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# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



## MARTIN'S JOURNAL

**T**here's a new book on the market titled, *"To Cork or Not to Cork: Tradition, Romance, Science and the Battle for the Wine Bottle."*

It's written by George M. Taber, and examines virtually every aspect of The Great Cork Debate, something we've been covering in *The Grapevine* for a decade.

A specially-shaped "tube" made of the bark of cork trees is the traditional closure for wine bottles, but an estimated 3 to 5 percent of corks are tainted by a chemical compound called 2,4,6-trichloroanisole, or TCA for short. When wine smells like wet cardboard, TCA is the culprit.

As Taber details in his book, a number of cork alternatives have been developed in recent years, ranging from plastic "tubes" to metal screw caps. He points out that some work better than others.

"The rituals and customs all go together in the wine experience, and cork is just a part of that experience," Taber notes. "But you shouldn't risk losing a \$200 bottle of wine."

I concur.

*Martin Stewart Jr.*

## Is Every Year a 'Vintage' Year' in the Wine World?

By Robert Johnson

**A** great debate raged on numerous wine world message boards late in the year. The subject: *vintages*.

The conversation was sparked by an assertion that vintages really don't matter anymore. The comment may have gone virtually unnoticed, except that it was made by one of the world's most famous wine writers:

Hugh Johnson.

Few people have studied wine as thoroughly as Johnson, who has penned numerous books, including the landmark (and ironically named) *Vintage: The History of Wine*, which is almost textbook-like in its thoroughness.

Johnson made the observation about vintages in his *2008 Pocket Wine Book*, and then expounded on his position in the January issue of the U.K.'s *Decanter* magazine. He cited techniques developed by grape growers that have greatly limited the impact of vine diseases

and bad weather on wine quality. In essence, he claims that any year is now a good year for wine drinkers.

We asked members of the Vinesse tasting panel to weigh in, and there was near-unanimity that bad years in wine are rare today. However, they added that there's a big difference between a "good" year and a "great" one. Good wine *can* be made virtually every year, they say, but great wine still requires the cooperation of Mother Nature.

For instance, if weather patterns were to mirror those of France in 1965 or 1968 — generally considered that country's poorest modern vintages — there's nothing that could be done in the vineyards or the cellars to make good wine. Weather

remains the ultimate trump card, and wine lovers have been fortunate that Mother Nature has chosen to play it very sparingly.

So, we must respectfully disagree with Hugh Johnson on this occasion. But we will meet him half-way: Vintages *do* matter — just not as much as they once did.



Read more by Johnson in "Editor's Journal" on [VinesseTODAY.com](http://VinesseTODAY.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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(aka "The Buck Stops Here"):

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## *How you wash and care for your wine glasses has a direct effect on how the wine that you pour in them tastes.*

As one who samples more than a thousand different wines each year, I've always been aware of this. And I was reminded of the importance of glassware when I attended a food-and-wine pairing event recently at a major department store.

The lineup of wines was stellar — a Sauvignon Blanc, a Chardonnay, a Merlot and a Cabernet Sauvignon, all from a well-respected producer in Sonoma County. Alas, when the Sauvignon Blanc was poured to accompany an exquisite crab cake, something was amiss. Instead of aromas of lemon or grapefruit or just-mown grass, all I could smell was dish detergent. An effort had been made to clean the glasses, but the rinsing process had left something to be desired — or, more accurately, undesired.

I asked for a replacement glass, but it, too, had a soapy smell. It was apparent that all of the glasses had been washed similarly, probably in one of those restaurant-style industrial dishwashers.

By pure coincidence, I happened to be transporting a half-dozen glasses from the Vinesse clubhouse to my home that day, so I trudged out to my

car and brought back a pair. The server gave me a fresh pour of Sauvignon Blanc, and what a difference: It smelled and tasted like... Sauvignon Blanc! The evening was saved for this admittedly picky wine taster.

The proper care of stemware is very important. I like to say that a perfectly clean glass adds to the wine-drinking experience by not detracting from it.

With that in mind, here are a few glass care tips...

