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Fall Bonus Shipment

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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

Man, was that
a hot summer,
or what?

Some days were so simmering in Southern California, all we wanted to do was stay inside. Of course, that provided more time for our tasting panel to sample the plethora of summer releases that found their way to Vinesse headquarters. If you've got to stay inside, I can think of worse ways to spend your time.

In fact, this special fall bonus shipment is the direct result of those extended summertime sampling sessions. The tasting panel found four wines that didn't really fit into our existing club programs, but definitely deserved to be showcased.

So, I decided to give the green light to this special bonus shipment. Once you open the bottles and try these wines, I'm sure you'll understand why I was so excited about them.

For us, these wines made staying inside during the summer worthwhile.

Martin Stewart Jr.

Reputations Are Made With the 'Ruby Treasures' of Autumn

By Robert Johnson

The season of the
year between
summer and winter,
lasting from the
autumnal equinox to
the winter solstice and
from September to
December in the
Northern Hemisphere.

That is the definition of autumn, a.k.a. fall. But we all know that there's much more to the season than mere scientific parameters.

Fall is when the trees in New England turn brilliant hues of orange, red, and yellow... when baseball players become heroes (Reggie Jackson) or goats (Bill Buckner)... when the school year begins... and when the wine grapes are harvested.

"Every season hath its pleasure," wrote Thomas Moore.

"Spring may boast her flowery prime, yet the vineyard's ruby treasures brighten autumn's sob'rer time."

Ah, those ruby — not to mention golden — treasures. Every spring shower, every ray of summer sunshine, and every effort undertaken in the vineyard has been leading up

to this moment — when the wine grapes are picked and transported to the cellar to be fermented into wine.

"If winter is slumber, spring is birth, and summer is life, then autumn rounds out to be reflection," wrote Mitchell Burgess. "It's a time of year when the leaves are down and the harvest is in and the perennials are gone. Mother Earth just closed up the drapes on another year and it's time to reflect on what's come before."

Reflect, yes, but not until the fermentation is complete and the new wine is safely transferred to its aging vessel, be it an oak barrel or a stainless steel tank. Once that task is completed, there's plenty of time for reflection... and for

anticipation.

Reflection can help fine-tune farming practices in the vineyard for future growing seasons, and identify cellar techniques that contribute to the overall quality of the wine.

And then anticipation kicks in as both vintners and growers begin the cycle anew.

No season brings forth such a wide spectrum of emotions among winemakers as fall. It's when both wines and reputations are made.



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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.

YOUR GRAPEVINE TEAM:

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CHARTER MEMBER BENEFITS:

-  *The Grapevine* Newsletter
-  Premium wine selections at members-only prices
-  Wine tasting as a participant on VINESSE's Gold Medal Award Panel
-  Free subscription to VINESSE's Cyber Circle Community
-  Members-only savings, including *Food & Wine* subscriptions, dining out, gourmet food and tickets to the hottest events
-  Random giveaways of wine and accessories
-  Wine Finders Reward — identify a future wine selection and earn a reward
-  Perfectly matched recipes for featured wine selections



In Pursuit of Unique Wines

Sometimes, winemaking reminds me of that game we all played as kids: follow the leader.

This is particularly true when it comes to the use of oak barrels for aging wine.

Before I get too far into this, let me say something about oak: When it comes to providing the perfect vessels in which to age wine, I consider oak to be a gift from above.

I've heard of vintners experimenting with barrels made out of chestnut, walnut, cherry and even pine. And while these woods may be great for floors or bookcases, I've never seen any evidence that they enhance wine in any way.

Barrels made from oak, on the other hand, can *transform* wine. Oak can

impart flavors of sweet vanilla and oak wood — sometimes referred to as vanillin oak — that lend depth and length to wine, when used judiciously.

Toward the end of the 1970s and into the '80s, California Chardonnay, aged in oak

barrels, exploded in popularity. Chardonnay became the "cash cow" that many

vintners — even some who didn't particularly care for the variety — depended upon to pay the bills. It was the engine that ran the winery and made it possible for vintners to experiment with the varieties in which they really were interested.

It didn't take long for wineries to fall into line not only in making Chardonnay, but in making a particular style of Chardonnay — namely, a wine defined by its vanillin oak framework. In some cases, regional character and even varietal

character was sacrificed in the name of sameness... because, it was reasoned, that's what the public wanted.

Then came the 1990s, and an influx of well-made, fruit-forward wines from Australia. These were wines that emphasized fruit



flavors above all, often to the total exclusion of oak notes. These Down Under “fruit bombs” typically came with a bonus for consumers: a lower price than their California counterparts.

By the dawning of the 21st century, Aussie wines had claimed significant market share... and some American vintners — particularly those who worked for the giant wine conglomerates — began to panic. Could the Aussies be on to something? Could consumers be tiring of oak-influenced wines?

Sure enough, here in the Vinesse cellar, I’m encountering more and more bottlings of “oak free” or “unoaked” Chardonnay. Many of the vintners who once sang the praises of vanillin oak flavors, and carefully selected barrels made from the trees of specific oak forests, suddenly turned their backs on oak and began touting the fruitfulness of their wines.

I guess this phenomenon could be explained away by the old saw, “Everything is cyclical.” But I think there’s more to it than that, because many of us simultaneously enjoy oak-influenced California Chardonnay and fruit-forward Aussie wines.

I think there’s also price pressure at work. Producing Chardonnay without the need to purchase oak barrels every year enables California vintners to compete with those attractive Aussie price points.

