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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

ELEVANT

Hot LIST

1 Hot Table — We love the reasonable prices and wine savvy at the Grovewood Tavern & Wine Bar, located on the east side of Cleveland, Ohio. The restaurant prints a “specials” menu daily, and includes suggested wine and/or beer pairings for most dishes. On a recent visit, we enjoyed the Crusted Twin Filets (two filet mignon medallions crusted with Peppadew cheddar cheese, and served with lots of tasty “trimmings”). The wine companion: a glass of Twenty Bench Cabernet Sauvignon. Perfection! *Reservations: 216-531-4900.*

2 Hot Read — “Secrets From the Wine Diva” is a breezy, entertaining introduction to the wonderful world of wine, written by Christine Ansbacher. Compact enough to slip into a handbag. *Available on Amazon.com.*

3 Hot Concert — Three of our favorite “smooth jazz” artists return to California wine country November 25 for “A Peter White Christmas, Featuring Rick Braun and Mindi Abair.” The holiday concert will be held at Grace Pavilion on the Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa. *Info: peterwhite.com.*



You may not think of Las Vegas as “wine country,” but we do. Adjacent to many of the desert city’s garish casinos on The Strip are quiet, sophisticated wining-and-dining oases that can create happy memories even when the slot machines don’t. Check out the “Cellarmaster” feature on page 3 for a look at five winning Las Vegas cellars.



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:

Intrepid Wine Enthusiast, Chief Taster and Winehound:

Martin Stewart

Chief Operating Officer (aka "The Buck Stops Here"):

Lawrence D. Dutra

Editor:

Robert Johnson








Wine Steward:

Katie Montgomery

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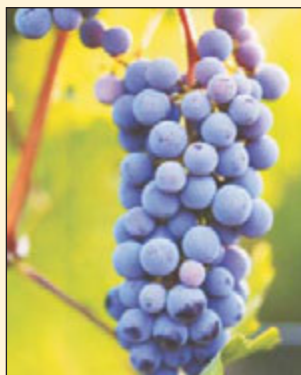
CHARTER MEMBER BENEFITS:

-  *The Grapevine* Newsletter
-  Premium wine selections at members-only prices
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-  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



NOT ALL OAK IS CUT OUT TO BE A BARREL

There will come a day when more wine is sealed with screwcaps than with corks. That seems to be an unstoppable trend. Could there also be a day when oak barrels no longer are used for aging wine?



Maybe. Consider that of the 400 species of oak, only about 20 are suitable for making oak barrels. Furthermore, of the trees used, only about 5 percent yield wood that's barrel-worthy. If the source of quality oak gives way to development or disease, another wine tradition may be endangered.

A TOAST TO THE FIRST GRAPES OF HARVEST

We know that grapes earmarked for Champagne or sparkling wine are harvested before those to be used in still wine. But why? Allow Mike Crumly, vineyard manager at Gloria Ferrer Champagne Caves in Sonoma County, to explain: "They don't require the high sugar content found in a later state of ripeness. In fact, higher sugar content, which would ferment into higher alcohol content, would destroy the two-step carbonation process. Part one is production of a wine of about 10.5 percent alcohol content. Then the wine is fer-

mented a second time with additional sugar and yeast to produce sparkle and an alcohol content of about 12 percent. If we started with riper grapes and the additional alcohol, the second fermentation wouldn't go. It would kill off the yeast. Beyond 14 percent, they can't live."

JUST IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING...

The world record for longest Champagne cork flight is 177 feet, 9 inches, set at Woodbury Vineyards in New York.

A PRESIDENTIAL BUDGET THAT MAKES SENSE

Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, was paid \$25,000 per year. And he spent nearly an eighth of his salary on wine. Among his expenditures in 1801 were \$6,500 for groceries and provisions, \$2,700 for servants and \$3,000 for wine.

WINE BY THE NUMBERS

- 1 grape cluster = 1 glass
- 75 grapes = 1 cluster
- 4 clusters = 1 bottle
- 40 clusters = 1 vine
- 1 vine = 10 bottles
- 1,200 clusters = 1 barrel
- 1 barrel = 60 gallons
- 60 gallons = 25 cases



Winning Las Vegas Cellars

Las Vegas seems more intent on plowing under (or, in many cases, imploding) its history than even Los Angeles.

The small desert town that the Rat Pack once made their personal playground has evolved into a sprawling metropolis with all the big-city trappings: on the down side, gawdawful traffic; on the up side, an amazing dining scene that some say surpasses that of New York and Paris.

Cheap buffets can still be found (mainly in the downtown area off The Strip), but most have become a part of Las Vegas lore. In their place: destination restaurants that meld ambience, food and wine into a tasty culinary stew.

Here are a few of the Vinesse tasting panel's favorite restaurants in today's Las Vegas...