**1. Don't use the dishwasher.** Even the finest machines leave some trace residue that may create a faint odor.

**2. Don't use soap.** Wash the glasses with warm to hot water, and

rinse them with cool water. Sometimes a cleaning agent is needed to remove red wine stains. If you must use a cleaning agent, make sure it's mild. Obviously, steel or wool pads should be avoided, unless your aim is to add an "artsy," scratched-up, well-used look to the glass.

**3. Dry the glasses with a lint-free cloth.** There are special microfiber towels on the market that work beautifully.

**4. If you have a glass that's already "foggy," soak it in white vinegar for a few hours, then wash it thoroughly with warm water.**

**5. Wash glasses only in the morning.** It's never a good idea to wash them right after you've been drinking because the stems snap easily and accidents do happen.





## WINE A TO Z

**Cuvee.** Another word for a blended wine, combining lots, varieties or vintages.

**Dry.** Having no perceptible taste of sugar. Wines may also be off-dry (possessing a little sweetness), semi-sweet (sweeter still), or sweet (like Port, Sauternes or other dessert-style bottlings).

**Estate-Bottled.** A term found on wine labels indicating that the winery either owns the vineyard from which the wine's grapes were sourced, or has a long-term agreement to purchase grapes from a specific grower. Wineries that grow their own grapes generally opt for a different phrase: "Estate-Grown."

**Finish.** A measure of the flavors that linger in the mouth after wine is tasted. The best wines have rich, long finishes.

**Gallo.** America's best-known wine brand. (See "Wine Buzz" for more.)

## APPELLATION SHOWCASE

### LIVERMORE VALLEY

**Commercial winemaking in California's Livermore Valley dates back to 1883, when the Wente family began producing wine from its estate-grown grapes.**

Amazingly, the family remains in the business to this day. That makes the Wente Estate Winery the oldest family-owned, continuously operating winery in California. That fact alone provides a good reason to spend a day in Livermore Valley wine country.

Another reason: Livermore is a great example of passionate vintners working together to maintain an agricultural stronghold in an area that

had been threatened by urban sprawl.

As early as 1981, the possibility of housing development overrunning the long-established vineyards had become very real. That year, a small group of growers and vintners got together to form the Livermore Valley Winegrowers Association. Largely as a result of the LVWA's efforts over the quarter-century since, the valley remains "wine country," home to 40 wineries and 3,800 acres of grapevines. All but 600 of those acres are protected by law as "vineyards in perpetuity."

So, even as adjacent communities expand their housing and business footprints, Livermore Valley will remain a farming-focused region — a glorious vinous island in a sea of sprawl.



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# ELEVANT SOCIETY™

## IT'S NOT FOR EVERYONE. IS IT FOR YOU?

Vinesse created the Elevant Society to meet members' demands for super-premium wines. While virtually all members of the original American Cellars Wine Club were very satisfied with their monthly selections, some wanted more, and they were willing to pay for it.

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## VINESSE STYLE

### SMILE AND SAY, 'FROMAGE!'

*A course of ripe, gooey cheese has been a part of French dining for generations.*

Only in the past three years has the tradition been embraced by a significant number of U.S. restaurateurs.

Interestingly, the trend is not limited to French-style establishments.

The European custom is to serve the cheese course between the entrée and dessert, but many American restaurants approach the cheese tray as an appetizer course. Served before a meal, the cheese may

be accompanied by olives, marcona almonds and perhaps Serrano ham. After a meal, the tray may be enhanced by figs, dried apricots and caramelized walnuts.

Many diners now make a meal out

of a cheese tray and a glass or two of wine. Enjoyable wine options range from buttery Chardonnay to complex Cabernet Sauvignon to decadently sweet late-harvest bottlings. If the restaurant has a sommelier, ask him or her for specific suggestions.

The typical cheese tray will include a variety of flavors and textures.

If you're unfamiliar with the different types of cheese, ask to have them arranged from mildest to sharpest. That's the order in which you'll want to eat them. You'll also enhance the experience by mixing textures — a soft cheese with crunchy toast, as an example.



For a "total immersion" experience, spear a chunk of firm cheese with your fork, top it with a nut, drizzle it with honey and then swipe it through a puddle of balsamic. (We now pause for a long sigh...)

