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# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



## MARTIN'S JOURNAL

*In times of great human tragedy, one never knows when it's the "right time" to address some of the parallel happenstances that pale in comparison to the loss of human life.*

Such was the case after 9/11. One of the world's great wine collections, belonging to the Windows on the World restaurant, was lost when New York's twin towers were destroyed. But it took a long time for anyone, including myself, to talk about that. How can you compare bottles of wine to even one human life, let alone the more than 2,700 people who perished on that terrible day?

Now, we face a similar dilemma with the wine cellars of restaurants in and around New Orleans, a year after Hurricane Katrina. Is it still too soon to talk about the fate of those cellars, considering nearly 2,000 people lost their lives in the storm? Frankly, I don't know. But we've had some inquiries, so in next month's column, I'll pass along some of what we've learned.

## There's Always Something New to Learn When You Take a Winery Tour

By Robert Johnson

*I have visited wineries around the world — including a very French-looking chateau outside of Tokyo, Japan — and every visit has been a learning experience.*

Some people will tell you that winemaking is winemaking, and there's not that much difference from one winery to another or one country to another.

While it's true that the marriage of nature and science is universal in winemaking, there's plenty of room for a vintner's individual style to show through. Likewise, each variety of wine grape will taste just a little bit different from vineyard to vineyard, state to state and country to country.

As an example, taste a glass of California Chardonnay and a glass of White Burgundy side by side. They're both made from Chardonnay grapes, but I guarantee you they'll smell and taste quite distinctive — regardless of which California wine or which French bottling you select.

Because there's always something new to learn about wine or wine-

making or a specific winery, I follow one cardinal rule whenever I'm in "wine country": If a winery offers a tour, I take it.

Some tours are extremely educational. If you get the right tour guide, they can even be entertaining. And some are ho-hum. But I've never taken a winery tour on which



I did not pick up some interesting or useful morsel of information.

I'm often asked which California winery offers the "best" tour, and while tour-taking — just like wine-drinking — is highly subjective, I'd have to say my favorite is the one offered by Sonoma County's Benziger Winery. It's educational, entertaining and even includes a ride through the vineyards on a tractor/tram.

But no matter where you are, if the winery you're visiting offers a tour, I've got two words for you: Take it!

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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 Steward:

**Katie Montgomery**

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*In the years I've spent spelunking around wine cellars in search of amazing wines for members of our various Vinesse clubs, I've met a lot of interesting people.*

Virtually all vintners are truly passionate about wine. There's nothing they'd rather be doing for a living. And even though winemaking can be grueling, particularly at harvest time, the men and women who make wine really don't think of it as work at all.

That's the best kind of job to have. When you look forward to going to work every day, whether it's in an office, at a manufacturing plant or in a cellar, life is good.

Dan Gehrs is perhaps the happiest winemaker I've ever met, a very happy person in an industry filled with happy people. So I thought it might be fun to pay him a visit and share some of his thoughts about winemaking and life with you.

By way of introduction, Gehrs (pictured here) is the man behind Daniel Gehrs Wines. We've featured his bottlings quite often in our clubs, and there's nobody who knows more about grape growing and winemaking in

California's Central Coast region. Over more than 30 harvests, he has pretty much seen and done it all.

So, without further ado, let's learn more about a good friend of Vinesse, Dan Gehrs, in his own words...

I became a wine enthusiast during my college years in the Northwest during the early '70s. I made small lots of wine for myself and my friends, not all of it grape, not all of it good. But for parties, it was something besides beer, and some of it wasn't even too bad!

I also started appreciating traditional wine and, after going through the Boone Farm-Rhine Castle-Mateus-Lancer's stage, I got to liking things like Almaden Mountain Claret or Burgundy. On a starving student's budget, you can't be much more choosy than that.

(After college in 1973), I got even more interested in wine and decided to go for it, first concentrating my efforts in the local area, driving up to the Santa Ynez Valley (in Santa Barbara County)

where I knew there were vineyards being planted. But it was all to no avail. I was just too early for what was soon to follow.

Not being overly discouraged, I found a job at Paul Masson Vineyards in the San Francisco Bay area. It was definitely entry-level, but that was okay; I was really in the wine business, and I learned a lot the two years I was there.

In 1990 (after a long stint at Congress Springs Vineyards), we founded Daniel Gehrs Wines. We finally had our own operation, and were free to pursue our own vision of fine wine.

