County has a cool mountain climate that is unfavorable to many pests and diseases that trouble other growing areas. This natural advantage has helped reinforce the commitment of winegrape growers to preserve the land and other natural resources. Several wineries are doing their part, too. Among them is Ceago Vinegarden, which combined biodynamic farming with ecological building to create an educational and hospitality center on the north shore of Clear Lake. Cougar's Leap Winery has built its facility entirely off the power grid, using photovoltaic and ground source cooling to power the winery. Six Sigma Winery donated a conservation easement when it originally acquired its property, and established vineyards integrated with native vegetation and wildlife corridors to preserve the natural habitat for deer, bobcat and other animals.



Pleasures & Pitfalls of Collecting

Human beings have always been collectors. Whether it's an art lover tracking down an Impressionist painting or a baseball fan coveting a Willie Mays card, we take great pride in possessing items that please us.

Wine is no different, and yet very different. While all collectibles are subject to the ever changing winds and whims of the marketplace, wine is unique because it is consumable. With wine, the collectible itself changes over time.

That very factor is what makes wine collecting so risky. Once a cork comes out of a bottle, there's no turning back. The wine must be consumed at that time or, certainly, within a day or two.

Well-made wines, properly stored, can gain complexity and character over extended periods of time. But there is no set-in-stone formula that applies to all red wines or all Cabernet Sauvignon or even every bottle from a single vintage of a single estate. Wine is a living, breathing thing, and no two bottles are exactly alike. That is what makes collecting both rewarding and risky. And it's why the wine clubs of Vinesse feature primarily wines that are ready to drink upon arrival.

Even given the undeniable perils, wine collecting can be fun. Elevant

Society wines typically are ageworthy, so if you're looking to build a collection, those bottlings represent an excellent starting point.



Here are three tips to help you get the most out of wine collecting:

■ You don't need a fancy cellar like that of Chicago's NoMI restaurant, shown here. What you do need, however, is a cool, dry place to store your treasured bottles. If you're serious about this endeavor, invest in a temperature- and humidity-controlled unit. If you're interested simply in mid-term aging, a dark closet will do the trick.

■ Get organized. Use bottle tags, such as those furnished with your Vinesse tasting notes, to keep track of vintages and optimum drinking times.

■ Track the progress of your wines. If you buy a case of wine, plan to open a bottle every six months to see how it's progressing. When the wine seems to be nearing its peak, uncork — and enjoy — the remaining bottles more frequently. As we always say, it's better to drink a wine a little too soon than a little too late.

Four Seasons



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Turning 'A Good Year' Into a Memorable Week

Yes, the wine estate featured in the movie, 'A Good Year,' is real. And, yes, you can visit it.

A Good Year is based on the novel by Peter Mayle, the same writer who brought us *A Year in Provence* and *French Lessons*. In case you haven't seen the movie, here are a few excerpts from critic Bill Zwecker's review:

"Perhaps more often than we realize, people wake up one day and discover they may have made the wrong choices, about career or relationships — and often both. I'm not talking about the obvious blunders that lead to dangerous paths we frequently see showcased in films — drug use or hooking up with the worst partners one could find.

"No, there are far more instances exemplified by men like Max Skinner, the extremely successful and very wealthy London stock trader. Clearly a workaholic, Max (Russell Crowe) is unable to carve out a personal life that allows him to enjoy the riches he has amassed.

"When news arrives that Max's Uncle Henry (Albert Finney) has died — leaving him a vineyard in the south of France (where Max spent his childhood summers) — the cocky financial whiz is presented with one of those forks in life's road.

"The intriguing part? Max hasn't a clue that he's suddenly thrust into a place where he will be making that kind of decision."

We don't want to give away too much of the plot, but we will add this from Zwecker's review:

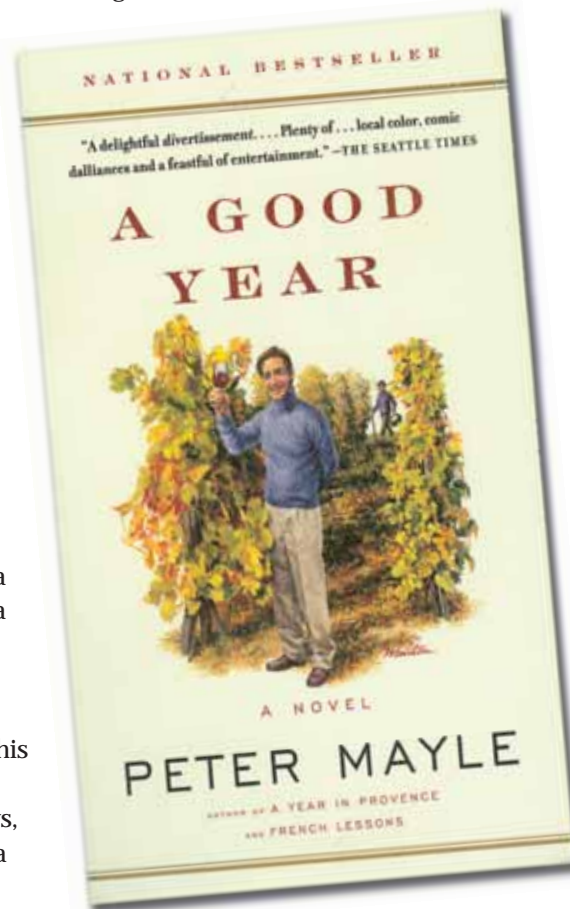
"Though predictable in many ways, I thoroughly enjoyed *A Good Year*, a pleasant jaunt through one of the



TOURING TIPS

most beautiful places on the planet — encased in a story that makes you feel all is right with the world."

So, if you missed *A Good Year* in theaters, be sure to buy or rent the DVD. Or, better, still, plan a trip to the little known French winegrowing outpost of Luberon, where author Mayle began what



would become his total immersion in the Provence lifestyle when he wrote *A Year in Provence*.

Writing a best-selling book about the place you've decided to live can be a double-edged sword. Perhaps because *A Year...* sold more than 5 million copies, Mayle and his wife soon found themselves as unwilling hosts to readers who wanted to see Mayle's Provence for themselves. Eventually, the unannounced guests became so numerous and bothersome that Mayle and his wife decided to pack up and take up temporary residence in the Hamptons.

The Mayles had become so accustomed to the lifestyle in France, however, that they returned four years later, this time settling in an unannounced locale "somewhere between Avignon and Aix." And while souvenir shops, huge hotels and golf courses have been added to the landscape, it's still possible to "get lost" in the countryside, traversing roads that corkscrew through the Luberon hills.

Among Mayle's favorite restaurants in the area is Auberge de l'Aiguebrun, a 19th century manor house where guests are greeted by a purring cat — not unlike those found on many wine estates — and a wild boar that has become something of a family pet to the owners.

For many years, the grape growers of Luberon sold their fruit to large cooperatives, which blended the grapes into non-descript cuvees for the mass market. More recently, however, a handful of farmers have dedicated themselves not only to growing grapes but also to making wine, and their dedication is paying off in the bottle.

If you're the adventurous type and would like to explore the region on your own, the closest international airport is in Nice, where you can rent a car and head out. However, many people prefer to fly to Paris

and then board a high-speed train to Avignon or Aix-en-Provence.

Once in Luberon, a good place to start — for the scenery as well as the wine — is Domaine de la Coquillade, which sits on a hilltop and offers magnificent views of the Luberon range as well as Mount Ventoux.

In France, it's not unusual for vintners to be involved in politics, and at Domaine de la Citadelle, you just may meet the Mayor of Menerbes, Yves Rousset-Rouard. At the Citadelle winery, you can sample the current releases while you peruse a museum displaying more than 1,000 corkscrews.

And at La Canorgue, where much of *A Good Day* was filmed, proprietor Jean-Pierre Margan often presides over the tasting room, along with his winemaker-daughter, Nathalie. They take great pride in their organic wines, and while they appreciate the business that Mayle's books have brought them, they worry about the area being overrun with tourists.

"We don't want to become like Mickey Mouse," Margan told *USA Today*. "Our job is to make wine."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

• A good deal of information about the Luberon region is available online. Start your planning by visiting these websites:

FranceGuide.com
ProvenceGuide.com
TheLuberon.com

• The French Government Tourist Office may be reached by calling 514-288-1904.

• Kathy and Charley Wood lead small groups to many of the places mentioned in Peter Mayle's books. Seven-day trips typically cost around \$2,500. For further information, call 865-693-3036.



Daphne Glorian's 'Second Label' Is a First-Class Wine

When your so-called "second label" garners consistently high scores from the wine media, you know you're doing something right.