## BEING GREEN

Here are a few interesting numbers associated with the "green" movement: **13.1 billion** — number of gallons of gas saved if every American converted to one of the four most efficient cars in each class. **555,000** — number of trees saved in one day if all of America's Sunday newspapers were recycled. **3** — percentage an average household heating bill would go down for each degree its thermostat is lowered during the winter. **1** — the number of people it takes to initiate positive change for the environment.



## The Blurry Concept of ‘Oak-Aged’

***More and more, a bottle of vino with a nice oak character is likely to be the result of wood in wine, rather than wine in wood.***

Just as corks gradually are being replaced by metal screwcaps, alternatives are being developed for — and used in place of — oak barrels.

Traditionalists shudder at the thought, but for many wineries, the decision to turn away from oak barrels is based on simple economics. Among the dollars-and-cents factors in play: a winery’s physical space (its square-footage), the cost of new oak barrels, and labor.

A common size for an aging tank is 14-feet in diameter and 16-feet tall, with a capacity of 18,000 gallons. It would take 300 standard-sized barrels to hold that much wine.

Then there’s the cost of the barrels. A new French oak barrel goes for around \$850. Even if a winery ultimately reuses or sells the barrels,



about \$1.40 has been added to the cost of one bottle of wine.

And let’s not forget the matter of looking after a cuvee as it ferments and then ages. As one vintner told us, “You can do each chore once with a tank, or you can do it 300 times with barrels.

Taking all of that into consideration, it’s easy to see why vintners in growing numbers are turning to barrel alternatives such as tanks with wood staves inside, adding oak

shavings during the fermentation process, or placing oak chips in the aging tanks.

And given the “romance” associated with aging caves carved out of the

earth, packed with aromatic, wine-filled oak barrels, it’s equally easy to understand why many vintners are reluctant to talk about barrel alternatives.

To the ambiguous language of wine — which offers no definitive definition of a “Reserve” wine, as an example — we can now add the phrase, “oak-aged.” That may infer that the wine was aged in oak barrels, but the reality may be something very different.

### Four Seasons



#### WINES THAT MATCH THE SEASON.

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# Take a Sip of Scenic Beauty in Monterey

**M**onterey County and its highly regarded wine country evolved through a confluence of nature and history.

Nature occurs in the drama of rocky promontories bathed in crashing waves, the silhouette of tenacious cypress trees clinging to cliffs, the panorama of a scythe-shaped bay giving way to the vast Pacific Ocean, and the sweeping mountain ranges, the peaks of which get lost in the ever-present fog.

Novelists John Steinbeck and Henry Miller, poet Robinson Jeffers and photographer Ansel Adams all documented the area's natural beauty and history: the rolling hills of the Santa Lucia range, the dramatic rock formations of the Pinnacles National Monument, the craggy coastline of Big Sur, the constantly changing waters of Monterey Bay, and the fertile inland valleys, now splashed with well-tended patches of grapevines.

Those coastal valleys and benchlands are blessed with cooling fogs and fresh breezes that emanate from the Pacific coastline and Monterey Bay. That maritime influence accommodates a longer grape-growing season. Compared to other California wine regions, the budbreak is two weeks



## TOURING TIPS

earlier and the harvest is two weeks later. The extra month of hang time



results in the berries possessing very concentrated fruit flavors.

While we can make generalizations

about the growing conditions throughout Monterey County, the region embodies nine sub-regions, each with unique characteristics: Monterey, Santa Lucia Highlands, Arroyo Seco, San Lucas, Hames Valley, Chalone, Carmel Valley, San Bernabe and San Antonio Valley. It's a region that's definitely worth exploring.

Golfers will want to "set up shop" at the Quail Lodge Resort & Golf Club, which features 850 acres of fairways, greens and sparkling lakes (known to pessimists as water hazards). Among the many resort amenities is complimentary wine served at check-in.

If golf isn't your "cup of tee," consider the Tickle Pink Inn and its Pacific-view rooms perched high atop rugged cliffs. The inn serves complimentary sparkling wine and also hosts evening wine-and-cheese receptions.

Allow plenty of time for touring, as Monterey County is home to nearly 30 tasting rooms that welcome guests.

