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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



**The Nose Knows: How
to Sniff Wine Like a Pro**

**Portugal's Douro Valley:
Wine & Olive Nirvana**

**The Wine & the Music
Flow at Rodney Strong**

**Recipes: Chilled Zucchini
Soup & Côté de Boeuf**

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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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Intrepid Wine Enthusiast, Chief Taster and Winehound:
Martin Stewart

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









Wine Steward:
Katie Montgomery

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

An Open Mind Leads to a Grateful Palate

By Robert Johnson

My mentor in the wonderful world of wine is Jim Crum — make that Dr. James Crum — a retired college professor whose eyes would absolutely light up when he was waxing poetic about wine. That's him in accompanying picture, checking out the entries in a major West Coast wine competition that he managed until a few years ago.

Actually, Jim wasn't so much a poet as he was a scientist. He loved the chemistry of wine, and could go on for hours about how we perceive aromas and flavors in the glass, and why different people might have very different perceptions about the very same wine.

I met Jim when Chardonnay was the darling of the wine world. It was the early 1980s, and when you asked for a glass of white wine at a bar, you'd probably get Chardonnay — as opposed to the generic plonk that typically had served as a bar's "house wine" up until

just a few years earlier. I must admit that I had jumped on the Chardonnay bandwagon at that time. A "good" Chardonnay had to be big and viscous — the more buttery, the better.

It was Jim who taught me that when I was smelling and tasting butter, I wasn't smelling or tasting Chardonnay at all. Malolactic fermentation and aging in new oak barrels were winemaker practices that actually masked the real flavor of wine, he explained.

Prior to hearing his explanation, I was astounded one evening when he told our class that Chardonnay was not his favorite white wine. No, Jim's wine of choice was Sauvignon Blanc — a variety then perceived by the fickle wine press as being somehow inferior to Chardonnay.

But tasting was believing. As Jim guided us through a half-dozen bottlings of Sauvignon Blanc, each distinctive and packed with personality, I began to realize that the

most important trait a lover of wine could possess was an open mind.

So, when you have the opportunity to taste a type of wine that you've never had before, I have three words for you: Go for it! You just may discover a new personal favorite.





The Nose Knows — How to Sniff Like a Pro

Ask a newcomer to wine to stick their nose in the glass, breathe in deeply, and tell you what they smell, and the look you'll get will resemble that of a deer caught in Matt Lauer's bicycle path.

Fear. That's the best way to describe the expression. That's because rarely in our lives have we ever been asked to think about aromas. We know that a loaf of bread in the oven smells like a loaf of bread, and that a piece of chocolate smells like chocolate. But what does wine smell like?

So we've come up with a few questions of our own that you can ask yourself while your nose is in the wine glass. The questions have no wrong answers. Rather, they're simply intended to make you think about what you're smelling... or not smelling.

Before long (practice! practice! practice!), you'll be able to departmentalize the aromas and pick out nuances. Example: Instead of apple as an aroma, you

may identify *spiced* apple, like that found in an apple pie. Ready? Let's get started...

First, fill your wine glass only about half-way. This gives you plenty of room to swirl the wine in the glass without spilling. Swirling is important because as the wine mixes with air, it "releases" its aromas. Next, stick your nose

deep in the glass, inhale through your nose, and ask these questions:

- Does the wine smell floral or fruity?
- If floral, what kind of flower?
- If fruity, what kind of fruit?
- Is there more than one kind of fruit

that you recognize?

- Can you smell smoke or wood?

(These are indicators of oak barrel aging.)

- Are there any earth-like aromas, such as mushrooms or green vegetables?

As the answers come to mind, jot them down. Use those notes as a basis of comparison the next time you

open a bottle... and you'll begin to identify your own preferences.



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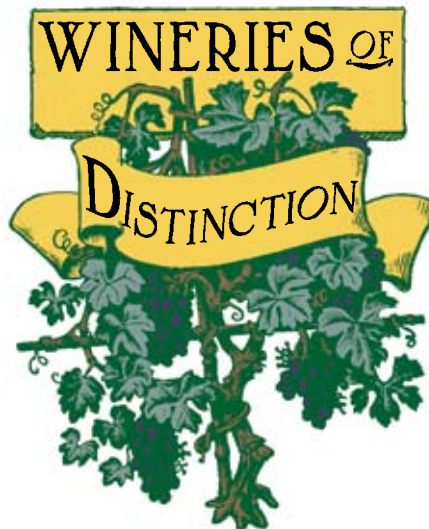
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The Summertime Beckons With Smooth Jazz and Smoother Wine

Each summer, the superstars of smooth jazz fill the grounds of Rodney Strong Vineyards with soothing, soulful music — the ideal companion to a chilled glass of Russian River Valley Chardonnay.