Such is the case with the "Laurel" Priorat, a wine made in the rugged hills of northeastern Spain by Daphne Glorian at Clos Erasmus.

Glorian had no intention of purchasing a venerable block of Garnacha (a.k.a. Grenache) or starting a winery when she was in the area visiting friends in the late 1980s. But those friends convinced her that some amazing wines could be crafted there if the vines were given the proper attention, and they turned out to be right.

What made the vineyard so challenging to farm was its setting: a

steep slope on a craggy hillside. The vines produce precious few grapes each year, but those grapes are highly concentrated in aroma and flavor, and that's what makes the resulting wines so amazingly complex.

Glorian uses basically the same grapes — in slightly different proportions — for both her signature Clos Erasmus and her second-label Laurel. In a typical year, the Clos Erasmus might consist of around 78 percent Grenache, 17 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 5 percent Syrah, whereas the Laurel might have a little less Grenache and a little more of the other two varieties.

Another difference is in the aging process prior to bottling. The Clos Erasmus typically spends 18 months in new French oak barrels; the Laurel is aged for 12 months in one-year-old barrels.

There's also a difference in the fruit used. The Clos Erasmus utilizes grapes primarily from the long-established vineyard, whereas most of the Laurel's fruit comes from younger vines that Glorian planted herself. She now has four vineyard sites in all, but their total area spans a mere two hectares.

Glorian came up with the Erasmus name as a nod to philosopher Erasmus von Rotterdam, author of the essay, "In Praise of Folly." In the beginning, many dubbed her enterprise pure madness, but she has

proven them wrong and, in so doing, helped reestablish the Priorat on the Spanish wine map.

In fact, with names like Glorian, Rene Barbier and Alvaro Palacios all calling the region home, the Priorat now seems destined to take its rightful place among Spain's great wine-growing regions. With "second labels" like Laurel, the possibilities seem deliciously endless.



Quotes Du Jour

■ Wine writer Karen MacNeil, on pairing wine with garlic-based dishes:

“Rosés combine the earthy red fruit character of red wine with the lightness and acidity of white. The affinity between Rosé wines and garlic is remarkable. If Rosé isn’t your favorite, opt for a super-fruity red, such as Zinfandel or Beaujolais.”

■ Before unrelenting winter rains put parts of Oregon underwater, grape growers had a successful harvest, as Chehalem winemaker Harry Peterson-Nedry explains:

“In general, this vintage has us hunting for negatives, finding only the six days of 86 degree-plus days in the early harvest. The rest of the picture is hard to imagine better, with no birds, no disease, perfect crop loads, no rain and cool nights.”

■ Where was Samuel Johnson when Mel Gibson needed him?

“One of the disadvantages of wine is that it makes a man mistake words for thoughts.”

■ For that matter, where was Heraclitus?

“It is better to hide ignorance, but it is hard to do this when we relax over wine.”

Q AND A

What’s the best way to tell, without opening it, if an older bottle of wine is still okay to drink?

The short answer is: There is no sure-fire way. However, there are a few tell-tale signs that provide clues regarding possible problems.

For instance, if there’s any sign of leakage around the cork — perhaps a sticky area on the neck of the bottle — that’s a danger sign because it indicates that air may have been getting into the bottle.

And as we know, air is the enemy of wine, at least when it comes to the aging process. Another warning sign is a change in color. With red wines, the color might become less intense. With white wines, the color may turn from light or golden to a more brownish hue. In both cases, this is a sign of aging,

and perhaps premature aging. Such wines will receive no benefit from additional cellaring; it’s time to open them and see how they are. You may be pleasantly surprised by how they’re drinking, but it’s best not to get your hopes up.

I just learned that a bottle of “Napa” wine that we had with dinner a few weeks ago wasn’t made from Napa grapes. How could this be?

Until recently, there were no laws that required a winery’s name — if it included a geographic reference — to match the

source of its grapes. However, earlier this year, a long-running lawsuit finally was settled that now requires truth in labeling. Henceforth, if a winery uses “Sonoma” in its name, as an example, it must use grapes grown in Sonoma County. We applaud this change.

/ if there’s any sign of leakage around the cork -- perhaps a sticky area on the neck -- that’s a danger sign.



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'IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM!'