Bargetto Winery, with a tasting room conveniently located on Monterey's Cannery Row, has produced handcrafted wines since 1933. At Bernardus Winery, the vintner's focus is on the mouthfeel of the wines. Carmichael Vintners specializes in off-beat varieties (for California) such as Pinot Grigio,

### For Further Information

**Quail Lodge  
Resort & Golf Club**  
Carmel  
[quailodge.com](http://quailodge.com)

**Tickle Pink Inn**  
Carmel  
[ticklepinkinn.com](http://ticklepinkinn.com)

**Bargetto Winery**  
Monterey  
[bargetto.com](http://bargetto.com)

**Bernardus Vintners**  
Carmel Valley  
[bernardus.com](http://bernardus.com)

**Carmichael Vintners**  
Berenda  
[carmichaelwine.com](http://carmichaelwine.com)

**Chalone Vineyard**  
Soledad  
[chalonevineyard.com](http://chalonevineyard.com)

**Marilyn Remark**  
Salinas  
[remarkwines.com](http://remarkwines.com)

**San Saba Vineyard**  
Carmel Valley  
[sansaba.com](http://sansaba.com)

**Monterey County  
Vintners & Growers**  
Monterey  
[montereywines.org](http://montereywines.org)

**Anton & Michel**  
Carmel-by-the-Sea  
831-624-2406

**Montrio Bistro**  
Monterey  
831-648-8880

**Sardine Factory**  
Monterey  
831-373-3775





Sangiovese and Syrah.

Chalone Vineyard is situated in such a unique microclimate — perched high in the Gavilan mountain range on limestone-rich soil — that it has its own American Viticultural Area. Marilyn Remark Wines specializes in Rhone varieties. San Sabo Vineyard is nestled at the base of the Santa Lucia Highlands, at the end of a scenic riverside road.

A detailed map pinpointing all of the area tasting rooms is available from the Monterey County Vintners and Growers Association.

After a hard day of wine tasting (hey, somebody's got to do it), you'll be ready for a good meal. Monterey County has no shortage of restaurants that can dazzle your palate.

Three of our favorites are Anton & Michel in Carmel-by-the-Sea, Montrio Bistro in Monterey, and Sardine Factory, also in Monterey.

Anton & Michel is the choice for romance, as it blends Old World elegance with modern charm. The cuisine is "Continental-California," and the wine list is one of the best in the state.

Montrio Bistro uses a wood-burning grill to prepare prime meats, sustainable seafood and organic produce. Its award-winning wine list is overshadowed only by the incredible level of service.

Sardine Factory has been an icon of fine dining for nearly four decades. In 2006, it was honored with *Restaurant Hospitality* magazine's "Best Wine List in America" award.

For fine dining, eclectic wine touring, gracious accommodations and beautiful scenery, it's hard to beat Monterey County wine country.



## Wines of DuMOL Are Amazing — If You Can Find Them

**G**ood marketing can introduce the "right people" to limited-production, luxury-priced wines.

But if the wine doesn't deliver in the glass, those "right people" will move on to the "next big thing" from another producer.

That's what makes the track record of DuMOL so impressive. From its very first vintage (1996), proprietors Kerry Murphy and Michael Verlander have sold all of their wines *before* the wines were released. It's like putting up a "Sold" sign in a yard before the home's "For Sale" sign goes up.

Murphy and Verlander had a clear vision for DuMOL: to produce the best wine possible. To achieve that goal, they focused on two key factors:

sourcing the finest fruit from the most respected growers in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley, and engaging the services of a talented winemaker in Andy Smith.

DuMOL specializes in crafting very small quantities of super-premium wines. Obviously, to make a super-premium wine, one must start with super-premium grapes — exactly the kind grown in the vineyards of Dutton Ranch and the Hanna family. Warren Dutton pioneered Chardonnay growing in the Russian River Valley during the 1970s, and his vines — now farmed by sons Steve and Joe — produce amazingly intense fruit.

The low yields, high quality and careful attention to detail in the cellar account for the exceptional products in the DuMOL bottles — and, unfortunately for wine lovers, the high prices of the wines.