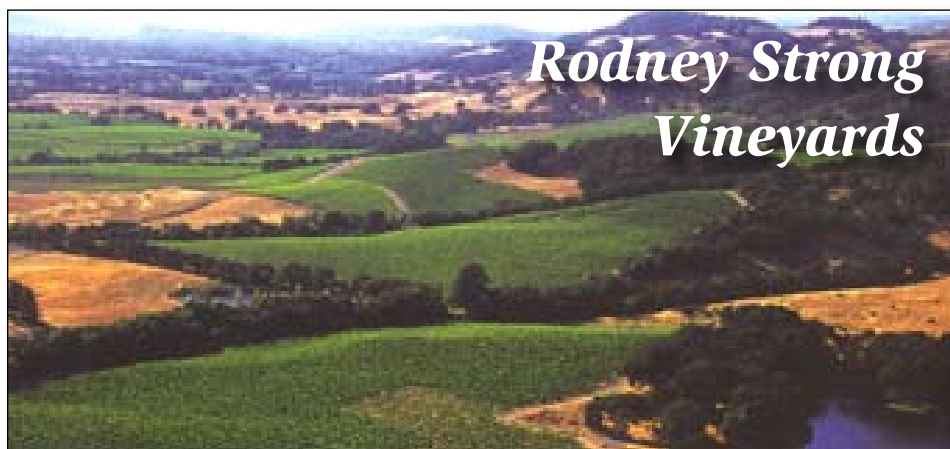
And the summer of 2009 will be no exception. Tickets for the KJZY Summer Concert Series at the winery in Healdsburg, Calif. — that's northern Sonoma County — are scheduled to go on sale in May, and the sneak peak that we were granted revealed a lineup

that's as... well... *Strong* as ever.

But wonderful, relaxing music in the shade of the summer sun is only one reason to visit Rodney Strong. The main reason, as you may have guessed, is the wine.

Although the estate has an admirable winemaking history, proprietor Tom Klein is constantly looking to the future. In that regard, Rodney Strong has embarked on a mission to produce small-lot wines that come from isolated parts of select vineyards — or "sweet spots," as viticulturist Doug McIlroy likes to call them. While Klein wants the winery to be successful, his chief goal today is to have it recognized as one of the very best.

In that pursuit, he brought on Gary



Patzwald, former winemaker for Matanzas Creek Winery, to work side by side with veteran vintner Rick Sayre. And he made available top consultants to assist them in the quality quest.

Together, Sayre, Patzwald and McIlroy have more than a century of experience with wine.

“It’s all about the vision,” says Klein. “It’s all about living the vision — being one of California’s most respected wine companies by crafting delicious Sonoma County wines that reflect our passion and creativity. It’s the same drive that brought us to this point and will take us to new heights in the future.”

While the future is bright, Klein does not neglect Rodney Strong’s past. In fact, he and his team have great respect for the winery’s founder and namesake, who passed away in 2006. Ironically, Strong was born in 1927 — during Prohibition.

Strong’s first love was dance, and by 15 he was practicing five hours a day, training for what would be a successful career, and refining his skills with the likes of Martha Graham and George Ballanchine at the American School of Ballet. His passion took him to Paris, where he lived for four years and was the lead dancer at the Lido in its early years. Strong returned to the States in 1951 to dance and to teach dance, but his head was filled with the wondrous aromas and flavors of so many fine French wines.

“I knew I couldn’t be an old dancer, but I could be an old winemaker,” Strong said on more than one occasion.

In 1962, he purchased an old vineyard and winery building in Windsor, once known as the Monte Carlo Winery. There, he crafted his first wines by asking questions, taking classes, making mistakes and learning. Once he’d mastered the basics, he quickly came to the inevitable



conclusion that all vintners must reach: Quality winemaking requires quality grapes, and the best way to assure the latter is to grow your own, and get good at it.