- **Aureole** — The Vegas outpost of Charlie Palmer's acclaimed Big Apple eatery, with a four-stories-high wine tower housing nearly 10,000 wine bottles on Plexiglas racks. When a diner orders a bottle, it's fetched by a "wine angel" who climbs the tower on a mechanical hoist. Call it a uniquely Vegas version of "dinner and a show." *At Mandalay Bay.* 702-632-7401.

- **Picasso** — Immerse yourself in country elegance as you savor chef

Julian Serrano's French-Mediterranean cuisine. Choose from a four-course tasting menu or a five-course "Chef's Degustation." On a recent visit, one tasting panel member enjoyed ("experienced" might be a better word) a meal of Maine lobster salad with a wonderful German Riesling, pan-seared scallop with an Alsatian Pinot Gris, sautéed foie gras with a Chianti, and sautéed filet of halibut with a Verdejo from Spain. Talk about Vegas excess. *At the Bellagio.* 877-234-6358.

- **Luxor Steakhouse** — In Vegas, this is carnivore heaven. While the various cuts of

aged beef take centerstage, you can't go wrong with the rosemary garlic Colorado lamb chops with apple chutney, or the Kurobuta pork chop with apricot chutney. And the wine list features multiple options for each entrée. *At the Luxor.* 702-262-4778.

- **Valentino** — Labeled by some as the best Italian restaurant in Vegas, this cousin of the Santa Monica, California, original features both pasta dishes and lavish main courses on its exquisite seasonal menus. A chef's tasting menu also is available, and the wine list offers 2,200 selections. *At The Venetian.* 702-414-3000.

- **Golden Steer Steak House** — For a taste of "Old Vegas," this is the only place to go. Dine in semi-circular booths once occupied by Frank, Dean and Sammy, and for a few hours, imagine how it used to be. *On Sahara, just west of The Strip.* 702-384-4470.



Quotes Du Jour

With the holiday season just around the corner, we'll soon be raising lots of glasses filled with wine or Champagne. And if you're called upon to offer a toast, you need to be ready. The book, "Crisp Toasts: Wonderful Words That Add Wit and Class to Every Time You Raise Your Glass," may have a way-too-long title, but it offers plenty of creative suggestions for just about any occasion you could imagine. Here are a few examples...

■ "To our best friends — who know the worst about us but refuse to believe it."

■ "To golf, the most frustrating and masochistic sport in the world, which may be why golf spelled backward is flog."

■ "May we be happy, and may our enemies know it."

■ "Life is not about holding good cards, but playing those you hold well."

■ "To Washington, our country's capital, where the roads, and everything else, go around in circles."

■ "Lift 'em high and drain 'em dry to the guy who says, 'My turn to buy!'"



DRY CREEK STEAK CABERNET

Our friends at Dry Creek Vineyard — specifically, Brad Wallace — developed this recipe to match with Dry Creek’s wonderful Cabernet Sauvignon. It makes 4 servings.

Ingredients

- 4 boneless top loin steaks (New York or filet, 5 or 6-oz.), about 1-inch thick
- 1 T whole black peppercorns
- 2 T unsalted butter
- 3 T shallots, finely chopped
- 3/4 cup Dry Creek Cabernet Sauvignon
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp. dried tarragon
- Salt to taste

Preparation

1. Crush the peppercorns with the bottom of a small saucepan, and roll the steaks in the roughly cracked pepper.
2. In a large enough skillet to accommodate the meat, melt 1 T of butter and cook the steaks until almost done. Remove from pan to a heated platter, and place in warm oven.
3. Add remaining 1 T of butter to skillet and sauté the shallots until just softened. Add the red wine and let reduce, over high heat, until 1/3 cup remains, about 5 minutes. Add the cream and tarragon, and reduce until sauce is thickened and 1/2 cup remains.
4. Season with salt, spoon 2 T of sauce over each steak, and serve hot.

PEPPER STEAK

We often recommend a good Zinfandel with this dish, but it also matches beautifully with well-aged Cabernet Sauvignon. This particular recipe yields 6 servings.

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons butter or oil
- 1 1/2 pounds round or flank steak
- 1 1/2 cups thinly sliced onion
- 1 cup diced celery
- 2 cups canned tomatoes, chopped
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 large green bell peppers
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1/4 cup cold water

Preparation

1. Cut meat into 1/4-inch wide strips.
2. Heat butter over medium-high heat, and brown meat in 2 or 3 batches so that each batch just covers the bottom of the skillet without crowding.
3. Remove meat and set aside.
4. Reduce heat, and sauté onions for 5 minutes. Return meat to skillet, and add remaining ingredients except peppers, cornstarch, soy sauce and water.
5. Seed and cut peppers in 1/2-inch strips, then add to skillet and simmer (covered) for 10 minutes.
6. Blend cornstarch, soy sauce and water in small dish; stir into meat mixture.
7. Cook until thick and clear, about 1 minute.