Over the years, Gehrs also made award-winning wines for Eilliston, Zaca Mesa and Bridlewood, but I think he's doing his best work right now with his own Daniel Gehrs Wines.





## WINE A TO Z

**Lagar.** A low-sided stone trough in which grapes are “stomped” and then fermented. While most *lagares* have been replaced in Portugal by modern fermentation vats, the troughs continue to be used by many estates in the making of Port.

**Midi.** A name sometimes used to describe the south of France, particularly the Languedoc-Rousillon region. From a strictly geographic perspective, it also would include Provence.

**Novello.** The Italian version of French Nouveau — wine sold only a few weeks after harvest.

**Ormeasco.** The name used for Dolcetto by people on the northwest coast of Italy.

**Perlant.** French term for a wine that is slightly sparkling. Many Italian Moscatos would fit this description.

**Quinta.** Portuguese term for a farm, also used to describe a wine-producing estate.

## APPELLATION SHOWCASE

### CHILE'S COLCHAGUA VALLEY

*Milwaukee has long been known for beer. If Chile's Colchagua Valley has been known for anything through the decades, it's Grand Marnier.*

In recent years, Milwaukee's “persona” has become more eclectic, to include a mammoth, indoor baseball park and a world-class, lakeside art gallery.

Likewise, the Colchagua Valley is no longer just about that orange-flavored liqueur that warms the heart (and other parts of the body) on cold winter nights. These days, the valley is gaining fame as a source of some of Chile's best wines.

Immigrants brought vine cuttings to Chile during the 1800s, and Bordeaux varieties were introduced

in Colchagua around 1870.

Early on, virtually all of Colchagua's wines were purchased by large bottling companies in Santiago, and were blended into non-descript cuvees intended for the mass market.

A hundred years later, however, the Chilean wine boom served to identify Colchagua as a reliable producer of high-quality wine — wine that deserved its own identity. State-of-the-art technology was introduced to the region, the wines got even better and the rest, as they say, is history.



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**VINESSE STYLE**

**FISH TACOS**

*One of the true culinary treats of Baja California and the San Diego area is the fish taco.*

In fact, some makers of the flavorful and pretty-good-for-you treat have elevated the fish taco to gourmet status, adding spices and other ingredients that give it their own “signature.”

Travel to Ensenada, and you'll find literally dozens of restaurants, diners and small outdoor stands that claim to make and serve the “original” fish taco. We don't know who was first, but we think the best are to be found at the eateries around Mercado Negro, Ensenada's big fish market.

Although the recipes vary, the “typical” Ensenada fish taco utilizes batter-covered, fried fish pieces. In fact, in some renditions, the fish almost seems to be an afterthought, as a plethora of other tasty ingredients fill the soft corn or wheat tortillas.

A “real” fish taco also has a little bit of a kick to it, whether it's from

cilantro or some other spicy ingredient. And it also can include a generous portion of veggies, ranging from cabbage to tomatoes to avocados. Mango salsa can add a sweet touch that many people enjoy.

In the San Diego area, we love the fish tacos at El Zarape Restaurant in University Heights. At this warm and cozy establishment, you also can get burritos filled with salmon or scallops.

Of course, it was the Rubio's chain that really popularized the dish north of the border, and there's one conveniently located right alongside

Mission Bay. Other San Diego area purveyors of blissful fish tacos include Fins Mexican Eatery in Mission Valley, Wahoo's in La Jolla and The Tin Fish in the Gaslamp Quarter.

We love fish tacos for another reason: They match nicely

with wine. Among the wines currently being featured in Vinesse clubs, we'd recommend Shady Bay Chenin Blanc, Daniel Gehrs “Pinnacles” Chenin Blanc, Hope Verdelho, Chumeia Silver Nectar or Trewa Sauvignon Blanc.

Those who think beer is the only thing to drink with fish tacos have no idea what they're missing.



**BEING GREEN**

Jack London, author of Call of the Wild, lived in the Sonoma County town of Glen Ellen during the early 1900s, and over time amassed some 1,400 acres of ranch land. Long before it became common for farmers to be concerned with preserving the land, London refused to use the then-new chemical fertilizers on the market in favor of animal waste. He also embraced terracing as another way of protecting the land. “He was pre-organic,” notes Greg Hayes, a former ranger at Jack London State Park, “but I think he'd probably sign on if he were around now.”



## Under-the-Radar Wine Varieties

*In the world of wine, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay get the biggest and boldest headlines. They are the world's star grape varieties.*

Earning “co-starring” roles on the wine marquee are such varieties as Merlot, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel among reds, and Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio and Riesling among whites.