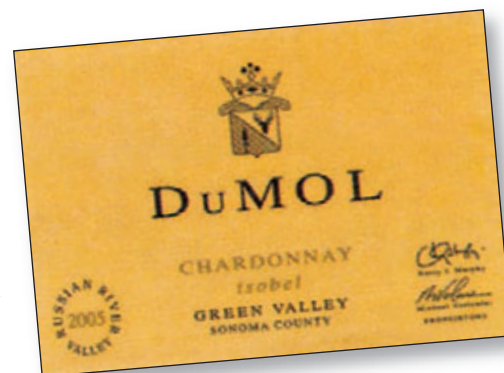
The Chardonnay bottlings typically retail for between \$45 and \$56, while the Pinot Noir releases range from \$56 to \$72. Among current releases, the case production runs from a mere 380 cases to a high of just 2,435. Considering many pre-release

customers purchase by the case, you can see why it doesn't take long for DuMOL to sell out each year.

The good news is that DuMOL's estate

vineyard in the Green Valley sector of the Russian River Valley — planted in 2003 — should begin yielding wine-worthy grapes within a few years. By having complete control in the vineyard as well as the cellar, the owners believe they can up the quality bar even more.

Nothing like setting one's goals high.



# Quotes Du Jour

## Assorted observations on the health benefits of wine...

■ *Louis Pasteur:*

“Wine can be considered with good reason as the most healthful and hygienic of all beverages.”

■ *Sir Alexander Fleming:*

“Penicillin cures, but wine makes people happy.”

■ *Albert Gorton Greene:*

“There’s life and strength on every drop — thanksgiving to the vine!”

■ *Bill St. John:*

“Wine is the sort of alcoholic beverage that does not destroy but enriches life; does not distort but clarifies perspective; does not seduce except in a way worth humanly being seduced.”

■ *The Quran:*

“And of the fruit of palm trees, and of grapes, ye obtain an inebriating liquor, and also good nourishment.”

■ *A Russian proverb:*

“Drink a glass of wine after your soup and you steal a ruble from your doctor.”

# Q AND A

### Are wines made by celebrities as good as those made by regular winemakers?

Not sure what you mean by “regular” winemakers, but the answer to your question is: It depends. Celebrities such as Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Andretti have their own wineries and are deeply involved in their businesses. Others simply lend their names to wines produced by others, with varying degrees of involvement. Paul Newman is said to be working closely with Trinchero Family Estates in producing the new line of Newman’s Own wines (*see “Wine Buzz” for more on that*), and hockey great Wayne Gretzky is having his wines made by Canada’s Creekside Estate, although he plans to have his own winery constructed by 2009. Lorraine Braco, who played Dr. Melfi on “The Sopranos,” doesn’t make the wines bearing her name, but is involved in selecting them.

**We love the Paso Robles wine country (part of California’s Central**

**Coast region), and now travel there once a year. Part of our ritual had been taking an afternoon and evening to drive over to Fresno for dinner at a Basque restaurant. But now that restaurant has closed. Do you have any suggestions for getting a similar type of meal in the area?**

Yes! And you don’t have to make the drive into the Central Valley for it. About seven miles north of downtown Paso Robles, in the town of San Miguel, you’ll find the 10th Street Café. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, Dallas and Caren Holt serve Spanish Basque and French Basque food to diners seated at long tables. It’s an eight-course, family-style feast, and many of the dishes are brightened by herbs grown in a garden that surrounds the restaurant’s patio. The wine list features a number of reasonably priced (\$15-32) bottlings crafted by Paso-area vintners. For directions and reservations, call 805-467-3141.

*Have a question about wine? Visit [VinesseTODAY.com](http://VinesseTODAY.com) and click on “Ask a Wine Question.”*



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### **B&B'S WINE LIST IS RATED 'B' FOR BARGAIN**

As restaurant concepts go, the one developed by Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich for B&B Ristorante in Las Vegas is, in a word, unusual. While B&B offers various meat choices in a number of "cuts" (lamb brains, as an example), it's the creative and palate-satiating pastas that steal the show. You've never had anything like Batalia's pasta tasting menu. Yet, while that memorable meal will set you back \$75, it can be accompanied by a well-selected, value-priced bottle of wine. That's where Bastianich comes in, and his mostly-Italian list is truly inspired. B&B is located at The Venetian resort. For more information, call 702-266-9977.



