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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

The idea that bigger is better may be true in certain aspects of life, but I'm not sure it's true when it comes to wine.

For the past 25 years or so, many wines have been gaining in alcohol as vintners seek to make bigger and bolder bottlings. The goal: to attract the attention, not to mention the adulation, of influential critics who prefer that style.

"We got the scores we wanted, but we went away from what I personally like," laments Central Coast winemaker Adam Tolmach. "We lost our rudder when we went for ever bolder, riper flavors."

Kermit Lynch, author of *Adventures on the Wine Route*, agrees. "Rejecting a wine because it is not big enough is like rejecting a book because it is not long enough, or a piece of music because it is not loud enough," he observes.

Is there a place for those big, inky "monsters" the critics adore? Of course. But we must also make room in our lives for wines that are subtle, nuanced, and that surprise.

Martin Stewart Jr.

The Consequences of the Spring Frosts Are About to Be Revealed

By Robert Johnson

In Grapevine No. 7 earlier this year, we reported on the spring frosts in California's North Coast region.

The area experienced wild swings of cold and warm spells, caused by a series of four cold-air and high-pressure systems from western Canada that were too dry to allow clouds to form a nighttime blanket. So, instead of the typical fog layer that insulates the grapevines, clear and cold nights were the order of the day.

The lowest temperature reported in Sonoma County was 25 degrees, and during one three-hour stretch in the Russian River Valley, the temperature hovered at 27 degrees. Those three hours seemed like an eternity to the men and women who depend on the annual grape harvest for their livelihoods.

What is it about frost that is so potentially damaging? The consequences vary, depending on the time of the year in which the frost occurs.

In the springtime, frost can kill

buds and shoots. With each dead bud or shoot, the potential output of a vine for that season is diminished. That's the "great unknown" of this spring's North Coast cold spell. Depending on the area, growers and vintners are bracing for a harvest that could fall anywhere from 5 to 20 percent below normal levels.

What happens when frost occurs

during the autumn months? The most typical damage involves grapes being deprived of their final push toward full ripeness. In extreme cases, the vines — especially younger ones — could be killed.

In the winter, when low temperatures are most likely, the potential for harm is minimized because the vines are dormant. But

an extended period of below-freezing temperatures could do significant damage even then.

Now, as we approach the 2008 harvest season, the consequences of the spring frost will begin to come into focus. While we fear the worst (a significant drop in grape tonnage), we join growers and vintners in hoping for the best.

What is it about frost that is so potentially damaging? The consequences vary, depending on the time of the year in which the frost occurs.



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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-  Perfectly matched recipes for featured wine selections



Classic Food & Wine 'Couplings'

I love Maneet Chauhan's outlook on life. "If I have the perfect meal and I'm with the person I love most," she observes, "what more can you want out of life?"

Maneet is the executive chef at Chicago's acclaimed Vermilion restaurant, where contemporary Indian and Latin American cuisines meld deliciously. This is where gourmands congregate to share small plates such as artichoke pakoras and blue corn-crusted scallops, feast on signature dishes such as chili-glazed and blackened tamarind ribs or a pistachio-crusted veal chop, or submit to the untamed spices of dishes such as Sri Lankan whole fish (with 16 spices!) or lobster Portuguese.

Maneet is a wine enthusiast, and carefully selects bottlings that match nicely with even the spiciest of the spicy dishes. So, even if it's not Valentine's Day, a romantic dinner is possible.

Ah, romance. Granted, we women are a bit more in tune with the

concept than many men, which is why we need to be aware of the dishes (and the wines) that are most likely to heat things up — even without Maneet Chauhan's spices.

With that in mind, here are a few classic pairings...

■ **Oysters and Champagne.** We've all heard that oysters are aphrodisiacs, and the perfect wine to slurp with them is a Blanc de Blancs — whether it's an authentic French Champagne, or a refreshing Italian Prosecco.