But there are hundreds of other varieties grown in commercial quantities around the world, and we thought it was about time we introduced a few of them to you. This month, we'll focus on two varieties currently being featured in the Vinesse family of wine clubs: Torrontes and Touriga Nacional.

Torrontes most commonly is found on the plains of Galicia in northwest Spain, but in recent years, it has found a second home in South America. Both Argentina and Chile

produce wonderful renditions of this flavorful white variety.

Torrontes is similar in weight and style to Gewurztraminer and the Muscat family of varieties. It typically has a floral aroma that leads to bright fruit flavors, usually of the tropical variety.

California's Chumeia Vineyards uses Torrontes from Argentina as the base wine in its off-dry elixir known as “Silver Nectar,” currently being featured in the Light & Sweet Wine Club.

For most of its history, Touriga Nacional was used exclusively in the making of Portugal's famed dessert wines known collectively as Port. In fact, it typically is used only in the best Ports because it's a low-yielding variety that is quite expensive to grow.

Today, Touriga Nacional also is crafted into dry wines by a small cadre of Portuguese winemakers who recognize that its smooth, soft texture provides excellent

aging potential — to complement its legendary, palate-pleasing flavor.

J.P. Vinhos' bottling of “Só” Touriga Nacional is currently a featured wine selection of the Elevant Society.



### Four Seasons



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# Here's How to Find Your Sonoma Smile

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ishing arts scene.  
Remarkable history.  
Charming shops.  
Tranquil lodging. Spas.

Sonoma Valley has it all. Oh, and did we mention more than 40 wineries?

Cradled between the Mayacamas and Sonoma mountain ranges, Sonoma Valley is the recognized (if not historically accurate) birthplace of the California wine industry. And it's easy to get to, just 45 minutes north of San Francisco.

The valley stretches some 17 miles, from the town of Sonoma in the south, through Glen Ellen and on to Kenwood. The beauty is unparalleled, with 13,000 acres of parkland — including Jack London State Historic Park and the breathtaking Annadel State Park — sharing the landscape with row upon row of grapevines cascading up the hillsides from the valley floor.

Begin your exploration by dropping by historic Sonoma Plaza, the largest town square of its kind in California and a National Historic Landmark. The eight-acre plaza features carefully-preserved adobe buildings, including Mission San Francisco Solano de Sonoma, the last to join California's 21-mission chain.

On the plaza, you'll



## TOURING TIPS

find the best of everything that the Sonoma Valley has to offer, from eclectic fine dining to abundant local produce, and from artisan breads to antique stores. Shopping opportunities abound, as the plaza is dotted with chic boutiques, quaint ma-and-pa shops and seemingly everything in-between.

If you enjoy the arts, the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art is a must-stop, as it houses a number of world-class exhibitions. There also are a number of galleries and studios that showcase the work of local artists — including numerous renderings of “wine country” scenery.

The residents of Sonoma Valley understand that they live in a special place, and they celebrate their good fortune several times per year by staging an array of festivals. And because they're nice people, they welcome the world to enjoy the good times with them.

Among the annual events worth checking out are the Salute to Arts (during the summer), the Valley of the Moon Vintage Festival (during the fall), and the Olive Festival (during the winter).

And the wineries — we can't forget the wineries. So as not to hurt any feelings among the valley's winemakers, we'll share a few of our favorites in alphabetical order: Adler Fels, Benziger, Castle, Cline, Gundlach-Bundschu, Imagery, Matanzas



Creek, Ravenswood, Schug, St. Francis and Valley of the Moon.

While a handful of wineries are located in the Carneros growing region, which rims the southern ends of Sonoma and Napa Counties, most can be found alongside or just off of Highway 12, which meanders through the heart of the valley. All of the wineries mentioned produce memorable wines and employ friendly tasting room staff members. But, frankly, it's hard to go wrong no matter which wineries you choose to visit.

Where should you stay during a visit to Sonoma Valley? The options are plentiful, and include cozy bed-and-breakfast inns, private guest rooms, historic hotels, stylish lodges, luxury spa resorts and national motel chains. Whatever your budget, there's an affordable option available.

And wherever one ventures in the valley, there are roadside signs pointing the way to the next winery... and the next taste of a very special place.

