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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

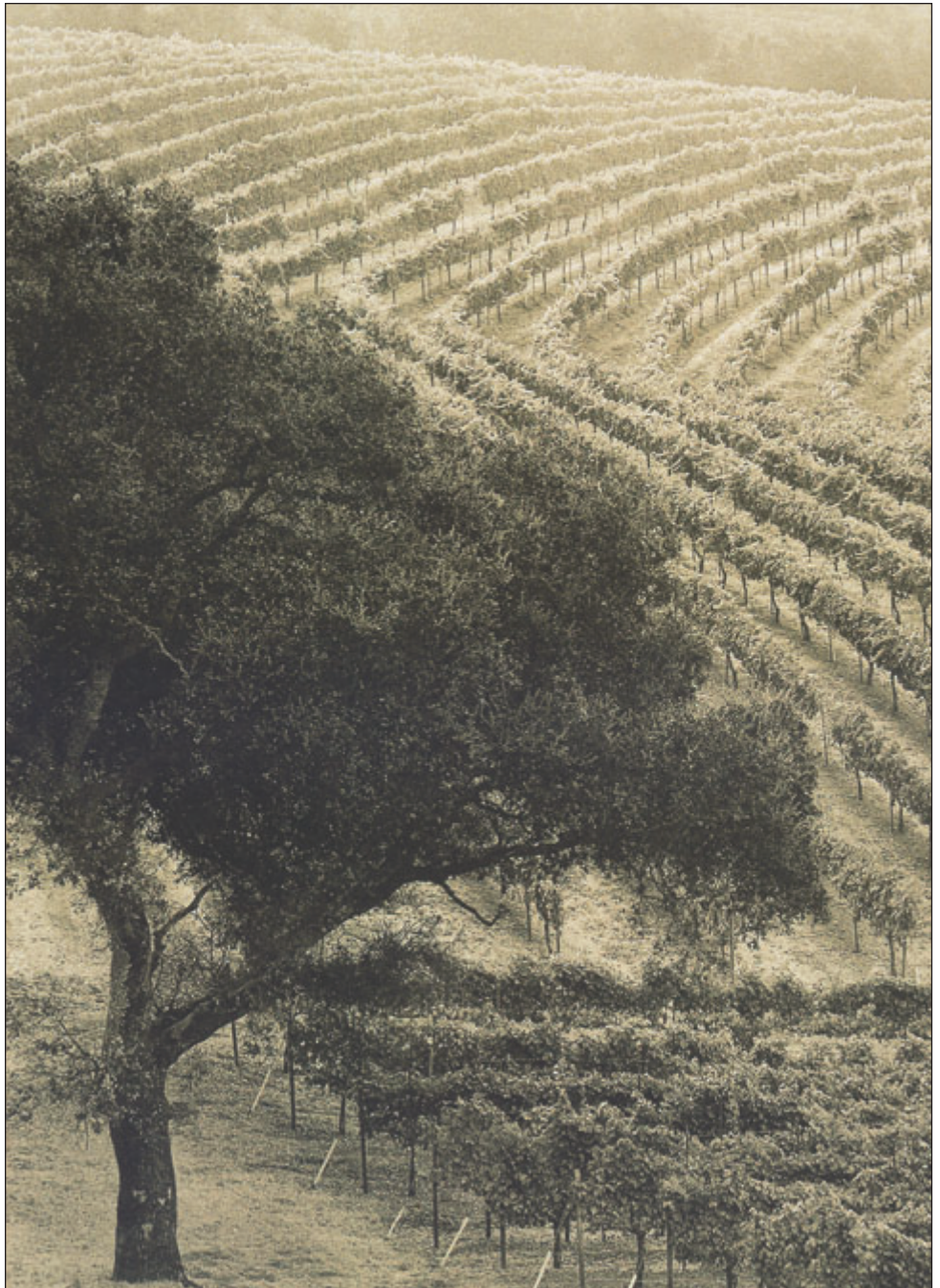
VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Restaurant: Craft has come to Los Angeles. The third offspring of restaurateur Tom Colicchio's Manhattan original has opened in Century City, featuring amazingly flavorful dishes and complementary wines. The 300-bottle list includes only a handful of "big bruisers." Instead, beverage director David Lusby opts for the "two F's" — finesse and freshness. Lusby and Colicchio believe that wine should be thought of as "a condiment for the food." It's a concept that works deliciously. Other outposts of Craft are in Dallas and Las Vegas. craftrestaurant.com

2 Hot Read: Any wine lover planning a trip to France should pick up a copy of Francois Thomazeau's charming *The Brasseries of Paris*. It will help you match the wining-and-dining destination to your personal tastes and preferences.
Published by Little Bookroom; \$16.95

3 Hot Wine Country Destination: Seen everything there is to see in Napa Valley? Head farther north to Oregon's Willamette Valley, where more than 160 wineries beckon. A must for aficionados of Pinot Noir. (More info: See "Wine Buzz" on page 2.)
willamettewines.com



This is the Nuns Canyon Vineyard in Sonoma Valley, which serves as the St. Francis winery's source of mountain-grown grapes. It's 1,700 feet above sea level, and spans 124 acres on a ridge of the Mayacamas range. Varieties grown in the vineyard include Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel and Syrah.



