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Spring Bonus Shipment

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# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



## MARTIN'S JOURNAL

**A**bout 10 years ago, I read an interesting article in *Business Week* about a wine educator.

The teacher would put a \$5 bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon in a brown bag, and a \$30 to \$50 bottle in another bag. He'd then have his students taste both wines, and about half of the class would guess that the \$5 wine was the more expensive of the two.

I don't doubt that's a true story. These days, while it's almost impossible to find a high-quality Cabernet for \$5, one definitely can uncover reasonably-priced bottlings that are as pleasing as those costing five or 10 times more.

In fact, that's what we do on a daily basis here at Vinesse. Our tasting panel runs through hundreds of wines in order to find two or three that deliver "\$50 flavor" without costing \$50.

I think you'll be impressed by the wines in this bonus shipment.

Impressed by the quality... and impressed by the value.

*Martin Stewart Jr.*

## Mere Words Don't Do Spring... or Wines of Spring... Justice

By Robert Johnson

**W**ords seem to flow easily when describing the warmth of summer or the colors of fall. And I'm certainly not lacking in colorful descriptors for winter.

But when it comes to the wonders of spring, I defer to those much more eloquent...

**"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant. If we sometimes did not taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome."**

Those of us who live in California occasionally forget that there are seasons. Our daily clothing choices revolve not around layering and the length of our coat, but whether we should don pants or shorts. Anne Bradstreet's words remind us that the dawning of spring is an occasion not to be taken for granted.

**"Science has never drummed up quite as effective a tranquilizing agent as a sunny spring day."**

Winter can be eerily quiet, but as W. Earl Hall reminds us, spring combines quiet with calm. It is the season of rebirth in the vineyards, the beginning of another harvest cycle that produces the grapes used

SPRING  
BONUS  
ISSUE

for crafting fine wine. When the sun shines in spring, all is right with the world.

**"In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt."**

As Margaret Atwood points out, there is much to be done in the vineyard during the spring months to help assure a successful harvest come fall. This issue's "Walking the Vineyard" feature explains why so many grape growers and vintners have dirt underneath their fingernails during the spring months.

**"An optimist is the human personification of spring."**

So says Susan J. Bissonette, and there are no more optimistic people than winemakers, whose livelihoods are so dependent on the whims of Mother Nature. Our "Purple Prose" feature is dedicated to the men and women who keep the faith and craft the wines we love so much.

Yes, spring is special. As Ellis Peters put it:

**"Every spring is the only spring, a perpetual astonishment."**

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# Walking the Vineyard

## Spring: Let a New Growing Season Begin!

***Many people assume that the most critical season of the vineyard year is winter, because that's when the most severe weather can occur.***

However, as the flooding in Napa County this winter demonstrated, grapevines can withstand a lot of abuse — particularly during the winter months, when the vines are dormant.

Had major rainstorms and associated flooding occurred during the spring or summer, it could have been bad news. Had the clouds burst and the rivers overflowed during the fall, it would have been catastrophic.

As numerous vintners have noted, if there were going to be flooding in wine country, it couldn't have happened at a better time. And now, as winter fades and spring awakens, the first indicators of the next harvest season slowly come into focus.

Generally speaking, the harbingers of spring arrive first in the southern portion of California and gradually cascade to the cooler climes of the Pacific Northwest. Various developments and practices in the vineyard may occur anywhere from a week to a month later in Washington's Columbia Valley than they do in California's Central Coast

growing districts. Our timetable here generalizes about California as a whole.

By the end of February, vine pruning is completed and, particularly in the Napa Valley, yellow blossoms of wild mustard begin to appear between the rows of vines.

Elsewhere, other signs of spring pop

bud break is not far away.

By March, the first green leaves and shoots appear on the vines — just a few at first, with the pace hastening as the weather warms.

The timing of bud break varies by grape variety, with Chardonnay being among the “early bloomers.”

Once the buds open, growers flip several pages ahead in their calendars and make a notation. As a general rule, harvest will commence 175 days after the buds open.

The main concern during the spring months is frost. Freezing temperatures are rare in wine country, but can cause great damage to the young shoots — negatively impacting both the quality and quantity of the harvest months later. That's why many growers invest in frost-control sprinklers, and activate them anytime the air temperature dips to around 35 degrees. The sprinklers are expensive, but no form of insurance in any industry comes cheap.

By April, winter storms have given way to spring showers, which have little impact on the growing cycle. Cover crops are mowed and disked into the vineyard, and frost prevention continues to

be practiced.

More importantly, the shoots on the vines continue to grow, while new leaves and tendrils unfurl toward the sun. After the dreary, dormant months of winter, the growing season finally is in full swing.



up in various hues on valley floors and hillsides.

The period of dormancy is over, and plump buds begin to appear on the vines. Experienced growers and vintners know that when fluid begins to drip from the fresh pruning cuts,

# Purple Prose

***M**aking wine is part science, part art and part luck.*

While Mother Nature controls the luck factor, the scientific and artistic aspects of winemaking are the sole responsibility of the vintner. Making good wine is fairly easy; making great wine requires an educated and passionate craftsman. California is a magnet for such artisans.

California winemakers have ridden the wine wave of the past 30 years to achieve a degree of visibility and renown within the industry and beyond. As the number of commercial bricks-and-mortar California wineries has grown from about 850 in 1998 to around 1,300 today, winemakers have taken center stage, much like football quarterbacks.

Whether they were born into a winemaking family or came to the profession through sheer will, or even by chance, winemakers have earned their superstar status through hard work and a devotion to the grape. The job requires a strong sense of self-confidence, along with an ability to make quick decisions and take risks.