Winemakers in France's Bordeaux region are shrugging off warnings that there is a growing trend of "faking" top Bordeaux wines. One method involves filling a bottle with non-descript wine and then placing a counterfeit, venerable-looking label on the bottle. Amazingly, however, Bordeaux vintners seem unfazed by the practice. "Yes, there are some fakes of very old bottles from the last century," said Francis Mayeur, the director of Chateau d'Yquem. "But fakes do not concern the chateau; they concern exchanges between collectors." Christophe Salin, director of Chateau Lafite, put it even more succinctly: "Fakes are not our problem." So, when purchasing high-end Bordeaux, the old saw definitely applies: "Buyer beware."

A TOAST TO THE SPEAKER

The new Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, is married to a San Francisco investment banker and owns a second home — and a vineyard — in the Napa Valley. Though we'll never fully understand politics, that figures to be good news for America's winegrowers, winemakers and wine lovers.

A POSITIVE IMPACT?

Elsewhere in this issue, we wonder whether *A Good Year* will boost tourism in the Luberon region of France in the same manner *Sideways* brought hordes of tourists to California's Santa Ynez Valley. Author Peter Mayle offered this take on the topic to *Wine Spectator* magazine: "I'd like to think the effect on the Luberon will be positive, and if that rubs off on wine sales, great."

WINE IN THE FUNNIES

One can find references to wine in the most unusual places, including the comic strip, "Hagar The Horrible." In a recent strip, Hagar returned home, presumably after a long day of plundering, and inquired, "What's for dinner, Helga?" The reply: "We're having veal cutlets in wine sauce." Hagar pondered this eventuality for a moment and then said, "I'm not crazy about veal. Why don't you just pour me a glass of the wine sauce?"

PLAN AHEAD

The Napa Valley Wine Train offers a number of special excursions throughout the year. But none is more spectacular than the "Fireworks Express Dinner," which takes place on the 4th of July, and includes a five-course dinner plus "the best seats in the house" for the annual fireworks show at the California Veterans Home in Yountville. To obtain a list of all upcoming Napa Valley Wine Train special events, call 800-427-4124.



NO SOUR GRAPES

When in New England, plan a visit to White Silo Winery, located on Route 37 East in Sherman, Conn. You won't find grapevines there, but you will find plenty of fruit trees. We liked the raspberry wine, in particular, and White Silo also makes very good sour cherry wine and rhubarb wine. The tasting room is open on weekends from May through December, and the rest of the year by appointment. Call 860-355-0271 to plan a visit.

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VEAL SCALOPPINE

Here's a recipe that serves 6, and pairs perfectly with Pinot Noir.

Ingredients

- 1-1/2 lbs. thinly sliced veal round steak
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 can (4-oz.) sliced mushrooms, not drained
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2/3 cup tomato juice
- Dash ground nutmeg
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley

Preparation

1. Heat oil in a heavy skillet over medium heat. Combine flour, salt and pepper. Dredge veal slices in flour mixture. Pound veal to thin and tenderize; cut into strips about 1 by 3 inches.
2. Add onion slices to the skillet; cook until they just begin to brown.
3. Add veal strips; brown on both sides,

about 15 minutes total.

4. Add mushrooms with liquid, chicken broth, tomato juice and nutmeg. Reduce heat to low, cover and cook for 30 minutes, or until veal is tender.
5. Sprinkle with grated cheese and cook 5 minutes longer.
6. Garnish with parsley, and serve.

PASTA PUTTANESCA

This classic dish, which originated in Naples, Italy, matches beautifully with Barbera or Sangiovese.

Ingredients

- 5 cups ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 1 lb. linguine
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 medium red or yellow bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 2 to 4 anchovies (if desired)
- 2 to 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/3 cup black olives, chopped
- 1-1/2 Tablespoons capers, drained
- 2 Tablespoons fresh basil, coarsely chopped
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano

- 1/3 cup Italian parsley, coarsely chopped
- 2 to 4 Tablespoons tomato paste
- Salt to taste

Preparation

1. Place chopped tomatoes in a colander to drain while you cook the pasta and start the sauce.
2. Heat olive oil in a stainless steel or non-stick pan over medium heat. Add onion and bell pepper and saute, stirring or tossing frequently until onion is transparent but not browned.
3. Add garlic and red pepper flakes; continue to saute for another minute or two.
4. Add anchovies (optional), and mash them fine with the back of a spoon.
5. Add the well-drained tomatoes and cook, stirring, until heated through.
6. Add the olives, capers, herbs and tomato paste. Continue to stir until very hot, giving the flavors time to mix and develop. Taste and salt, if necessary.
7. Mix with drained pasta and serve.

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