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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A 'WINE VALLEY' WORTH EXPLORING

Oregon's Willamette Valley — home to more than two-thirds of the state's wineries and vineyards — is recognized as one of the premier Pinot Noir-growing regions in the world. Buffered from Pacific storms on the west by the Coast Range, the valley follows the Willamette River north to south for more than a hundred miles, from the Columbia River near Portland to just south of Eugene. At its widest point, the long, broad valley spans 60 miles and the climate allows for a long, gentle growing season. As the area's wine industry has grown, so have the lodging options, now ranging from the usual "logo" motels to eclectic bed-and-breakfast inns.

IS THE END NEAR FOR AMPELOGRAPHY?

DNA fingerprinting is best known for its use in criminal cases. But in recent years, it also has been utilized to clear up some long-held misconceptions about grape varieties, such as the heritage of Zinfandel (which, it turns out, is not native to California, but rather to Croatia). In the past, a science known as ampelography was used for varietal identification. It involved the study and measurement of a vine's shoots, canes, buds, flowers, clusters, seeds and grapes. Ampelography is still used for "eyeball" I.D.s, but more and more, it's being replaced by DNA fingerprinting for reliable varietal identification.

DOES DRINKING WINE IMPROVE MEMORY?

A recent study conducted jointly by the University of Auckland in New

Zealand and The Ohio State University reveals that drinking alcohol in moderation may improve one's ability to maintain memory. Rats were used in the study, and it was found that those who drank alcohol in moderation seemed to have superior cognitive skills compared to both heavy-drinking rats (which one would expect) and non-drinking rats (which one might not expect). Results of the study were published in the *Journal of Neuroscience*.

THE SAUVIGNON BLANC CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

The zippy, herbal Sauvignon Blanc bottlings of New Zealand have generated a great deal of press in recent years, but the quality capital of the variety remains the Loire region of France. The best way to describe Loire Sauvignon Blanc is another "Z" word: zesty. The Loire also is the quality capital of Chenin Blanc.



EXPLORING THE QUIET CORNERS OF PARIS

Americans seem to have a love/hate relationship with the French. We either love them or we hate them. But it's difficult to hate Paris, one of the world's great cultural capitals (even if it can seem as crowded as New York City during the peak tourist season). If crowds are your main complaint about Paris, pick up a new book from publisher Little Bookroom titled, *Quiet Corners of Paris*. Most of the places mentioned are out of doors and open to the public, and range from museum courtyards and royal gardens to 15th century cloisters and tiny passageways to the backstreets and lanes of the various neighborhoods. Some famous sites (Luxembourg Gardens, for example) are included, but so are unknown treasures such as the Irish Cultural Center and Paris' lesser-known islands. And, if you're not afraid of ghosts, some of the city's evocative cemeteries also are listed.



What Makes a ‘Meritage’?

As with most things in life, wine goes through cycles.

Beginning in the 1980s, “100-percent-varietal” wines became fashionable in California. If a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon, for instance, included even a small percentage of Merlot, it was looked down upon by the (largely uniformed) masses. Its “purity of fruit” was called into question, and its perceived value was lowered several notches.

The irony of this craze was that, in many cases, blended wines can be superior to “100-percent-varietal” wines. A little bit of Merlot can round off the rough edges of a young, tannic Cabernet. Add a dollop of Cabernet Franc to the blend, and the aroma can be lifted with an engaging floral scent. The French have known and understood this for generations, and it’s rare to find a French wine — particularly in Bordeaux — that is not a cuvee of two or more varieties.

Knowledgeable California winemakers knew they needed to do something. They could ride the trend and make “100-percent-varietal” wines, or they could buck the trend and, in many cases, make superior wines. But if they chose the latter course, the big question was: Could they sell that superior wine?

So, in 1988, three talented (and frustrated) winemakers — Agustin

Huneus of the Quintessa winery, Julie Garvey of Flora Springs and Mitch Cosentino of Costentino Winery — got together and formed what came to be known as The Meritage Association. The word “Meritage” — which rhymes with “heritage,” despite what some restaurant servers may tell you — combines “merit” and “heritage,” and reflects the spirit of the association and its members, and the concept of blending.



Wineries must join the association in order to print “Meritage” on their labels, and based on the traditional Bordeaux

model, Meritage wines must consist of two or more of the following varietals:

■ **Reds** — Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot, St. Macaire, Gros Verdot and Carmenere.

■ **Whites** — Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Sauvignon Vert.

That’s why La Storia Winery is able to call its blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc a Meritage. It’s also why Trou de Bonde’s blend of Petite Sirah, Zinfandel and Tempranillo may not use the Meritage name. Trou de Bonde instead uses a proprietary name: “Roux.”