By 1970, Strong was breaking ground for a new winery building in the recently planted vineyard he called River East, in Healdsburg.

In what originally was a large prune-plum orchard, he planted Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and constructed an impressive, efficient winery building, which today houses the tasting room and lower cellar of the estate.

Behind the tasting room, on a vast expanse of tree-dappled lawn, is where the summertime concerts take place. As the music plays, one can close their eyes and imagine the estate’s beginnings. And with a glass of Chardonnay in hand, one can toast the winery’s founder, the new proprietor who is leading it to new heights, and the many men and women who have helped to bring good wine and good music to hundreds of thousands of people through the years.

Winery 4-1-1

Rodney Strong Vineyards

11455 Old Redwood Hwy.
Healdsburg, Calif.
800-474-9463
707-433-6521

Winemakers:

Rick Sayre
and Gary Patzwald

Winemaking Consultants:

David Ramey
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Concert Series Info:

www.rodneystrong.com

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A B.C. Region That Gets Straight A's

The Thompson Okanagan region of British Columbia isn't as well known as the big cities to the west (Vancouver and Victoria), but it's an area worth exploring if you like to bask in beautiful scenery and discover new types and styles of wine.

The Okanagan Wine Route stretches from Osoyoos, just north of the United States border, to the town of Salmon Arm. Together, the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys are home to more than 100 wineries. It's difficult to beat lounging on a sun-drenched winery patio, soaking in the glorious views

while sipping a glass of locally grown and crafted wine.

Twenty of those estates are huddled in a 12.5-mile stretch near Oliver, where the vineyard areas are delineated as Golden Mile and Black Sage Bench.

You may want to begin your journey with a stop at the Wine Welcome Centre in Oliver, where you can sample a few of the local wines and acquire maps and other useful information about the area.

For a one-of-a-kind experience, at least in the North America, head to Nk'Mip Cellars in Osoyoos, the first

Aboriginal-owned and operated winery on the continent. There, you can enjoy the wines while noshing on First Nations-inspired cuisine.

Of course, nobody knows an area as well as the people who live there, so we asked around for a few other touring tips. The top four suggestions:

1. Attend a wine festival. Activities can range from grape stomping to formal wine dinners. Each season brings its own big celebration, with the Okanagan Spring Wine Festival in May, the Summer Wine Festival in August and the Fall Wine Festival in October.



2. Go to the biggest bash of all, the Okanagan Winter Icewine Festival.

Held in January, it provides an opportunity to escape the winter chill and savor some of the finest dessert wines in the world.

3. Cycle past the grapevines. Take a guided trip or pedal on your own past an array of sun-kissed vineyards and superb wineries. Make mental notes about the estates you want to visit when you return by car later in the day.

4. Wine and dine. Depending on the season, you can dine *al fresco* at one of the many vineyards that also has a restaurant, or at one of the local ski resorts.

Between winery stops, there's plenty to see and do in Thompson Okanagan.

In April and May, entire hillsides all over the region are covered with colorful flowers. In the summertime, before August, the heady fragrance of lavender engulfs the Kelowna area.

In the hills above Summerland, stop by Summerland Sweets to sample fruity pancake syrup, wonderful jams and fruit candy. At Planet Bee in Vernon, you can watch industrious honeybees at work from the largest bee observatory in western Canada.

Fruit fans will love Hanna & Hanna Orchards in Salmon Arm, which offers a self-guided tour and samples of its apples and cold-pressed apple juice. At the end of the day, head to Davison Orchards for a wagon ride, which concludes with a sampling of homemade fruit pies.

Thompson Okanagan also offers water-skiing and windsurfing on warm-water lakes... houseboat rentals in the "Houseboat Capital of Canada" (in Sicamous)... golf courses with stunning scenery... spectacular waterfalls at Wells Gray Provincial Park... and an interactive wildlife experience at the BC Wildlife Park.

Parks can be found all over the region, providing opportunities for camping, fishing, hiking, mountain climbing, mountain biking and canoeing. For those who love the outdoors, there's always something to do between winery visits.

To learn more about Thompson Okanagan and other areas of British Columbia, visit www.HelloBC.com.