*For a detailed list of Sonoma Valley accommodations, as well as an up-to-date events calendar for the region, visit [Sonoma.com](http://Sonoma.com).*



## At Washington's Betz Winery, They Know Every Barrel

*Washington is known as an excellent producer of Merlot and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Cabernet Sauvignon.*

But the Betz family is showing other winemakers that Washington's Columbia Valley also can produce some exceptional bottlings of Syrah. In fact, the Betz Family Winery's "La Cote Rousse" is among the finest Syrahs we've tasted from the 2002 vintage.

That Bob and Cathy Betz would make exceptional Syrah from Columbia Valley fruit is no mere coincidence. They have spent much time over the past 30 years visiting nearly every vineyard region in the United States and Europe, constantly seeking out new grape-growing methods and winemaking philosophies that they would apply to their operation in the Columbia Valley.

And over that time, they've come to the conclusion that Washington State

wines take a backseat to nobody's.

"Washington wines are a blend of the best elements of the New and Old Worlds," says Bob Betz. "They have full, ripe fruit, yet they're textured for food and structured for longevity."

Because the fruit is so good, Betz is almost fanatical about letting it "speak for itself" in the wine glass. "Our goal," he explains, "is to craft compelling wines with individual character that reflect the vineyards the grapes come from, and our dedication to them."

After years of learning everything they could about the making of fine wine, the Betzes realized their dream in 1997, when Bob made the family's first commercial wines. The total production that year: 150 cases.

Of course, it takes more cases than that to have a viable business, but the Betzes say they don't plan to grow beyond 2,000 to 2,500 cases. They say they want to limit themselves to "a quantity that we can directly watch over."

And they have a clear understanding that without exceptional grapes, they have no chance of making exceptional wines.

"We work with selected, dedicated grape growers," says Bob. "And we employ methods that we believe result in superior wines — wines of individual character, with a

blend of richness, balance and pleasure. Our winemaking focuses on the purity of the individual varieties and the vineyards they come from.

"We do those things that a small winery has the luxury of doing," he adds. "We know every barrel."

The Betzes moved into their own winemaking facility in Woodinville, Washington, in time for the harvest of 2005. That should help assure a long future for the family business because, henceforth, they'll get to know each barrel even better.



# Quotes Du Jour

■ Galileo Galilei — the 16th and 17th century physicist, astronomer, astrologer and philosopher — had this to say about our favorite subject:

“Wine is sunlight, held together by water!”



■ British wine writer Jancis Robinson, during a visit to Napa Valley, on the influence of “Wine Advocate” Robert Parker and Wine Spectator magazine:

“It’s a shame that these two have such similar tastes as I honestly don’t believe they are shared with the overwhelming majority of wine drinkers. One of the saddest things I hear is a wine producer admitting that they make wines they don’t actually like themselves. They make them bigger than their own taste because they think they’ll get high points.”

# Q AND A

**We’ve invested in a few dozen cases of wine this summer, and would like to know the best way to store it in our house.**

If you purchased some expensive wines (\$50 or more bottle), we’d strongly suggest renting space in a temperature-controlled storage facility — preferably one with a separate area for wine. But if that’s not an option, or if you plan to drink up your stash fairly quickly, here are a few tips for home storage:

1. Choose a spot that receives no sunlight (perhaps a closet) and where the temperature is constant. Keep the wine away from heat ducts. Also keep it away from the refrigerator, because vibration also is not good for wine.

2. Store your bottles horizontally, with the top tilted slightly downward so the cork remains moist. When a cork dries out, it shrinks, and when a cork shrinks, it can allow wine-damaging air into the bottle. If you’re keeping some of the bottles in their cardboard casboxes, stack those boxes on their sides.

3. Wines with big tannins and prominent oakiness usually need more time to age than those that are fruit-forward and devoid of oak. When aging wines — particularly cases of expensive wine — you’d be wise to open a bottle at least quarterly to check on its progress and plan future uncorkings.

Remember, as we always say, it’s always better to drink a wine when it’s “too young” than when it’s “too old.”

*Wines with big tannins and prominent oak need more time to age than those that are fruit-forward.*



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### IF YOU'RE COUNTING CARBS, CHOOSE WINE

If you're trying to lose weight, and you can't decide whether to pop open a can of Budweiser or uncork a bottle of wine to wash down tonight's dinner, allow us to provide some useful information. That can of Bud has 10.5 carbs and 145 calories. On the other hand, a glass of red wine has just 3 carbs and 128 calories, while a glass of white wine has a mere 1.4 carbs and 120 calories. Keep in mind that the carb and calorie count will be a bit higher in sweet wines — so think of them as dessert.