It should be noted that “100-percent-varietal” wines can be very enjoyable. They just can’t be labeled, “Meritage.”

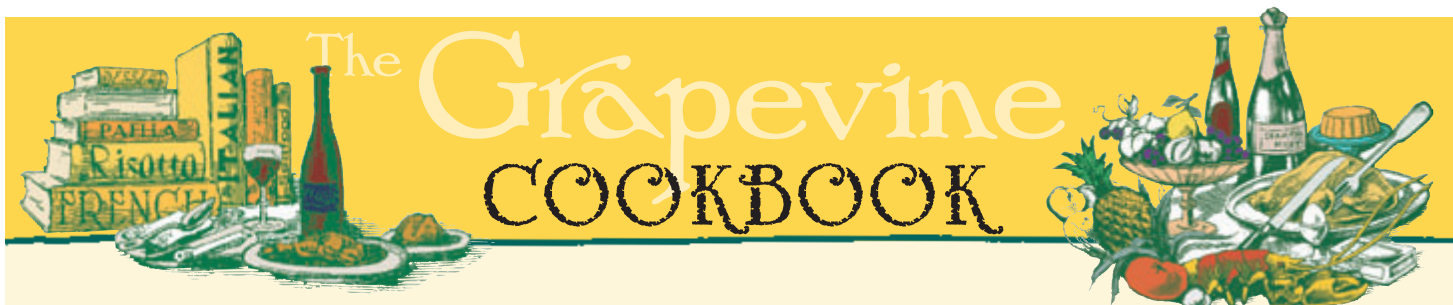
Quotes Du Jour

The quotes that follow come from the book, The Accidental Connoisseur, written by Lawrence Osborne. The paperback version is published by North Point Press.

■ “Few things make us more insecure about taste than wine.”

■ “[Paul] Masson was a curious character. Highly cultured, with connections to San Francisco’s high society and San Jose’s exclusive Saint Claire Club, where he was quaintly known as the Duc de Cognac, Masson was a hedonistic gentleman farmer in a place where such exotics were virtually unknown.”

■ “I wondered if it was true that modern taste — our taste — is essentially the taste of children. Such was surely increasingly dominant back home in America, where everything had the energy and instantaneous relish of childhood. Childish sex, childish relationships, childish entertainments — and now, at last, childish wine.”



CARMELIZED BRISKET

This recipe serves 6 to 12, depending on the size of the brisket, and matches beautifully with Meritage wines or other red blends.

Ingredients

- 1 first cut brisket or top of the rib, 3-7 lbs.
- 2-4 garlic cloves, peeled
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 1-3 onions, thinly sliced
- 3-4 fresh tomatoes or 4-5 canned plum tomatoes, drained
- 1-3 bay leaves

Preparation

1. At least one day before cooking, put slivers of garlic in slits all over the brisket. Rub it well with black pepper and salt. Slice onions and arrange all over and under the roast. Marinate, covered, in the refrigerator overnight.
2. On the day of cooking, preheat oven to 500 degrees F.
3. Put meat in a roasting pan with a cover, and arrange the onion slices from the night before all around.
4. Squash either 3 medium fresh tomatoes or about 4 canned tomatoes (do not add juice from the can). Add bay leaves.
5. Cover the pan and put it into the very hot oven. After 15 minutes, turn down the oven without opening it to 350 degrees. Cook for approximately 3 hours. (When the water has disappeared and the meat, onions, etc. are browned, but not quite burnt, and the meat is soft to a fork, it is done.)
6. Remove meat from the pan and make gravy by deglazing the pan with lots of water (more than a quart to start) and cooking it down until it's to your taste.
7. Slice the meat across the grain and serve with the gravy.

SPRING LAMB

This recipe serves 6 to 8 people, depending on their appetites, and matches beautifully with Petite Sirah, Zinfandel or blends based on those varieties.

Ingredients

- Lamb trimmings and chopped bones from butcher
- 1 head of garlic, halved horizontally
- 1 leg of lamb bone-in, appx. 4 1/2-lbs.
- 6 garlic cloves, halved
- 1 bunch fresh rosemary
- 1/2-oz. softened butter
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.
2. In the bottom of a roasting tin, scatter the chopped bones, trimmings and garlic head.
3. Make 1-inch-deep incisions in the lamb. Into each incision, insert the garlic cloves and rosemary sprigs.
4. Rub butter over the lamb and place the leg on top of the bones. Season and place in the oven for 60-90 minutes (15 minutes per pound for rare, and 20 minutes for medium), turning over half-way through.
5. Remove the lamb from the oven, season again, and transfer to a tray to rest.
6. To make the gravy, place the roasting pan over a moderate heat to caramelize the lamb juices. Strain any excess fat. Pour in 12 fluid ounces of cold water, reduce heat and simmer gently for 5 minutes. Strain through a sieve.
7. Serve lamb with the gravy and seasonal vegetables.