■ **Chiles and Riesling.** Here's a case of opposites attracting — the hot, sweat-inducing spiciness of the chile with the cool, calming mouthfeel of the wine. It should come as no surprise that there always is a Riesling featured on Maneet's menu at Vermilion.

■ **Basil and Cabernet Sauvignon.** Turn those basil leaves into a simple pesto, slather it on your

favorite style of pasta, pour a glass of Cabernet and prepare to be seduced — by the food and wine, to be sure, but probably by your significant other as well.

■ **Chocolate and Tawny Port.** When pairing wine with almost any kind of dessert, it's best if the wine is a little bit sweeter. So, go with a high-quality chunk of bittersweet chocolate.





WINE A TO Z

*A few food and wine pairings...
or not...*

Quatre épices. French phrase meaning four spices, used to flavor soups and stews. Wine: Riesling or Viognier.

Rhubarb. A member of the buckwheat family, and while it's generally eaten as a fruit, it's botanically a vegetable. Wine: Because of rhubarb's extreme tartness, don't even try.

Sashimi. Sliced raw fish served with shredded daikon radish or gingerroot, wasabi and soy sauce. Wine: Champagne or other sparkling.

Teleme. Pronounced TEHL-uh-may, this cheese is found in some of the better cheese shops of California's North Coast wine country. Similar in texture to brie. Wine: Oak-aged Chardonnay.

Udon. A thick Japanese noodle, similar to spaghetti. Can be round or squared, and made from either wheat or corn flour. Wine: Should be matched to the sauce used to top the udon.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

CARNEROS

Can grapevines find happiness where sheep once reigned supreme?

If the vines are planted in the Northern California region of Carneros, which straddles the southern ends of Napa and Sonoma counties, the answer is yes.

While Carneros (the Spanish word for ram) has long been considered an ideal location for the cultivation of Burgundian grapes such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, in recent years special sites throughout the region have increasingly produced Merlot, Syrah and other varietals.

Carneros enjoys a long, moderate growing season that allows the grapes to mature slowly and evenly, resulting

in balanced fruit that is rich in color, flavor and acidity. Topographically, it is the crossroads between the low-lying areas of the northern reaches of San Francisco Bay and the rolling hills to the north that define the Napa and Sonoma valleys. The elevation in

Carneros ranges from sea level in the south to about 400 feet in the Mayacamas foothills.

As inland temperatures rise during the day, moist air over the cold Pacific is drawn inland through San Pablo Bay and over Carneros. This helps cool temperatures from the mid-afternoon into the evening. The fresh afternoon winds slow activity in the vine leaves and dry the dew left by morning fog, thus inhibiting mildew and mold. Fog then rolls in throughout the night,

providing a gentle buffer to the next morning's sun, repeating the climatic cycle that is friendly to winegrapes.

Carneros

enjoys a long, moderate growing season that allows the grapes to mature slowly and evenly, resulting in balanced fruit that is rich in color, flavor and acidity.



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VINESSE STYLE

SONOMA MISSION INN & SPA



The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa has unveiled new accommodations known as the Winemaker Suite Collection.

Six renowned Sonoma Valley wineries — Benziger, Chateau St. Jean, Deerfield Ranch Winery, Hanzell Vineyards, Robledo Family Winery and St. Francis Winery — have lent their names to six unparallel suites that offer guests an authentic wine country experience.

The California Winemaker Signature Suite package includes overnight accommodations in a themed-decor suite, complete with wood-burning fire place and sommelier wine selection offerings, private VIP wine tour (at any of the aforementioned wineries), breakfast, signature amenities and gifts, valet parking, and exclusive access to the resort's famed bath house.

Benziger Family Winery is a highly respected, pioneering winery at the forefront of sustainable winemaking. Founded in 1973, Chateau St. Jean has long been recognized as a leader in vineyard-designated wines and is

particularly known for its Robert Young Vineyard Chardonnay, Belle Terre Vineyard Chardonnay and La Petite Étoile ("Little Star") Vineyard Fume Blanc.

