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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Event: Taste Washington-Spokane.

Features fine wines from numerous Washington wineries and culinary creations from several regional restaurants. Back by popular demand: a special tasting bar featuring white wines that pair well with fish, and an adjoining fresh seafood bar. At the Davenport Hotel. \$75 per person. Tickets: 206-667-9463.

2 Hot Tour: Beau Wine Tours.

Visit the wineries of Napa Valley and Sonoma County in style — in a limousine. The knowledgeable drivers know North Coast wine country like the backs of their hands, which means you can enjoy gorgeous scenery of the back roads without worrying about negotiating those tight turns. Information: 800-387-2328 or 707-938-8001.

3 Hot Table: Alfama.

The next time you're in the "Big Apple," head to the Village for a taste of Portugal. The food is authentic, the service is warm, the wine list offers numerous choices from Portugal, and fado music is featured on Wednesday nights. Reservations: 212-645-2500.



It's a Glass of Wine ... and So Much More

By Robert Johnson

There it sits on the table, or on the bar, or on the tray: a glass of wine.

It may be white... red... pink... or sparkling. It's a glass of wine, but it's so much more.

It's the perfect antidote to the day at the office when nothing went right and little got done.

It's a drink to sip with friends as you catch up on families and dish the latest gossip.

It's the perfect way to pass some time on a long airplane trip.

It's the perfect excuse for not reading the Sunday paper until mid-afternoon.

It's the beverage of celebration.

It's the beverage of reflection.

It's the sour cream and chives on the baked potato... the dark amber Vermont maple syrup on the waffle... the cherry atop the sundae... of any special meal.

It's the most wonderful byproduct of the grape imaginable (with apologies to that precocious little girl on the Welch's commercials).

It helps break the ice.

It requires no ice.

And it tastes a whole lot better than Caffeine-Free Diet Coke.

It's a glass of wine.

And best of all, it's *your* glass of wine.

Robert Johnson can be reached at 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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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



SAVING THE FARM BY MAKING WINE

About 44 percent of California's Zinfandel is grown in and around Lodi, yet times are tough for farmers in the region. For many years, the growers were content to sell their grapes to wine giants E. & J. Gallo and Woodbridge. But industry consolidation eliminated their negotiating leverage, and prices have dropped by half over the last five years. As a



result, more and more Lodi growers are finding that to stay in business, they have to do more than grow grapes; they have to make wine. There has been a big increase in the number of Lodi area wineries... as well as more choices for consumers.

AUSTRALIA REGION HIT BY PHYLLOXERA

Australia's Yarra Valley has been hit by an infestation of the root louse phylloxera, and the region's grape growers association has implemented protocols to stop the spread. Spokeswoman Anna Aldridge says that anyone connected with the val-

ley's wine industry in any way — including tour companies and tourists — should procure a copy of the document and adhere to the protocols.

GLOBAL WARMING IS BLAMED FOR SHORTAGE

There won't be nearly as much of Germany's luscious *eiswein* (ice wine) in the marketplace because of the unseasonably balmy weather in that country during the late fall and early winter weeks. Yes, some of the growers and vintners are blaming the lack of freezing temperatures on global warming.

OUTSIDE PORTLAND: A NEW APPELLATION

Oregon now has its 15th American Viticultural Area: Chehalem Mountains. The region is located just outside of Portland's southwestern suburbs, and presently is home to 1,600 acres of grapevines and 31 wineries and growers. Grape ripening generally takes place about three weeks later than in most other areas of the Willamette Valley, with the makeup of the land, higher elevations and wide air temperature swings all helping to define the new AVA.

HALL OF FAME NOD FOR ROBERT MONDAVI

Robert Mondavi, a true pioneer of the California wine industry, has been elected to the new Vintners Hall of Fame. The induction dinner — at which several other pioneers and icons of California wine were to be honored — was to be held at the Culinary Institute of America in the Napa Valley.

HOLD THE ICE AND ENJOY THE WINE

Most Chardonnay in restaurants is served too cold. The colder wine is, the more difficult it is to taste its full spectrum of flavors. It's much better for an opened bottle to be left on the dinner table than placed in an ice bucket.



Even in America's warmer climes, the onset of winter can be depressing. The days are shorter, and the warmth of the sun may not be felt for days or weeks at a time.

Little wonder our thoughts may wander back to the winegrape harvest that unfolded only a few months ago...

It's a cool, crisp, damp, pre-dawn morning in the Napa Valley. One by one, the pickers begin to appear in the vineyards. Will this be the day that the delicate fruit finally is ready to harvest?

For several days, the grapes have been exhibiting the first sign of ripeness. Gently cradled between the thumb and the forefinger, they are soft to the pinch. And upon closer examination, they have attained their full coloring.

The time has arrived for the vintner to taste the grapes. Only a few days earlier, they would have been very sour and bitter. But now the ripening process has picked up momentum, and evaluating the grapes no longer is a day-to-day activity; it's day part to day part.

A specific sugar level — measured by degrees Brix — is desired for each variety. In the early days of the harvest season, the testing typically is done by tasting. Once the bitterness of the grapes begins to subside, the



testing becomes more "scientific," as a hand-held instrument known as a refractometer is put to use.