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Wine Festival. The Finger Lakes Wine Festival in Watkins Glen, N.Y., offers attendees something that no other festival can match: the opportunity to take a ride around the Watkins Glen International Race Track in an official NASCAR pace car. You might want to do that *before* enjoying the Taster's Banquet, where regional fare will be paired with festival wines and live jazz music. There's also a wine-and-cheese tasting, a massive walk-around wine tasting, and a Champagne breakfast. July 17-19. www.flwinefest.com

2 Hot L.A. Wine Bar. Its name does not refer to the number of wine bottle cubbyholes, but rather to its address. Bin 8945 (at 8945 Santa Monica Blvd. in West Hollywood, Calif.) does offer around 600 wine selections, along with small plates melding Latin American, European and Asian flavors. 310-550-8945

3 Hot Napa Valley Seafood Restaurant. Go Fish is not a card game, but rather *the* place to go in California's North Coast wine country for seafood. From the sushi to the starters, and from the salads to the entrees, this is a fish lover's paradise. The wine list includes 25 selections — most of them seafood-friendly — for \$25. 641 Main St., St. Helena; 707-963-0700





Quaffer. An everyday drinking wine, or slang for a wine drinker.

Reserva. Spanish and Portuguese word for a Reserve wine. In those countries, the word has actual legal meaning; in the United States, it does not, although it infers that the wine so labeled is the winery's best.

Sommelier. The wine director of a restaurant, charged with helping customers choose a bottle of wine that is complementary to their meal.

Table Wine. Another term for "quaffer." The alcohol level typically falls between 7 and 14 percent.

Uvaggio. Italian term for a multi-variety cuvee. Example: a Sangiovese-based Chianti that also includes other varieties in the blend.

Vouvray. A wine from France's Loire Valley made entirely from Chenin Blanc grapes. Styles range from dry to very sweet, and there even are some sparkling versions.

VINESSE STYLE

THE VERMONT CHEESE TRAIL

Vermont may be best known for its fabulous maple syrup, but it's also one of America's top producers of cheese — and not just cheddar.

For instance, at Vermont Butter and Cheese Co. in Websterville, goat's milk is procured from more than two dozen local farms and made into chevre. Goat's cheese was a relative rarity in the United States when the company began producing it in 1984. French-born cheesemaker Adeline Folley also makes mascarpone out of cow's milk.

Green Mountain Blue Cheese, located in Highgate near the Vermont-Quebec border, makes a tangy gorgonzola, a Swiss-style *tomme*, and its signature cheese,

known as Boucher Blue. The honor system is embraced here; if nobody's around, customers may select their cheese and leave their payment on the counter.

But our favorite purveyor of Vermont cheese is Three Shepherds of the Mad River Valley in East Warren, which has an on-site market stocked with everything one would need for a fabulous picnic — fresh fruit, patés and breads,

in addition to the homemade cheeses. And for those who really, really love cheese, the proprietors conduct three-day cheesemaking classes from April through October.

You can contact Vermont Butter and Cheese Co. at

802-479-9391, Green Mountain Blue Cheese at 802-868-4193, and Three Shepherds of the Mad River Valley at 802-496-4559.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE

There's no better way to appreciate Portugal's Douro Valley winegrowing region than by taking a day cruise on the Douro River.

The Douro Valley is a magnificent sight, and the farther inland one floats, away from the cities, the more "wild" the countryside becomes. At seemingly every curve, a new vineyard terrace or olive grove comes into view. Almond trees also are abundant.

Of course, the river also serves an important purpose in terms of commerce: With so many *quintas* along its banks, it provides a key link in getting Port wines to market.

Indeed, wine always has been the lifeblood of the Douro — both the river and the valley — as the long tradition of Port and table wine production helped foster the building of churches, towns and infrastructure. For this reason, in 1991, the Alto Douro was named to the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

While a vast majority of the wine estates have adopted modern winemaking practices, a handful stubbornly stick to tradition and crush at least some of their grapes

underfoot in large vats known as *lagares*. The fermentation process makes this perfectly sanitary, although the practice is both labor- and time-intensive.