Of course, I could be wrong. It’s really one of those “chicken or egg” situations. What I can say with certainty is that a vintner for a giant wine company will always make wine with one eye on the barrel — or, perhaps, the stainless steel tank — and one eye on the ledger sheet.

And that’s why we constantly seek out the smaller wineries for our featured wine selections. I’ve found that the smaller the winery, the less likely the vintner is to play follow the leader... and the more likely we are to experience a truly distinctive wine.

The Fall Harvest Season ... Numerically Speaking

*The wine business,
like any business,
is a game of numbers.
Here are a few numbers
that are associated with
the fall harvest
season...*



20 The number of tons of grapes per acre achieved in some Australian vineyards of the variety known as Pedro Jimenez. When the yield is so high, grape quality suffers, which is why the fruit from those high-yielding vines is used to make fortified wines.

5 The average number of tons of grapes per acre harvested in Napa Valley’s Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards. Hillside vineyards typically average even less — 3 or 4 tons per acre.

200 Number of tons of grapes that a mechanical harvester can pick in an 8-hour day.

2 Number of tons of grapes that an average California harvest worker can pick in an 8-hour day. While that tonnage pales in comparison to the capability of a mechanical harvester, it’s still an amazing amount for a human being.

12 Number of feet between rows in the typical California vineyard.

8 Number of feet between vines in the typical California vineyard.

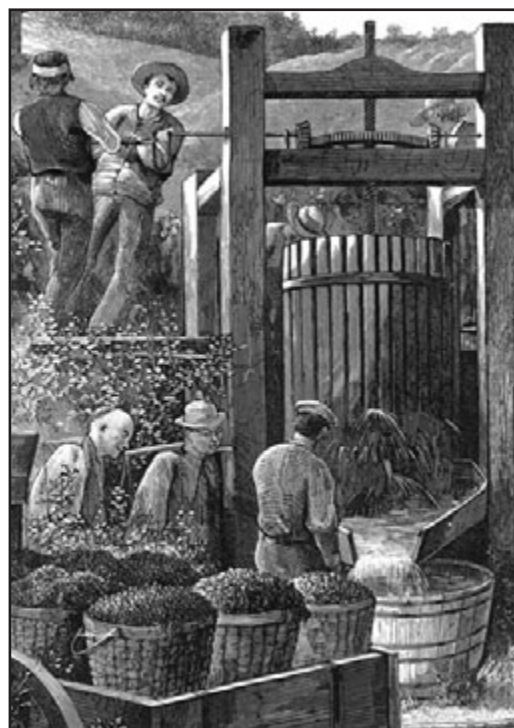
13,000 Number of California acres planted to Petite Sirah in 1978.

2,700 Number of California acres planted to Petite Sirah in 1998.

13,000 Number of California acres planted to Chardonnay in 1978.

93,000 Number of California acres planted to Chardonnay in 1998.

720 Number of bottles of wine produced from 1 ton of grapes.





SHRIMP & AVOCADO SALAD

This recipe matches beautifully with Sauvignon Blanc or Semillon, and makes 4 servings. While the recipe calls for marinating the ingredients for 15 minutes, we've had even better results by mixing the ingredients and refrigerating the mixture overnight. When using this method, chill down your wine a little longer than usual so the "mouth temperature" of the food and wine is similar.

Ingredients

- 1 lb. frozen cooked medium-sized shrimp, tails removed
- 1 medium tomato, seeded and chopped
- 3 scallions, chopped
- 1 large clove garlic, pressed
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
- 1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
- 1 large firm avocado, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 Tbs. cilantro, chopped
- 1 Tbs. fresh mint, chopped
- 2 Tbs. pumpkin seeds, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Pinch red pepper flakes
- Extra virgin olive oil to taste
- 1 head small romaine lettuce, outer leaves removed

Preparation

1. Make sure shrimp is completely unfrozen, and patted dry with paper towels.
2. Assemble all ingredients — except lettuce — with shrimp in a bowl and mix. For optimum flavor, marinate in refrigerator for 15 minutes or more.
3. Serve on a bed of chopped romaine lettuce.

GRILLED CHEDDAR TOASTS WITH RED ONIONS & PEPPERS

Here's an easy-to-make meal that pairs perfectly with Syrah or red blends. This recipe makes 4 servings.

Ingredients

- 2 large red bell peppers, halved, cored and seeded
- 2 large red onions, sliced crosswise, 1/3-inch thick
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for brushing
- Eight 1/2-inch-thick slices bread (whole wheat or multi-grain)
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 3 tablespoons prepared pesto sauce
- 1 1/2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1/2-lb. sharp Cheddar cheese, sliced

Preparation

1. Light a charcoal grill or preheat a gas grill. Brush the peppers and onions with olive oil, and grill over high heat until softened and charred in spots, 8 to 9 minutes.
2. Transfer the peppers to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap and let cool. Then peel the peppers and cut into thin strips.
3. Lightly brush the bread on both sides with olive oil, and grill until toasted, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack.
4. In a small bowl, mix the mayonnaise with the pesto sauce, and spread it on the bread. Preheat the broiler.
5. In a bowl, mix the tablespoon of olive oil with the vinegar. Add the onions and peppers, season with salt and pepper, and toss to coat. Mound the peppers and onions on the toast.
6. Cover with the cheese and broil for 1 to 2 minutes, turning the rack, until the cheese is melted.