Deerfield Ranch Winery is an award-winning boutique winery producing ultra-premium, artisan wines. Hanzell Vineyards is recognized as one of California's most enduring and historically important wine estates, particularly known for its Pinot Noir.

Robledo Family Winery is owned by the first Mexican immigrant vineyard worker to establish his own winery in the U.S., Reynaldo Robledo. And St. Francis Winery owns more than 600 acres of prime vineyards in the Sonoma and Russian River Valleys.

Set in the heart of the wine country, the Sonoma Mission Inn is home to an acclaimed spa where ancient thermal mineral waters ease bathers into blissful relaxation. All guests of the resort are invited to congregate in the Lobby Living Room for the daily wine tasting that runs from 4:30-5:30 p.m.

Rates start at \$699 per night, based on single or double occupancy. For further information or reservations, call 800-441-1414.

BEING GREEN

TerraCycle, a New Jersey-based company known for its unique eco-friendly home products, is now offering refurbished Kendall-Jackson wine barrels, transforming them into water storage containers. With water conservation being a major concern across the country, homeowners now can capture roof runoff by redirecting rainwater from any downspout into a used, clean oak barrel, ready for garden use at a later time. The oak Rain Barrel is a more natural alternative to the typical plastic rainwater storage systems currently on the market. The Rotary Composter is a simple method of turning grass clippings, leaves and other yard waste into garden fertilizer. It's situated on a roller system, making it easy to load and rotate, thereby speeding up the natural process. Each barrel retails for \$99.



Thumbs Down on Topping Up

There are only three possible reasons for a server in a restaurant to regularly “top up” customers’ wine glasses:

1) The server is trying to drain the bottle with the hope of selling the diners another.

2) The restaurant is extremely busy, and the server is trying to “turn over” the table as quickly as possible.

3) The restaurant owner preaches first-class customer service, and believes that having the staff regularly replenish the wine glasses is a service courtesy.

Only the owner, the sommelier and the wait staff know for sure, but if a diner believes that either No. 1 or No. 2 applies, that

restaurant should be crossed off the list for future nights on the town. However, if the diner believes that No. 3 applies, then it’s time to have a few minutes of friendly “face time” with the owner.

Why? Isn’t the pursuit of customer service a good thing?

Absolutely. But regularly “topping up” a wine glass is not good

customer service. The additional visits to the table can interrupt the flow of conversation, deprive diners of a very enjoyable aspect of wine drinking and even waste wine.

Even in the relatively few minutes that wine is in a glass, it evolves. Its aroma changes. Its flavor spectrum tends to expand. But when the glass is constantly refilled, that evolution is stifled.

But even more egregious is the matter of wasted wine. Let’s say you’re dining with someone who really isn’t into wine — or, at least, the wine being served. They’ll take a

sip every so often, but have no intention of finishing it. When that patron’s glass is regularly “topped up,” chances are good that a nearly full glass of wine will remain on the table, unconsumed, at meal’s end.

When dining out, follow this advice: Once the bottle of wine is brought to the table and uncorked, politely (but firmly) inform the server that you, as the host, would like to be in charge of pouring it. In a restaurant that truly embraces customer service, the server not only will gladly oblige, but probably be somewhat relieved.



Four Seasons



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Wine Roaming In and Around Wellington

Throughout the world, only one in every 500 bottles of wine is produced in New Zealand.

Yet even though it's considered a "niche player" in the global wine marketplace, it is responsible for some of the most highly acclaimed bottlings made anywhere. The country is best known for its zippy, zesty renditions of Sauvignon Blanc, but it's also a world-class producer of Pinot Noir, Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer and Syrah.

New Zealand is home to 10 main grape-growing regions, six on its North Island (Northland, Auckland, Waikato/Bay of Plenty, Gisborne, Hawkes Bay and Wellington) and four on its South Island (Nelson, Marlborough, Canterbury and Central Otago).