Most vintners keep year-to-year logs of sugar levels for specific blocks of vines on specific dates. This provides a range of time that more or less defines the harvest season. But since every year is different, there is no opportunity for coasting. Once the grapes enter their final stage of ripening, they

must be monitored constantly to make sure they're not allowed to over-ripen.

Finally, the day... the hour... the minute arrives. It is time. The picking crews go to work, carefully snipping the bunches of grapes and placing them in bins for transport to the winery, where the presses and fermentation tanks and barrels... and the winemaker... await.

Every honest vintner will tell you that great wine is made in the vineyard. And when the grapes are picked at just the right time, we'll have plenty of wonderful wine to keep us warm on those cold winter nights.

Quotes Du Gour

■ *H. Warner Allen, on Portugal's most decadent wine:*
"Port is essentially the wine of philosophical contemplation."

■ *Ashley Terradista of Hall Winery in the Napa Valley, on visiting wine country during the winter and spring months:*
"Off-season is more for wine connoisseurs — those interested in the craft of wine."

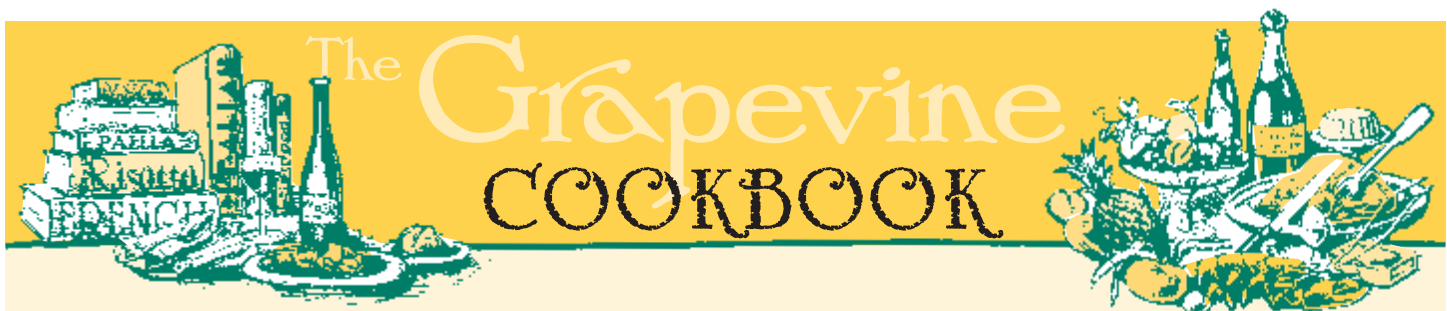
■ *French vintner Phillippe de Rothschild, on seeking out exceptional bottlings:*

"Excellent wine generates enthusiasm. And whatever you do with enthusiasm is generally successful."

■ *Alexander Dumas, on the art of wine assessment:*
"At the first sip a good drinker will recognize the vineyard, at the second the quality, and at the third the year."

■ *Wall Street Journal wine columnists Dorothy Gaiter and John Brecher, on the virtue of keeping an open mind:*

"The most memorable wines might well be those that, at first, don't taste comfortable and familiar. Give them a chance to show their stuff; hang in there."



GRILLED SHRIMP & CORN WRAPS

This recipe makes 4 wraps, which match beautifully with Chenin Blanc or Chardonnay.

Ingredients

- 1-lb. large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 cup fresh corn kernels (from 2 large ears)
- 1 celery rib, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 teaspoon hot paprika
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 1/2 cups shredded Napa cabbage
- Four 10-inch flour tortillas

Preparation

1. Light a grill or heat a grill pan. In a medium bowl, toss the shrimp with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Grill, turning once, until the shrimp are pink and curled, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate.
2. Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a medium skillet. Add the corn and cook over moderately high heat until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and let cool.
3. Add the celery, lemon juice, garlic, mayonnaise, paprika and cayenne, and season with salt and pepper. Stir in the shredded cabbage.
4. Quickly warm the tortillas on the grill. Spread the tortillas on a work surface and mound the corn slaw in the center of each. Top with the shrimp. Roll up the wraps, cut in half and serve.

FILET MIGNON WITH MERLOT SAUCE

This recipe — perfect for a romantic meal for 2 — should be served with Merlot... preferably, the Merlot you use in its preparation.

Ingredients

- 2 filet mignons (6-oz. to 8-oz. each)
- 3 Tablespoons butter, divided
- 1 Tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup Merlot
- 2 Tablespoons heavy cream

Preparation

1. In a skillet over medium-high heat, melt 1 tablespoon of butter with 1 tablespoon of the oil.
2. When the butter is melted, add the filets and cook, about 4 minutes per side. (Note: Don't allow the butter to become too dark.)
3. Remove filets from pan, place on plate, and keep warm.
4. Pour the wine into the skillet and, using a wooden spoon, stir to loosen any of the brown bits on the bottom of the skillet.
5. Cook the wine until it's reduced to about 1/4 cup.
6. Stir in the cream, bring to a boil, and remove from the heat.
7. Stir in the remaining butter. Pour the sauce through a fine sieve into a cup.
8. To serve, place the filets in the center of a serving plate and pour some sauce over the top.