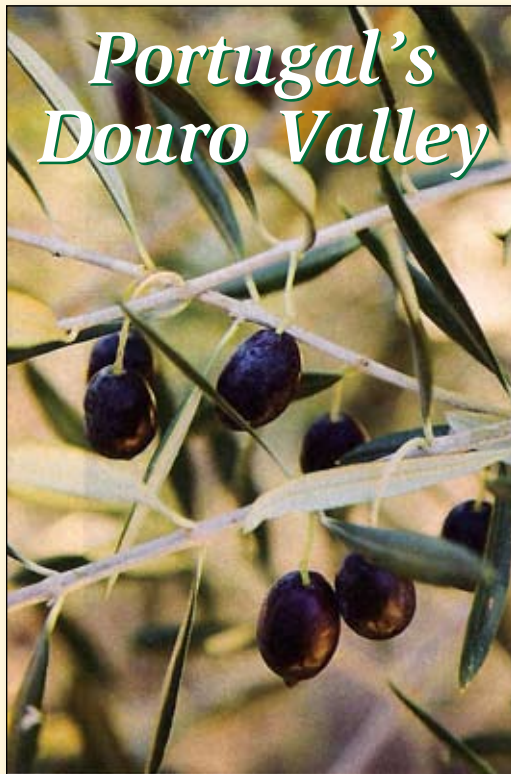
The Douro Valley has a moderate to hot climate, thanks to the production of two mountain ranges. There's plenty of sunshine during the growing season, and the occasional frosts are restricted to when the vines are dormant. The schist/slate soils permit the roots of the grapevines to establish themselves, and also drain

well so the vines do not receive too much water.

Portugal's Institute of Vine and Wine recognizes 341 grape varieties, but in the Douro Valley, most of the acreage is devoted to just three: *Touriga Nacional*, *Tinta Roriz* and *Touriga Francesa* (a.k.a. *Touriga Franca*). Those are the grapes primarily used in making the country's famous Port wines, but

a number of excellent white and red table wines — as well as refreshing Rosés — also are crafted in the Douro Valley.

As a wine, olive and olive oil hotbed, the Douro Valley offers an abundance of joy to foodies on holiday... and to folks like Vinesse wine club members who can enjoy the region's vinous bounty in the comfort of their own homes.



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Q We've started going to some wine tastings, and the hosts all agree that dry wines are better than sweet wines. Why is this so?

A Better? In what way? Sweet wines simply represent a different style of winemaking. And how sweet are we talking about? Perceptions of sweetness range from "trace" to "off-dry" to "semi-sweet" to "very sweet." Truth be told, some varieties actually "show" better when there's at least a bit of sweetness present. Chenin Blanc would be a good example. Even some Chardonnay makers cut off fermentation before all of the sugars have been burned off. And it should be noted that the Light & Sweet Wine Club is the fastest growing club in Vinesse history. The point is this: There are great dry wines and great sweet wines, and trying to compare the two styles is fruitless — especially since each person has his or her own preferences.

“ Rip out and never again plant the vile and noxious Gamay plant. ”



— Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy in the early 1300s, upon changing the favored (and legal) winegrape in the region from Gamay to Pinot Noir



Few California wineries have as much experience with Pinot Noir as Navarro Vineyards in Mendocino County's Anderson Valley. Co-owner Ted Bennett shares this morsel of information, culled from 35 years of growing grapes: "Pinot Noir clusters are dark, and when exposed to direct sun, the berries can be up to 30 degrees warmer than the air temperature." That's why leaves are left on the vines — to protect the fruit from direct sunlight during the growing season. "The day before harvest, we remove the leaves to make the grapes visible to pickers," Bennett adds.



Sonoma County's Rodney Strong Vineyards (featured in this issue's "Wineries of Distinction" department) has been becoming more and more "green" ever since it was acquired by Tom Klein in 1989. The hiring of viticulturist Doug McIlroy in 2001 helped perpetuate the efforts. Sustainable farming practices have been embraced, the winery became a Fish Friendly Farming grape-grower, and Rodney Strong has won multiple Green Business awards. It also has installed the world's second-largest solar panel system at a winery.



3,588

Number of "Peanuts" comic strips adorning the ceramic tiles that cover one wall of the 27,000-square-foot Charles M. Schulz Museum & Research Center in Santa Rosa, Calif. For fans of the classic strip, the museum makes an entertaining and educational stop between winery visits in Sonoma County. 707-579-4452



Thornton Winery in Temecula, Calif., has unveiled its 2009 Champagne Jazz Series schedule. It runs most weekends from April 26 through Oct. 11, with Mindi Abair and David Benoit kicking things off, and Jesse Cook bringing the curtain down. In between, the series will feature such outstanding performers as Chris Botti, Al Jarreau, Boney James, David Sanborn, Dave Koz, Peabo Bryson and Peter White. Reserved seating is available with gourmet dinner packages. www.jazzconcerts.com

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

'A TASTE OF SPRING' AT FERRARI-CARANO

You can learn a lot about food-and-wine pairing by seeing what wineries serve with their own bottlings.