### OREGON WINE BIZ AT A CROSSROADS

One of the men largely credited with pioneering Oregon's wine industry now is catching some heat from industry observers. We speak of Dick Erath, a man who believed that Oregon could produce high-quality wines, particularly out of Pinot Noir grapes, and then went out and proved it, prompting dozens of others to follow. Now, Erath has sold his brand to Washington's Chateau Ste. Michelle, which is a subsidiary of U.S. Tobacco. That prompted a story in one Oregon newspaper that carried this headline: "The Grapes of Erath." Not all response to the sale was negative, however. Noting that the deal validated the worth of Oregon's wine industry, another pioneering vintner, Dick Ponzi, opined: "This is a positive for all concerned." The sale of the Erath brand comes at a time when both vintners and residents are debating whether Oregon wishes to create a "Napa-style" wine industry, complete with an influx of tourists and tourist-related businesses.

### PORTLAND WINE BARS ARE PROLIFERATING

Speaking of Oregon wine, the state's largest city — Portland — is now brimming with wine bars. Among those a Vinesse wine finder enjoyed on a recent visit were Vitis Enotica (503-241-0355), featuring no less than 80 wines by the glass, not to mention a menu that includes tasty salt-cod fritters; Pour Wine Bar & Bistro (503-288-7687), where the by-the-glass list happily includes some high-end choices; and M Bar (503-228-6614), a tiny room with an ever-evolving by-the-glass list and late-night hours that make it the perfect after-movie spot.

### PIONEER GENETICIST HAROLD OLMO DIES

The wine industry is mourning the loss of Professor Harold P. Olmo, the leading grapevine geneticist of his era



and a mainstay of the Department of Viticulture and Enology at the University of California at Davis, America's leading wine school.

### LODI GETS 7 NEW WINE APPELLATIONS

We at Vinesse have been touting the wines of California's Lodi region since our company's founding. Now, at long last, the federal government has acknowledged the unique microclimates of the area by approving seven new American Viticultural Areas within the existing Lodi appellation. The new AVAs are named Alta Mesa, Borden Ranch, Clements Hills, Cosumnes River, Jahant, Mokelumne River and Sloughhouse. Local wineries may begin using the new designations with the 2006 vintage.

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### TOMATO BASIL SOUP

Try this tasty soup with Riesling, Chenin Blanc, other off-dry white wines, or Syrah. This recipe makes 6 servings.

#### Ingredients

- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 1 3/4 cups diced onion
- 1/4 cup whole peeled garlic cloves
- 2 cans (28-oz.) diced tomatoes
- 1 can (14-oz.) coconut milk
- 1 vegetable bouillon cube
- 3 tablespoons evaporated cane sugar or granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon sea salt
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Fresh basil leaves, chopped

#### Preparation

1. In a large saucepan, warm vegetable oil over medium heat and add onions and garlic. Sauté until onions are lightly golden.
2. Add tomatoes and their juice,

coconut milk and bouillon cube, and stir. Turn heat to high, bring mixture to a boil, then allow to simmer for 20 minutes.

3. Stir in sugar and salt, and remove from heat.
4. Purée in a blender.
5. Serve soup in bowls, drizzle with olive oil and garnish with basil leaves.

### ZUCCHINI RISOTTO

Serve this dish as part of an Italian dinner with the red wine of your choice. This recipe makes 4 servings.

#### Ingredients

- 1/2 onion, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1-lb. small zucchini, cut in 1/2-inch chunks
- Salt and freshly-ground black pepper
- 6 cups low-sodium beef broth
- 1 3/4 cups Arborio rice, uncooked

- 1 tablespoon fresh Italian (flat-leaf) parsley, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup freshly-grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

#### Preparation

1. Put onion and butter in heavy-bottomed braising pan. Place over medium-high heat and sauté until onion turns golden. Add zucchini and salt and pepper (to taste), and cook until tender.
2. Meanwhile, put broth in a pot over high heat and bring to a boil. Lower heat to maintain a gentle simmer.
3. Add rice to the zucchini and stir until well coated with butter. Add 1 cup of hot broth, and continue stirring until liquid is absorbed. Continue adding broth in small amounts, seeking the consistency of a thick soup, and stir until all liquid is absorbed before adding more.
4. Season with additional salt and continue to cook until rice is al dente.
5. Remove risotto from heat, stir in parsley and cheese, and serve.



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