TOURING TIPS

As a nation of islands, New Zealand benefits from the temperature modulating effect of the sea. The extremes of heat and cold experienced by vast landlocked countries simply don't apply. The country also enjoys long, dry autumns, ideal for winegrapes to attain full ripeness and good acid

structure. There also are numerous microclimates, which accounts for the variety of grape types grown and wines made.

For those with at least a week at their disposal, it's possible to plan a wine adventure that extends from Hawkes Bay to Wairarapa, and then using Wellington as a "gateway" to Marlborough. A more contracted agenda would involve just Wellington and Marlborough, with Wellington serving as a good home base.

Wellington buzzes with cafes, delicatessens and restaurants, and the downtown area is divided into distinct quarters, making it easy for visitors to experience the various "personalities" of the city.

Courtenay Quarter is the nightlife hub, packed with restaurants, bars, cafes, cinemas and theaters. Cuba Quarter is bohemian and alternative — a great place to find ethnic cuisine.

Lembton Quarter is upscale, boasting the city's finest restaurants and countless purveyors of designer fashions. And the Waterfront Quarter offers numerous parks, museums and landmarks — perfect for daytime exploring.

Among the special food experiences available to Wellington visitors are a chocolate cafe, a restaurant that puts a new spin on traditional Maori food, and a seafood restaurant that's housed in a historic, restored wool shed. There's even a "walking gourmet" tour of the inner city, which culminates in a three-course tasting lunch, each course matched with a New Zealand wine.

Just over the hills from Wellington, the Wairarapa region boasts a fabulous wine culture, with Pinot Noir being the star vinous attraction. In the village of Martinborough, you can take a leisurely stroll or bike





ride around the local vineyards and olive groves. Some of the wine estates include restaurants or cafes. All told, there are more than 50 wineries in the area to explore.

A like number of wine estates are situated in and around Marlborough, reached via a memorable ferry journey over the Cook Strait to the Marlborough Sounds. On the Sounds, you can take a cruise that offers fresh seafood and local wines in addition to the magnificent scenery.

Marlborough is the wine region that first put New Zealand on the world wine map. This is where eye-opening renditions of Sauvignon Blanc — big, herbaceous and absolutely true to the variety — are produced. You can obtain a winery map by logging on to winemarlborough.net.nz.

Comparable in size and/or shape to Great Britain, Japan or Colorado, New Zealand has a population of just 4 million — making it one of the world's least crowded countries. It is a haven for those seeking peace, rejuvenation and relaxation, as well as a playground for thrill seekers and adventurers. A temperature climate with relatively small seasonal variation makes it an ideal year-round destination.

New Zealand's spectacularly beautiful landscape includes vast mountain chains, steaming volcanoes, sweeping coastlines, deeply indented fiords and lush rainforests. Take the time to soak in the scenery in between winery visits, and you'll have vacation memories to last a lifetime.



Chateau La Nerth: The Superstar of Chateauneuf-du-Pape

For aficionados of Chateauneuf-du-Pape, one of the most cherished estates is Chateau La Nerthe.

The estate is ancient, even though what one might call its “renaissance period” dates only to 1986. It may be as much as 800 years old, but the first document describing its existence was produced in 1560.

Then known as Grange de Beauvenir, the estate was owned by the noble Tulle de Villefranche family of Piedmont. The wines of the time enjoyed a good reputation, and even were enjoyed by King Louis XVI.

Some of the cellars still in use were constructed during that period, while work on the estate's chateau commenced in 1736. By the middle

of the 18th century, the fruit produced on the estate was widely distributed, and estate-grown and bottled wines began to be made after the harvest of 1784.

Like many French estates, however, Chateau La Nerthe was wiped out by phylloxera during the 1800s. It enjoyed a period of rebirth after being bought by Commandant Joseph Ducos in 1870, but once the new century dawned, Ducos was gone and the estate gradually declined.

Then in 1986, an accountant-turned winemaker named Alain Dugas advised the Richard family that the historic estate would make a good investment. The Richards agreed, and subsequently hired Dugas to serve in a supervisory role.