There are countless paths to becoming a winemaker. Some go to college from winemaking families, as they want to perpetuate their heritage. Others have a love of wine and decide to be winemakers, sometimes after having started careers in other fields. Many have a creative bent and are looking for an appropriate outlet. Whatever the motivation, a successful winemaker must have scientific aptitude, coupled with strong intuitive and sensory abilities.

Most California winemakers have completed a four-year degree program, such as the ones offered at the

## A Toast to the SUPERHEROES of the Wine World



University of California at Davis, Cal State Fresno and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. The Davis and Fresno programs, for instance, graduate 20 to 25 students annually with a B.S. degree in viticulture and enology.

The curriculums are rigorous, with courses in pests and diseases, plant physiology, microbiology, fining and more. The new Cal Poly program is similar, and also includes wine business courses.

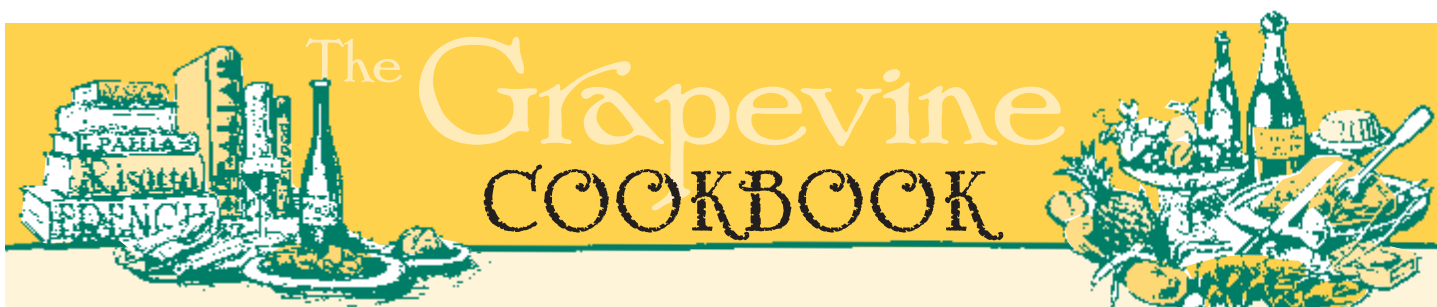
College provides the technical information about the process of winemaking, but experience is the great teacher. After graduation, future winemakers may start out in a winery lab or as an assistant winemaker. If they are fortunate, they will have a mentor, allowing the art of winemaking to be passed down from generation to generation, from expert to novice.

A winemaker's depth of knowledge regarding the vineyards that produce the fruit for his or her wines is perhaps the most important aspect of the job. Each vintage is different, and winemakers need to use their training and skills to work with every season.

A winemaker's relationship with growers or vineyard managers is usually one of close cooperation and communication. Many are long-term relationships built on trust and a shared vision of how to achieve certain parameters for making the finest wine possible from a given vineyard site.

Tasting is an important facet of winemaking, from the beginning when the juice is in the fermenter to the final blend before bottling. Winemakers learn the technical aspects of tasting at school. However, it is through experience that they gain the ability to affect the taste of their wines through a myriad of daily winemaking decisions.

Blending is another tool in the artistic palette of a winemaker. Often a vintner will have 20 to 30 lots of a wine that come from different vineyards with various vine maturity, aged in different types of oak, or differing in color from light to opaque with varying degrees of alcohol. It is up to the winemaker to decide how to blend this array of wines to create the final product that will be bottled for us to enjoy.



## TURKEY & SPINACH POTSTICKERS

This recipe matches beautifully with Sauvignon Blanc, and yields 6 servings.

### Ingredients

- 1 package wonton wrappers, square or circular

### Filling Ingredients

- 1 lb. white ground turkey breast
- 10-oz. package frozen chopped spinach
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons ginger root, fresh and grated
- 3 tablespoons green onions, finely sliced
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

### Dipping Sauce Ingredients

- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1/4 cup rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon chili oil

### Preparation

1. Thaw spinach thoroughly and press it very dry. Chop green onion. Peel ginger root, then grate.
2. Mix all ingredients for filling together.
3. Place wonton wrapper on palm of hand. Put 1 tablespoon filling in center of wrapper. Lightly moisten edge of wonton wrapper with a bit of water to help it seal. Fold in half diagonally. Pinch the edges together firmly. Place on surface and cover with kitchen towel until ready to cook.
4. Put 1 tablespoon oil in the bottom of a large

frying pan. Line the bottom with a single layer of potstickers. Fry until brown on one side, about 1 minute on medium-high heat. Add 1 cup water and bring to a boil. Cover, lower heat, and steam for 12 to 15 minutes or until most of the water evaporates. Remove the lid and cook until remaining liquid has evaporated.

5. Mix dipping sauce and serve in individual bowls with potstickers.

## WINTER SQUASH SOUP

Try this heart-warming recipe, with serves 2-4, with Chardonnay.

### Ingredients

- 1 (2 1/2-lb.) acorn squash
- 12-oz. can spicy vegetable juice
- 1 cup chopped green bell pepper
- 1 cup fresh or frozen corn kernels
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh basil
- Pinch of salt

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 400. Line a medium-size baking pan with foil. Halve the squash, remove the seeds and place the squash cut-side down in the pan. Bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until the squash is tender when pierced with a knife. Set aside to cool, about 15 minutes.
2. Scoop the squash into a large saucepan and mash it with a potato masher or fork to remove any large lumps. Add 1 1/2 cups of water, the vegetable juice, bell pepper, corn, basil and salt, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Serve hot, or cool the soup to room temperature, refrigerate, and serve it chilled.