Each April, Sonoma County's Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery hosts "A Taste of Spring" for some of its best customers. Among the activities are a walk-around tasting in the winery, and a sit-down winemaker dinner.

Here's a look at some of the various food-and-wine combinations that the winery featured at "A Taste of Spring" in 2008...

- Goat Cheese, Leek and Swiss Chard Bruschetta — Fume Blanc.
- Apple Fennel Salmon Cakes — Chardonnay.
- Wild Mushroom Ragout on Polenta — Pinot Noir.
- Rosemary Orange Brochette — A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (70%) and Syrah (30%).
- Savory Bread Pudding with Fresh Herbs, Fontina



and Swiss — A blend of Sangiovese (68%) and Malbec (32%).

- Braised Short Ribs with Six Spices — Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Grilled Day Boat Scallops with Spring Vegetables, Apple Bacon and Meyer Lemon Vinaigrette — Chardonnay.
- House Made Willie Bird Smoked Chicken Ravioli with English Pea Broth, Pea Shoots and Chive Blossoms —

Reserve Chardonnay.

- Roasted Breast of Liberty Duck with Frisee, Fava Beans and Roasted Beets — Pinot Noir.

- Roasted Niman Ranch Filet of Beef with Grilled Asparagus, Roasted Yukon Gold Potatoes, Green Garlic and Blue Cheese Bearnaise — Cabernet Sauvignon.

- Basque Cake

with Almond Brittle, Organic Strawberries and Orange-Scented Mascarpone — A sweet dessert wine made from Semillon (76%) and Sauvignon Blanc (24%).

Light & Sweet

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CHILLED ZUCCHINI SOUP WITH WHITE TRUFFLE OIL

A rich soup calls for a rich wine, and no white wine is richer than an oak-aged Chardonnay. This recipe, from *The Casual Vineyard Table*, makes 4 servings.

Ingredients

- 6 zucchini (about 3-lbs.), cut into 3/4-inch slices
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh tarragon
- 8-oz. package cream cheese, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 cup Chardonnay
- 1 to 2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 teaspoons white truffle oil
- 1 tablespoon Italian (flat-leaf) parsley, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest, finely grated

Preparation

1. Place zucchini and salt in a saucepan with just enough water to barely cover. Bring to a boil over high heat. Lower heat and simmer for 2 minutes, or until tender. Drain and set aside.
2. Heat a sauté pan over medium-high heat and add the butter. When butter has melted, add the onion and tarragon and sauté for 4 minutes, or until onion is translucent. Remove pan from the heat.
3. Combine onions and zucchini in a food processor or blender. Add cream cheese and wine, and puree.
4. Transfer to a bowl and stir in enough broth to make a thick, creamy soup. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Cover the soup and refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes. To serve, divide the soup among serving bowls. Drizzle with white truffle oil in the center of each bowl. Garnish with chopped parsley and lemon zest.

COTE DE BOEUF FOR TWO

When you want a special dish to serve with a special red wine such as Cabernet Sauvignon or a rich Rhone blend, try this recipe. As its name indicates, it makes 2 servings.

Ingredients

- 2-lb. prime aged rib steak with bone in, about 2 inches thick (available at upscale supermarkets and most butcher shops)
- 2 teaspoons coarse sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Preparation

1. Bring the beef to room temperature, about 2 hours.
2. Heat a grill or grill pan with deep ridges until very hot, then adjust heat to medium-high.
3. Season the meat well on both sides with salt and pepper.
4. Lay the meat onto the grill and cook 3 minutes. Turn diagonally to cross-hatch the grill marks, and cook 3 minutes longer. Repeat the searing and cross-hatching on the second side.
5. Continue cooking, turning the meat and draining off the excess fat as needed, until the center of the meat reaches an internal temperature of 110 degrees for medium-rare. (This should take just a few minutes more.)
6. Transfer to a cutting board and let stand for 10 minutes.
7. Carve the meat at the table: Slice the bone away from the steak, then slice the meat into one-half-inch strips perpendicular to the bone.

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