Today, all 13 of the permitted Chateauneuf-du-Pape varieties are planted in the vineyard that surrounds the chateau, with Grenache accounting for 62 percent of the acreage. Syrah has an 18 percent stake in the vineyard, followed by Mourvedre with 15 percent and Cinsaut with 4 percent. If you know your math, you realize that the other varieties encompass only a few rows apiece, yet they're important because they add nuance to the finished cuvees.

The vineyard benefits not only from a favorable Mediterranean climate, but also from meticulous care. Yields are strictly limited in order to concentrate flavors in the grapes, and

that concentration — combined with expert blending — results in wines that are beautifully balanced, rich, long-lasting — and nearly impossible to procure.

The estate is open by appointment only.



Quotes Du Gour

■ *Scottish essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle, on the social nature of wine:*

“Men who have communion in nothing else can sympathetically eat together, can still rise into some glow of brotherhood over food and wine.”

■ *Ralph Waldo Emerson, on the social power of wine:*

“A man will be eloquent if you give him good wine.”

■ *Duff Cooper, writing in Old Men Forget:*

“Wine has lit up for me the pages of literature, and revealed in life romance lurking in the commonplace. Wine has made me bold but not foolish; has induced me to say silly things but not do them.”

■ *Saki (H.H. Munro), on wine’s role in a happy life:*

“You needn’t tell me that a man who doesn’t love oysters and asparagus and good wines has got a soul, or a stomach either. He’s simply got the instinct for being unhappy highly developed.”

Q AND A

How many different varieties of winegrapes are there?

It depends on how you look at it. Historians have identified around 24,000 different names for wine varieties. This includes multiple names for the same variety, such as Syrah and Shiraz. On average, there are between four and five names per variety, as ampelographers believe there are about 5,000 truly unique varieties. Yet, of those 5,000, only about 150 are planted in any great quantity — in other words, to make commercially significant amounts of wine. And finally, pundits would tell you that there really are only nine “classic” varieties: Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon among whites, and Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Syrah among reds.

What’s the best wine to chill wine quickly — like when unexpected guests arrive?

Get a bucket that’s deep enough so a wine bottle can be completely

submerged in it. Fill the bucket about half-way with ice, and then fill it up to the top with cold water. An ice/water mixture will chill wine more quickly than ice alone. Keep red wine in the bucket for about five minutes, fruity reds (such as Beaujolais) for 10 to 15 minutes, whites for 15 to 25 minutes, and sparkling wines for about a half-hour.

Should we include the price of the wine when we figure out our 15 or 20 percent tip for a restaurant meal?

There are two schools of thought about tipping in restaurants that offer wine — particularly expensive wine. One school teaches that you base your tip on the total bill. Another school says that doesn’t make sense, since no more work is involved in opening and serving a \$100 bottle than opening and serving a \$20 bottle. If you agree with that logic, tip your normal percentage based on the food bill, and then add a set amount — such as \$5 per bottle — for the wine service.



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**DOES HEATHER LOCKLEAR
KNOW ABOUT THIS PLACE?**

After watching a rerun of “Melrose Place” on Soap Net, Angelinos — or visitors to Los Angeles — can head for Melrose Bar & Grill in West Hollywood for an amazing wine experience. The restaurant has a casual atmosphere and a moderately priced menu, yet the wine list features more than 600 selections — a veritable *Who’s Who* of the world’s top wine estates and vintners. Normally, one would have to go to a *much* more expensive restaurant for such a sterling selection of wines. 310-278-3684.

**WINE KNOWLEDGE
WITHOUT AN ATTITUDE**

What is the role of a sommelier in a restaurant? We’ve never heard it explained better than by master sommelier Michael Jordan. “It’s important for our guests to feel comfortable when selecting a specific wine, or to feel that they can ask for a suggestion to pair with a particular dish,” Jordan says. “The role of a sommelier is to pass on our knowledge without being stuffy.”