### **SALAD DRESSING, PASTA SAUCE... AND WINE**

Paul Newman has expanded his Newman's Own line of products with two California wines — a Chardonnay and a Cabernet Sauvignon. As you may recall, Newman's Own debuted 25 years ago with a salad dressing that was packaged in old wine bottles with parchment labels. "We have come full circle," Newman observes. "We are back to wine bottles, but this time we are filling them with wine that will complement my salad dressing and pasta sauce. Wine was the only thing missing at dinner time.

Now the meal is complete." Newman's Own products generate revenue for the Newman's Own Foundation, which has donated more than \$200 million to specially selected charities.

### **A TASTE OF THE OLD WORLD IN MANHATTAN**

Redevelopment and gentrification are slowly eroding ethnic neighborhoods in America's big cities. But Italian strongholds seem to be persevering better than others, with notable conclaves still thriving in Cleveland, San Francisco, Chicago, The Bronx, St. Louis, Boston and elsewhere. In Manhattan's Little Italy, you can learn everything you'd ever want to know about Parmigiano Reggiano at Di Palo Fine Foods. And for a real eye-opener, head to nearby

Caffe Roma for an authentic *caffee corretto* — a shot of espresso mixed with a shot of Grappa, Brandy or Sambuca.

### **DO YOU KNOW YOUR GLOBAL WINE BRANDS?**

The world's two best-known wine brands (in English-speaking countries) are Jacob's Creek and Gallo.

Jacob's Creek, an Australian brand, tops the awareness chart in the United Kingdom, Ireland and its homeland. Gallo is the best known brand in the United States and Canada. Also faring well in the Wine Intelligence survey were J.P. Chenet, Carlo Rossi, Mouton Cadet and Wolf Blass.

### **WHEN IT COMES TO WINE, 'WAGRAM' SAYS 'AUSTRIAN'**

Austrian wines long designated from Donauland henceforth will be labeled "Wagram." The change was promoted by local winemakers who felt "Wagram" would give their wares a more focused Austrian identity.

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# The Grapevine COOKBOOK



## RADICCHIO RISOTTO

Try this dish with a big red wine such as Zinfandel or Cabernet Sauvignon. It makes 4 servings.

### Ingredients

- 3/4-oz. dried porcini mushrooms
- 2 cups boiling water
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cups finely minced onion
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 1/2 cups Arborio rice
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup dry white wine, room temperature
- 1 medium-size (8-oz.) head radicchio, finely chopped (about 3 cups)
- 3/4 cup grated Pecorino-Romano or Parmesan cheese

### Preparation

1. Place mushrooms in medium bowl and cover with boiling water. Cover with a plate and let stand 30 minutes. Drain mushrooms, squeezing out and saving all the water. Remove stems, and cut mushrooms into thin strips.

2. Combine mushroom water and broth in medium-large saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer.
3. Meanwhile, heat oil in 4-quart casserole over medium heat. Add onion and sauté 1 to 2 minutes, until softened. Add mushrooms, garlic, rice and salt, and stir 1 minute. Pour in wine and cook until it is all absorbed.
4. Stir in radicchio, then start to add simmering broth 1/2-cup at a time, letting each addition be completely absorbed before adding another 1/2-cup. Reserve 1/4-cup broth to be added at end. (Note: It takes about 18 minutes to reach the al dente stage.) Stir in remaining 1/4-cup of broth and cheese.
5. Combine well and serve immediately.

## SPAGHETTINI AGLIO OLIO

Enjoy this easy-to-prepare dish (the recipe makes 6 servings) with any wine you enjoy with garlic-flavored food.

### Ingredients

- 1-lb. spaghetti

- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil (divided)
- 10 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
- 1/2-cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

### Preparation

1. Bring 6 quarts of salted water to a boil in an 8-quart pot over high heat. Stir the spaghetti into the boiling water. Cook the pasta, semi-covered, stirring occasionally, until tender but firm.
2. Meanwhile, heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook, shaking the skillet and stirring, until pale golden. Remove from the heat and add crushed pepper.
3. Ladle about 1 1/2 cups of the pasta cooking water into the sauce. Add the parsley, the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil and salt to taste.
4. Drain pasta, return it to the pot and pour in the sauce. Cook until pasta is coated with the sauce and done. Serve immediately in warm bowls.

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