**NOW AVAILABLE: ‘SIDEWAYS’
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Filmed almost entirely on-location around Solvang and the Santa Ynez Valley in Santa Barbara County, the movie “Sideways” premiered in the

fall of 2004 and won numerous awards, including an Oscar and two Golden Globes. The tale of two middle-aged men and the women they meet on a week-long wine tasting adventure continues to bring worldwide attention to the area. Now, visitors can experience real-life scenes from the movie with specialty maps and tour packages. For details, visit santaynezvalleyvisit.com or solvangusa.com.

**HOW TO KNOW WHAT’S
REALLY INSIDE THE BOTTLE**

Although the rules and guidelines are changed every so often, a wine label presently may include a varietal name (such as Chardonnay) only as long as it has at least 75 percent of that variety in the blend. For a specific appellation (growing area) to be listed, 85 percent of the wine must come from that appellation. And for a wine to include a vineyard designation, 100 percent of the wine must have been made from grapes grown in that vineyard.

**IS MECHANICAL HARVESTING
IN NAPA VALLEY’S FUTURE?**

With the number of trained migrant workers limited and harvest dates ultimately determined by Mother Nature, a number of Napa vintners reportedly are considering the use of mechanical harvesters for the first time this fall.

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The Grapevine COOKBOOK



BOEUF BOURGOGNE

This family-sized recipe hails from the Burgundy region of France. It matches beautifully with California Petite Sirah or Zinfandel.

Ingredients

- 3-4 lbs. Chuck roast, cut into 2-inch cubes
- 1 bottle Petite Sirah
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup flour
- 2 ribs celery, diced
- 2 medium red onions (one diced small, the other in large cubes)
- 5 medium carrots (one small dice, the others in 2-inch pieces)
- 2 lbs. whole button mushrooms
- 6 cups beef stock
- Bouquet garni
- Salt and pepper to taste

Preparation

1. In a medium sauce pan, reduce beef stock by half and reserve.
2. Place beef chuck cubes in a large bowl. Salt and pepper to taste, then dust with flour to coat.

3. Heat olive oil in stock pot or roaster with lid under medium-high heat. Add one-third of the beef and brown thoroughly. Remove beef and do the same with the remaining two-thirds (one-third at a time). Remove beef.
4. Keeping burner on medium-high, add diced celery, carrots and onion with about 2 tablespoons flour. Cook, stirring, for 5 minutes.
5. Add entire bottle of wine, stock and bouquet, and put beef back in. Reduce to simmer. Put lid partially on and simmer, stirring occasionally for 3 hours.
6. Add carrot pieces, onion pieces and mushrooms. Cook until newly added vegetables are tender and sauce is thickened, about 45 minutes.
7. Salt and pepper entire mixture to taste, remove from heat and serve.

LEMON-HERB CHICKEN

This recipe, which serves 4, matches perfectly with Sauvignon Blanc.

Ingredients

- 1/2 onion
- 3 tsp. whole oregano
- 3 tsp. whole thyme
- 3 tsp. rosemary
- 6 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tsp. salt, optional
- 1 cup lemon juice
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 whole chicken breasts, split in half

Preparation

1. After removing skin, rub the chicken with the cut half of the onion. Discard onion.
2. Mix the herbs and garlic with the lemon juice and olive oil. Add the chicken, turning to coat with the marinade.
3. Marinate for 30 minutes.
4. Place chicken (bone-size up) on a broiling pan and broil (4-6 inches from the coil) for 20 to 25 minutes or until done. Turn once. Baste with reserved marinade frequently.

Light & Sweet

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WHITE WINES

Member Price

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2006 Old School Lane California Viognier	12.99
2007 Castoro Cellars Paso Robles, California Muscat Canelli	16.99
2006 MAN Vintners Coastal Region, South Africa Chardonnay	17.99
2006 Ledgewood Creek Three Clones Suisun Valley, California Chardonnay	19.99
Vega Barcelona D.O. Cava, Spain Brut Reserve	19.99
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